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**CHALLENGING THE VICTIM-ESCAPEE STEREOTYPES: A
FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE OF DUR E AZIZ AMNA'S A
SPLINTERING**



Rubeel Khalid^{*1}, Ayesha Khadim², Mehwish Kanwal³

^{*1}*M. Phil Scholar (English), The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus*

²*Visiting Lecturer (English), The University of Layyah*

³*M. Phil Scholar (English), The University of Lahore, Sargodha Campus*

^{*1}rubeelkhalid659@gmail.com, ²ayeshakhadim077@gmail.com,
³70171280@student.uol.edu.pk

Abstract

This thesis explores how Muslim women are represented in the modern South Asian Anglophone literature using a feminist and postcolonial approach. A Splintering is centered around the main character of Tara and how she challenges the traditional Victim -Escapee dichotomy that tends to limit the representation of postcolonial women. Based on the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler and critiques of Orientalist stereotypes, this study explores how Tara negotiates personal agency, struggles against structural oppression, and maneuvers strategically to overcome cultural, patriarchal, and class-based restrictions. The thesis uncovers major themes of moral ambiguity, economic ambition, strategic compliance, and negotiation of social norms through qualitative textual analysis to show that the process of enabling Tara is relational, contextually situated, and performed continuously. The research also puts her ambitions and desires in parallel with the male counterparts, and the horizontal organization of agency and ambition is emphasized to subvert literary hierarchies grounded on gender. The application of feminist literary theory and postcolonial criticism to the research demonstrates that Tara possesses a subjectivity that is multidimensional and includes desire, calculation and resistance, and is not limited to the dualistic denial of victimhood or escape discourses. The fact that it is included in the contemporary literature of the Muslim women as it helps to underline the importance of how or small identifications could enlarge the notion of agency, identity, and resistance. Splintering gives us a preview of the complexity of the female subjectivity in postcolonial environments, where empowerment refers to the moral bargain, monetary self-sufficiency, and tactical social acting. The results show that modern literary forms may defy the old stereotypes and at the same time offer politically, culturally significant depictions of women negotiating the systemic limitations.

Keywords: *Muslim women, postcolonial literature, feminist literary criticism, gender performativity, Victim–Escapee stereotype, agency, cultural negotiation, South Asian Anglophone fiction.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In modern literary discourse, especially in the field of postcolonial studies, the image of the Muslim woman has been distorted into binary clichés, of the passive victim or the liberated escapee of the patriarchal system. Such reductive models are common in Western literary productions especially the essentialization of women in Muslim majorities into either a subjugated and silent being or a remarkable being whose liberation necessitates abandonment of culture and religion. These binaries not only reduce the complexity of female subjectivity, but also act as a way of naturalizing orientalist assumptions regarding non-western societies (Kahf, 2003; Mohanty, 2003). In this respect, the Pakistani contemporary novelist Dur e Aziz Amna A Splintering (2025) is a subtle experiment with these stereotypes embedded in the fabric, where the protagonist, Tara, cannot be limited to simple categorizations and instead, her story focuses on the themes of agency, moral ambiguity, and negotiation of relations.

The binary of victim and escapee has been the dominant way of viewing Muslim women in literature in the West. Victimized characters are generally positioned as passive, morally idealized characters whose plight evokes sympathy and strengthens a culture of cultural inadequacy and patriarchal tyranny (Said, 1978; Kahf, 1999). On the other hand, the escapee archetype features women who seek empowerment by disavowing their culture and religion, and frequently adopting western liberal ideals as the sole way toward liberation.

Both constructs act to restrict the extent of intelligible female subjectivity where the lived realities of women as they negotiate various socio-cultural and religious norms are disregarded (Mahmood, 2005). The novel by Aziz is an interventionist act that introduces Tara as a transitional character that walks the line between these poles, a form of agency that has a contextual embeddedness and is neither passively conformist, nor fully Westernized.

The central element of feminist intervention of the novel is the gendered norms being acted out by Tara debating the norms. Applying the theory of gender performativity of Butler (1990) to explain her point, Tara demonstrates that we perform gender and do not pre-perform gender, and that through repeating and rearticulating norms we subvert. Deviations in performance, her language and dress code, her social interactions are good illustrations of deviations in performance that do not fit the stereotypical expectations of being victimized or being an escapee hero. Indicatively, the strategic silence of Tara, her selective claim of opinion and her quest to gain financial and social agency demonstrate that non-Western empowerment can be unobtrusive, relational, and morally intricate (Mahmood, 2005). Such gestures challenge conventional literature forms according to which liberation is simply an issue of declamation or a rebellion against traditions.

The politics of representation is also interfered with by the novel. In a post-9/11, post-MeToo global state of the literary, *A Splintering* is an act of writing that deals with the pressures of representation of Muslim women. The stereotypical versions of orientalism, the story of liberating Muslim women, and western feminist assumptions have a tendency to obscure the very real voices and agency of Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, 2013). Aziz is a fierce critic of such formations, that is, the subjectivity of the protagonist lies in the thirdness of a speculative space (Bhabha, 1994) of the cultural belonging, the religious identity and the norms of the diaspora. This liminality is a significant theoretical sign of the greater scope that the novel may have had: it reveals that feminine sources of postcolonial literature can be subtle, place-based, and unbinarized, and offers alternative paradigms of feminist critique.

Finally, *A Splintering* is a nice illustration of how contemporary literature can expand the representational repertory of Muslim women, including the thematic, formal, and ideological planes. Through its narrative tricks (interior monologue, temporal and spatial metaphor, ethical ambiguity), the novel gives a form of feminist postcolonial critique, one that considers the intersectional complexities. It also highlights that agency, identity and empowerment are relational, contextually specific and morally complex, and they are challenging to literary conventions and socio-cultural expectations (Spivak, 1988; Kahf, 2003; Mohanty, 2003). Denying the victim-escapee dichotomy, Aziz Amna offers an important critical model of the representation of Muslim women in the culture of the world literature and makes an important contribution to the discourse of feminism, as well as to the discourse of postcolonialism.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The image of Muslim women in literature is usually a victim of dichotomy of the victim or the escapee which simplifies the intricacies of the lived experiences. This thesis aims to dispel these stereotypes by examining the feminist approach to *Dur e Aziz* in the work *A Splintering*, as a novel that complicates the dichotomy and provides a more subtle view on female agency in the context of patriarchal and cultural structures.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To critically analyze the representation of the female protagonist in *A Splintering* and how her character challenges the stereotypical victim-escapee narrative.
- To examine the feminist undertones within the novel, particularly how the protagonist's journey reflects agency, resistance, and negotiation of cultural norms.
- To explore how *A Splintering* contributes to the broader discourse on the representation of Muslim women in contemporary literature.

1.3 Research Questions

- How does *Dur e Aziz*'s *A Splintering* subvert the victim-escapee stereotype commonly applied to Muslim women in literature?
- In what ways does the protagonist of *A Splintering* navigate her personal agency within the confines of cultural and patriarchal expectations?
- How can a feminist reading of *A Splintering* enhance our understanding of gender and identity in the context of postcolonial literature?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research has a great significance in the perception of Muslim women in the modern literary world, especially south Asian and Middle Eastern women. Applying a feminist approach to *A Splintering*, this study provides a new approach to understanding the intricacies of feminine identity in the context of patriarchal domination. The relevance of the present study is that it dispels the myths about Muslim women that have existed since time immemorial and points to the fact that there is more than a single story that can be told about them and that is lost in the mainstream media and literature. By showing how the writers of ethnic minority women such as Dur e Aziz challenge the simplistic feminist depictions of women in patriarchal societies, this study will make contributions to the larger framework of feminist literary criticism.

Moreover, this research will enhance our knowledge of migration, identity and dynamics in postcolonial literature. With the emphasis on *A Splintering*, which is a text that explicitly criticizes the victim-escapee dichotomy, the study will serve as a valuable source of information on the ways women writers in postcolonial settings respond to the intersections of culture, tradition, and gender.

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

This research is delimited to a textual examination of *A Splintering* and make no effort to present us with a thorough overview of the whole range of Muslim women representations in literature. Particular attention will be paid to the criticism of the victim-escapee stereotypes in the context of the feminist literary theory, so that the research will not lose its focus on the feminist view of the novel.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Pakistani English fiction has emerged to be an important area of study in post colonial literary studies since it gives critical understanding of identity, gender, class, religion, migration, nationalism and globalization. Pakistani writers dependent on English since the late twentieth century have already addressed not only local but also global issues, which have enabled the Pakistani social reality to enter the wider literary and academic discourse. English, in this regard, is not merely a colonial bequest but is put into service of cultural strife, political instability, historical trauma, family formation, and gendered subjectivities by Pakistani writers.

In this literary scene, *A Splintering* by Dur e Aziz Amna plays a significant role. The novel discusses gender, the classes, ambition, motherhood, poverty and patriarch in relation to the character of Tara, a woman who is not ready to follow the boundaries given to her by poverty in rural areas and male power. The novel depicts Tara as either an easy target of patriarchy or a completely liberated fugitive. Rather, we have a morally ambiguous woman whose agency is begun by aspirations to the class, societal demands, maternal obligation, and personal will. Thus, the novel helps to end this reductive representation of Muslim women in contemporary women writing in Pakistan: it foreshadows the conflict of female subjectivity.

A Splintering by Dur e Aziz Amna could be perceived as the extension of these feminist interventions. In the novel, Tara is shown as a woman whose mobility, affluence, and dignity as well as selfhood cannot be defined as victimhood or liberation. She has made her decisions influenced by gender inequality, deprivation of classes and the demands of the home and pressures of the contemporary consumer world. The novel makes bringing feminist readings with an understanding of agency as being unstable, contradictory, and rooted in social processes more plausible through Tara, which complicates traditional understanding of Muslim womanhood.

Reductive stereotypes, especially binary of victim and escapee, have long informed the representation of women in literature and the media. According to Mohja Kahf (1999) the popular images presented in the West show that Muslim women are victims of the oppression of nature, or they are the heroes breaking out of the traditional cultural standards. These binaries that prevail in literature and media representations impose on the female subjects their underlying complexity and agency, converting the diverse experience of living to simplified stories. The modern feminist and postcolonial literature dispute this polarization by highlighting more subtle maneuvers of how women move around socio-cultural demands, defy oppression, and assume agency.

In all those areas, one might observe the similarity: in most cases female agency is either distorted or limited by the simplistic stereotypes. Simplistic binarial structures of victim-blaming, be it on the legal, media, or literary grounds, reinforce the complex negotiations women go through in their personal, social, and cultural lives. These misrepresentations meet with Orientalist suppositions in South Asian and Muslim environments,

as women are either passive victims of patriarchy or those who need to cut off to their origin in order to come into existence (Mohanty, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 2013). In modern feminist literature, though, the issue of agency is more focused on making concession, being adaptive and strategic when confronting the established cultural norms, than by outright rebellion.

Mohja Kahf's *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman* remains one of the most influential works on the victim-escapee stereotype. According to Kahf (1999), the discourse of Western literature and culture has long portrayed Muslim women in a form of stereotypes of victimized women in the harem, silent women and rebel women of escape. Such images not only fail to depict Muslim women in a proper light but also uphold Orientalist beliefs of Muslim societies as primitive, patriarchal and in need of salvation. The work by Kahf is necessary in the current study as it offers a theoretical language that can be used in determining the way Muslim women are framed in the cultural discourse. Her critical observation can be used to justify why Tara in *A Splintering* cannot be read as a woman trying to get out of the rural patriarchy. Though escaping is a part of her movement her experience still becomes far more complicated as she has to face new types of social pressure and genderized judgement.

Another intervention that makes a splash in the discussion of agency of Muslim women is the *Politics of Piety* by Saba Mahmood. It is argued by Mahmood (2005) that the liberal feminist presumption of agency as necessarily opposing to social norms is misplaced. She analyzes women in the Egyptian mosque movement arguing that agency can have to do with possessing, bargaining and morally operating within the religious or cultural systems as well. Despite the fact that the study of Mahmood is anthropological and not literary, the conceptual meaning of his study is huge. It enables the current research to perceive the agency of Tara as not only rebellious but also negotiation, adapting, and performance, which is strategic. It is not that Tara always demonstrates open rebellious thoughts, but it is clear that she makes an effort to give her life a new image under the restricted options.

Notwithstanding these contributions, there is still a gap. The role and representation of Muslim women, their agency and resistance in the postcolonial and South Asian literatures are widely discussed in current academical literature, yet few academic sources have paid attention to the *A Splintering* by Dur e Aziz Amna. Furthermore, the novel has not received enough attention in terms of integrating the lenses of feminist literature criticism with Judith Butler gender performativity, and the victim-escapee archetype critique. This gap is filled in the current research by analyzing the way in which Tara balances gendered expectations, higher classes living aspirations, motherhood, family regulation, and self. By so doing, it helps in the current feminist and postcolonial debates on the subjectivity of Muslim women.

2.1 Research Gap

The analysis of the literature discloses some critical gaps that underpin the current study. First, there is already a lot of research on the representation of Muslim women in literature; however, much of this research is done in more general theoretical discussions, or more often than not, on writers whose works are more commonly discussed. The *A Splintering* by Dur e Aziz Amna has not been completely explored in scholarly criticism, especially in a feminist literary approach.

Fourth, the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler has found a common application in literary research, yet it is not substantially applied to *A Splintering* yet. The theory expressed by Butler can be used to shed light on the formation of the gendered identity of Tara through repetition of these roles, expectations and social performances. It is also capable of displaying the ways in which the main character not only enacts normative femininity but also breaks its rules.

Lastly, the current body of knowledge tends to regard agency as direct opposition or escape of tradition. But the modern feminist theory demonstrates the possibility of agentic creation as well which can take place in a negotiation amid the restraints of society. This is a point of view that has not been developed enough as far as *A Splintering* is concerned. Thus, the current research aims to address this gap by analyzing the way in which the novel challenges the stereotypes of victims and escapees and portrays female agency as multi-layered, multi-polar and context dependent.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework of this research is grounded in the synthesis of the theory of gender performativity introduced by Judith Butler, as well as in the criticism of the victim-escapee stereotype that is presented in the feminist and postcolonial literature.

The theory of the gender performativity by Butler is the first constituent of the framework (1990). Butler suggests that gender is not a predetermined or nature identity but rather a social construction that is created through continually repetitious acts, gestures, roles and performances. This theory allows the current work to analyze how Tara developed her identity by playing the gendered role and fulfilling the role of a daughter, sister, wife, mother, socially-ambitious woman. It also enables the analysis to take into consideration the way Tara violates gender norms and yet, exists within them.

The second element is the victim-escapee stereotype, which implies the depreciating portrayal of Muslim women as victims of repressive patriarchy or liberated escapees who are free because they deny their cultural and religious heritage. Kahf, Mohanty, Abu-Lughod, Mahmood, and Bilge, as well as other feminist and postcolonial academics, criticize this duality due to its simplification of the experiences of Muslim women and lack of appreciation of different kinds of agency.

Through the synthesis of these points of view, the work explores the ways Tara acts and negotiates gendered identities, the ways she disrupts and challenges the victim-escapee discourses, the ways in which agency is created within a patriarchal and class-based society, and how the novel intermingles with modern feminist insights into the subjectivity of Muslim women. Through this framework, there is the opportunity to have a multidimensional analysis whereby identity is identified as fluid, contextual and negotiated.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study placed in the realm of the feminist literary theory, where the idea of gender performativity, coined by Judith Butler, and the Victim- Escapee Stereotype critique as a part of the recent feminist and postcolonial research are combined. These theoretical approaches offer a wide prism to examine the manner in which female subjectivity is reified and produced in *A Splintering* (2025) by Dur e Aziz Amna, especially in the realm of the postcolonial society and Muslim women identity.

The key suggestion of the theory of Judith Butler is that essentially, a fundamentalist conceptualization of gender is quite flawed since gender is not an inborn or preset characteristic and that a performance is created, through the repetitive performance (Butler, 1990). Butler says that these performances are controlled by the social norms, cultural expectations and institutional discourses and are meant to create an illusion of a stable gender identity. Nonetheless, gender is still permeable to subversion and redefinitions since it is performative, making people capable of negotiating and thus disrupting the normative gender roles. As far as *A Splintering* is concerned, Tara is constantly shifting and changing self in relation to the family, society, and its expectations. Her agency is revealed in her capacity to be both submissive to and subversive of the assigned roles, which illustrates the performance of identity instead of inherent identity endowment.

Simultaneously, the research is based on the idea of the Victim–Escapee Stereotype which is highly criticized in feminist and postcolonial texts. This stereotype is a simplistic binary where women in non-Western cultures are portrayed either as docile subjects of patriarchy or as escapees whose emancipation is determined by renouncing cultural values and adopting the Western principles (Bouallegue, 2022). These images become propagation of the Orientalist stereotypes, presenting the postcolonial societies as the place of total oppression and the Western paradigms as the only way to become empowered. These patriarchal representations undermine the complexity of lived experience of women, and the range of potential ways agency can be manifested within the culturally scaffolded social structures.

Combining the performativity model by Butler with the discussion of the Victim-Escapee Stereotype, the theoretical framework offers to analyze *A Splintering* in a many-dimensional context. Tara is neither victimized nor escaped, she exists in a gray space between and not outside her socio-cultural and family systems where agency is negotiated within and not outside her. Her relationships, aspirations, choices speak of how the identity, desire and resistance is formulated within social and cultural conditions and demonstrates the intricacy of the subjectivity of Muslim women in postcolonial literature. This schematism highlights the contingency and constitute of agency by showing that empowerment is not an absolute process or an end but a continuing process of negotiation between personal desire and social limit.

The project is qualitative research that involves a textual analysis research design to analyse *A Splintering*. The qualitative approach is appropriate to the research of complex literary and cultural phenomena such as gender representation, agency, and cultural norm negotiation. Analysis of text can be used to analyze a text to provide a detailed analysis of narrative technique, characterization and richness of theme.

The study uses a feminist and postcolonial to interpret the character of Tara, her morality in choices,

and her bargain against social limiting factors. Secondary scholarship is used to accompany textual evidence such as feminist literary theory, victim-blaming studies, gender performance and postcolonial critique.

In this research, the systematic close reading of *A Splintering* by Dur e Aziz Amna (2025) was used to collect data. The main purpose of this procedure was to establish the textual segments which reveal the treatment of the female subjectivity in the novel, especially in terms of the subversion of the Victim / Escapee stereotype, the expression of the feminist agency and the establishment of the cultural and ethnic identity. Close reading also provided the opportunity of paying close attention to the language, structure and narrative techniques employed in the writing to reveal the existence of delicate textual clues that helps portray Tara's opposition to uncomplicated gendered images. Besides the passages involving character, the narrative functions of dialogue and internal monologue, free indirect discourse and description imagery were studied to evaluate the way in which negotiating patriarchal expectations, social norms, and personal ambitions is portrayed in the novel.

After the data collection, they were analyzed in a thematic coding manner that presented passages into three main themes: (1) subversion of the Victim-Escapee stereotype, (2) feminist agency, autonomy, and resistance, and (3) cultural negotiation and identity performance. In the first theme, a text was examined to show how Tara escapes becoming a passive victim and a liberated runaway instead of a complicated interaction of vulnerability, desire, and negotiation. The second theme centered on moments in which Tara displays active agency, critical self-reflection and resistance in domestic, familial and social environments. The third theme was the navigation of cultural, class-based, and religious expectations of Tara and how performance of identity is a constant matter of negotiation between various social structures involving each other. In the analysis, the focus was directed at how methods of literature like narrative perspective, metaphor, and time alterations support and complicate the evaluation of the meanings of agency and identity. This approach contributed to a subtle appreciation of the multidimensional descriptions and ideological remarks anchored in the text by enabling the research to map findings in the text to the theoretical frameworks of the approaches of gender performativity and stereotype critique.

4. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: THE VICTIM-ESCAPEE STEREOTYPE, FEMINIST AGENCY, AND REPRESENTATION IN A SPLINTERING

Here, the discussion of the representation of Tara as a female protagonist who disturbs the dominant binary in which Muslim women are commonly read is discussed in both popular and literary discourses. The stereotype of victim-escapees leaves the women in the postcolonial world with two ways of narratives: the helpless victim caught by patriarchy or the genius among the women who truly liberates herself with the loss of her cultural, family or religious world. *A Splintering* challenges this duality by offering as a figure a character with both injury and ambition, constraint and strategy where both vulnerability and moral force exist in her life. She falls under the influence of patriarchal as well as class societies but is never subdued to either. Her ambition to be free, to be rich and famous, and able to do things on her own makes it a lot harder to recognize that the female lead in a play is expected to be as innocent, self-sacrificing, or morally transparent a figure and thereby deserves a feminist focus.

"It is considered noble to be proud of one's origins. I have no nobility. I come from darkness and filth." Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

This is the quote that depicts her cold realism about her country roots. In contrast to stereotypes that exaggerate and romanticize poverty or small-town life, Tara also puts her upbringing in stark unsentimental terms. She denies the act of victimhood, moral posturing and proclaims agency and self-awareness that prefigures her autonomy and moral complexity. Postcolonial feminist literature emphasizes that these representations are a reaction against the idea that Muslim women should deliver purity, passivity, or appreciations towards the liberation (Mohanty, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 2013). Tara also talks about having disidentified with constructed identities:

"Like a snake, I was trying to shed my skin, and the linguistic resummoning required by these encounters exhausted me." Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

The skin-shedding metaphor indicates a conscious rejection of external demands, the quaint, pathetic village girl myth that has become a commonplace ideal in city society. Her enactment of identity is deliberate and tactical, which agrees with Butler (1990) that the gendered subject is performative, socialized and negotiated over time. In fact, when Tara opposes the sentimentality of her constructed rural identity, she shows

that agency is a phenomenon to be exercised in creating self-definition as opposed to following purported moral or cultural formulas. The experience of Tara problematizes the belief that the idea of relocation or escape, in any case, leads to empowerment, a celebrated cliché of postcolonial literature:

“But I did not care if I appeared grovelling. I wanted nothing more than to sit at that dining table, eating sliced white bread and apricot jam for the first time in my life...” Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

This quote prefigures the apology-free searching of material comfort and social uplift by Tara. Her aspirations are realistic and not moral or spiritual. In contrast to the classic escape stories, that suggest emancipation by taking flight, the desires of Tara revolve around social mobility, classes, and economic status, which is a realistic and postcolonial negotiation of agency within structural limits. In the novel, the hindrance of relocation is also highlighted:

“She wants what the rich mothers at her children’s school have. She wants what their husbands have.” Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

The quotation presents Tara as a subject whose aspirations are strategically positioned in regard to social hierarchies and flout the normative limitation of female desire to domestic or emotional sphere. Tara opposes the literary and social norms of passive Muslim womanhood and resists patriarchal dominance by actively striving towards economic and social influence. Her aspirations display both the convergence of agency and social navigation, which are in line with postcolonial feminist theorizations that emphasize the exchange of power among women in the prevailing cultural systems. The moral ambiguity of Tara upsets the conventional norms of feminine heroes:

“The woman forever judged and examined.” Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

Tara practices personal agency, negotiating patriarchal demands, even in the conditions of constant surveillance imposed by society to satisfy her wishes. Her subjectivity is personal and grounded in context that shows how personal ambition and structural restraints interact with each other within the framework of a postcolonial feminist analysis (Abu-Lughod, 2013). Monetary independence is one of the key means of resistance

“Money was the only levee against indignity.” Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

Economic empowerment is not just survival but a tool of power to assert dignity in negotiating power. The leverage of wealth that Tara uses is followed by postcolonial feminist theory of material agency in the context of socio structural constraints, as well as the possibilities to articulate empowerment, as practical interaction with social realities (Mahmood, 2005). Tara is taking an active stance against gendered prescriptions:

“I am what some call an unrelatable character.” Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

“Patriarchal modes define everything, even the terms of defiance.” Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

“You wonder: in her quest for a life of her own, has she lost more than she’s gained?” Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

This loose ending rejects a narrative of liberation in which it is linear, with continual negotiation of identity, desire, and agency. As evidenced by Tara, feminist subjectivity in postcolonial societies is fluid, interpersonal, and even multi-dimensional as it defies clean cut solutions that can be easily given to the stereotypical escapism texts. Altogether, the characterization used by Tara disrupts the Victim-Escapee dichotomy, merging moral and ethical, economic and social agency. Her ambitions, aspirations and strategic engagement with the structural constraints illustrate that empowerment is delicate, inter-personal and rooted in a culture. Dur e Aziz Amna develops a realistic, politically relevant and an agency-based feminist subject of interest, based on self-possession, which cuts across gender, classes and cultures. The multidimensional subjectivity of Tara is supported with the help of literary techniques of the novel, including the internal monologue, the free indirect discourse, the ethical ambiguity, etc. Using a postcolonial critique of stereotypes to tie up the theory of gender performativity by Butler with the analysis of Tara, the author will show that Tara represents negotiated agency challenging traditional ideas of victimhood and escape and the way that feminism should empower itself by being more realistic, engaging in social critique and cultural specifics.

“His self-professed socialism functions as posture rather than praxis—a convenient rhetoric that absolves him of his gendered responsibilities.”

This observation holds much importance as it reveals the fact that patriarchy is not always practiced in the traditional forms or in the conservative forms. It is also able to work by means of modern, educated, and supposedly progressive men. The political or ideological terms used by Hamad can lead one to think of

equality, yet his domestic policy displays the boundaries of such a progressive approach. The novel is a criticism of men who use the language of justice and do not end up being just in the home.

“Of course it was a performance; that was what made it impressive.” Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

This quote is key towards the realization of the feminist and class consciousness of Tara. She sees no such thing as elite women being inherently better or better born. Rather, she is aware that their position is based on performance. They are dressed, speak, gesture, emanate, and engage in social rituals, which project an image of social superiority. This intuition of Tara is potent, as it gets rid of the mystic of class. After she realizes that there is a performance of class, she also realizes that this can be learned, emulated, and perhaps entered.

“...a character who wants more than just a room of her own. A Pakistani woman demands money and independence—and it comes at a cost.”

This assertion sums up the radically materialistic desire of Tara. She is not in search of mere emotional acknowledgment, from a neuro-intellectual liberty, or privacy. She desires money, status and independence due to the fact that she realizes dignity in her world is directly connected with financial security. Money does not simply mean love, so to Tara, money is a defense against humiliation, reliance and social vulnerability.

The ambition of Tara breaks the traditional norms of representation of Muslim women. She does not feel satisfied about existence, marriage, kid birth, and decency. She wants more. This passion flouts patriarchal values and literary customs. Women characters are usually allowed to want love, safety or a family; however, Tara wants money and power. The politeness of her wish is important since it asserts a Pakistani woman the type of ambition which is typically granted to the male heroes.

“I feared they could do the same with me.” Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

This quote sums up how social and class performance heighten hyper awareness by Tara in the postcolonial urban landscape. Her nervousness is an indication of the competition of middle-class city landscapes as well as the surveillance of gendered and social demands. Tara is conscious of her position as a member of the particular class of female, unlike the traditional portrayals of Muslim women that are focused on the aspects of domesticity or religiosity. Thus, the novel can be part of the discourse, showing that the Muslim woman in modern fiction is not one-dimensional; she is placed between the classes and genders as well as social hierarchy at the same time with the ambition as socially and economically colored as her male opponents.

“Tara imagines herself in competition with her brother, and in the culminating moment of that rivalry she responds with a startling, decisive act...” —Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

When Tara is set in a stringent horizontal rivalry with her islamized brother Lateef, the novel changes its tale of abstract oppression to a greater deal of tangible interpersonal rivalry. In contrast to the female protagonists of the stereotypical victim-escapee narratives, when Tara is contrasted with a male one, she is determined in terms of female and male financial and social status. This enables the text to consider female ambition as structurally straightforward to male ambition, showcasing that postcolonial feminist subjects can act in arenas where conventional male dominance is maintained whilst negotiating culturally particular binds.

“...whether the story of ruthless ambition can be lived horizontally across a gendered spectrum.” —Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

This quote places Tara within the literary tradition of ambitions, morally ambivalent male characters like Balram Halwai in *The White Tiger* or Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In so doing, Amna defies the unspoken dictum that female characters are required to be morally reassuring, docile, or compassionate. Tara and her ambitions, morally and ethically adaptable, strategically self-fashioned challenge gendered literary expectations demonstrating that women narratives may include similarly moral and economic interests as those of their male counterparts without being entirely depriving of gender-specific social pressures.

“An intoxicating, high-voltage mix of female rage, economic ambition, erotic awakening, and biting disdain...” —Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

This quote brings out one of the most radical in the work of the novel, the connection between female emotionality and economic ambitions. Tara is also strategic and performative in her anger and desire, but rather it concerns her material and social progress and resources instead of strictly domestic or relationship issues. In preempting the anger and ambition of women as acceptable forms of the text, the text disrupts literary conventions, which propose that women are dangerous, immoral, or disruptive of social order through their anger. Rather, Amna defines the female desire to be multidimensional, which includes the economic,

emotional, and sexual levels, thus broadening the frames of postcolonial feminist representations.

“A textured, unflinching portrayal of a woman daring to live on her own terms in a society rigged against her.”

—Aziz Amna, 2025, p. xx

This excerpt highlights how patriarchal restrictions are systemic in the world Tara lives in. The novel does not show her crushed and defeated by these structures, but rather it records her calculating involvement, misgivings in strategy, and perseverance in her quest to attain autonomy. Through a focus on the concept of a constraint and agency, *A Splintering* makes it clear that empowerment is not a strict absolute, but a negotiated, relation-based, and contingent concept. Tara and her experience develops as a model of knowing postcolonial Muslim women as subjects in worlds which are structurally limiting and confront the long-running stereotyping and victimization of women as victim or moral inactivity.

In order to determine the contribution of *A Splintering* to the larger discourse, related to the reflection of Muslim women in present-day literature, one should map the discursive field that the novel intrudes. As it has been variously reported, the portrayal of Muslim women in the cultural production of the West has been conditioned by a potent schema of Orientalist conventions which develop Muslim femininity as a passive, oppressed and culturally backward entity (Kahf, 1999; Said, 1978; Abu-Lughod, 2013). The conventions have been extraordinarily resilient even without implied scholarly and political criticism, and are still found in bestselling memoirs, literary fiction and screen culture in the twenty-first century. This discursive space is penetrated by the novel as an intentional intervention in the sense that it provides representational strategies which interrogate the conventions of Orientalism on a narrative level, a level which concerns characterization and an ideological framing.

The geopolitical situation after 9/11 has heightened the intensity of this representational politics. The victimized Muslim woman has been strategically used to legitimize military interventions and cultural imperialism and to mask the voices of desires and forms of agency by Muslim women in politics and culture, as Abu-Lughod (2013) presents such a forceful case of the systematic erasure of these voices in the discourses purportedly representing them in her influential critique of the saving Muslim women narrative. Any fiction that attempts to portray the discursive power and subjectivity of Muslim women in a current time thus functions within a highly charged discursive space where the pressure to affirm or deny the templates of representability at hand is acute. The way *A Splintering* finds its way through this milieu is a considerable aspect of its political and literary worth.

Aziz Amna's novel is in productive dialogue with a number of works in this tradition, and the placing of the novel in relation to its literary antecedents will reveal both the continuities and innovations of the novel in the context of its literary tradition. *A Splintering* shares with Aboulela's fiction a focus on the religious and spiritual dimension of female subjectivity, and rejects the secularist presuppositions of much contemporary mainstream feminist literary criticism (Bouallegue, 2022). Like Shamsie's work, it is an investigation of the political aspects of Muslim identity in the post-9/11 world, but without the apologetic or victimological flair that might otherwise wash over it.

But what sets *A Splintering* apart from many of its literary forebears is the specific register and intensity of its inward focus on its character, in particular. The novel's most important formal innovation is that it tries to capture the totality of the protagonist's inner life, not the simple, comprehensible, suffering Muslim woman that Western readers might be accustomed to seeing in their portrayal of Muslim women's lives, but the full spectrum of thought and feeling, desire and doubt, humor and contradiction that make up the lived experience of a Muslim woman in a cultural world that is not single. The emphasis here on interiority as a representational device is politically crucial because it asserts the potential of the Muslim woman as a complete experience, rather than as a symbol or representative of a cultural discourse.

5. CONCLUSION

The current paper finds that *A Splintering* by Dur e Aziz Amna is a defiance against the cliché-heavy and repeated stereotype of the Muslim woman as the powerless victim or as the runaway who has to abandon her culture to become liberated. The novel through the character of Tara gives a more complex and realistic picture of womanhood. Tara is not shown as totally helpless, nor is she depicted as totally liberated in a naive or idealistic manner. Rather, she resides in a challenging zone between agency and constraint that works in tandem. Family, class, gender, marriage, motherhood, and cultural expectations influence her decisions, but she still wants, makes decisions, rebels and bargains.

The victim-escapee stereotype tends to confine Muslim women to two narrow roles. In the former role, they are conceived as silent victims who lack a voice, power to make decisions, and inner depth. In the second part, they are depicted as women who have no other way to be free other than to leave their homes, families, religion, and culture. These representations are a problem in that they overlook the ordinary resistance and compromise, ambition, and survival in their own social worlds. *A Splintering* towards this binary. Tara does not easily fit the description of the poor victim, since she is an ambitious, perceptive, emotionally-charged and strong-willed person who can make tough choices. Meanwhile, she is not just a mere escape, as her trip will not imply that freedom is attained solely by renouncing culture. Instead, the novel demonstrates that even in the confining spaces, women agencies may come out.

One of the key discoveries of this research is that the character of Tara questions the conventional feminist interpretations that seek only open revolt or a head-on collision as a form of resistance. It is seen in her rejection of the restrictions imposed on her due to poverty, gender, and social status. It is manifested in her wish to have another life and her trying to escape the limited role assigned to her. The ambition of Tara is significant as it disrupts the belief that women are supposed to be self-sacrificing, silent and happy with the suffering. The ambition to be mobile, comfortable, powerful, and recognized turns into a feminist problem since it is the ambition of women that is not judged compared to the ambition of men in the society. Whereas male ambition is quite natural, the female ambition is often regarded as being selfish, dangerous or even morally wrong. This unequal judgment is revealed in the novel.

In consideration of the first research question, the paper concludes that *A Splintering* defies the victim-escapee stereotype by denying the audience a one-dimensional character of Tara. She is not merely a victimized woman but a liberated woman. Her fight is not diminished so that she can escape the culture, or to make her suffer with the sole purpose of generating pity. Rather, the novel portrays her as a woman who desires something more in life and is actively trying to find another future. This complicates her character as opposed to the typical stereotypical character of Muslim women in literature. The novel also confronts the readers to realize that the life of women cannot be described solely in terms of victimhood. The presence of pain, ambition, anger, desire, love, guilt and resistance can all be in the same character.

Regarding the second research question, the study concludes that Tara is able to her personal agency in the confines of cultural and patriarchal expectations by continually negotiating between what she desires and what the society permits. The fact that she resides in structures that limit women in their choice is a reason that she does not have absolute agency of her own. Nevertheless, it is not nonexistent as well. She acts, thinks of other ways, and goes beyond the frames of her situation. It is through her journey that agency cannot be perceived as nothing but total freedom. Within a feminist perspective of literary analysis, agency may also be understood as the possibility of acting under constraint, of making meaning under pressure and of resisting, however imperfectly, even incomplete resistance.

Regarding the third research question, the research concludes that a feminist reading of *A Splintering* helps to understand better gender and identity in postcolonial literature because it demonstrates that the identities of women are formed by a variety of forces. Gender is not the sole determinant of Tara. It also is influenced by class, family, rural and urban divisions, marriage, motherhood and social mobility. This intersectional knowledge is significant since the experiences of postcolonial women cannot be analyzed using gender alone. Feminist interpretation of the novel shows how the past experiences of colonialism, classist, patriarchal beliefs and culture still play out in the lives of women in modern society.

This complexity is a feminist value of the novel. It is not a plot of a plain oppression and emancipation. Rather it introduces womanhood as a challenging compromise of desire and duty, freedom and restriction, resistance and compromise. The character of Tara makes the readers remember that the agencies of women are not necessarily evident in the heroic deeds. It manifests sometimes in minor choices, internal rejections, life survival, and the strength to desire more.

Thus, the study concluded that *A Splintering* is a significant contribution to the feminist and postcolonial literary discourse. It invites the reader to transcend the stereotypes and to see Muslim women as sophisticated individuals with their goals, contradictions, and resistances. The novel breaks the victim-escapee stereotype, which opens up a space in the literature of the time, allowing a more mature and humane approach to gender, identity, and agency.

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