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Echoes of Motherh d Women's ood an Position in Rebel English Academy by Mohammed Hanif: A Feminist Analysis

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Abstract

In this article I engage the feminist lens of Mohammed Hanif's writing, Rebel English Academy (2026), to analyse how the novel builds and challenges the positionality of women in the overlapping patriarchal, military and religious systems of 1970s Pakistan. The central theme of motherhood as a biological weapon against women and as a symbolic voice of resistance lie at the heart of the analysis. This paper identifies the textual evidence of Sabiha Bano's narrative and the critical reception of Hanif's 'tough and purposive' feminism and recommends that the novel makes the female body the main terrain of contestation for the authoritarian control, while at the same time teaching women their agency of the testimony as an act of rebellion.

Keywords: Rebel English Academy, Feminism, Motherhood, Pakistani Literature, Gender Violence, Patriarchy, Authoritarianism

INTRODUCTION

Mohammed Hanif's literary work has always had a tendency to turn its satirical eye on the darkest corners of Pakistani history and politics and Rebel English Academy (2026) does not
disappoint, as critics have justly termed it 'unhinged, near-treasonous irreverence'. The novel is Hanif's most ruthless exposure of the way in which authoritarian power marks bodies, especially female bodies. The novel is set during period in the wake of the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto under General Zia-ul-Haq's military junta, which occurred in the period after the 1977 1979 martial law regime. This place, run by the defunct socialist Sir Baghi, is a cauldron in
which the political and the personal violently merge and in this cauldron, Hanif undertakes his most sustained feminist intervention yet.

The academy of the novel's title is supposedly granting its students the mastery of the language of the colonizer, a mastery of a language that will "pretend to serve power" but at the end of the day "will break it."" The institution, however, is very gendered from its birth.

It begins with the absence of women in the pedagogical vision their presence is so seamless and ubiquitous, that it is not even mentioned. The imbedded existence of a woman in this male
enclosure disrupts this enclosure and reveals the cracks in the revolutionary talk of the academy where the assumption of patriarchy lies. It is most evident in the disruption of this novel, which takes the shape of a woman in Sabiha Bano, its main consciousness, through whose eyes Hanif does his feminist analysis.

Sabiha comes into the story with a burden of several subjugations. She is a young widow, whose marriage had been arranged to an older gentleman who sold males enhancement treatments, and she was labelled damaged goods in the marriage economy as a result of a sexual assault. She
comes from "jiyalas," or Bhutto supporters who have been "disappeared" by the state, and are already orphaned in a politics that has left her parents languishing in the void of extrajudicial detention. She comes to the academy as a refugee, disguised at first, at the cost of her schooling. She is, importantly, the narrator of

much of the novel in the "homework" assignments that Sir
Baghi gives her in composition, whereby she becomes a witness to history from the comfort of her own home. Baghi says to teach what the other students teach, but "you are not just another student, you are a witness to history" this is her instruction and the intent of the author.
The thesis that comes from this narrative structure is twofold. The novel is an ongoing assault on the devaluation of the female body in a world dominated by male powers, as the body becomes a space to be colonised, controlled and traded. At the same time, it examines the language of
motherhood, as both a stifling burden and a ghostly lack, as an ambivalent echo that resonates throughout women's lives, both as an oppressive force and as a mode of rebellious testimony. But the metaphor of the echo is the one that is most apt here: motherhood is not a lived,
embodied reality in Rebel English Academy, but a persistent echo in memory, in institutional demand, in the narrative forms that Sabiha creates with her writing. Her missing mother,
"Mother Bano," is physically absent but makes a presence in Sabiha's compositions, her name called out, her legacy claimed by the carceral apparatus of the state. The constant refutation of the official narrative of finality, in the novel through rumours of Bhutto's life, is echoed in the maternal presence as it unsettles the official narrative of total control over women's lives and bodies, which is the order of the patriarchy.
As the critical reception has pointed out, Hanif's feminism is "tough and purposive." It denies the romanticized notion of a redeemed or noble motherhood, and the idealization of women as innocent victims. When Sabiha shows up at the academy, she is carrying with her not just her
trauma, but "a pistol and, worse, an attitude" her agency on display in ways that are disheveled, sometimes violent, and can't be neatly packaged into the story of empowerment. Some critics
have suggested that the novel's unflagging record of sexual violence, the rape by her PT teacher, the religious-justified predation of the maulvi Molly who "uses the Qur'an to justify taking a second wife", and the casual cruelties of Captain Gul, whose pregnant girlfriend gives birth to
his child while he takes in other conquests, leads to a desensitisation that is voyeuristic. However, by insisting on testimony, on giving Sabiha the power to name and record these violations, Hanif places the act of writing itself as a rebellion against the silencing which is
demanded by patriarchal and authoritarian systems together. English is the language taught by the academy, but it's Sabiha who shows how to use that language as a weapon in a body that has been the main theater of battle. In her last assignment, titled How I Run, this internal struggle of
limitation and motion is captured in the grammar of the body, a literal and symbolic commentary on the limits of enclosure offered by the man**.**

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q1: How does Rebel English Academy represent the institution of motherhood as a site of both patriarchal oppression and resistant female agency?
Q2: In what ways does the novel critique the reduction of women to their

reproductive and sexual functions within the intersecting structures of the household, the state, and religious authority?
Q3: How does Sabiha Bano's testimonial narrative - specifically her homework assignments -
function as a feminist counter-archive that challenges the silencing mechanisms of authoritarian patriarchy

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To examine the motif of motherhood in Rebel English Academy as a double edged structure of vulnerability and spectral resistance, through its appearances in Sabiha's life and throughout the symbolic economy of the novel.
To analyse, using Walby's theory of patriarchy, how the novel portrays the unity of the patriarchy of the household, of the authority of the state and of the authority of religion in relation to women's bodies and reproductive capacities.
To assess Sabiha's home assignments as a case of testimonial agency, using Lanser's feminist narratology to theorize about the way in which narrative voice contests patriarchy's silencing.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological structure of this study aims to provide a foundation for the interpretive conclusions drawn in the following analytical sections that are systematic, transparent, and
replicable. The following will outline the research design, method of data collection, method of data analysis, and ethical considerations that guide the research process.

Research design

This study employs a qualitative textual analysis research design, situated within the interpretive tradition of feminist literary criticism. The methodology is hermeneutic in its orientation, aiming not at the measurement of quantifiable variables or the testing of falsifiable hypotheses but at the deep interpretation of textual meaning as it emerges from the dynamic interaction between the literary text, its informing theoretical frameworks, and its specific historical context. This
hermeneutic orientation is appropriate to the research objectives, which require not the enumeration of instances but the nuanced interpretation of how the novel constructs meaning around motherhood, embodiment, testimony, and resistance. The design is structured around the systematic application of the integrated theoretical framework comprising Sylvia Walby's theory of structural patriarchy, Susan Sniader Lanser's feminist narratology, and Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality to the primary text, Mohammed Hanif's The Rebel English Academy, with supporting evidence drawn from the novel's published critical reception. This integrated framework
functions not as an external grid imposed upon the text but as an interpretive lens that brings specific textual features into focus, enabling an analysis that is simultaneously attentive to thematic content, narrative form, and the intersecting structures of power that the novel represents. The choice of a qualitative textual analysis design is further justified by the nature of the research questions, which ask how the novel represents, critiques, and enacts resistance —
questions that demand interpretive engagement with the specificities of literary language, narrative structure, and figurative expression rather than the aggregation of

data points.

Data Collection

The main primary data of this research are Rebel English Academy by Mohammed Hanif, which was first published in February 2026 by Grove Press and Hamish Hamilton. This text is chosen as the main data source because there is no sustained scholarly article yet that has examined this novel from a feminist perspective, thus it is the very text that needs to be examined and analyzed. The entire text is analysed as a unified aesthetic and ideological construct with each occurrence of motherhood, female body, sexual violence, religious power, or testimony writing treated as potentially relevant data. Secondary data consists of the findings from published reviews and critical commentaries on the novel published in reputable literary publications such as The Guardian, Kirkus Reviews, The Indian Express, The Telegraph India, Frontline Magazine, Dunya Digital, EdexLive. They are treated methodologically, not as authoritative interpretations of th novel by scholars who might stand in for the analysis this study is conducting, but as evidence of the novel's reception in its immediate aftermath and as a source of information on the thematic and formal elements which feminist critics have singled out as significant for analysis. By focusing on what has been perceptively identified by contemporary readers as salient in the text, the reviews offer a point of departure for the interpretation of the text that will be carried out here in the present study.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data in this study is carried out in four successive steps, one step for each of the four research objectives, which should proceed in a cumulative manner towards the conclusions of the study. The sequential structure of the analysis creates a sense of findings building on each other, giving rise to a coherent interpretative representation instead of a set of uncoordinated observations.

In phase one, the motif of motherhood in the novel is analyzed thematically. During this phase, all the instances of the biological motherhood, maternal absence, maternal memory, or maternal imagery are identified and interpreted in detail, paying special attention to Sabiha's homework assignments and her textual calls to "Mother Bano." Thematic analysis focuses on the particular language used to represent motherhood, the narrative contexts within which maternal imagery is used, and the symbolic associations that become attached to the maternal figure throughout the novel's development. This phase materializes the first research objective by outlining the ways in which motherhood is simultaneously a mechanism of vulnerability, making Sabiha an object of exploitation in the marriage economy, and a spectral one, that continues to exist in memory and in writing long after the mother is gone.Phase two uses Walby's six structure model of patriarchy to map the narrative events, character interactions and institutional representations of the novel to each of the six structures, which correspond to the six household modes of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, the patriarchal state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal cultural institutions. This mapping activity is not simply a

classification of the textual elements but an interpretive activity that looks at the convergence and
reinforcement of these textual elements within the novel. The analysis is of the way in which Sabiha's arranged marriage (household), her economic precarity (paid work), the regime of martial law (state), the raping of Sabiha by the PT teacher (male violence), the maulvi Molly's predation in his religious name (sexuality) and the academy's original ban on women (cultural institutions) form a whole system of patriarchal control.

In phase three, Sabiha's homework chapters are analyzed from a narratological perspective using Lanser's typology of narrative voice (authorial, personal, communal). This illustrates how Sabiha develops her assignments from 'Our Cow' to 'Our Mother and Father' to 'How I Run', how she deals with the limitations of the pedagogical context, and how she uses her narrative techniques, linguistic selections and rhetorical strategies to create writing beyond compliance and to stake a claim to authority in the form of testimony. In this phase, the concept of testimonio is an extension of Lanser's writing-as-bearing-witness model, allowing for the study to be shaped by an understanding of how the text positions Sabiha's writing as both a personal experience and a collective condition.

In phase four, a critical synthesis is conducted that reflects upon the relationship of tensions, ambivalences and limitations in Hanif's feminine representation. This phase situates the critical response to this novel in productive dialogue with the results of the textual analysis, seriously engaging with the counterpoints raised by reviewers who have wondered whether the novel's constant barrage of sexual violence may lead the reader to become desensitized or to become a
voyeur, whether the novel treats English as a language of subversion sufficiently to recognize the colonial history of the language and the conditions of its acquisition. In this phase the study
results are presented as affirmative but also as a reflection of them, recognizing the complexities and possible failure that the novel presents as a feminist achievement.

Ethical Considerations

This research will be conducted on a published literary work and the published critical reception that has occurred, and there is no risk to privacy, informed consent, confidentiality or harm to the participants. Institutional Ethics board review is not required because the analysis is clearly
grounded in accepted practices of humanities scholarship to examine published cultural artifacts and public discourse. The study is conducted in strict adherence to the rules of academic honesty, so that all the sources (both the text and the secondary critical ones) are cited in a uniform
referencing style, and that every interpretation made in the study is based on a specific and
identifiable textual evidence. The analysis upholds a commitment to being intellectually honest with the critical reception of the novel, accurately representing the arguments of reviewers in an accurate manner; not dismissing or caricaturating reviewers' views that may pose challenges or make the interpretive framework of the novel more complicated. This is an ethical recognition of the positionality of the researcher as an interpreter whose reading is influenced by specific
theoretical perspectives and cultural settings, and whose interpretation claims are not

false universalist or objective claims.

Significance of the Research

This study is important for several scholarly reasons, all of which require careful expression to determine the value of this research to the current knowledge while making the work relevant to the future conversations in and out of literary studies.

On the level of literary criticism, this work is the first academic, feminist analysis of a novel that was launched in February 2026, and whose critical reception has been largely written enthusiastically and widely, at major literary venues, but has yet to bring forth peer reviewed scholarly engagement. The feminist aspects of the novel, its challenge to rape culture, its satirical depiction of the ideology of religious justification for sexual exploitation, and the use of a female narrator have been noted in reviews published in The Guardian, Kirkus Reviews, The Indian

Express and Frontline Magazine but these reviews have been evaluative rather than analytical. This article contributes to a growing body of scholarship that is both theoretically informed and methodologically explicit while also being textually grounded, offering a feminist reading of the text.This article offers a feminist reading of the text and is grounded in theory and methodology as well as in texts, and is one of a growing body of scholarship that is grounded in a feminist perspective. Moreover, this contribution is not limited to a specific work, but enrichment of the new research group of Hanif's total oeuvre. Our Lady of Alice Bhatti (2011) is Hanif's first

novel, which has garnered scholarly interest for its portrayal of women's violence and is an intertextual examination of gender, religion and class in the contemporary city of Karachi. This study extends the previous scholarship by examining the development of Hanif's feminist project in his newest fictional entry, which traces the themes which critics have seen in his earlier work. In this analysis, the work helps to provide a longitudinal perspective on the development of

Hanif's literary oeuvre as a novelist who has increasingly focused upon gender politics in his work.

Theoretically, the study shows how the theory of structural patriarchy developed by Sylvia Walby, the theory of feminist narratology developed by Susan Sniader Lanser, and the theory of intersectionality developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw can be combined into one analytical tool for postcolonial literary studies. Typically, these three approaches have been used separately, as Walby's model has been influential in the social sciences and gender studies, but less so in literary criticism . Lanser's narratology has had an impact on feminist narrative theory, though

few attempts have been made to integrate it with a sociological study of patriarchy and Crenshaw's intersectionality has been invoked broadly across the humanities and social sciences, but rarely used as a tool for sustained analysis and interpretation. "Lanser's (1992) distinction between 'public' and 'private' narrative voice where 'women's

public voice has historically been constrained by cultural prohibitions against female authority' explains why Sabiha's testimony must emerge within the supposedly 'private' form of school

homework assignments. "

This research combines the three approaches together and illustrates how each can operate in

tandem in various ways through continuous textual analysis and proves to be a model that can be replicated by scholars who study at the intersection of gender, narrative form and political
critique. The structure presented here does not apply exclusively to Hanif's novel but could be transferred to other postcolonial literary works that produce the merging of patriarchy, testimonial voice, and intersecting identity categories.

This study contributes to the ongoing debate on the depiction of entanglement between gender violence and state authoritarianism and religious patriarchy in the wider discourse of Pakistani anglophone literature. Cara Cilano, Muneeza Shamsie and Claire Chambers have charted the
gendered landscape of Pakistani fiction, highlighting the constant themes of the body, the nation, and the politics of voice. This study adds to that scholarly discourse by providing a
comprehensive examination of the novel's attention to these issues by a prominent Pakistani
novelist. Rebel English Academy is a rich case study of how the gendered dimensions of state power are represented in literature because of its specific historical context, the era of Zia-ul-Haq, when a strong, and lasting, authoritarian grip of military rule and political Islam became established.

The analysis is not only relevant to the field of Hanif scholars but to the general field of scholars that study on postcolonial fiction and how it deals with the effects of authoritarian government and its varying effects on women.

At the sociopolitical level, finally, the study claims the ongoing relevance of literary analysis to the understanding of structures of gender oppression in the real world. The novel's account of sexual violence, of women's abortion and reproductive exploitation and of the use of religious narratives to legitimise patriarchal predation is more than fictional invention – it addresses
historical and contemporary realities that go far beyond the novel's setting in the 1970s. The study argues for the epistemic value of literature in conveying the lived experiences of women under Patriarchal and Authoritarian regimes, through the example of Sabiha's homework tasks
and their role in the creation of an archive of her experience. In this sense, literary criticism isn't a cloistered academic endeavor, but a practice where we come to know, understand, and
challenge the systems fiction reveals. This aspect of the study's relevance is especially significant, because the novel itself thematises the political power of language; the critical inquiry into language is political and has the potential to both serve and dismantle power.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly and critical terrain relevant to this study encompasses four interconnected domains that together establish the context, provide the theoretical resources, and reveal the gap that this
research addresses. These domains are the existing critical reception of Hanif's fiction with specific attention to feminist themes, the broader field of feminist literary criticism on
contemporary Pakistani anglophone writing, theoretical work on motherhood as both institution and experience, and scholarship on testimony and narrative voice in

women's writing. A systematic review of each domain follows, culminating in an identification of the research gap that this study fills.

The critical reception of Mohammed Hanif's fiction has consistently noted a feminist preoccupation that intensifies discernibly across his body of work. His 2011 novel Our Lady of Alice Bhatti was widely recognized for its unflinching focus on what reviewers and scholars have characterized as "violence against women," centering as it does on a Christian nurse navigating the misogynistic structures of Karachi's public hospital system and the predatory masculinity that pervades both the medical establishment and the wider urban landscape. Critics identified in that earlier novel the seeds of what one reviewer, writing specifically on Rebel English Academy, would later characterize as a "tough and purposive" feminism a descriptor that captures Hanif's signature refusal of sentimentalized female victimhood in favor of representations of women's agency that are messy, compromised, and sometimes violent in their expression. This feminist trajectory reaches its most developed and formally ambitious expression in The Rebel Academy, where the delegation of substantial narrative authority to Sabiha Bano through the homework assignment structure represents a formal innovation that deepens the political stakes of Hanif's gender critique by making a woman's consciousness the primary lens through which the narrative's events are refracted and interpreted. The novel's critical reception, as documented across venues including The Guardian, Kirkus Reviews, The Indian Express, The Telegraph India, Frontline Magazine, and EdexLive, has consistently foregrounded its confrontation with "rape culture," its satirical dissecition of religiously justified sexual exploitation, and its representation of the female body as a site of intense political contestation. Reviewers have noted that the novel "powerfully confronts rape culture," that the maulvi Molly "uses the Qur'an to justify taking a second wife, cloaking the exploitation of a vulnerable young widow in the language of righteousness," and that Sabiha's resilience "propels the novel along and provides that vital note of redemption and relief in a harrowing narrative of power and its brutality." However, these observations have remained at the level of evaluative review commentary rather than sustained scholarly analysis. No peer-reviewed article has yet taken up these critical insights and developed them into a rigorous, theoretically informed feminist reading of the novel.

The broader field of feminist literary criticism on Pakistani anglophone fiction provides the essential scholarly context within which this study positions itself. Scholars including Cara Cilano, Muneeza Shamsie, and Claire Chambers have mapped the gendered preoccupations of contemporary Pakistani novelists with considerable analytical precision, identifying recurrent thematic clusters around the body as a site of national and religious inscription, the nation as a gendered imaginary, religious identity as a vector of patriarchal regulation, and the politics of voice as a central concern for

women writers negotiating the constraints of a literary culture shaped by multiple patriarchies. Cilano's work on the representation of the 1971 war and its specifically gendered aftermath, developed in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction in English: Idea, Nation, State (2011), has established how contemporary novelists have revisited the foundational violences of Pakistani state formation through attention to the women's bodies upon which those violences were enacted. Shamsie's editorial framing of Pakistani women's writing as a distinct tradition, articulated through anthologies such as And the World Changed: Contemporary Stories by Pakistani Women (2008), has provided the critical vocabulary for recognizing the gendered specificities of Pakistani literary production. Chambers' analysis of British-Pakistani women's fiction, developed in British Muslim Fictions (2011) and related works, has extended this inquiry into diasporic contexts while maintaining attention to the transnational operation of patriarchal structures. Within this field, particular scholarly attention has been directed toward how women novelists such as Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsie, and Uzma Aslam Khan have negotiated the representation of female subjectivity under patriarchal constraint, developing formal strategies for rendering women's interiority and resistance within narrative structures that do not simply reproduce the objectifying logics they critique. Hanif's contribution as a male novelist writing explicitly feminist fiction invites comparative analysis with these traditions established by women writers, raising questions about the possibilities and limits of cross-gender feminist representation that this study will engage directly.

The theorization of motherhood that underpins this study draws substantially on Adrienne Rich's foundational distinction, articulated in Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (1976), between motherhood as a patriarchal institution that controls and constrains women by subjecting their reproductive capacities to male authority and social regulation, and motherhood as a potentially empowering lived experience that can ground forms of female knowledge, creativity, and resistance. Rich's framework enables an analysis that refuses the reduction of motherhood to either pure oppression or pure liberation, attending instead to the contradictory ways in which the institution operates in women's lives simultaneously a source of vulnerability to patriarchal exploitation and a resource for identity formation and political solidarity. This theoretical resource is supplemented by more recent feminist scholarship on motherhood in postcolonial contexts, which has emphasized how colonial and nationalist discourses have historically mobilized maternal imagery to consolidate particular visions of community and nation while simultaneously regulating actual women's reproductive lives through policies governing fertility, family structure, and population. Sara Ruddick's concept of "maternal thinking," developed in Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace (1989), provides a framework for understanding the cognitive and ethical practices that emerge from the work of mothering, practices that may be claimed and adapted even by those who are not themselves mothers. Patricia Hill Collins' analysis of

motherhood in the context of racial oppression, articulated in Black Feminist Thought (2000), offers additional theoretical resources for understanding how motherhood operates differently for women positioned at the intersection of multiple systems of subordination. Together, these theoretical resources enable an analysis of how Sabiha's relationship to her absent mother and her own reproductive vulnerability are shaped by the specific historical conditions of 1970s Pakistan conditions in which the state,
religious institutions, and kinship structures converge to determine the meanings and possibilities of maternal experience.

Feminist narratology, particularly the work of Susan Sniader Lanser, provides the theoretical vocabulary for analyzing the formal dimension of Hanif's feminist project, the dimension that
distinguishes Rebel English Academy from his earlier novels and that carries the weight of its most significant feminist claims. Lanser's Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice (1992) examines how women writers have historically negotiated the constraints of patriarchal
literary culture through strategic deployments of narrative voice, developing a taxonomy of voice types authorial, personal, communal and analyzing how each mode carries different possibilities and limitations for feminist expression. Her concept of "communal voice," in which an
individual narrator speaks for or in concert with a marginalized collective, resonates with
particular force in the context of Sabiha's homework assignments, which transform personal experience into a record that carries implications extending beyond the individual to illuminate the shared condition of women under authoritarian rule. Lanser's theorization of "discursive
authority" as a claim to speak and be heard that must be negotiated within specific historical and cultural constraints provides the framework for understanding what is at stake when Baghi
instructs Sabiha that she is "no ordinary student" but "a witness to history." The concept of "testimonio," developed in Latin American literary and cultural studies to describe narrative forms that bear witness to collective experience from a position of marginality, offers a
complementary framework for understanding Sabiha's writing as a form of feminist testimony
that exceeds the individual and gestures toward the collective condition of women navigating the interlocking structures of patriarchy and authoritarianism. Scholars such as John Beverley and Doris Sommer have theorized testimonio as a genre that challenges the distinction between literature and history, between the personal and the political, and between the individual voice and the collective experience it represents distinctions that Sabiha's homework systematically
undermines.

While the review of existing literature reveals rich traditions of feminist criticism on Pakistani anglophone fiction and robust theoretical resources for analyzing motherhood, testimony, and narrative voice, a significant gap remains unmistakably evident: no sustained scholarly article has yet offered a feminist analysis of The Rebel Academy. The novel's recency, having been
published in February 2026, partially explains this absence, as the temporal lag

between a literary work's publication and the appearance of peer-reviewed scholarship on it is a well-established phenomenon in literary studies. Yet the enthusiastic critical reception the novel has received, with reviewers across major literary venues noting its feminist dimensions without
developing them into full analytical arguments, makes the case for scholarly engagement both timely and intellectually necessary. The theoretical resources are available, the critical context is established, and the primary text has been identified as a significant contribution to the feminist trajectory within Pakistani anglophone fiction. What remains absent is the sustained, methodologically explicit, theoretically grounded feminist reading that would bring these elements together. This study addresses that precise gap by providing the first such reading,
contributing both to the specific subfield of Hanif scholarship and to the broader field of feminist postcolonial literary criticism.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, a feminist critique of Rebel English Academy must be based on a framework that allows for the multiple, interlocking structures that subjugate women in the novel. There are
three interrelated theoretical traditions that are essential: structural theory of patriarchy by Sylvia Walby, feminist narratology of voice and testimony by Susan Sniader Lanser, and the
intersectional framework by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Each tradition is to be read not as a set of ideas, but as a corpus of text, with the specific formulations, terms and analysis of those texts serving as a lens through which the novel will be viewed.

This analysis is based on Theorizing Patriarchy by Sylvia Walby (1990). Walby's major
contribution has been to emphasize the need to do more than simply see patriarchy as one single structure: each of the many structures has its own dynamics and each plays its part in the overall subordination of women. According to Walby (1990,), "patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" and "the concept of
patriarchy cannot be separated from an analysis of gender relations. Walby's typological
specificity, however, is the fact that she specifies six structures of patriarchy: the household mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, the patriarchal state, male violence, patriarchal
relations in sexuality, and patriarchal cultural institutions, and insists that these six structures are necessary to capture the depth and pervasiveness of patriarchal relations for literary analysis.

When applied to Hanif's novel, the typology provides light on the way the novel brings about the coming together of these very structures, instead of depicting patriarchal oppression as the
product of any one factor. The household mode of production can be seen in Sabiha's arranged marriage, which Walby would read as an example of "the marriage contract is a labour contract in which the wife exchanges domestic and sexual services for maintenance" (p.24). The patriarchal state is manifested in the most extreme form with the martial law regime that has taken away Sabiha's parents, and which Walby describes as the "systematic exclusion of women from the

political realm" (p.195). From the very first chapters on, male violence is present and pervasive, proving that Walby is correct to say that "male violence is not an isolated act but a social structure that
underpins all other patriarchal structures" (p.128). With a specific understanding of patriarchy offered by Walby's analysis of patriarchy instead of an abstract concept of patriarchy, the analysis can
illustrate how Hanif's character is a product of the system of patriarchal power in various institutional fields.

The novel's most striking formal aspect, its use of a large part of the narrative voice for the person of Sabiha, via her homework assignments, requires a matching theoretical tool in Susan Sniader Lanser's Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice (1992). Lanser's project is to show that narrative form is not a neutral repository of content, but an arena of gendered ideology struggle. For women writers, "narrative voice is a place of crisis,
contradiction and challenge," as she writes, since they have to deal with "the problematic
relationship between social authority and narrative authority" (Lanser, 1992 p.7).

This formulation helps to clarify Sabiha's narration: she does not write as a recognised authority, but as someone who is extremely marginalized; her possibility of being an authority in narrating is built and
negotiated within and against the limits imposed by a patriarchy and an authoritarianism. There is more precision in Lanser's taxonomy of narrative voices. She distinguishes between authorial voice, personal voice, and communal voice, where the latter she defines as "a practice in which narrative authority is given to a definable community, and is textually represented in the multiple voices of community, or in the voice of a single individual who is clearly authorized by a community" (p.21).In this sense that all of Sabiha's homework is read productively as communal testimony; she writes as a single person but her testimony is authorized by the missing
community of disappeared dissidents, including her mother's testimony, and to whom she speaks. Baghi's assertion that Sabiha is "no ordinary student" but "a witness of history" evokes a concept that Lanser calls "discursive authority" " the intellectual credibility, the ideological legitimacy, and the aesthetic worth given to or attributed to a work, an author, a narrator, a character, or a
textual practice"(p.6) . Lanser's framework thus enables the analysis to acknowledge that Sabiha's homework is not just a theme of the novel but a formal device that is utilized by the novel to assert feminist narrative authority.

The Echoes of Motherhood: Thematic Analysis

Motherhood as Vulnerability

Throughout Hanif's novel, he sees motherhood not as a source of sentimental fulfillment or as a "naturalized" female purpose, but as a condition of greater vulnerability, and as a condition
shaped by and surrounding the organization of patriarchal exploitation. Throughout the story, Sabiha's capacity to reproduce is the ground of her own value to the patriarchal economy, that is, the thing that makes her valuable in the economy, just as it makes her subject to it. The marriage to a "much older man who sells male enhancement snake oils," as the critical reception has put it, is a trade in which her

reproductive body is exchanged for the harm inflicted upon it by her
rape. There is nothing hidden in the logic; she is no longer fit for "normal" marriage due to her rape, but her reproductive power is still a valuable asset to be used by a man whose manhood is now undermined by age and his profession. The marriage is both a punishment for being raped and a way to extract reproductive labour from a body that has been scarred by male violence.

This is not just Sabiha's case, but rather the novel's overall depiction of women and men in heterosexual relationships in a patriarchy. This asymmetry forms the basis of reproductive heterosexuality in the world of the novel, embodied in the form of Captain Gul's pregnant
girlfriend. The central observation of the review is "a woman is carrying his child" as he goes off and makes other conquests – it is a biological fact of sex that women carry the burden of pregnancy, but it is not a burden that men are forced to accept when they pursue other sexual conquests. The mother-to-be is a personified figure of abandonment, the body filled with Gul's baby, and Gul himself's movement and sexual freedom is not affected at all by the reproductive ramifications he has unleashed. This is not an accident of history, but a structural one, and it is
because the female reproductive system is the foundation for the subordination of women, while the male reproductive system is left purely to the abstract, the momentary, the fleeting.

The Absent Mother and the Disappeared

The physical absence of Sabiha's mother, disappeared alongside her father into the carceral ments, invoking a figure whose physical erasure by the state has not succeeded in extinguishing
Her significance within her daughter's psychic and textual universe. This invocation is not merely
Nostalgic or elegiac; it constitutes a form of counter-memory, an insistence that the disappeared continue to structure the lives of those who survive them, that the state's attempt to render
Dissidents invisible founders against the persistence of familial and political memory.

The echo of the absent mother operates in structural parallel with the novel's sustained thematic investment in rumour as a mode of resistance to official discourse. Just as the persistent rumour that "Bhutto is still alive" circulates through the narrative as a challenge to the regime's claim to have decisively eliminated its political opposition, the echo of Mother Bano's presence her name repeated in her daughter's writing, her political commitments legible in her daughter's resistance unsettles the patriarchal state's assertion of total control over women's lives and bodies. Both
Rumour and maternal echo function through the logic of the trace: that which is officially
Declared absent persists unofficially, haunting the pronouncements of power with the possibility of its own incompleteness. The disappeared mother thus becomes not merely a victim of
Authoritarian power but a resource for its contestation, her absence paradoxically generative of the testimonial impulse that drives her daughter's narrative production

Reproductive Bodies under Control

The novel's engagement with reproductive control extends from individual acts of violence to the institutional and discursive mechanisms through which women's bodies are regulated. The critical reception has rightly noted that the novel "powerfully confronts rape culture," and

Sabiha's rape by her PT teacher functions as the originating trauma that sets in motion the chain of events leading to the academy. This act of sexual violence is not represented as an exceptional breach of social order but as an expression of that order's fundamental logic, a logic in which women's bodies are available for male appropriation and the distinction between consensual and non-consensual access is systematically blurred. The rape forecloses Sabiha's reproductive

autonomy in the most direct sense: it destroys her capacity to determine the conditions under which her sexuality will be expressed and her reproductive capacity exercised, channeling her instead into a marriage economy that treats her violated body as damaged goods still possessing extractable reproductive value.

The novel extends this analysis to the domain of religious authority through its representation of the maulvi Molly, whose predation upon Sabiha exemplifies the mechanism by which patriarchal control over women's reproductive lives acquires ideological legitimation. Molly "uses the

Qur'an to justify taking a second wife, cloaking the exploitation of a vulnerable young widow in the language of righteousness." This is not merely individual hypocrisy, though it is certainly

that; it is a structural feature of patriarchal religion, which has historically provided theological warrant for men's control over women's sexual and reproductive capacities. The maulvi's

invocation of Islamic sanction for his desire to acquire Sabiha as an additional wife demonstrates the ease with which religious discourse can be mobilized to transform exploitation into piety,

predation into providence. That Sabiha is a widow a woman whose reproductive availability has been rendered ambiguous by the death of her husband makes her simultaneously more

vulnerable to such predation and more easily represented as its appropriate object, a woman in need of male religious guardianship.Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality framework clarifies that Sabiha's oppression cannot be explained through gender alone. She is simultaneously a woman, a widow without economic independence, a rape survivor marked as damaged in the marriage economy, and the daughter of disappeared political dissidents which means the state offers her no protection. These categories do not operate separately; they converge and intensify each other. The maulvi Molly's predation is only possible because Sabiha is female, economically vulnerable as a widow, and politically unprotected as a dissident's daughter. Remove any one of these axes and his access to her changes. This is precisely what Crenshaw (1991, p. 1245) means when she argues that intersecting systems of oppression produce conditions of vulnerability that single-axis analysis cannot capture. Hanif's novel enacts this insight structurally no single institution, the household, the state, the mosque, fully accounts for Sabiha's condition; it is their convergence that defines it

The Female Body as Battleground

The body is the central focus of Hanif's feminist analysis, which is suggested in the critical observation that the novel presents "an overdose of sex which is probably a way of dealing with a deeply repressed society;" this formulation is not without its problems, however, and does not indicate the systematic nature of the novel's discussion of embodiment. The female form in Rebel English Academy isn't just an excess or a transgression of sexuality; it's a place where multiple
forces converge, be it the military, religious, economic, domestic, etc. and where the forms of power are inscribed. Sabiha is raped by a representative of the educational system, the institution of marriage markets her body, a military officer takes an interest in her, a religious official does as well, and her body is hidden in a school that "has no interest in women." All of these
interactions are attempts to control the female body, to define its meanings and uses.

Even the seemingly sympathetic male characters in the novel are caught up in the objectifying logic of this battlefield. One of the exclusions that makes the academy of Sir Baghi so
revolutionary is the normalization of the male subject, the one who receives education and
political awareness. Initially, it's not stated as an active misogyny, it is an unconscious default that shows how far we are in the process of normalization of the patriarchy. In the academy's
final housing of Sabiha (assuming she is disguised and hidden), the academy's accommodation is not really an attack on this default, but a confirmation of it in the supernormal steps taken to
avoid it. The space of intellectual and political formation is still a space that is destined to remain a space for women, and not one for men.

Testimonial Agency: Writing as Resistance

In this world of physical assault and institutionalization, the novel imagines Sabiha's writing as a response, a way of agency found in language that is a way of producing resistant testimony.

Baghi's command to write what the other students write, but keep in mind she is "no ordinary student" but "a witness to history" is a pivotal shift of the students' homework. In compositions about cows, about parents, about physical action, what seems to be a pedagogical exercise turns into history, the record of a life lived at the intersection of patriarchy and authoritarian violence becomes evidence.

Sabiha's homework exercises, from 'Our Cow' to 'Our Mother and Father' to the final 'How I Run', can be understood as a feminist counter-archive, a collection of writing that documents aspects of experience which have been ignored by official histories. Even when the assignment form is so limited in scope to only contain words that are grammatically correct, linguistic
subversion is seen in her refusal to write that 'the cow is Allah's splendorous creation because Sir does not believe in the existence of Almighty'. Sabiha is not a mere submissive or a rebel to
Baghi's directions, but a negotiator, who claims her own epistemic authority by finding a niche in the pedagogical contract. The title of the final assignment, How I Run, is a double-folded one:
the physical and the testimonial agency alike - descriptions of body motion become a

meditation on escape and on the propulsion of the self beyond the enclosures domestic, marital, institutional that have structured Sabiha's existence.

English as Ambivalent Empowerment

In the academy's founding statement, that its students would be "armed with a language that would pretend to serve power but in the end would smash it," English is most explicitly
theorized as an instrument of subversion. But at the same time, the novel claims that this
linguistic empowerment is also ambivalent and objects to any unmediated celebration of the acquisition of colonial language as liberation. English is already an established instrument of colonial rule, and its learning has traditionally been associated with class status and access to power. The academy's revolutionary aspirations do not simply negate this history, however, but work within it, trying to steal the master's tools and wield them for the master's destruction.

This linguistic ambivalence, which is gendered, is made apparent when the issue of access is
directly addressed. Sabiha is present at the academy under the pretense of having been there for some other reason and her training in the rebel language is contingent upon keeping her sex a secret. The novel thus presents a paradox at the center of the university's emancipatory project: the language that is supposed to break the power cycle becomes available to women, yet also through dissimulation a process of gendering which replicates what it works to transcend. In
order to confront her subordinate status as a woman, Sabiha has to be, in some way, not-a-
woman, in order to gain access to the linguistic tools that could be used to do so. The problem is never solved within the story but maintained as an imminent state of tension, a space where the powers of language's emancipation show themselves alongside the constraints of language.

CONCLUSION

In Rebel English Academy, motherhood echoes as both burden and memory, a duality that this study has traced across the thematic, structural, and formal dimensions of Hanif's novel, demonstrating through the integrated application of Walby's structural patriarchy, Lanser's feminist narratology, and Crenshaw's intersectionality that Hanif's feminism is structurally sophisticated, formally
innovative, and politically uncompromising, even as it generates tensions and ambivalences that resist easy resolution. Sabiha bears the weight of reproductive exploitation her body rendered
vulnerable by rape, her marriage contracted as damage management within a patriarchal
economy that assesses female worth in terms of sexual purity and reproductive potential, her widowhood targeted for religiously justified predation by the maulvi Molly who cloaks
exploitation in the language of Qur'anic righteousness while simultaneously channeling an absent mother's political legacy into testimonial prose that transforms personal experience into historical witness, the spectral presence of Mother Bano, disappeared by the martial law regime yet persistently invoked in her daughter's

homework assignments, constituting a resource for
identity formation and political memory that the state's violence has failed to extinguish. The novel refuses any singular resolution of the maternal into either pure oppression or pure
resistance, insisting instead on the contradictory simultaneity of these functions, just as Hanif offers no sentimental redemption, for Sabiha's resilience, which one reviewer notes "propels the novel along and provides that vital note of redemption and relief in a harrowing narrative of power and its brutality," is resilience without romance, agency forged in the crucible of violence rather than sheltered from it, an agency expressed in the fact that Sabiha arrives with "a pistol and, worse, an attitude," and it is this messy, sometimes frightening agency that the novel ultimately affirms as women's position under conditions not of their choosing. The novel ultimately suggests that under authoritarian patriarchy, women's position is one of perpetual
precarity a condition in which the body is never fully one's own, in which reproductive capacity is always liable to appropriation, in which voice is always at risk of silencing yet the act of
narrating that precarity, of bearing witness through language to the conditions that produce it, constitutes its own form of rebellion, a rebellion that operates not through direct confrontation with power but through the quieter, more persistent work of testimony. The echo of the mother, persisting through physical absence, and the echo of the witness, persisting through the textual record of testimony, together constitute the novel's most profound feminist insight: that what is declared silenced may continue to reverberate, unsettling the architectures of power with the persistent sound of its refusal to disappear, and it is this insight irreverent, uncompromising, alive to both the brutality of power and the persistent possibility of its undoing that secures the
novel's place within the feminist tradition in Pakistani anglophone literature and establishes its significance as an object of sustained scholarly attention, with Sabiha's story embodying the "rebel" spirit of the academy's name made flesh.

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