

WOMEN AT THE CROSSROADS: GENDER AND CLASS INTERSECTION IN SELECTED SOUTH ASIAN ENGLISH NOVELS

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Abstract

Purpose of the Study: The Study explores the concept of intersectionality research's desire to improve society. The factors responsible for the oppression of women, such as religion, culture, gender, and class, have been studied separately; however, the present Study attempts to explore the concept of 'intersectionality' coined by [Crenshaw \(1989\)](#), in Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, by viewing the discrimination and oppression experienced by the literary female characters as the result of multiple oppressing as a result of multiple oppressing systems working simultaneously.

Methodology: Thru critical reviews of the existing literature, including qualitative analysis, including Textual analysis support, helps explore the existing phenomena of the current studies. The Textual-analysis approach provides the investigator to examine thoroughly the respondents' views by getting more explanations. Textual analyses are helpful tool for additional explanation and findings, as provide foundation and considers as the necessary tools in qualitative analysis.

Main Findings: The Study has examined the idea of intersectionality. However, this investigations also examined the different social factors, like different class and genders in the lives of South-Asian-women. Based on our in-depths examination of case-study., we clarifies, different classes and genders inequities contributions to some women in South-Asian-culture.

Novelty/Originality of Study: This paper discussion has great values to scholars, that found interest in intersectionality-framework-applications. Similarly, A greater and extra thoughtful existing of intersectionality' could increase the population –level interactions such as policy change, or applicable within-the social interactions of affected publics.

Keywords: *Intersectionality, Multiple Discriminations, South Asian Women, Gender Equality, Qualitative Textual Analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

South Asian writers attempt to give females who have been silenced a voice by depicting conflicts that result in discrimination and oppression. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), Khalid Hosseini, an Afghan-born American novelist, depicts the story of friendship and commitment at the cost of self-sacrifice when the lives of two women, a mother named Nana and an illegitimate daughter, Maryam, intersect in the upheavals of Afghanistan. Similarly, Mohammed Hanif in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) portrays problems faced due to class, gender, and religion in Pakistani society through his protagonist, Alice Bhatti. She, as a Catholic nurse and the daughter of a Catholic sweeper, faces violence and oppression both at her work place and home. The oppression and subjugation of South Asian women is usually associated with patriarchy by ignoring the intersection of multiple oppressing factors like gender, class, religion, and race that lend a helping hand to men in exercising domination over the opposite gender. Therefore, the present Study attempts to explore "intersectionality" in the form of gender and class segregation by focusing on the endurance and resilience displayed by the female protagonists in response to the simultaneous segregation of gender and class as depicted in the selected South Asian English fiction.

Intersectionality has developed as an isolated ideology emerging from feminism. Feminism as a movement strives for the legal protection of women's political, cultural, and economic rights ([Berten, 2007](#)). Women of color, working-class women, and lesbians refused to seek universal sisterhood as a result of their realization of shared oppression ([Aguilar, 2012](#)). In its early stages, feminism aimed to give all women a voice regardless of class, race, or culture. However, this claim was only proven when African-American critics and writers debated the fact that academic feminism ignored black women writers ([McDowell, 1980](#)). Therefore, the lack of interest of white feminists resulted in the emergence of black feminism because Afro-American women experienced subordination on the basis of gender as well as class and race. In this regard, black feminists have often criticized white feminists for not addressing racial problems ([Hooks, 1989](#)). It was observed that white women would always get hurt and annoyed when black feminists raised their voices.

Therefore, they realized that the issues of women could not be addressed by addressing gender alone, but class and race also needed to be discussed ([De la Rey, 1997](#)).

In the late 1960s, women of colour who were in a debate with civil rights, Black Power, Chicano liberation, Red Power, and Asian American movements resulted in the intellectual production and activism of black women ([Roth, 2004](#)). At the same time, many women of color endured sexism while participating in the Civil Rights movement and were often shut out of leadership positions ([Bilge & Collin, 2016](#)). African American women developed the understanding that their problems of oppression could not be solved without dealing with race, class, gender, and sexuality individually, which led to the concept of intersectionality ([De La Rey, 1997](#)). This resulted in the creation of separate literary traditions with the purpose of reflecting their own identity ([Collins, 2002](#)). The black women were against the division made based on race and gender, as for them, the two were inseparable and the oppression faced by black women was not because of sexual difference only. Furthermore, the black men who played a leading role in the struggle for justice and equality denied its worth and utility at the time of the rights of black women. Therefore, [Beal \(2008\)](#) considers her a 'slave of a slave' (p.168).

The treatment of black women and women of colour received at the hands of white feminists resulted in the emergence of intersectionality. In her speech in 1852, abolitionist Sojourner Truth emphasized the effects of race and class dominance on her life ([Crenshaw, 1989](#)). In her famous speech, "Ain't I a Woman?" she questioned the double oppression of black women due to racism and sexism ([Brah & Phoenix, 2004](#)).

Anna Julia Cooper, a born slave who raised her voice against the double enslavement faced by black women, exemplified the struggle of black women on the dual grounds of racism and sexism ([Cooper, 2000](#)). Black women are discriminated against not because of being women but because of being colored women ([Collin, 2016](#)).

The core ideas of intersectionality first appeared in the 1970 volume of *The Black Woman* edited by Toni Cade Bambara and Frances Beal's essay 'Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female published in 1960'. Both works emphasized that black women will never be free unless the oppressions of class, race, and gender are addressed ([Collin, 2016](#)). Beal's essay depicted the ways in which capitalism and racism severely affect the lives of black people. Capitalism controlled the black man by depriving him of reasonable wages and employment, whereas the black woman was not only 'economically exploited' but also 'physically assaulted' (Beal, 2008, p.166). The location of black women within the 'social relations of race, gender, and class' is responsible for the forced domestic and agricultural labor ([Beal, 2008, p. 168](#)). Women of color in the United States distinguished themselves from white feminism by referring to their oppression and discrimination as 'triple jeopardy,' emphasizing the intersection of gender, race, and class and giving voice to the struggles of Latina, black, Asian, and Native American women ([Aguilar, 2012, p. 421](#)).

However, King criticized Beal for limiting herself to gender and race, as Beal considered class as a product of race, whereas King described class as a status involving 'occupation, income, and lifestyle' ([King, 1988, p. 222](#)). She claimed that double and triple jeopardy were additive in nature. King (1988) introduced her own 'multiplicative' approach where 'racism multiplied by sexism multiplied by classism' (p.236). She had used 'multiple jeopardy' to raise multiple consciousnesses of ideologies ([Aguilar, 2012, p.425](#)).

Similarly, Combahee River [Collective \(2014\)](#) gave its concept of 'interlocking systems of oppressions' ([Collins & Bilge, 2016, p.73](#)). The collective women worked hard alongside black men to combat racism; however, they were opposed to black men in their fight against sexism ([Brewer, 2016](#)). CRC focused on the multi-layered textured of black women's lives, which depicted the struggle of black women against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression ([Collective, 2014](#)).

The Combahee River Collective, established by Black Lesbian feminists, paved the way for *the production of the concept of intersectionality*. Crenshaw argued that discrimination against black women is the result of multiple social factors interacting ([Crenshaw, 1989](#)). Intersectionality as a metaphor is employed for the collision of gender, race, and class discrimination. In other words, discrimination could happen on the basis of several different social factors like race, gender, class, and religion, which needed to be addressed simultaneously ([Crenshaw, 1991](#)).

INTERSECTIONALITY IN OTHER FIELDS

Intersectionality as an interdisciplinary term has been applied by students and faculty in interdisciplinary fields ([Collins & Bilge, 2016](#)). The concept of intersectionality has been explored in the fields of medicine, psychology, and sociology to depict the various issues in the respective fields, though no substantial study has been conducted in the field of literature ([Semu, 2020](#); [Cerezo et al., 2020](#); [Konkor et al., 2020](#)). [Henderson and Tickamyer \(2009\)](#) demonstrated the ways in which class, race, space, and culture intersect with gender to introduce the politics of welfare society by employing an intersectional framework. Furthermore, [Mancenido, Hajat, and Williams \(2020\)](#) analyzed the intersectional impact of generational status on the emotional well-being of migrants to feature the presence of mental trouble in original foreigners and non-workers when contrasted with second-age settlers concerning race, destitution, status, and sex. Single parents confronted intersectional issues in their working environments because of the approach of 'workfirst' ([Gatta, 2009, p. 101](#)). Additionally, [Manuel and Zambrana \(2009\)](#) dissected the maternity leave choices as the result of the convergence of various individual, family, business, and strategy factors by race, identity, and class.

Besides, an intersectional investigation has been directed to examine the role of kid insurance offices in ensuring abused kids (Middel et al., 2020). While looking at the predicament of poor people, Jones-Deweever, Dill and Schram (2009) used an intersectional focal point to feature the underlying examples of imbalance that had brought about the overrepresentation of women of shade among poor people. Dance (2009) utilized an intersectional approach to deal with the secondary school dropout rate and early school leaving. By bringing up biased practices that influenced minorities in the United States, he highlighted the issues of understudies having a place with various races, classes, sexes, and areas. Dance (2009) contended that changes in legitimate calling in the USA, for example, the extension of enormous law offices and disavowal of relationships with solo practices, made individuals of color face intersectional issues because of their sex and class, for example, being female and dark. Similarly, the intersection of race, class, gender, space, and culture has been investigated in the lives of poor White Appalachian women in order to comprehend the complexities of poverty identities, locations, and control mechanisms, as well as to demonstrate how the existence of this complexity reinforced the welfare racism that underpinned poverty discourse (Higginbotham, 2009). Cerezo et al. (2019) investigated the role of various social spaces, such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, in shaping the intersectional personalities of Latinx and African American women.

The present Study analyzes characters portrayed by the writers in their writings to expose the discriminatory attitudes, unjust treatment, and oppressive behavior South Asian women experience because of the overlapping of multiple identities such as gender and class.

Crenshaw explores the concept of 'intersectionality' in a political context by raising a voice for the oppressed African American woman, whereas the present Study focuses on the utilization of the concept in the sociological context by employing qualitative textual analysis with the focus on the three levels of the context utilized in qualitative textual analysis namely, 'the genre of the text, the general context and the rest of the text' in which it is produced (McKee, 2003, p. 40). However, the present Study investigated the question of "How does discriminatory attitudes affect South Asian women, especially because of their gender and class?"

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative methodology allows the investigator to find in-depth clarification. However, mentions that the qualitative nature of the examination is free of statistical analysis. According to Dawson (2009), qualitative research examines experience, behaviour and attitudes. However, the present Study employs qualitative textual analysis. Textual analysis is a methodology of academic analyzing and collecting true information (McKee, 2003). Textual analysis utilizing cultural studies, media studies, mass communication, philosophy & sociology. However, two novels, such as '*A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007)' and '*Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011)' were selected for analysis. Moreover, the Study used to select South Asian women's attitudes towards the other characters' behavior. Similarly, this Study carried out in South Asian context on Khalid Hosseini's '*Thousand Splendid Suns*' (2007) and Muhammad Hanif's '*Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*' (2001).

Analysis

The female characters, namely Alice, Nana, and Mariam of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), are analyzed one by one under the sub-headings of three levels of context in the South Asian context, with a focus on the oppressive role of interlocked systems such as gender and class in making South Asian women the point of intersection.

The Genre of the Text

The word "novel" is derived from "novella," meaning "new deals with human experiences depicted imaginatively by characters located in a specific setting. The selected texts are classified as different genres of novels. Khalid Hosseini's selected narrative as a contemporary writer is classified as domestic fiction, which portrays the daily lives of women and wives. Therefore, such books are also termed "women's fiction. Similarly, Muhammad Hanif, as a contemporary writer, depicts the social problems of the marginalized group of society in his writings.

The General Context of the Selected Texts

The Study tries to highlight the intersectional experiences of the selected characters in the South Asian context. As a mouthpiece of women, the writings of South Asia highlight the struggles made by South Asian women. They also address the discrimination and inequality imposed on women by societal and cultural norms. The selected texts of the Study depict the social issues of South Asian society. Both Khalid Hosseini and Muhammad Hanif put an effort into depicting the experiences of South Asian subordinated women.

South Asian women are generally expected to conform to culturally stereotyped gender roles. Such roles represent women as docile, weak, irrational, and confined to domestic service. Moreover, the oppression and discrimination experienced by working and lower-class women are far worse than those of middle-class and elite-class women. Sweepers and cleaners have always been looked down on and considered slum dwellers in South Asian society. Therefore, when Alice applies for the vacant post of a nurse, she comes across questions like "Since when does mopping floors count as A & E experience?" (Hanif, 2011, p.8) Similarly, senior sister, HinaAlvi, while discussing Alice's family

background, mentions the residents of the French colony as 'your people' (Hanif, 2011, p.76). A class discriminated and alienated on the basis of locality, profession, and ethnicity as the privileged doctors of the hospital underestimate the steps taken by Alice Bhatti for the betterment of patients with a notion that 'sister Alice grew up in a gutter and still carries that stench' (Hanif, 2011, p.156). The femininity of a woman is linked with sexual attraction to men. The more a woman appeals to men, the more feminine is she. Therefore, Alice's body and appearance grabs more attention of Dr. Ortho in comparison to her experience and qualification. She bears the staring and gaze of men at several places ranging from Borstal to Sacred hospital. She is sexually abused and molested by her co-workers due to her existence as a source of sexual attraction and her disreputable position in society. The phrase rolls' his tongue around his gum'portrays Alice's objectification and exploitation because of her need for a job as a female as she clearly states that if she 'didn't want this job so badly, she could have tackled the situation differently' (Hanif, 2011, p.9).

In order to protect herself from the evil eyes of men, Alice selects dresses that cover her from neck to toe. Throughout the novel, Alice is defined by her physique and body. After facing several attempts of abuse and harassment, she realizes that cutting, torturing, and molesting a woman is a sport older than cricket played by men (Hanif, 2011, p. 95). Her situation gets worse because of her identity as a female nurse, which makes her easily available for men to feed their hunger and lust.

The gender roles constructed by society and culture have assigned women the task of relieving men from the sufferings of their daily dealings. Similarly, Teddy, Alice's future husband, gives her the means of 'curing all his wounds' that he is likely to suffer in his career, like every other man who associates the words "peace and solace" with women by negating all their rights and needs (Hanif, 2011, p.36). Alice has attributed the task of playing the conventional role of helper, caretaker, and counsellor to men. As the male patients of the 'Charya Ward' welcome her with the slogan of 'dardaur, dawaaur', with a claim that she knows, she knows... she has been sent for them to reduce and lessen their sufferings (Hanif, 2011, p. 35).

In South Asian culture, most men leave no stone unturned to molest, abuse, and exploit women. However, a minute of resistance or opposition on the part of women is considered a crime. Therefore, a group of women bear the imposed injustices to save their face in a patriarchal society, as honour, respect, and dignity are the attributes that a South Asian woman should have to meet the definition of an ideal woman (Beal, 2008). In essence, a patriarchal culture holds women accountable for all of society's wrongs. In Nana's case, the situation gets worse because of her identity as a female maid. Jalil, the father of Mariam, holds Nana responsible for 'forcing herself on him' (Hosseini, 2009, p.7). Nana, being a housekeeper, is accused of the mistake and considered an outcast as he cast them 'out of his big fancy house...he did it happily' (Hosseini, 2009, p.6). She is abandoned by her father as honour, respect, and prestige are confined to women only in patriarchal societies, and these norms affect the lives of women.

Similarly, another injustice in South Asian society is that men, as superiors, have the authority to marry girls much younger than them. Similarly, Mariam, being the daughter of a maid, is forced to marry a brutish cobbler, Rasheed, who is 30 years older than her, which validates Crenshaw's notion of the intersection of social factors in oppressing women. The birth of a son as a male heir is a symbol of honour and prestige in South Asian society. However, women who fail to provide a male heir to the family are marginalized and discriminated against, as Mariam' failed him seven times and now she is nothing but a burden to him' (Hosseini, 2009, p. 61). Therefore, being female with a weak financial background, she bears the oppression of Rasheed throughout her life, which otherwise no woman of reputed background would have tolerated and lived.

The Context of the Rest of the Text

The current Study connects the selected excerpts to the context of the rest of the text in order to examine the overlapping of gender and class segregation in the lives of the chosen characters, such as Alice, Nana, and Maryam. Moreover, while analyzing the selected text from the perspective of endurance and resilience shown by the selected female characters in response to class and sex segregation, the present Study also views the context of the rest of the text.

The Intersection of Class and Gender Segregation

Alice, the major character of the novel, is presented as a poor girl who faces humiliation at every step of her life, not only because of her gender but also because of her class and lineage, which reflects Crenshaw's concept of the intersection of multiple social factors. She, being the daughter of a Christian janitor, is doubly marginalized not only within her own community but also in other communities. While facing the interview panel, she dreads the rejection that she is not likely to get the job because of her association with the lower class (Hanif, 2011, p. 1).

Usually, surnames are a matter of identity and dignity in society; however, she hesitates to mention it in front of the panel, for she deliberately writes her name as 'Alice Bhatti' Alice Joseph Bhatti (Hanif, 2011, p. 5). Alice's nervousness and trembling in front of the interview panel can be interpreted as a result of her belonging to a Christian slum, as Dr Pereira's words reflect the bitter and harsh reality of the society that 'all sweepers are Christians' (Hanif, 2011, p. 8). The words of the doctor highlight the attitude and thinking of the elite and middle class, due to which lower-class women have distinct experiences compared to privileged women (Crenshaw, 1989).

Alice, on the other hand, must fight on two battlefields at the same time. She is considered untouchable, an outcast, and a sex tool for the men in her daily life. As a female, she has been harassed, molested and exploited in her daily life, which is very vivid in the line 'Lewd gestures, whispered suggestions, uninvited hands on her bottom are all part of her daily existence' (Hanif, 2011, p.9)

Moreover, Alice is paid no respect and no honor by the hospital employees and patients nor by society, as honor, respect, prestige, and dignity are the terms associated with privileged women. At the session of court, it is her appearance and physique that are admired by the lawyer rather than her qualifications and skills. Her life becomes miserable not only because of her femininity but also due to her multiple identities as the daughter of a sewage cleaner (Crenshaw, 1991). She, a female, is dominated and subjugated by the men of her society because of her identity as a nurse and a resident of the sweeper community of the French Colony. The relatives of the VIP patient address her as a sister, 'reflecting on the treatment of the general public towards the nursing profession (Hanif, 2011, p. 73). By profession, nurses are considered a source of comfort and the 'personal maid' of men (Hanif, 2011, p. 74). Therefore, Alice realizes that nurses face the same injustice and oppression at the hands of men irrespective of their place and role because of being the point of intersection of overlapping identities (Crenshaw, 1989).

In the novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), Nana and Mariam share the relationship of mother and daughter. Nana, as a female maid, is held responsible for the birth of an illegitimate child, Mariam, who is addressed as a clumsy little Harami' (Hosseini, 2009, p.1). Mariam, the illegitimate female child of both Nana and Jalil, inherits the poverty and shame of her mother and is denied the fame, wealth, and prestige of her wealthy father. She, because of her identity as the illegitimate daughter of a maid, is denied any "legitimate claim" regarding the very common basic necessities and blessings of life, such as love, a family, and a home (Hosseini, 2009, p. 5).

Moreover, Jalil, being a wealthy businessman, lives in "a fancy house" and finds it difficult to maintain a relationship with a maid (Hosseini, 2009, p. 6). The demand of Jalil's wife to throw Nana out "like a pokeroor and mugwort" because of her class validates Crenshaw's concept of the intersection of social factors (Hosseini, 2009, p.7). Nana experiences a troubling life not only because of being a woman but also due to her financial background. The participation of Jalil's wives in the banishment of Nana proves the view of MacKinnon (1982) that privileged women lack interest in the issues of proletariat women.

Moreover, strong financial background interlocks with sexism to oppress women, as Mariam, being the female child of a wealthy man, is denied the happiness that is rendered by her father on other children; as in the words of Nana, "the children of strangers get ice-cream. What do you get, Mariam?" (Hosseini, 2009, p. 6)

Mariam's severe beatings by her husband depict the oppression South Asian women experience because of the gender roles assigned to them as men, having all the sources of production, finding it easy to subjugate women, confining them to the walls of a house as a guardian and supporters. As Rasheed mentions, a woman's face is her husband's only (Hosseini, 2009, p.44). Similarly, the compulsion to wear a burqa on Mariam by Rasheed also indicates the act of isolating her from the rest of the world and viewing the world through the eyes of her husband, described as a "mesh screen" (Hosseini, 2009, p. 45). The burqa equates Mariam with the animals, as "the pleated cloth kept pressing against her mouth" takes the right of freedom of speech from her, and it reflects the domination and authoritative nature of man (Hosseini, 2009, p. 46). She is not allowed to mingle with the elite-class women in her neighbourhood, as in the lower class of South Asian society, the burqa is made an obligation by the man to use it as a tool to exert power and control over the woman. Upper-class women, unlike lower-class women, do not experience such segregation and discrimination, as in the words of Rasheed, "the women come with their heads uncovered and their husbands stand there and watch" (Hosseini, 2009, p.44). Therefore, the discrimination and oppression experienced by Mariam because of her belongings to the lower stratum of society reflect Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality.

Moreover, like many other innocent desires of Mariam, the desire to gain formal education, unlike her other half-sisters, is also unfulfilled as Nana refuses her daughter to gain worldly knowledge and teaches her 'one skill a woman... needs in life is tahamul', specifying it to lower-class women by stating 'women like us, we endure' (Hosseini, 2009, p. 13). The depiction of distinct experiences of lower-class women is very evident in these words, "like us" and "we. This means that Beal's additive approach to racism and sexism proves invalid in Mariam's and Nana's cases, as they experience oppression not because of gender and race but as a maid and an illegitimate daughter, which confirms the overlapping of social factors in shaping identities.

Furthermore, Rasheed's use of words like "we," "you," and "I" depicts class differences between Mariam and his third wife. As he says, 'we are city people, you and I, but she is dehati, a village girl (Hosseini, 2009, p. 139). Her husband alienates her for belonging to a lower-class village girl. The only trait she is admired for is being a "good worker," which further degrades her (Hosseini, 2009, p. 139). Moreover, the analogy of cars being used for both women and men demonstrates the discrimination women face on the basis of class structure.

Endurance and Resilience Shown by Selected Female Characters

Human history encompasses the struggles made by women while enduring obstacles in the shape of oppression and discrimination. Though marginalized and alienated in their own culture and homes, women endure injustice to develop

and claim their identity.

Alice, being the daughter of a Christian janitor, although oppressed and subjugated as a female due to her association with the lower class, encounters the behaviour and treatment of society bravely. Her thoughts of 'even if she gets this job, she might end up castrating someone' reflect her courageous personality (Hanif, 2011, p. 9). She, unlike other women, does not end up in endurance but believes in protecting and saving herself from the injustices imposed on her by society. Her experiences of unequal treatment have taught her to keep quiet and speak only when absolutely necessary, which projects her policy of distancing and isolating herself from society (Hanif, 2011, p. 52).

As depicted in the court scene, Alice, despite her family lineage and class, faces the obstacles and hurdles placed in her path very boldly. The way she carries "the handcuffs" is compared with the bangles (Hanif, 2011, p. 47). The bestowal of handcuffs instead of bangles depicts the class difference and treatment of society towards lower-class women. Alice's carefree attitude in the court shows her dissatisfaction with the segregation of class and gender. The policewomen and the judge represent the privileged class of society, and Alice's stare at the judge... spitting on the floor of the court' depicts her dissatisfaction with the systems of law imposed on the lower class by the privileged, as mentioned by Crenshaw (Hanif, 2011, p. 49).

Moreover, Alice, from her distinct experiences as a female nurse and the daughter of a sewage cleaner, emerges as a strong and confident woman. Rather than getting suppressed and scared of the harassment she experienced in the VIP room, she decided to lodge a complaint against the junior (Hanif, 2011, p. 73). Her distinct experiences, as an outcome of gender bias and poor financial background, have led her to combat the oppression and discrimination thrust on her as she resists the sexual harassment caused by the relative of the VIP patient despite having "a gun to her head" (Hanif, 2011, p. 75).

Alice hopes to rise above the stench that is her daily bread' and change her status and identity of belonging to the French colony by studying and marrying a semi-employed Musla (Hanif, 2011, p. 92). She refuses to accept the marginalization imposed on her because of the intersection of class and gender and struggles against it as a trainee nurse... is a sign that the next generation is ready to move on (Hanif, 2011, p. 92).

Alice adopts certain strategies to protect herself from the harassment she experiences because of her socially constructed identity. In order to survive in a patriarchal society where 'a woman is not shot or hacked, strangled or suffocated, poisoned or burnt, hanged or burnt alive, she is determined to secure her dignity and respect by not becoming a victim of violence and sexual harassment (Hanif, 2011, p. 98). She refuses to be "that kind of woman" but rather adopts certain strategies regarding her walking style and clothing (Hanif, 2011, p. 98). While having social interaction, she prefers no-touch transactions. Moreover, in a social conversation, she 'avoids eye contact' by not 'looking at people directly, choosing her words carefully and "sidestepping even when she sees a boy half her age walking towards her" (Hanif, 2011, p. 98). Similarly, her instructions to make my privileges look a bit flat' to the tailor regarding the stitching of her wedding dress reflect her precautionary measures of hiding and covering her physique and figure from the eyes of men (Hanif, 2011, p. 99).

Mariam and Nana, both victims of gender discrimination and oppression due to the intersection of social factors, endure all the suffering and deprivation silently. Their association with the lower class and gender has silenced them. Endurance is the very first lesson taught to Mariam by her mother, Nana, as she mentions that "women like us endure. It is all we have (Hosseini, 2009, p. 14). Mariam endures and submits to the patriarchal norms' oppression and subjugation of her, but after a series of discriminatory behaviours, she resolves to be a strong woman for the safety and security of Laila and her children.

Mariam, whose illegitimacy becomes her identity, tolerates the injustice and discrimination of her father and husband. However, every obstacle assists in emerging with her own identity. After receiving the discriminatory treatment of her father, she endures the treatment in the form of forced marriage. However, she very confidently refuses to meet him again. As she mentions, 'do not come, I won't see you. Don't you come? I don't want to hear from you... It ends here for you and me' (Hosseini, 2009, p. 35). She tries to close the chapter of illegitimacy after realizing that her presence is a symbol of shame and disgust for her father. Similarly, she endures the ironic remarks, scornful attitude, and insults of her husband because of the lesson taught to her by Nana. However, she hopes to have a better future. Even at the loss of her baby, she consoles herself that she is 'young and will have many other chances' (Hosseini, 2009, p. 57).

Moreover, she, unlike the wives of Jalil, does not abandon Laila but rather develops a friendly attitude with her as she places "a stack of baby clothes, neatly folded outside her bedroom door" (Hosseini, 2009, p. 156). She brings a change in the rival attitude towards Laila, the second wife of Rasheed, when she discovers the illegitimacy of Aziza, Laila's and Tariq's daughter. Mariam, being a victim of societal norms and values, makes a life-changing decision when she has to choose between a life full of suffering and troubles with Rasheed or living independently. She chooses the latter as Rasheed's beating reminds her of all the pains that she has borne in the past twenty-seven years to win his heart and gratitude. She emerges as a strong woman who stands against Rasheed to stop him from taking the life of Laila, her most precious relative. As in the words of Mariam, "What a fool she had been. Had she been a deceitful wife? A complacent wife? A dishonourable woman? Had she not looked after him when he was ill?" (Hosseini, 2009, p. 225). The tolerance and endurance of twenty-seven years have taught her that she has been a fool. Therefore, she refuses to forgive Rasheed

for snatching her freedom, honour, identity, and self-esteem and she "would not watch him take Laila too... she hit him across the temple... this time she gave it everything she had" (Hosseini, 2009, p. 225). Her endurance makes it possible for her to develop a strong bond of love with Laila and her kids, which indirectly fills her emptiness and deprivation. Her bitter experiences enable her to take a decision regarding her own self. She, for the very first time, takes the bridles of her life and decides to live her life without Rasheed, a symbol of patriarchy. Mariam refuses to belong to the identity granted by her father and her husband but rather shapes her own identity by gaining her lost freedom. As she states, 'For me, it ends here. There is nothing more I want... You and your children have made me so very happy. It's alright, Lailajo... 'Don't be depressed' (Hosseini, 2009, p.233).

After the turmoil of overlapping identities, she emerges as a woman with self-esteem and grace. Although her appearance as an unwelcomed one makes her a source of shame and disgrace in the lives of her parents and husband, all her sufferings and deprivations shape her into a being with a pure and sincere heart. She overcomes her illegitimate identity as a lower-class female, due to which she is deprived of the love of her father and exposed to suffering for twenty-seven years. Mariam decides 'the course of her own life' by sacrificing herself to save her most precious one (Hosseini, 2009, p. 227).

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the concept of intersectionality proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw. The Study demonstrated the overlapping of social factors such as gender and class in the lives of South Asian women. The characters of Khalid Hosseini and Muhammad Hanif depict the oppression and discrimination experienced by poverty-stricken women. Because of their humble backgrounds, Alice, Nana, and her daughter Mariam endure the discriminatory attitudes and treatment of both privileged men and women. The first objective of the Study is achieved after Nana's banishment, on the insistence of Jalil's wife, from her master's house and Mariam, as the illegal daughter of the maid, is denied even the slightest moments of joy throughout her life. Similarly, Alice, being the daughter of a sweeper, experiences humiliation because of her belonging to the unprivileged class of society. She, as a female, is harassed, molested and abused in her social dealings due to her least respectable profession, which indirectly frames her class. Although all three main characters suffer from class and sex segregation, they emerge as strong women with an effort to shape an identity other than the one assigned to them by society. Alice, Nana, and Mariam show resilience towards the existing norms and patterns set by society. The second objective is met when Alice, the daughter of a janitor, on the one hand, endures discriminatory behaviour at her workplace and within her own community. However, on the other hand, she very boldly encounters gender and class segregation because of the overlapping social factors. Similarly, Nana, unlike Jalil, accepts being an outcast and refuses to give Mariam away. She becomes her daughter's mentor, teaching her the life skills required to live as a lower-class citizen. In the same way, Mariam also endures discrimination imposed on her by her father and husband. However, after the endurance of 27 years, she decides to take the course of her life in her own hands and secures freedom from the imposed identity of being an illegal child of a female maid. The researcher attempts to educate women about the multiple discriminations that occur to them at their workplaces and homes at the same time, as well as how to combat the various oppressions and change their perception of the imposed identities as fate. Further studies can be conducted by employing the concept of intersectionality in interviewing and conducting a survey regarding the oppression experienced by lower-class women in the real setting of countries like Pakistan.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As seen, there is a number of limitations, such as the qualitative research approach utilized instead of the quantitative. Moreover, only a few women reflect the sample population. It has been suggested to utilize quantitative research in future studies and increase the sample contribution to remove business.

CONTRIBUTION OF EACH AUTHOR IN ARTICLE WRITING

Major contributors, such as AbidahGafoor and Mohammad Muazzam Sharif, contributed the effort to complete the introduction section. However, Sadia Nazeer&MutuahiraYousaf make their contribution to complete the analysis section & also write the methodology section. Furthermore, Kashif Ahmad and Khushboo Khan provided their support in the conclusion and did a review and peer review.

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