

From Playmates to Pariahs: Exploring the Loss of “Silly” Khala

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Abstract

The feminist debate surrounding gender and sex has influenced many disciplines including literature. Similarly, Naima Rashid critically tackles the notion of ‘womanhood’ through the character of ‘Iffat’ in her short story titled Iffat Khala. Therefore, the major aim of this paper is to examine the ways in which the notion of woman is socially mediated and constructed and to find out how social constructs impact subjugated individuals. These questions are answered via close reading of selected text as this method allows for deeper analysis. Moreover, the analysis is theoretically informed by Judith Butler’s concept of Gender Performativity as the notion of ‘gender’ being performance is explored by Rashid in the text. As analysis reveals that Iffat, like every other woman around her, tries to perform socially expected acts to be ‘woman’; however, her inability to have children devoid her said identity. Moreover, the societal expectations cause Iffat to be ‘pariah’ in a circle where she used to be ‘silly’ Khala. The analysis concludes that the normalized societal expectations aided by self-implicated definition of woman including making “Barrenness” a stigma, have pushed Iffat into a place where she is not in “touch” with her “silly” and self-reflecting past. Therefore, she confines herself to her own universe, i.e. into isolation. The research contributes to ongoing debate surrounding gender and sex in literature. Moreover, it also adds to Butler’s theory as paper discusses a nuanced concept, i.e. ‘Barren’. Similarly, the research also adds to existing scholarship in Pakistani literature on issue of gender, social construct and infertility.

Keywords: Woman, Identity, Patriarchy, Performativity, Barren and Reinforcement

Introduction

Pakistani literature in English had constantly been expanding to different dimensions like Partition literature, Postcolonial literature, Diaspora

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literature, Indigenous literature, feminist literature, etc. Such dimensions have been on rise in all literary genres. English literary world has experienced some great Pakistani writers in novel, those who include are Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Moni Mohsin, etc. However, in the art of short story writing, people like Aisha Malik, H.K. Burki make to list of those masters, who have enriched the genre with literary masterpieces. In contemporary times, like novelists, short story writers have produced great works i.e. In *Other Rooms, Other Wonders* written by Daniyal Mueenuddin. These writers have often explored the themes around women plight and their journey to asserting agency. In this study, an interesting short story *Iffat Khala* by Naima Rashid has been selected in order to examine the contemporary feministic concerns in the light of Judith Butler's theory of Gender Performativity. As for Naima Rashid, she is an author, literary translator and poetess, her famous translated works include *Naulakhi Kothi* and *Defiance of the Rose*. The selected story, *Iffat Khala*, embodies nuances reflecting Pakistani cultural insights surrounding the notion of gender thereby its social construction. Rashid's text contributes to broader feminist discourse on the notions of sex and gender; however, it adds more in sense that it is socially informed.

The study under consideration critically engages in social construct like infertility that is attributed nuances thereby changed into a gendered construct as 'barren'. Such ideas are often explored in Pakistani fiction, particularly the debate between gender and sex, which has been ongoing for so long. Judith Famela Butler is a key theorist that discussed in great length the notion of gender as a construct and voiced the idea of gender performativity. For her, gender is an identity which is constructed by repeated acts thereby resulting in performance (Butler, 1988, p. 519). Moreover, in her work *Gender Trouble*, she is of the view that society create gendered norms around the concepts of femininity and masculinity; therefore, "the very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms" (Butler, 1999, p. 4). Moreover, she simply calls gender as the interpretation of sex (Butler, 1999, p. 10).

According to Singh (2024) Judith Butler “deconstructs Beauvoir’s famous aphorism that female becomes woman” because gender is rather a performance than merely a result (p. 285). Like Butler, Lorber (2018) argues that people construct and perform gender for themselves and the people around them (p. 5). Moreover, West and Zimmerman (1987) define such performance as ‘doing gender’ and believe that “doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micro-political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (p. 126). Their ideas, like those of Butler, situate gender as an act rather than a passive result. As we shall see in analysis, Rashid situates her character of Iffat into a situation where she has to act of her performance into socially accepted terms.

Similarly, the discussion around sex and gender has also been of great significance in the Pakistani context, particularly dealing with the issues of women oppression. For instance, Awan and Rasheed (2019) analyzed two Pakistani novelists i.e. Bapsi Sidhwa and Qaisra Shahraz and found that through their writings, both the authors have “tried their best to highlight the issue of gender stereotypes in their writings” (p. 608). Since, gender stereotypes are a major source of the process of gendering (Rehmat & Umar, 2022). Moreover, Fatima (2019) utilizes Butler’s theory of performativity to “to critique and evaluate women’s representation in Pakistani popular cultural texts” in order to “engage with the politics of gender in Pakistan.” (p. 3). In her analysis of Pakistani dramas, she finds that there is stereotypical representation of femininity in serials (Fatima, 2019, p. 13). Similarly, in a recent study done by Tariq and Husnain (2025) argue claim that Pakistani dramas perpetuate and reinforce gendered roles and stereotypes. All these studies have defined the way gender is constructed and negotiated; however, the impact of such construction is often ignored. Therefore, this paper aims to look into such construction in Rashid’s text and analyze the impact thereby.

Naima Rashid wrote *Iffat khala* in 2020 which was published online by The scores. It is a short story narrated through the eyes of a young girl narrator. The narration dives into the contemporary household of "Shakeel Mansion" and elicits to the readers the normalized and layered subjugation and oppression of the women. Unnamed girl narrator introduces readers of her khala Iffat, who is her favourite of all khalas. Since Iffat is yet to be married.; therefore, she does all childish things with narrator and her cousins. Being Physics lecturer, Iffat is often involved in schooling her nephews and nieces apart from being their playmate. Moreover, she spends a lot of time with these kids and keeps their secrets unknown to other grownups. Therefore, all kids including narrator is sad over the fact that their favorite khala is getting married. After her marriage with Saleem, Iffat moves to Saudi Arabia and often comes after every two or three years. When she returns home for the first time, narrator notices change in her behaviour. Soon it is apparent that Iffat has completely changed her persona and has become typical woman and has grown "angrier and fatter". Therefore, she behaves so strangely that narrator calls her "witch"; lurking for secret of people to talk about. However, it is revealed that Iffat khala's husband Saleem has been living in Islamabad and has three children with his second wife, for it is established that Iffat is barren.

Naima Rashid, through a child narrator, highlights a journey of an individual from merely being female to woman. It is worth noting that both the words might be used interchangeably in day to day communication; however, in feminist discourse both words are nearly taken as dichotomy. For instance, Toril Moi (1987) defines feminine as a set of characteristics that is culturally defined and constructed, that a female must conform thereby being feminine. However, female is a word used for an individual capable of (typically) producing offspring. Such concepts have been centre of attention in feminist discourse, including in literature. Similarly, *Iffat Khala* is story of a journey from personhood to womanhood or from female to woman. Thus, story indulges into critically examining the embedded social

constructs that are of serious concern to feminist literary theory. Therefore, through this paper an effort has been made to delve into the layered meanings of the text to critically view the issues that are of utmost concern according to Gender Performativity theory of Judith Butler.

Review of the Literature

Literature often mirrors contemporary lifestyles, traditions and norms of a society. However, at the micro level, it gives insights into the lives of individuals. Such a depiction might be called subjective or objective based on the nature of literature itself. Having said that, literature in recent years have reflected the postmodern condition of human beings and discussed on key aspects like human psyche and identity fragmentation. However, such concerns have always been the centre of concern for many critical theories i.e. post-colonialism, postmodernism, feminism (etc). In feminist discourse concept like identity has always been the major point of concern as it carries signification beyond merely being stable entity. The following section thematically tackles that issues of identity and representation of women in literature.

For feminists, the patriarchal misrepresentation of female identity has been the major cause of women exploitation throughout the course of history. In English literature, such a representation was challenged by authors like Irigaray (1977) in *This Sex Which Is Not One*. She is of the view that male-centric lens in English literature has misrepresented female sexuality and identity. Therefore, this male-centric structures have effectively, not necessarily fairly, defined what it meant to be a woman. Thus, when De Beauvoir (1949) claims that woman is not born rather she becomes one after birth, she appears to refer to the very claim Luce Irigaray posits regarding misrepresentation. Both the authors suggest of the change or what Beauvoir calls *écriture féminine*: women writing for self-representation. There was, indeed, a positive response to this call as explained by Showalter (1977) in her book

A Literature of Their Own. According to her, women writers during mid-20th century took the approach of redefining female identity and her experiences: an era she calls as the 'Female Phase'. It is apparent from feminist discourse that misrepresentation has indeed made women vulnerable in every social sphere, and even today women like Iffat Khala are facing that socially inflicted burn.

From this very debate of identity arose the debate that sex is biological faculty whereas gender is a social construct. It is discussed by Butler (1990) in her work *Gender trouble*. She believes that gender i.e. man and woman is constituted and performed (p. 4). Therefore, one cannot argue about the stability of gender since it mere the performance of socially designed acts (Butler, 1999, p. 4). Moreover, she voices her distinction stating that "gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (Butler, 1999, pp. 9-10). While commenting on her ideas and theory, Singh (2014) is of the view that for Butler gender is an act that needs to be performed repeatedly under a social regime (p. 285). In this ongoing discussion on gender and sex, Lorber (2018) holds the view that we are gendered because we perform the very act of gendering (p. 4). However, for West and Zimmerman (1987) sex and gender are not fixed categories rather "sex is a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males...Gender, in contrast, is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" (p. 127).

Similarly, socially constructed norms and rules around gender and thereby their subsisting impact on women, have been highlighted by many female writers in every genre of English literature. For instance, Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, talks about patronizing reality of a patriarch and its impact on agency of woman. Both the female characters perform their role of being women; a phenomenon discussed by Butler's Gender Performativity theory. Moreover, there have been substantial amount of studies around that the notion of gender, some

calling it a social construct (Rodrigues, 2011), while other prefer calling it performativity (Hamoodi & Fejer, 2018; Thibordee & Panlay, 2018) and stereotyping (Rehman & Anwar, 2020). Similar are the issues explored in their short stories by writers like Jhumpa Lahiri, Alice Munro, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who have explored issues of identity in context of society and culture.

Similarly, the aforementioned debate around gender construction and performance have also been of great significance in Pakistani literary context. For instance, Abbasi et al. (2023) analyzed two novels i.e. Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy* and *The Holy Woman* by Qaisra Shahraz, and establish that "specific roles assigned to each gender according to the cultural traditions" (p. 43). Similarly, Mujahid (2023) in his study analyses Pakistani fiction and finds that the portrayal of gender roles is evident in the works of female writers. Moreover, some studies have shown that gender stereotypes have been the source of enacting gender difference (Awan & Rasheed, 2019; Haleem, 2014; Rehmat & Umar, 2022). Such discussions around gender are not confined to novels only; however, they are being explored in many genres and through different mediums. For instance, Jabeen and Afzal (2023) critically analyze Pakistani poetess Parveen Shakir and Fahmida Riaz in order to look at the portrayal of gender. Similarly, studies around Pakistani TV serials shows that Pakistani Dramas enact and reinforce gendered roles and stereotypes (Fatima, 2019; Tariq and Husnain (2025). However, Sohail et al. (2020) while examining Pakistani Films, in order to analyze aforementioned themes around gender, found that Pakistani films challenge gendered roles and stereotypes. All the aforementioned studies, pertaining to issues of gender construction as reflected particularly in Pakistani literature, have demonstrated and explained the ways in which gender is constructed and negotiated. However, these studies fall short of explaining the influence and impact on individuals of such gendered roles and stereotypes. Moreover, neither do these studies have defined the impact of said construction. Therefore, this study aims to analyze Rashid's short story *Iffat Khala* through Butler's

theoretical notion of gender performativity, in order to not only look into such construction but also to analyze the impact thereby.

For the purposes hence provided afore, the literature review discussed the notion of gender construction, women identity, its link with society and impact on women. These issues have been explored by Pakistani novelists and short story writers like Kamila Shamsie, Daniyal Mueenuddin, Uzma Aslam Khan (etc). As for short story Iffat Khala there remains apparent research gap and thus awaits a thorough investigation from different theoretical frameworks. For such reason, the effort has been made to critically appreciate the short story from notion of Gender Performativity in order to find underlying oppression motivated by social and patriarchal norms.

Theoretical Framework

The present study uses the concept of gender performativity by Judith Butler as a theoretical framework. Butler, a theorist and philosopher, is better known for her magnum opus *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. In her book, she (1999) posits serious questions on the normalized and traditional understanding of gender and sex, arguing that gender is not and should never be considered as a stable identity, agency or persona of any individual; however, gender as an identity is result of repeated performance of gendered acts that are performed in time and it's that repetition that creates the so-called gender (p. 179). For her gender is the result of conventionalized acts that gets fixed once it repeated over time. As we shall see, the performativity of women is carried and repeated in form of conversations. According to Butler, such performance causes a superficial and stereotyped identity which in returns produces an illusion of stable identity. In her earlier work titled *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, Butler (1988) iterates that the acts required to carry out gendered performance are intentional thereby paving the way for very idea that gender is socially constructed, negotiated and

performed (pp. 521-522). In this regard, she further adds that since gender is not stable and 'fact' based, there are certain gendered acts that "creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender" (Butler, 1988, p. 522). Thus, when one claims that gender is real, according to Butler (1988) that reality is only true to the extent of its performance which indeed is real but not product itself i.e. gender (p. 527). It is why she claims that "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler, 1999, p. 179). From her arguments it can be deduced that being man or woman is not always automatically decided by the sex one is born into; rather, it is normalized repetition of certain gendered acts one performs that decide his or her gender. This notion of performance will be looked in the analysis of text to see how characters, particularly women, negotiate and enact gendered norms thereby performing the act of gendering.

As discussed afore, the gender is not stable rather it is constructed and performed. The problem, therefore, with such construction is that it is based on overgeneralization. For instance, similar norms are used as a yardstick to map the subjectivities of all men or women. Just like the notion of motherhood is problematic for Judith Butler. She argues that the patriarchal structures have made "institution of motherhood as compulsory for women" (Butler, 1999, p. 118). According to prescribed yardstick based on overgeneralization, every married woman should have children after marriage. Such ideas are portrayed as commonsensical and are thereby normalized. Therefore, women, who are unable to become mother, are considered something unnatural or deviated. Thus, Butler (1999) calls such phenomenon as "restricting frames of masculinist domination" (p. 180). Since, such normalizations cause oppression for those women who do not fall on prescribed gendered terms. In this regard, while commenting of Butler's concept, Lorber (2018) is of the view that the problem with such generalizations is that they

are normalized to the extent that if one does not follow it, he or she is called “unmanly or unwomanly” (p. 6). The impact of such impositions arising from the “matrix of coherent gender norms” makes those vulnerable who does not fall under the ascribed category. (Butler, 1999, p. 23). By applying the concept of gender performativity by Judith Butler, the analysis aims to highlight socially created identity of women including Iffat, her self-inflicted isolation, and socially created stigma around the infertility.

Methodology

According to Seliger and Shohamy (1989), a successful research is the one that is well designed in terms of methods and techniques. Therefore, the design of this paper is qualitative in nature as it is leaning towards interpretivist paradigm. As far as the notion of paradigm in research is concerned, Creswell (2009) argues that it is researcher’s orientation of the world (p. 6). Similarly, for Guba (1990) it is worldview; a guiding set of beliefs (p. 17). There are many other names associated with paradigm; however, many calls it simply as research paradigms (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Mertens, 1998). The paper under consideration uses interpretivism as a research paradigm as it will help in carrying out an informed exploration of gendered norms and constructs thereby their impact. For Schwandt (1998), the interpretivist school of thought believes that in order to understand any phenomenon and lived experience we must interpret it (p. 222). This study, therefore, utilizes interpretivist paradigm as it allows for the interpretation of lived experiences which is crucial in understanding the experiences of character ‘Iffat’. Thus, the primary source of data collection is the text of short story Iffat Khala, which utilizes close reading for that matter, in order to extract relevant passages, quotes, instance, excerpts that directly or indirectly refers to gender roles, individuality, social expectations and impact of fixation. Moreover, the secondary sources of data include existing scholarship in form of articles and books on sex and gender, gender performance and social construction of norms. Textual analysis

method as suggested by Catherine Belsey (2013) is used as a method of data analysis as it allows for a thorough exploration of text in order to find answers to the questions without extensively considering the other resources (p. 160). The analysis is limited to only character of Iffat from short story; therefore, the generalization cannot be articulated explicitly. However, the further research in Pakistani literature could complement the findings of this study.

Analysis

❖ Gender performance, woman and society; An intersection.

Naima Rashid's short story named *Iffat Khala*, discusses in great detail the concepts like gender performativity, the societal expectations and impact of said normalized gendered norms on individuals, particularly women. As discussed earlier in literature review, the notion of womanhood, as a gender, has long been the subject of Feminist concerns throughout their struggles against patriarchal structures. Such notions have been propagated, claims Feminists, through male dominated literary writings. Therefore, critics like Cixous (1976) in her work *The Laugh of Medusa* states that the only possible way for female to get freedom from misrepresentation is that "She must write herself" (p. 880). Therefore, the sole purpose is to get away from defining and fixation of gender roles by male. In this short story, through the female child narrator, we are told of the typicality of womanhood. Naima's method of simply stating the roles related to womanhood is, in itself, a critique of the notion of womanhood. As the text states that, a woman once married, is always busy with her kids and husband. The way child narrator iterates this statement casually is reflective of the very normalized and insidious nature of gendered norms which a woman is 'obviously' expected to comply and conform thereby being a woman. Similarly, another normalcy stocked around womanhood is that after marriage she "suddenly learn(s) how to cook" as it is something commonsensical and always "happens after marriage" (Rashid, 2020, para. 2). Such practices are normalized

enough that it becomes norms of a society, which in return gets associated with the people living in that society. Such expected roles and duties ascribed with gender of women are often portrayed as natural and based on commonsensical grounds. It is the reason that Butler (1999) claims that “gender is always a doing” (p. 33), a sort of repeated sequence of norms and roles. Just like all the grown-up women around narrator, have learned how to be a socially expected woman. Thus, womanhood in a sense entails the notion of an angel in the house.

For Butler (1988), these gendered norms or stereotypes, that rests on false belief, are propagated solely to maintain persisting gender order and by no means create a stable gender identity (p. 522). Similarly, text incorporates such layered meanings in such a way there mirrors such patriarchal notions that too are normalized in a subtle way and give a falsifying idea that resulting gender is natural just like sex. For instance, another reference to this continued conformity with prescribed notion of womanhood is reflected by the very instance that narrator is refrained from having her hair cut short. As her mother is very proud of her daughter’s long hair that are just like her and her those of her sisters. In subcontinent culture, particularly Pakistani culture, having long hair is considered to be beautiful. However, despite narrator’s consistent requests as being merely a girl child, her mother refrains her from having short hair as it is considered something against the family heritage. The fact that narrator’s mother often feels proud at photo of her family women with long hair is reflective of continued conformity to said gendered norms. Moreover, narrator is often schooled about right beauty standards as her mother believes that a woman’s beauty is supposed to be best reflected by normal dress with preferably long hairs, and otherwise is considered aberration according to prescribed performative norms. Hence, mother’s objection to her short hair becomes abjection of narrator, who believes that her likeness should have been considered instead of the maternal family tradition of having long and thick hair.

Moreover, the notion of womanhood has variations since it is rather performance than a stable identity (Butler, 1999, p. 179). Therefore, socially accepted norms and acts work as yardstick to measure whether one is man or woman which often is decided, claims Butler (1999), by the performance of individual of those acts. Similarly, in text as Iffat is not married, she is not officially qualified as woman enough to be included in the group of grown up women thereby being part of their conversations. Therefore, she becomes part of children's group where she teaches them, plays with them, does 'silly' things with the narrator and her cousins and "keep (our) secrets". She is basically at the verge of becoming a qualified 'woman'; however, since her marriage is yet to take place, she is not officially considered women enough to be allowed to sit with elder women. Similarly, her illegibility to womanhood is confirmed by her absence from a womanly conversation for "she wasn't in the group of married people yet" (Rashid, 2020, para. 14). However, in these conversations the participating women are always discussing non-serious topics and merely talking about fellow women. This reflects the very discourse that women always discuss useless things; however, via these conversations gender norms about the very notion of 'woman' are reflected, reiterated and reinforced to younger generation like narrator. Every married woman is directly qualified to be part of these conversation, along with girl-child as narrator, who often accompanies mother for oiling up rituals that causes these conversations to happen. Through these conversations, an ideal sketch of women is crafted thus every woman learns everything after marriage as states narrator. In this regard, like Butler, Lorber (2018) is of the view that people always construct and perform gender for their own selves and the people around them (p. 5). Same can be deduced from the conversations held by women, where they not only define and redefine the definitions of perfect 'woman' but also are redefined themselves in the process. Thus, once a new woman enters their circle, she is trained to be a perfect wife just like her mother as claims narrator. Similarly, when Iffat gets married, the narrator confirms that Iffat has succumbed "to grow-upness" thereby her upgradation from female to womanhood

in a proper sense. Like every women part of these conversation, Iffat also becomes a woman after marriage and automatically qualifies for these gatherings.

❖ Identity, Infertility and society

Now that Iffat is married and has obtained the status of 'Grown up', narrator is hopeful that Iffat would be the same and 'silly'. She is afraid of the fact that she might lose her only real friend who used to keep her secrets. Thus, after marriage the narrator informs that Iffat has made a promise to keep in "Touch" with her, for she is moving to Saudi Arabia and might visit back after two, three years. Here, it is worth mentioning that the notion of keeping in touch may symbolically be interpreted as keeping in touch with her personhood, her past or basically her real-silly-self. However, as Iffat visits the family after two years, the narrator searches for that "touch" which might therefore give her hint that Iffat is the same old silly Khala. But, it is a situation so heartbreaking for the narrator that she does not receive any hint from Iffat let alone that old touch. At this moment, it is apparent that Iffat has lost that flare or the aura that signified her being 'Iffat': favourite of khalas. Apart from passage of time, narrator witness the apparent passage of very old familiarity with her favourite khala. She is afraid of her own commonsensical believes which she utters at the start of the story that after marriage every woman becomes angry and fat. Once Iffat visits them, narrator is afraid for the fact that she can no longer spot her old friend and silly khala. For now, she learns that her old friend is promoted to grown-up-ness.

However, it is during such a critical examination of Iffat, that the narrator casually mentions that Iffat and Saleem "didn't have a baby yet, but that was bound to come" (Rashid, 2020, para. 31). Again, Naima Rashid uses her normalizing albeit deceptive style as she criticizes the very notion build on normalization of capacity to have a baby. Therefore, the way it is narrated, it sounds like it is a fact universally acclaimed that after marriage a baby is always bound to come regardless of exceptions and biological impossibilities. However, it is rather the criticism that the author deploys

after such an ironic representation. Similarly, such normalcy around the concept of motherhood is questioned by Butler (1999), who argues that patriarchal structures have made “institution of motherhood as compulsory for women (p. 118). Therefore, women who are unable to be a mother are made to feel guilty of the infertility. Thus, the idea of feminine and conforming to the ideals of womanhood establish having a baby a commonsensical phenomenon thereby making otherwise stigmatized. Similar is with Iffat Khala whose infertility is so out of common sense that the narrator is sure that the baby is ‘bound to come’. Moreover, it can also be argued that the belief, which narrator holds that after marriage baby is always bound to come no matter what, is informed by her participation in the conversations of grownups. Therefore, in those conversations, she was again and again reminded of the fact that once woman gets married, she has a baby. This very act thereby resulting in performance is considered as the very act of gendering (Butler, 1988, p. 519).

As discussed afore, according to Butler (1999), the gender (women) is not a stable entity and cannot be understood in fixed terms (Butler, 1999, p. 4). Therefore, it is constructed and negotiated in the society one lives. Similarly, for Iffat being ‘barren’ means something great because she knows what it means to the society where she lives. Therefore, the role of society is key in this trilogy of gender, bareness and societal expectations since gender performance is reiterated and reinforced by social cooperation. When De Beauvoir (1949) claims that a woman is not born rather she becomes one after birth, she credits this construction to society with social expectations that is directed by gender performativity norms. Now that Iffat is told that she can never bear offspring to her husband, she is afraid not because she would never have any children of her own but because she has to face the society which has set having children as a yardstick for a married woman. Therefore, the very stigma is socially propagated via platforms like women conversations where it is set as standard notion to be a woman that a female must have a baby after she gets

married. Iffat fears socially inflicted accountability because she fails to what Butler (1990) calls ‘Perform gender’. Like Butler, according to West and Zimmerman (1987) believe that in order to successfully be a gendered individual one must ‘do gender’ which involves “a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micro-political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (p. 126). However, Iffat can no longer fulfill said criteria as uttered forth by societal expectations communicated via womanly conversations. Thus, her inability to align with set forth conventions not only strips her off her individuality but she is labelled with tag “barren”; a tag adding insult to injury. On the other hand, Saleem, her husband, gets married easily and avoids burn of being labelled ‘barren’ with his first wife, all due to impunity served by social norms. Such are the reasons that motivate Lauretis (1988) to propose that patriarchy is a very intricate system that always puts men at advantages and women at disadvantages in various spheres of life. As reflected in the misery of Iffat, she has to solely bear the blame and face haunting isolation from her husband despite being married just because she cannot bear him a child.

❖ **The loss of playmate, emergence of pariah**

What is more interesting about the gendered thereby normalized oppression of Iffat is the coalition of societal expectations, selfhood and her inability to bear offspring or better known as her ‘barrenness’. The issue with the aforementioned trilogy is that by making fertility the defining agent of a female's identity, it cloaks “barrens” like Iffat thereby making them burdened. According to Butler (1999) such norms and gendered constructs “require(s) the female body to be characterized primarily in terms of its reproductive function [is] inscribed on that body as the law of its natural” (p. 118). It is, unfortunately, for such a reason that the fate of Iffat Khala is dictated not by her identity but by her inability to have children. Therefore, this gives her husband a way to get married to another lady and have three children. Though, Saleem does not divorce Iffat but has restricted his presence in Iffat's life

like that “ghost”. Therefore, it is only her that is facing the burn of social inflicted stigma, of being called “Baanjh” and then retiring oneself into isolation. Thus, her plight is best described by the fact that she has silently succumbed to “the atmospheric pressure” of society. Thus, she limits herself to her own room and is lost completely into the darkness of the room where “She had slowly built a self-sufficient universe for herself inside that room”. (Rashid, 2020, para. 33). Amid such isolation, she does not join oiling up rituals because she is no longer a normal married female and also because she cannot fight against her stigma. Everything adds up to her alienation including her husband’s role as merely ghost; who has walked out of her room. This walking-out-of-room symbolically signifies the privilege patriarchy has bestowed to men, who simply washes off their hand and are given clean chit of “barren” tag. However, women like Iffat are made to feel guilty because of this socially manufactured stigma, thus they become victim of self-loathing. In this regard, Butler (1999) holds view that such phenomenon needs to be called as “restricting frames of masculinist domination” since the fixed yardsticks often end up oppressing the women gender (p. 180).

Moreover, her situation psychologically impacts her severely because she not only witnesses the utter isolation from her husband side but also from other members of the family. In this regard, Butler (1999) adds that such “matrix of coherent gender norms” impact drastically to those vulnerable individuals who does not somehow fall under the fixed and ascribed category (p. 23). Such claims can be confirmed via studies; for instance, according to the study conducted by Qadir et al. (2015), regarding those experiencing infertility among 177 participants, 37.3% reported to have experienced distress due to lack of family and social support. Similar is the case of Iffat, who lacks support from her husband. Saleem, rather than supporting her psychologically and emotionally, ends up marrying with another woman and finally has ‘children’. Had her husband supported Iffat at such haunting crossroads, she would have never lost her temper let alone individuality or her real being. However,

her husband marries without a slightest of the delay. The fact that her husband has three children from his second wife, adds insult to Iffat's injury. Therefore, the result of such turmoil adds up to apparent rage manifested in her demeanor. After such successive incidents, she loses her temper, control, persona thereby her individuality. Thus, Iffat instead of defending herself as being a physics lecturer and setting an example for her female students by opting for what Woolf (1938) calls acts of defiance; she returns to doing exactly the same things "grown up" ladies has been doing in their confined conversation: "always talking about marriage" and having children (Rashid, 2020, para. 13). Here Naima Rashid uses irony to highlight the fact that often times it is the fellow woman who works as gatekeeper of patriarchy and gendered norms cloaked as normal fact. Similarly, instead of fighting for herself and openly denouncing that her inability is not something she has control on, Iffat choses to talk bad about all those women who are struggling in their lives just like herself. For that very reason Butler (1999) is of the view "that to operate within the matrix of power is not the same as to replicate uncritically relations of domination. (p. 40). Similarly, Iffat does not direct her rage and power to undo domination, rather she follows the same cyclical route, she too molds her hatred in the wrong direction. It is reason that even narrator is afraid of her once-used-to-be favourite khala. Therefore, the narrator calls Iffat "a woman who resembled a witch" (Rashid, 2020, para. 41); a symbol Rich (1977) deploys to define "formal rage, rebellion, and defiance against patriarchal control" (p. 153). However, Iffat's rage is directed towards fellow women, whom she discusses in her confined conversation with her brother or other female relatives. There she "starts the whole cycle anew" whenever she finds any women doing any little/ "silly" mistake. Thus, in this way the cycle never ends, rather it is repeated and enacted the same way gendered acts are repeated to perform the gender. It is reason, Iffat had to face her inability to have children as a stigma because no one in past had decided to undo the cycle of iterating such as stigma arising out of confined womanly conversations. Not that Iffat has decided to do exactly what had been done in the past, she is doing for future

Iffat's or 'barrens' the same thing she has been victim of herself. Therefore, in this way the cycle seems not to be challenged rather it is reiterated in a way that is becomes gendered thereby normal.

Therefore, amid her all rage and anger, her imposed persona is expanding to the extent that she starts scaring the narrator. It is alarming in a sense that she was the best friend of Iffat and whom she used to call as her favourite and 'silly' khala. Now her favourite khalas seems scary to the narrator because she is asked by Iffat to tell her about her parents last fight and other secrets in exchange for chocolate. Such incident summarizes the haunting journey of Iffat who was once playmate, the 'silly' khala that used to keep secrets of even the children; however, now she has been completely transformed into a 'witch' that needs to know every secret. Her condition is defined greatly by Showalter (1987) that "the isolation and despair experienced by women struggling with infertility was often pathologized, adding to their burden." (p. 132). Therefore, such a self-inflicting pain of isolation motivated by social created stigma around barrenness results in complete alienations of Iffat from her "silly" past. Thus, despite the narrator's struggles to find that "touch", that "old frequency between (them) but there was no sign of it. She had blanked out on that completely" (Rashid, 2020, para. 7). In such a way, she loses individuality and gets herself removed from circle of playful group and becomes pariah. She is no longer same Iffat, who used to share secrets, play with kids and teach them happily. She has become a woman albeit a deviant one because of her inability to have a baby.

Discussion and Conclusion

Through this paper, Iffat Khala by Naima Rashid has been analyzed thoroughly by linking it with subsisting feminists concerns those particularly raised by Judith butler. The study revealed that socially created definitions and tags around women subtly marginalizes them as they embark on performance of their gender. In case of Iffat, she experiences identity metamorphosis as she transforms from a girl doing

‘silly things’, becoming ‘grown up’, being ‘barren’ to ending up being a ‘witch’. She performs her gender thereby causing her identity to disappear in the process. Such an act, according to Lorber (2018) is called “act of gendering” (p. 4). Therefore, by going through the process, it can be metaphorically stated that Iffat Khala has been transformed from playmate to pariah due to the very act of gendering. However, such a surprising transformation is assisted greatly by the element called society and its expectations. Thus, the isolation of Iffat and her reiteration of dominant patriarchal notions subscribe to notions of female oppression. The resultant individual is totally pruned of all those qualities that highlighted her individuality of being ‘Iffat Khala’. Now she does not “listen to [our] stories, Keep our secrets” (Rashid, 2020, para. 4) rather she says “nasty things about [women]” and wants to know every secret even those of narrator’s parents (Rashid, 2020, para. 37). Similarly, once narrator proudly owned that Iffat “was on my side”; however, now that Iffat had gone beyond her personality, the narrator started feeling scared and intimidated by a seemingly witch woman who once was her favorite khala (Rashid, 2020, para. 14).

The resulting transformation assisted by self-isolation is not a commonsensical proof of individuality, rather it is a subjugation indoctrinated so subtly that those marginalized do not even realize that they are subjugated. Women often fell proud of having children and being in a working marriage; however, those otherwise merely become the subject of conversations and examples to learn from. Thus, not only other women mentioned in text are busy discussing above mentioned subject matter, but Iffat is also busy talk nonsense about all those women whose marriage is not working. Moreover, women conversations are sort of symposium where patriarchal structures are often reinforced than negotiated. Since narrator is often part of oiling up rituals, she often hears all conversations where “they were always talking about marriage, whose marriage was working, who wasn’t” (Rashid, 2020, para. 13). It is during these conversations that narrator too, is exposed to

assumptions normalized as facts as she states “they didn’t have a baby yet, but that was bound to come, sooner or later. It always does” (Rashid, 2020, para. 31). However, neither narrator nor do women involved in symposium answer to the very question that what if a female does not possess the ability to have a child? Such females, hence, are often challenged mentally where some succumb to self-loathing and some direct the anger to fellow being, Iffat is later in this regard.

The literature like *Iffat Khala* is often patronized and labelled exaggerated; however, the concerns being highlighted here are anything but exaggeration. It is an insightful representation of those marginalized who often lacks agency to voice their concerns. Therefore, it can be concluded that Naima Rashid through text has criticized the patriarchal structures in Pakistan by exposing the embedded and normalized oppression in the name of womanhood. The fact that narrator hears ‘Baanjh’ “a word that had echoed like a refrain in all conversations”, tells more of a society that labels an ability or an inability as a tag with overall personality of an individual. Moreover, she has also criticized the gatekeepers of patriarchy by stating Iffat’s reinforcement of such suppressing notions as an example. The story is enriched with multiple issues dealing with women’s education, social norms, gendered customs, family, institution of marriage; therefore, there is still need of literary scholarship that should cover the areas from different dimensions and theoretical lenses.

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