

Narratives Stereotypical Roles and their Counter-Narrative: A Feminist Analysis of the Verdict by Osman Haneef



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Abstract: This paper explores Haneef's novel "The Verdict" (2021), aiming to unveil the stereotypical roles of genders and their counter-narratives in the context of feminism through a qualitative analysis of textual lines. On the one hand, some characters conform to their socially constructed roles, while on the other hand, some characters seem averse to conventional gender roles and nature. Moreover, both kinds of characters depict the lifestyle of two different factions of society. Stereotypical characters are the conventional representation of patriarchy, where women are marginalized, objectified, and oppressed by men. Men are shown as rational, cruel, and oppressors. Characters crafted in the counter-narrative are independent, break stereotypes, and bring the feminist version, introducing us to independent women with significant societal roles. Men are shown as protectors, partners, kind, polite, and loving. By contrasting the two kinds of characters, this paper tries to reveal the changing trend from stereotypical roles to modern roles in the light of feminism.

Key Words: Stereotypical Roles, Gender Roles, Feminism, Counter-narrative, Oppression, Marginalization, Objectification, Sexism

Introduction

"The Verdict" by Osman Haneef is his second novel, published in 2021 after his first novel "Blasphemy: The Trial of Danesh Masih" (2020), and is considered its sequel. Haneef states that this novel reminds us of the masterpiece of American literature, Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" (1960), in the sense that innocent people are often falsely accused in prejudiced societies. The story revolves around the trial of Danesh, a twelve-year-old Christian boy accused of blasphemy due to his sister's disapproval of a marriage proposal from Yusuf, a merchant and representative of the elite class.

The novel begins with the introduction of a foreign law graduate who has returned to Pakistan, greeted at the airport by his mother. Despite

appearing to be a traditional, domestic lady, she is also independent and urges her son to marry as soon as possible. She informs him of the reception card of his friend Sanah, which shocks him deeply as he loves her and has returned to Pakistan to find her. When he visits her at the printed address, he meets Sana, an independent human rights lawyer who embodies feminism. During their meeting, she hugs him emotionally before asking him to leave her alone. Although socially constructed differently, she is sensitive and emotional as a woman.

As the story proceeds, we meet the female character Ahbey through Sikander's memories of her. She is the lady who brought up Sikander, and he used to be in distress as he could not meet her before her death. Now, he has deep desires to do something for her. Then, we meet two other female characters

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referred to as Sikandar's family by Ahbey. They are Alice and Mena, Christian female characters, mother and daughter in relation. Danesh is thought to be the child of Alice but is the child of Mena, whom Ismail, the oldest son of Ahbey, raped. Mena and Alice are servants at Sikandar's home and live a good life. Mena used to be harassed by a well-known merchant, Yusif, whenever she went to the market. Danesh learns this, and one day he confronts Yusif on the spot. Later, with the help of Pir Piya, Yusif conspires against him and accuses him of defiling the mosque. The child gets arrested, and a trial begins against him, with Sanah and Sikander defending him. One day, under the influence of Pir Piya's threats, he tries to escape and is shot down. Danesh faces death due to his sister's dissent to Yusif's proposal.

This article highlights how the stereotypical representation of male and female characters is changing. This change is visible through the counter-narrative of different characters, which not only starkly contrasts with stereotypical characters but also affirms the influence of feminism in Pakistani society in the contemporary era. Ahbey, Nazneen, Alice, and Mena represent the stereotypical characters confined to their roles defined by their respective society and culture. As we move from one character to the other, we observe a breaking of stereotypes, with women emerging from their social constructions and seeking to understand the true purpose of their lives and derive meaning from it. The counter-narrative shows how women define their essence in the world, making their own choices. Sana, a beautiful young law graduate who returned to Pakistan, now serves as a human rights lawyer in a human rights firm. She is a complete departure from the conventional role of women who are bound to serve their counterparts and are confined to the four walls of their homes, fulfilling domestic chores. Her character contrasts with the traditional way of life, as she has defined her life purpose. Simon de Beauvoir, in her book *"The Second Sex"* (1948), wrote about independent women, stating, "However, there are quite a lot of privileged women today who have gained economic and social autonomy in their professions." (Beauvoir, 1949, p.815). Despite being the wife of military officer Fazeel and being persuaded by him to quit her profession, Sana remains engaged in her career because she finds it the purpose of her life to fighting for the rights of the deprived.

On the other hand, Ahbey, an older woman, is ready to serve Ghaznavi's family at the suggestion of

her son. In *"The Second Sex"* (1949), Beauvoir wrote about old-age women, stating, "Her attitude is different depending on whether she is counting on being saved by a son or a daughter; she usually puts her strongest hope in her son." (The Second Sex, 1949, p.712). Ahbey agreed with her son's decision, probably because it was the only thing she could do for her family and herself. Beauvoir also wrote, "Here we touch upon the older woman's tragedy: she realizes she is useless" (The Second Sex, 1949, p.718). By taking on this job, Ahbey avoids boredom and becomes a source of income for her family. Alice and Mena were also badly treated in a patriarchal society where they were marginalized, objectified, and oppressed through various tactics. In his collection of essays *"Fallen Leaves: Last Words on Life, Love, War, and God"* (2014), Will Durant highlights that adolescent women often become the object of sexual attraction for men. He writes, "My heart goes out to her as her adolescence nears its end, and I see young males gathering around her, anxious for her favour, eager for the touch of her hand, her lips, plus ultra" (Durant, 2014, p.83). We see this happening with Mena as she was raped by Ismail at a young age, later harassed by Yousaf, and eventually submitted herself to Yousaf, who later reneged on his promise to bail out his son, Danesh.

In the context of the discussion mentioned above, *The Verdict* investigates the gender roles predetermined by society or determined by an individual himself or herself. The characters in the novel are represented in old order vs. new-order manner, which shows the transition from typical and traditional roles to modern roles opted for by both genders. The characters of Sana and Fazeel show a complete transformation from conventional roles as they both seem different in their attitude toward life. Sana, despite of settled life, chooses to work for her satisfaction, and Fazeel, who knows about his wife's past relationship with Sikandar, still loves her and does not want to lose her. This article hopes to find the stereotypical elements and practices of various characters and the negation of those stereotypes through the modern characters, which accurately represent feminism in the counter-narrative.

Literature Review

The present age is abuzz with feminism as its interaction with women's social, political, and economic lives also becomes part of our literary writings and expressions. These writings delve into

women's lived experiences and hint at the possibilities and opportunities women can seize by raising their voices against societal pressure, oppression, and violence. Various authors often hint at these kinds of opportunities in their books. Judith Butler's book, "Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity" (1999) explores gender construction in society. Butler opines that "a set of repeated acts" performed in a regularized way is the primary factor in constructing gender. These acts and practices are socially and culturally driven, shaping natural gender identity. He attempts to explore the critical element: "The controversy over the meaning of construction appears to... conventional philosophical polarity between free will and determinism" (Butler, 1999, p. 12).

Literary writings explicitly or implicitly depict the prevailing patriarchal pressures, stereotypes, and the way forward for breaking traditional roles and duties assigned to genders. Many Western and Pakistani novels tackle topics addressing various forms of stereotypes, the marginalization of women, objectification, sexism, ill-treatment, violence, oppression, and the deprivation of women's fundamental rights. In her novel "To the Lighthouse" (1927), Virginia Woolf introduces us to two distinct female characters. One accurately represents a domestic woman, Mrs Ramsay, who is obliged to fulfil whatever her family demands but often thinks, "She could be herself, by herself" (Woolf, 1927, p. 43). On the other hand, we have the character of Lily Briscoe, who subverts the prevailing stereotypes by pursuing her career as a painter. By the end of the novel, Lily's complete portrait of Mrs Ramsay juxtaposes her independence from the already prevailing male-dominated society. In her novel "Pride and Prejudice" (1813), Jane Austen introduces us to various types of male and female characters.

On the one hand, we have male characters such as Mr Gardiner, Fitzwilliam Darcy, and Charles Bingley, who not only defy the stereotypical notion of men being cruel, oppressive, and violent but also present an unequivocal view of men as loving, caring, and protective. Upon deeper analysis, female characters like Mrs Bennet and Charlotte Lucas are somewhat stereotypical. Their stereotypical approach is rightly expressed through the character Lucast in her words, "Happiness in marriage is entirely the matter of chance" (Austen, 1812, p. 35).

American writer Toni Morrison's "Beloved" (1987) narrates the story of black woman Sethe in the

context of the American Civil War. The story delves into Sethe's experiences, from her enslavement to her present circumstances. She was compelled to kill her daughter to save her life and the life of her other daughter. Haunted by her past, she endures a series of events that not only shatter her identity but also make it difficult for her to live peacefully. Maya's masterpiece "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" (1969) explores the early years of Maya's experiences as a young black girl growing up in a racially segregated society. The novel highlights the victimization of women, who were viewed as sexual objects, while also depicting the frustration women felt towards the typical behaviour of men. However, by the end of this volume, Marguerite becomes the first black woman to secure a job in San Francisco. Her changing position and society's reaction are as follows, "The fact that the adult American Negro female emerge.....is often met with amazement, distaste, and even belligerence." (Maya, 1969, p. 274).

The character of Nadia in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (2017) is also novel in her type and breaks the stereotypes through her indifferent behaviour. The character Nadia is averse to societal roles, and her behaviour is indifferent to what society expects from her. Nadia, who is expected to be shy, sexually passive, and submissive, is blunt and sexually active. In the novel's beginning, Nadia appears extremely religious in her attire. However, it is soon revealed that her appearance is an illusion, and she subverts prevailing notions about the conduct of women. Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) depicts characters with contrasting spirits, as the novel's name suggests. The characters of Asghar and Mir Nihal are contrasting in appearance; however, their treatment of women is similar. Both characters are ungrateful towards their wives. Female characters like Begum Nihal and Bilqeece fit the role of being submissive to their counterparts. These female characters are contrasted by Mushtari Bai and Babban Jan, who are the mistresses of Asghar and Mir Nihal, respectively, and are much more valued by them compared to their wives. The characters in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Pakistani Bride* (1990) also demonstrate the place of women in two different societies and their ability to act independently, as evident from Zaitoon and Carol's responses to the societies they live in. Hanif Kureishi's *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) features characters like Chanda, who has been divorced twice, lives with Jugnu in an illegitimate relationship and suddenly disappears. On the other hand, the character portrayal of Kaukab and

Shamas is somewhat stereotypical, as they always try to maintain their image in their surroundings.

Awan (2019) investigated gender stereotypes in Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* and Sharaz's *The Holy Woman* through textual Analysis using the theory of Mellene. The objective was to find evidence of gender stereotypes and the particular use of nouns and pronouns for various gender stereotypes. Results confirm the presence of such gender stereotypes, which are cultural and make the role of men dominate over women. *Farnon (2021)* took under study the textbook of class ix and x for exploration of the fact that gender discrimination is reinforced through gender stereotypes presented to high school students in their textbooks. The results indicate a lack of female expression and a theme of male dominance. Recommendations regarding the content revision have been made which condemn the promotion of gender stereotypes causing gender discrimination. *Kayani (2017)* explored the Pakistani novel *The Weary Generation* by Abdullah Hussain. He opined that this novel is a departure from the traditional roles in its characterization, and its protagonist Azra, influenced by Western feminist thought, breaks the stereotypical roles and acts as an independent woman in the patriarchal society. *Kayani (2021)* analyzed Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* using the theory of Mystique by Friedan. He found the problem of the nonconformity of feminist ideology in Pakistani society and the impact of feminism and modernism in subverting the conventional role of women. *Safdar (2010)*, while investigating Hamid's novels *Moth Smoke* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in South Asia* through textual Analysis, found the effect of global exposure and its influence on urban women of Pakistani society to define their gender roles. He also noted that influenced by these Western ideas of women's independence, these women also transgressed the sacred social and religious institutions like marriage. *Adil (2021)* exposed the issue of women's oppression in *Pakistani Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa using Gilman's feminist approach. She opined that there are three types of women in the novel, but the essence of their existence converges when they are born to serve as a sex and reproduction tool. It simply shows how women are treated as 'other' in society. In his novel, *The Verdict*, Haneef has shown us the stereotypical characters confined to their gender roles and feminist characters, who seem averse to the set notions about gender roles. I will explore this shift from stereotypical characters in both genders; in female characters from Ahbey, Nazneen,

Alice, and Mena to Sanah and in male characters from Ismail and Yusuf to Fazeel and Sikander.

Theoretical Framework

Being one of the most critical and widely discussed issues in the contemporary age, gender stereotypes have their essence in the roles defined to the gender by society, which usually results in deprivation of their rights, oppression, objectification, and othering the one gender by another. Gender stereotypes can be considered preconceptions and notions about traits, characteristics, and qualities that men and women must possess. Gender stereotypes also explicitly want genders to fit with the gender roles predetermined by society. *Oxford's A Dictionary of Media and Communication* defined gender stereotypes as "*Personal beliefs about gender differences in traits and behaviour, largely attributable to socialization.*" Feminism is the socio-political movement that calls into question these gender stereotypes and breaks them by serving as a counter-narrative. Feminist criticism investigates how culture defines the personal identity of being a man or woman. It examines how men and women are labelled masculine and feminine based on socialization. It also strives to expose how women are oppressed in a patriarchal society. In the words of *Tyson*, "*Feminism, therefore, seeks to understand how women are oppressed.*" (*Tyson, 2001, p.139*). Apart from it, feminism seeks to know how women are marginalized and objectified for taking adequate measures to alleviate the conditions of repressed gender.

Feminism, on the one hand, fights for women's rights; on the other hand, it aims to expose various ideologies of the patriarchy. Patriarchy holds various traditional and conservative views on the position of women in society. Such views have given birth to what we usually call "gender stereotypes." Feminism not only encounters gender stereotypes by exposing patriarchal ideologies; but also breaks them by introducing independent women who are deviated from their traditionally defined roles.

I will expose the fundamental ideologies of patriarchy: traditional gender roles, sexism, the cult of true womanhood, objectification, and marginalization of women given by *Lois Tyson* in her book, *Using Critical Theory: How to Read and Write about Literature (2001)*. These ideologies are the by-products of a patriarchal mindset, which is used by them to reinforce

the dominant narrative of stereotypes and to marginalize women in the dominant male society. Patriarchal ideologies that we will deconstruct in this article sprout from the concept of patriarchy. Patriarchy is a society in which men hold significant power shares. Men and women are expected to adhere to their traditional gender roles strictly. Traditional gender roles define men as strong, decisive, rational, and protective and women as weak, emotional, and submissive. These gender roles are socially constructed and are not by nature. That is why feminism negates these roles and believes in the independence of women. Women who strictly adhere to their traditional roles are considered good women, and those who deviate are considered bad women. Failing to fulfil the obligations of patriarchal ideologies, women are marginalized and oppressed by their counterparts, who have a sexist approach; believe women as inferior creatures in every aspect of life. In the words of Bijay Keytan Pattanayak, "*The major ideological values which all the Feminist Criticism share is the concept of patriarchy or sexism.*" (Pattanayak, 2020, p. 71). The concept of sexism believes that women are born inferior to men. It underrates the capability of women and labels them weak, not only biologically but also psychologically.

Feminism disapproves of these ideologies and champions women's position in society by promoting equal status for women as men. It conforms as a counter-narrative to patriarchal ideologies, stereotypes, and dogmas prevalent in a male-dominated society. Reading "*The Verdict*," using a feminist lens, helps us to analyze the depiction of women in Pakistani society, which is patriarchal. Along with stereotypical representation, the character of feminist ideals will also foreshadow the changing trend from a conventional role to a modern one. The chief questions which I will investigate are:

Research Questions

1. How are the stereotypical characters and characters built in the counter-narrative represented?
2. What is the changing shift from stereotypical roles to new gender roles? How are the feminist characters different from the stereotypical ones?

Textual Analysis

The study's main objective is the changing trend from stereotypical roles to modern roles, which serve counter-narrative to the established view about genders by society. While doing textual Analysis, we will be following the specific order in which we will first analyze the stereotypical characters, starting from those strictly confined to gender roles. Secondly, we will analyze those characters who start deviating from them and define their essence. Moreover, thirdly, our focus will be shifted to the modern roles after the previous shift, where we will analyze the contemporary roles, the true spirits of feminism, and their counter-narrative to the prevailing order of society. Both genders will be separately discussed with their changing trend.

Stereotypical Female Characters

Character of Ahbey

Ahbey's character represents old age, traditions, values, habits, and commitment to gender roles. Ahbey is an older woman sent to Sikander's home to serve as a nanny. As she comes to Sikander's home, her appearance defines as a traditional old woman, "*Ahbey faded purple kameez clung to her stomach as she rambled around the room.*" (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.79). Her appearance is conventional. It represents an older woman's appearance in Pakistani society who usually does not find suitable clothing. Ahbey was widowed two decades ago, and Ismail took charge of the family head. Zer Shah, her youngest son, returned from the expedition one day and told her about the family searching for a nanny for their one-year-old kid. "*It will be good for us, brother. The money would certainly help.*" (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.83). Zer Shah said this to his elder brother when he commented on whether the Ahbey should join or reject the offer. As she listened to the conversation of her sons, she thought that, on the one hand, she would be able to help her family, and on the other hand, she could do some work to kill boredom. Ahbey joined this job. Ahbey remains strictly confined to her role as a nanny. She loved Sikander as her son. She cared about him so much. She was a mother figure for him and cared about him in each matter. Once Sikander forces her to take food, she replies, "*How will you grow up to be strong...If I eat your food?*" (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.70). She did everything up to the mark. She did not leave any effort to bring out the best in Sikander. She always took care of him and avoided discussing her personal life. Ahbey's life was hard. She

always tried to displace the topic when it came under discussion. Her understanding of the complexities of life and response toward people is very typical, as she knew that Sikander would not understand it well. She knew that her life story would bring nothing to listeners except boredom. In her words to Sikander, "Anything I would share would simply bore you." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.64). The last part of her life reflects that Sikander's family abandoned her. Zeeshan, while arguing with Sikander, says that he was at a loss because of Sikander, he remains deprived of her mother, and he exactly tells him about her condition when Sikander's family abandoned her. "You rich people think you own us....Even whores are treated better." (*The Verdict*, 2021,p.76). The character, on the whole, represents her loyalty to her family and Sikander, whom she served as a nanny. However, just like a stereotypical old age woman, they abandoned her when they did not need her anymore.

Character of Nazneen

The character of Nazneen introduces to us in starting of the novel, and her physical appearance is described in words like "Crow eyes" and "healthy youthful glow skin." She is sixty-six but still looks young. Her outfit juxtaposes with the appearance of a Pakistani mother, "Nazneen wore a tailored sky-blue kameez with lace trimmings.....but Sikander recognized it as one of his mother's favourite outfits." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.09). From her appearance, she seems the mother of the new generation. Nazneen behaviour with her son is stereotypical. She seems to be obsessed with the marriage of her son. During the first conversation, she asks him about his girlfriend on his revival in Pakistan. "Any girlfriends?" (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.12). Nazneen, the mother of Sikander, is a character of a housewife who has devoted herself to her husband and her son. She stands by her husband in thick and thin. Even after her husband's death, she lives the remaining life in her husband's name. After the death of her husband, they shifted to Queeta, and for their survival and to pay the debt, she sold the house."Nazneen sold their house in Islamabad to pack back her relatives." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.16). These sacrifices are only expected from a woman who has deep sincerity for her family. Nazneen has a deep love and a sense of association with her spouse and son. She always supports them in their bad time. These are the things that patriarchy demands from a good wife. When Sikander's father suffered from Alzheimier, "Nazneen begged Baba to write everything down and take notes." (*The Verdict*,

2021, p.43). Similarly, when Sikander felt low after his revival in Pakistan, Nazneen hugged him tightly and said, "I love you." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.42). That was the pure kind of love she always gave to her relations. When the mob attacked Sikander's house, Nazneen was not ready to leave. Later she explains to Sikander that there were her husband's and Sikander's memories, which is why she was stubborn and not ready to leave. Sikander asked her the question, what is in the safe? She replied, "Your father's old letter to me." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.227). Her love for her family and her confinement to traditional roles confirm her as the true representative of society's stereotypical roles.

Characters of Alice and Mena

Alice and Mena are the two characters who serve Sikander's family. Alice serves as a master chef in residence. Alice and Mena's relationship is "Alice is the proud mother of Mena and Danesh." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.54). They are Christian. Where the characters of Ahbey and Nazneen show us confinement to traditional gender roles, these two characters show us the victimization and marginalization of women. These two characters are not so much defined in terms of their relations. Alice is remarked as characterless by Pir Piya, who says about the birth of Danesh (who is the son of Mena) to Sikander, "Even if she gave you an extensive list of all the men she fucked the year before Danesh's birth, it would not give you the answer you need." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.119). These remarks reveal the patriarchal society's oppressive, violent, and illiterate mindset. Mena is introduced in the starting chapter. She has sharp looks, as given in the text in these words, "Her tanned youthful face, delicate mouth, and small nose made her extremely young." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.16). Her looks are described in detail, suggesting she is in her thirties. Her features are objectified. Moreover, on the next page, we learn that she is uneducated. "She never finished high school." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.17). Both the women have been served at Ahbey's residence before coming here. These characters have a dark background of victimization. While serving at Ahbey's house, Mena was raped by Ismail, the eldest son of Ahbey, who refused to marry her later. She gave birth to Danesh. Zer Shah best describes this in a conversation with Zeeshan, "He is Ismail's son....When the family worked for us, Ismail raped the boy's mother." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.198). Similarly, Mena was harassed by Yusuf when she went to buy fruits from

her store. Mena's character represents the accurate picture of patriarchal oppression and marginalization. Yousaf has forced her to the level that she submitted herself to him. "I went to him...I gave myself to him." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.207). However, he reneged on his promise of releasing Danish in return when he was done with her. Signs of oppression can be seen when she shows herself to Sikander, "Mena removed a dupatta around her neck, revealing a large bruise." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.206). By the end of the novel, Sikander hints at the migration of Alice and Mena to save them from further oppression and to save their lives. In a nutshell, I can say that these characters are the left signs of patriarchal oppression, which will be strictly condemned by feminist characters in the upcoming character discussion.

Stereotypical Male Characters

Character of Ismail

Ismail is the eldest son of Ahbey. He was the family's leading member after his father's death. Ismail's physical appearance parallels his personality, attitude, and nature. Scars covered his face and stuck in his hand. He was blind. The character of Ismail is representative of stereotypical men's nature. Ismail's character, defined through his own words or Zer Shah, depicts his corrupt nature, lusty attitude, and sexist approach towards women. In his first meeting with Ismail, Sikander lied that Ahbey "spoke very fondly of you." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.64). She never discussed him in front of Sikander. She was probably disappointed by his son's attitude towards life and women. As the conversation proceeds between them, he encounters Sikander with the question, "Tell us about the women." This question, on the one hand, hints at the lusty nature of Ismail, who keeps thinking about women and their stories as he further passed another comment, "You must have enjoyed their company." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.68) and on the other hand, it indicates that he is projecting his womanizer nature on Sikander. Ismail's depraved nature further reveals when Zeeshan learns that Ismail is Danesh's father "An innocent person, right under our nose, and we did nothing." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.198). He rapped Menna when Alice and Menna were working at their home. Overall, the character of Ismail is the explicit critique of patriarchy as all his violent acts and expressions negate what patriarchal society claims men as protective and robust. A stereotypical man with animalistic desires victimizes an innocent young

girl Menna by rapping her and refusing to marry her later.

Character of Yusif

Yusif is one of the play's notable characters who run the plot of blasphemy charges against Danesh, Mena's brother. Blasphemy charges were false propaganda and revenge from Mena's family as she refused to marry Yusif, and "Yusuf had come to the Pir Piya with a plan to punish Mena." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.233). The character is somehow similar to the character of Ismail as he also victimizes women, but his appearance and social standing are ironical with his lustful nature. Pir Piya describes him as a "good Muslim man" and "Yusif is a great man." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.121). He was wearing a starched shalwar kameez. His face was wrinkled. He was stroking his beard. From the looks, he seemed civilized and religious, but as soon he started to talk with Mena, he began to use his hands, "Yusif then placed the enormous palm of his right hand." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.58). By the end of the conversation, Mena refused her, and Danesh attacked him in defence when he was messing with Mena. His sexist approach towards women can be traced from his remarks about Sanah when she was cross-examining him in the court proceedings. Judge sustained the prosecutor's objection, but Yusif said, "No need to be scared. I can handle a few questions from a woman." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.181). However, as soon as she started cross-examining, she turned the tables and proved the doubt that there would be personal reasons behind the case against Danesh. It made everyone shocked in the courtroom, including Yusif. However, the overall character of Yusif is malicious; he victimizes women and thinks them inferior to men

Character of Zer Shah

As we move away from the stereotypical characters of men like Ismail and Yusif, who are oppressive and violent, the character of Zer Shah lies in dark contrast with both characters. It is a shift from men as "cruel and oppressive" to men as "loving and caring" about their relationships. Zer Shah is the youngest son of Ahbey. He is her most beloved son. Zer Shah is the "laziest person on the planet" (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.82), as described by Ahbey. He is quite different from his elder brother Ismail. Zer Shah has at least a moral sense of right and wrong. However, he has the problem of inconsistency in keeping his job. His

laziness and inconsistent attitude are somehow typical and conventional. He is the rich man's soul in the poor man's body. As a son, he got his mother a job to help the family earn a good income and help Ahbey kill her boredom. As a father, he is also anxious about his son's future which is evident when he asks Sikander, "Can you please help him get a job?". (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.66). As a representation of the patriarchal point of view, men as protectors (Tyson, 2011, p.), he accepts the failure of saving Menna from being raped by his brother Ismail. His character can be considered slightly different from men as cruel and brutal beings and shows us men as kind-hearted, loving, and sophisticated.

Counter-Narrative Female Characters/ Feminist Characters

Character of Sanah

Sanah is the character who is the representative of the feminist spirit. It embodies all the characteristics a woman should possess, according to feminists. In the patriarchal society where women are considered weak, Sanah accurately represents women's empowerment. The whole chapter of the novel is named "Sanah-A cry for help." "Will you help?" (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.136). Sikander asked for help in fighting the case of Danesh. He knew that she was the only person who would help her. As she was a law student at Boston, we come to know that she was now practising law as a human rights lawyer in Pakistan from the words of Fazeel while suggesting Sikander not to waste time on "human rights stuff that keeps Sanah busy." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.25). Fazeel did not like her work and used to say, "You know you do not have to work. We have enough money." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.138). However, as a feminist spirit, she defines her essence of life by serving the people as a human rights lawyer. When defining her essence and role, she also knew that the society she lives in is male-dominated, where women's career positions are not credible. They are considered less intelligent, capable, and incompetent than their counterparts. She commented, "In the town, judges, lawyers, and witnesses..... think I am incompetent because I am a woman." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.220). She proved herself a great lawyer when Sikander panicked in the first preceding cross-examination. With the confidence she stood up and defended, the objections can be precisely expressed through her body language, which Sikander thought, "...so composed that if she had

prepared to step in at the last moment."(*The Verdict*, 2021, p.180). It was the first step that negated the sexist approach. She made another strike by warning the judge to appeal his misconduct, and the judge's behaviour changed suddenly. "If I had to appeal against a judgment or say malfeasance.....Sanah let the threat linger." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.182). Sanah's intellect and decisiveness to deal with the matter at the right time vanishes all the prevailing notions of women being less intelligent and professional. She devoted herself to the cause of fighting for the rights of women, and she did her best to do so. Where the character of Sanah is socially strong, intellectual, powerful, and challenging because of her choice of denying the traditional gender roles and engaging herself in a profession where she is free to work for the welfare of people, this is the positive side of the Sanah, where she seems empowered and independent. However, the same character betrayed herself and other characters (Sikander and Fazeel) due to her incapacity to manage her emotions for them. She betrays Sikander by marrying Fazeel and, conversely, betrays Fazeel by sleeping with Sikander. During their preparation for Danesh's case, there are several incidents in that they dance together and seduce each other. They kissed many times. Transgression reaches peaks when they are having sex. "After they made love, Sanah had left Sikanader in the middle of the night, naked in his room, and returned to her home." (*The Verdict*, 2021, p.169). Where social independence makes her indifferent to patriarchy, her emotional independence only throws her into guilt, and by the end, she asks forgiveness from Sikander and requests him to leave. She seemed to realize the worth of relation with her husband. Overall, this deviation loyalty of a woman's loyalty to her husband leaves questionable remarks on the women's independence.

Counter Narrative Male Characters/Inversion of Patriarchal Representation

Character of Fazeel

Fazeel is a thought-provoking character that are men cruel. He is an army officer by profession and belongs to the elite class. He was imprisoned in Kargil, and news of his death was circulated. Sana got into a relationship with Sikander in Boston. Later he was found alive. Sana left Sikanader and went back to marry Fazeel. This character breaks the stereotypical notion of men being cruel, violent, and oppressive. He is a highly positive character who is protective, loving,

caring, and loyal to his wife. His childhood is described as cruel, but after analyzing his relationship with his wife, all this sheds. Even after knowing about the affair of Sanah with Sikander in Boston, when he met Sikander for the first time, he pretended that he knew nothing about him, "but my wife never mentioned you.....Do not worry. I am sure you are good friends. (The Verdict, 2021, p.28). When Sanah was working on the case with Sikander, and they were transgressing the limits, Fazeel trusted Sana to the extent that she always treated her like a queen. "But does one need an excuse to treat his beautiful wife?" (The Verdict, 2021, p.149). He said this when he suddenly visited Sikander's home to surprise his wife. It shows us his great care for Sanah; he loves and wants to see her happy. Despite knowing the level of intimacy between Sanah and Sikander, he saved Sikander twice. First, when the mob attacked Sikander outside the jail, "but he felt himself being dragged back towards the prison gates." (The Verdict, 2021, p.217). This was when there were no hopes left as the mob was steadily approaching him. Fazeel entered like a hero, dragged him away from the mob, and saved his life. Second, when the court was adjourned for a week, and Danesh was shot, he was pushed, and "Fazeel was on top of him." (The Verdict, 2021, p.242). These attempts are clear illustrations of his brave personality. By the end, he revealed to Sikander, "I know that you and Sanah used to be lovers." (The Verdict, 2021, p.252). Fazeel is the man who realizes Sikander that even after knowing his relationship with Sanah, Fazeel saved his life because he loves Sanah to the extent that he does not want to devastate Sanah. "I love her completely, Sikander." (The Verdict, 2021, p.253). His love and loyalty to her are further evident from his love for children, but even after knowing that "She had ovarian cancer" (The Verdict, 2021, p.254), he did not abandon her. He held her more firmly and more intensely. This represents the modern age, and modern roles have changed the mentality of men.

Character of Sikander

The character of Sikander is distinctive from the stereotypical male of society. It is the character who shows devotion to his profession, sincerity to his love, and efforts for the causes, he invests himself in. He is the lawyer who returned from Boston to settle in Pakistan. He made this decision with the intent to marry Sanah, who remained in a relationship with him in Boston and suddenly disappeared. When he went to Pakistan, he got the news that the girl would marry

Fazeel and invited him to marry. This breaks him, but they reunite later when they take the case of Danesh. He is the character who is inclined to help the poor and oppressed and is averse to oppression, tyranny, and violence against minorities and women. The first incident, which hints at his sympathetic nature, is where he remembers how he encountered Fazeel to save Mureed from his oppression. Sikander remembered his father's advice when he got the case of Danesh, "You have a duty to look after those less fortunate." (The Verdict, 2021, p.91). Sikander is a character who questions the prevailing norms of society. When encountering Pir Piya, he asked, "How does one acquire these talents?" (The Verdict, 2021, p.118). Sikander asked it when Pir Piya was trying to manipulate him. However, as a literate and educated man, he challenged Pir Piya as he knew that these kinds of Pir only wanted the significant power share of society. Pir Piya forced him to persuade Mena to marry, but he refused and said, "Mena will decide whom she marries." (The Verdict, 2021, p.121). This shows his positive approach and inclinations towards the oppressed people of society, and his approach towards Pir shows his standing with the oppressed people. He tried his best to win the case of Danesh. During the trial, Sikander tried to save Danesh's life despite knowing he could not deal with the mob. In the first incident, when the mob planned to assassinate Danesh, his reply to Sana shows his sincerity in his cause. "Sanah, we are going to do whatever we can." (The Verdict, 2021, p.214). He also made a great effort to save his life at the final trial as "he ran toward the exit." (The Verdict, 2021, p.240) when he found suspicious murmur and activity. He threw himself in danger twice. This was the one side of the coin other is yet to be revealed. Just like the character of Sanah, this character also imbalances in his emotions. Where he is devoted to his profession and serves as a counterpart to patriarchal oppression, this character is emotionally weak and does not fit what society demands from them. His weak emotional position remains evident in both the proceedings of the court as well as his relationship with Sanah. In the first court proceedings, when he failed to handle objections, he was panicked, as expressed in the words, "He started to feel tightness in his chest." (The Verdict, 2021, p.180). In the second proceeding, he seemed better composed as he talked about injustice inflicted upon women and minorities. "Yet about the injustice we inflict upon ourselves? Against minorities, the poor, against women.....in the name of honour." (The Verdict,

2021, p.239). He has good rhetoric there but is not suitable for Pakistani courts. It seems more like a speech than a debate. That is why he also failed in the second proceeding, and the court was adjourned for two weeks. As I have already discussed, the character is emotionally divergent from the societal demands, he is also unable to deal with his emotions for Sanah diligently even after knowing that she is married to Fazeel now, and he does not have any right to rule over her. He slept with her, and he romanced her. He also seemed guilty of it by the end of the novel when Sikander realizes "*he played the alternative lesser love interest in this tale of romance.*" (*The Verdict, 2021, p.259*). His inclinations towards someone's wife show that neither he controlled himself nor fulfilled his social and moral obligations. Overall the character is the counterpart to the oppressive stereotypical male characters but lacks in his emotional management.

Conclusion

The behaviour and attitude of each character glimpse the change from stereotypical roles and nature to new gender roles. Female characters show a complete shift from that female characters who are serving their counterparts and families, bearing violence and oppression, to that one character who lives for herself and decides the essence of her life, which lies in serving the suppressed people. Similarly, male characters shift from cruel, oppressive, violent, and sexist to brave, loving, caring, and encouraging characters. These characters, which are built-in counter-narrative, are the hopeful indication of the degradation of stereotypical roles which allow men to suppress women and confine them to their traditional gender roles, which lie in serving their husbands and bearing all the violence they inflict upon them. On the other hand, it is a ray of hope for elevating the position of women and giving them sufficient rights to define what they want to do independently, which is the real manifesto of feminism at its core.

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