

SOCIAL PRESSURE AND IMPULSIVE DECISIONS: BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES TO MARGINALIZATION IN AWAIS KHAN'S *IN THE COMPANY OF STRANGERS*

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Abstract

*This article examines the relationship between social marginalization and impulsive decision-making in Awais Khan's contemporary Pakistani novel *In the Company of Strangers* (2011). Drawing on Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory (1989) and Louis Althusser's concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (1971), this study analyzes how overlapping forms of oppression—including class inequality, gender discrimination, and ideological pressure—limit characters' agency and compel hasty, often destructive choices. Through close textual analysis of three central characters—Mona, Ali, and Mir Rabiullah—the research demonstrates that impulsive decisions emerge not from individual moral failings but from systemic pressures that constrain rational deliberation. The findings reveal that marginalized individuals face intersecting constraints that reduce their decision-making autonomy, while those in positions of power use manipulation and violence to maintain control. This study contributes to understanding how contemporary South Asian literature represents the psychological costs of social exclusion and the ways marginalization shapes human behavior under duress.*

Keywords: Social marginalization, impulsive decisions, intersectionality, Pakistani literature, Awais Khan, behavioral responses, social pressure

Introduction

The modern literature of Pakistan is increasingly questioning the psychological consequences of social inequalities, explicating with insight and prescience the manner in which the stratification of classes, gendered hierarchies, and ideological apparatuses manufacture individual behavior and decision-making systems. The textual analysis of these dynamics presented in Awais Khan's work, *In the Company of Strangers* (2011), is so incisive that the behavioral decisions of its protagonists are framed by the layers of marginalization. The novel is set in Lahore in a backdrop of terrorism and social upheaval, the intersection of Mona a rich, but emotionally distant woman, Ali, an exposed model of lower-class roots and Mir Rabiullah a charismatic charity workman has connections with covert extremist circles. When their biographical accounts overlap, the text reveals the extent to which social pressures push actors to impulsive, usually devastating, decisional results.

Impulsivity in decision-making, i.e. speedy decision-making without proper evaluation of the consequences of such decisions in the long run, can be widely studied in the context of psychological research (Kahneman, 2011; Baumeister and Vohs, 2016). However, there is a gap in the literary criticism on the interrelation of social marginalization and impulsivity, especially when

dealing with South Asian situations. Although the works of Aravind Adiga have been examined by scholars to explore the issue of class stratification (Shingavi, 2014) and Bapsi Sidhwa's works investigated through lens of gender oppression (Akhtar et al., 2015), there is very little literature that systematically examines how the combination of many forces of marginalization can produce behaviour in the form of hasty and pressurized judgements.

The novel by Khan provides an abundant source of such a hermeneutic question. The characters live in strict social constructs that evaluate their value using factors of wealth, gender and their observations of religious and cultural standards. These structures do more than act as external restraints and they are internalized systems of beliefs that influence the way options are perceptually appraised and subsequent decision processes. When Mona is defying social norms by engaging in extramarital affair, when Ali is accepting aid of a suspicious charity organization or when characters are acquiescing to violent retaliations to save honor, their judgment making is a product of complex negotiations between competing powers and marginalization.

This article argues that the impulsive nature of decisions in the novel *In the Company of Strangers* is symptomatic of the larger structure of violence that is entrenched within the class, gender and ideological formations of Pakistani society. Due to the application of intersectionality as developed by Crenshaw and the theory of ideological control by Althusser, it is revealed that superficially irrational decisions are the logical adjustments to intractable conditions developed through overlapping oppressions. The novel is therefore not only a socio-critical comment but a serious psychological discussion that defines the fundamental change of human agency and decisional capacity through marginalization.

Research Objective

To analyze how intersecting forms of social marginalization—including class inequality, gender discrimination, and ideological pressure—compel impulsive decision-making in Awais Khan's *In the Company of Strangers*, demonstrating that such decisions represent behavioral responses to systemic oppression rather than individual moral failures.

Literature Review

Social Marginalization and Decision-Making

Social marginalization refers to the processes through which individuals or groups of people are systematically ostracized in the full involvement in economic, political, and cultural life (Davis, 2006). Empirical studies show that marginalization breeds great psychological sequelae, including anxiety, depression, and a change in decision-making styles (Dutt, 2020). People who face numerous types of discrimination tend to have an experience of what Crenshaw (1989) calls intersectional invisibility whereby the needs and experiences are hidden in single-axis models of oppression.

The intervener of social marginalization and impulsive behavior has been of interest to psychological literature. Baumeister and Vohs (2016) find out that social rejection depletes self-regulatory resources, creating a situation of poor decision-making. Equally, the nomenclature of fast (intuitive) and slow (deliberative) cognition provided by Kahneman (2011) illuminates the role of stress and marginalization in fast, unthoughtful decisions. However, these mental constructs often overlook the structural aspects of decision-making - i.e. how the social systems themselves define the scope of the range of available choices to the marginalized actors.

Impulsivity in South Asian Literature

South Asian literature has always struggled with the issues of agency and forced choice. In the novel *The White Tiger* (2008) by Adiga, the violent tendencies of the main character Balram

provoke the response of the so-called darkness of poverty and caste discrimination (Shingavi, 2014). In both the setting and the tactics that the lower-caste characters employ to survive, Misty's *A Fine Balance* (1995) highlights adaptability to systemic violence being rational, including through the acceptance of exploitation (Kavitha and Selvam, 2015). The book by Lee, *Pachinko* (2017) studies the effects of the colonization of Korean women, whose apparently self-destructive compromises are instead maneuvering through the rigid situation (Srikureja, 2022).

These texts, similar to the novel of Khan, focus on the role of structural oppression in determining the agency of individuals. However, the current research has largely dichotomized the study of class struggle (Roy, 2014) or gender oppression (Akhtar et al., 2015) but has not used intersectionality theory to examine the concomitant marginalization that binds decision-making. The latter gap is especially acute in the field of Pakistani literary studies as of today, as the obsession with the narrative of the terrorism or gender-related motifs overshadows the psychological and behavioral outlines of marginalization.

Gender, Class, and Behavioral Responses

The feminist scholarship records the way in which the patriarchal systems suppress the independence of women which influences them to make choices that support male dominance (Butler, 1990; Collins, 2000). Women in Pakistan face a form of marginalization that is both gendered and systemic in nature, resulting in a so-called double marginalization (Akhtar et al., 2015). Similarly, class-based marginalization produces Bourdieu (1977) concept of symbolic violence whereby, oppressed groups internalize oppression, producing decisions that perpetuate oppression.

Current interdisciplinary intersectional literature studies deal with these intersecting limitations. Bilge (2010) argues that intersectional scrutiny should avoid the additive categorization of identities and instead engage in the study of co-constitutive identities. Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) stress out that intersectionality reveals unusual types of marginalization that arise at the point of the collimation of diverse oppressions. This paradigm, when applied to the interpretation of character behavior, aids in the decoding of character behavior as an outcome of complex, reinforcing systems of power.

Research Gap

Although the current literature on the topic of class and gender in South Asian literature includes a substantial amount of corpus, the systematic investigation of impulsive decision-making as the reaction to intersectional marginalization is still limited. Current literature tends to narrow the scope of one axis of oppression or explain the choice of character as mere basic moral deficiency, ignoring the underlying structural factors that provide those results. The intellectual gap that the current article aims to fill is by using the intersectionality theory to challenge how the conglomeration of marginalized forces generates conditions under which impulsive and seemingly irrational choices are rational but unavoidable responses to unsolvable structural dilemmas.

Methodology & Theoretical Framework

Research Approach

This study employs close textual analysis of Awais Khan's *In the Company of Strangers*, examining specific passages where characters make impulsive decisions under social pressure. Kain describes close reading as an act of paying attention to details in the text, the language, the imagery, the characterization and the structure of the narration, and trying to uncover other layers and repetitive motifs (Kain, 1998). The technique is especially appropriate to the psychological

studies of literature, since it allows one to go into detail about how stories express psychological conditions and the decision-making process via linguistic and structural selection.

The discussion focuses on three main characters of the work, Mona, Ali and Mir Rabiullah, whose convergent stories highlight various aspects of social marginalization. Passages are selected as they explicitly describe the instances of decision-making when agency is evidently limited by social pressure. These are the moments which are judged not separately but in the context of the broader social positioning of the respective characters and the portrayal of Pakistani class, gender and ideology of the novel.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality

Its main theoretical framework is the intersectionality theory, originally constructed by Kimberle Crenshaw to explain the experiences that Black women face when attempting to deal with discrimination, but cannot be reduced to either of the two (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Intersectionality argues that the social categories like race, class, gender, sexuality and religion are not independent variables but rely on each other constitutive systems that bring about distinct oppression and privilege at their intersections.

Intersectionality applied to literary analysis helps provide a finer analysis of how the interplay of multiple social positions of characters can influence how they live and make decisions. According to Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013), intersectionality not only uncovers additive forms of oppression (e.g. sexism and classism) but also the formation of unique forms of marginalization that cannot be divided into the separate parts. A poor woman in *In the Company of Strangers* is not just the victim affected by the amount of poverty and sexism; she faces certain limitations and vulnerabilities that are created by the presence of both roles at the same time in the Pakistani society.

Intersectionality proves particularly useful in the analysis of decision-making as it reveals how marginalization being overlapped constrains choice. When people have to face several, overlapping oppressions, the range of socially possible choices becomes extremely small, with some courses of action looking impulsive or self-destructive to the outside observer, but as forms of confined rationality to the social situations of the characters.

Complementary Framework: Ideological State Apparatuses

The Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) concept presented by Louis Althusser provide alternative analysis resources to comprehend the influence of the social pressures on behavior (Althusser, 1971). Althusser believes that social reproduction is not only carried out by repressive state violence but also by institutions such as family, religion, education, media, which interpellate individuals and place them in ideological position as subjects. This is a type of control that is seemingly natural and unavoidable as these institutions instill what seems like consent, as opposed to coercion.

In the Company of Strangers, ISAs, especially family arrangements, religious requirements and cultural demands in regard to honor, are potent sources of restraint over character behavior.

These ideological messages enter into the characters and are not seen as external impositions but as these are self-evident truths on how to behave. Whenever they implement impulsive actions that are against these norms they are overwhelmed by guilt and anxiety and therefore show how deeply the ideology affects their subjectivity.

Integration of Frameworks

The synthesis of intersectionality and ISA theory allows the study to provide a thorough insight into the way social marginalization contributes to making impulsive choices. Intersectionality

explains the many, overlapping restraints experienced by the characters due to their social roles, whereas ISA theory explains the restraints at work within the characters as a result of internalized ideological concepts and outside through social influence. Collectively, these models indicate that the impulsive choices are a result of the interaction between the narrow structural opportunities and the internalized understandings of the acceptable behavior.

Textual Analysis

Economic Desperation and Masculinity: Ali's Impulsive Consumption

The narrative arc of Ali is representative of how the marginalization as a result of class intersects with gender expectations to create a series of impulsive financial choices which threaten to heighten his economic vulnerability. Ali is a lower-class background provider with an unstoppable economic pressure as a brother to his hospitalized brother Hussain. Intersectional marginalization making him buy a costly motorcycle in the face of family financial crisis is an example of how marginalization is forcing him to behave rashly:

The new motorcycle had taken a chunk out of his savings, and unfortunately, that wasn't the only extravagance he had been able to afford. With money came an inexplicable power, a forceful urge to spend, rise, and dominate. (p. 115)

This quote is an expression of various levels of Ali and his intersectional marginalization. The expression of violent desire to consume, to stand, to control is the characterization of the interaction between the consumer culture and the construction of masculine identities, specifically among the economically disadvantaged men. The notion of habitus by Bourdieu (1977) sheds light on such a process: Ali has internalized the rules of the classes that established the association between conspicuous consumption and social value and male success. In an economic capital-based society, the motorcycle serves as a shrine of social population and male empowerment, which offers momentary psychological relief to the embarrassment of financial deprivation.

In the rhetoric of compulsion, the idea of forceful urge, the suggestion is that the choice is not as independent as it can be but a reaction to internalized pressures. Ali is under the pressure of what Bauman (2000) describes as the demands of liquid modernity whereby identity will constantly be acted out and authenticated by consumption. In the case of marginalized men, this pressure is further exacerbated in cases where other channels of affirming respect and status do not exist. The motorcycle purchase therefore constitutes an attempt to realize the successful masculinity in the material show off to compensate structural powerlessness in the symbolic gesture of control and dominance.

However, this rash move adds to the financial instability of Ali and this highlights the ironic tragedy of how marginalization can breed self-defeating tendencies. Ali cannot afford the medical treatment of his brother, but subsidies status symbols as an illustration of how the combined pressures of classes and genders can override effective financial practices. His rashness is not explained by a closed-mindedness to think ahead as the text mentions that it was not the only extravagance but rather the psychological pressure to avoid being marginalized identity in the short term overshadows the long-term survival mechanisms. Intersectionality shows that such behavior cannot be disaggregated to a single approach of class analysis, but instead, it is a result of converging economic disenfranchisement and patriarchal demands that define manhood in fiscal prosperity and material display.

The next decision made by Ali to seek the help of Mir Rabiullah's charitable organization although he clearly knew its militarized nature is a good example how economic desperation can override

rational prudence. The scene is summarized by Khan (p. 122) quote: "Why does Mir Sahab need all this?" He gestured around the men with Kalashnikovs strung around their shoulders and the ten-foot-high mud brick walls. 'The presence of so many weapons is alarming for a charity organization.' Despite the fact that the symbolism of guns and fortified walls clearly points to an ill intent, Ali does it since the medical needs of his brother Hussain are a single imperative that leaves no room of equal consideration to an alternative. Lacking private hospitals, trusted doctors, or lawful funding, the poverty of Ali always leads him to a militarized organization that in order to receive short-term help will require his subsequent allegiance.

The text is a perfect example of an intersectional construct introduced by Crenshaw (1989), that is, the vulnerability of Ali can be explained not only by his position on the class hierarchy but also by the collision of family relations (as the eldest son who has to care about Hussain) and gender norms (as the man who has to support his dependent relatives) and state failure (or more precisely, the lack of the proper health infrastructure). The combination of these two limitations leads to a situation where the only way out seems to be taking the help of Mir regardless of the dangers involved.

Further, a wiser cognitive understanding of the danger is demonstrated in Ali interrogating, as he says, 'Why does Mir Sahab need all this?', so the argument that his decision was made due to lack of knowledge or stupidity cannot be accepted. The fact that he perceives the danger alarmingly through the sound of the Kalashnikovs and fortified walls highlights a rational evaluation of danger, but the fact that he has been marginalized has taken off the alternative, which is safer. It is a situation that represents the principle of constrained rationality: the search of the most optimal solution in severely limited choices. Intersectionality explains why this limitation is so harsh: the poverty of Ali is a decisive factor that combines with the filial duty, gender responsibility and institutional failure to create an ideal storm of vulnerability against which Mir strikes with a scalpel-like precision. As a result, even the allegedly reckless act of accepting help is actually a survival mechanism that is created in conditions of impossibility instead of failure to judge.

The climax of the limited agency of Ali is when Mir Rabiullah is ready to use veiled threat to his family to win compliance. According to Khan, the conversation went like this:

I was planning to visit your dear mother and that wonderful boy Hussain soon, just to see how he was getting along. Ah, family. What a blessing from God, for after all, where would we be without our loved ones?" His voice had possessed the same sweetness as ever, but the words were poison. (p. 234).

This situation is a classical example of the Bourdieu (1991) phenomenon of a symbolic violence when the coercion is disguised as care or concern. Mir does not directly threaten the family members of Ali, he is merely playing the family card and playing off religion to send a noticeable threat that is not so noticeable at the same time. The use of divine blessing as a coercive tool shows how ideological state apparatuses used in offering religious discourse can work as Althusser (1970) contends to reveal how the mechanisms of coercion work: the religious discourse is utilized as an instrument in ensuring compliance through an internalization of a sense of duty, family and divine will.

The juxtaposition of the voice as "sweet" and "poison" is used by Mir in order to highlight the insidiousness of symbolic violence. In contrast to direct actions of corporal violence, symbolic violence operates by implication and implication, and thus making resistance a psychologically

challenging experience since it has to face head-on the unsaid. Ali is not able to reject without seeming to devalue religious values, or in the reverse is pathological paranoia in seeing goodwill as evil. This two-sided bind shows that power is exercised not only through the higher level of force but also in the form of manipulation of collective cultural and religious codes that make some interpretations binding.

Intersectionality also reveals that the domination of Ali by Mir is based on a number of converging forces. The inequality among classes provides Mir with the economic power, Ali relies on the charity to provide Hussain with medical help. Gender norms require Ali to stay vigilant of vulnerable relatives especially his ailing brother and his mother, who is growing older, increasing the intensity of the risks that affect the dependents. Religious and cultural ideologies that apply to family responsibility add to the feeling of obligation in Ali thus, making it psychologically unsustainable to make a personal decision about his well-being at the expense of the people he has to support. Lastly, the lack of state protection, which is evidenced by corruption of the police and the lack of social services, denies Ali an opportunity to turn to the authority. These overlapping weaknesses create complete dependency, which Mir subordinates with carefully burdensome symbolic violence.

This threat is not obeyed in a moral failure, rather it is a recognition of structural reality. When Mir then orders Ali to wear a suicide vest, the freedom of choice to do so was already predetermined by a previous situation when it was practically impossible to do otherwise. Intersectionality shows that marginalization is cumulative in that each restricted choice limits the possibilities in the future until the agency is virtually unsustainable.

The final acknowledgment of Ali as perplexed is the essence in the argument of the study when it comes to limited agency: Ali said to himself, 'I don't have a choice,' he whispered. 'I wish I did' (p. 260). That is what this statement sums up to; the fact that intersecting marginalization does away with deliberative decision-making. The whisper sells out emotional depletion and mental failure, as a way of cursing the lack of even the strength to raise a voice. The fact that he recognizes the fact that choice is in itself evaporated is the last stage in the process of cumulative marginalization: initially, poverty itself limits the range of choices, then the family obligation restricts further, next the financial dependence on Mir beats out choice, and the ideological pressure and physical threats make refusal virtually impossible.

The conditional desire –"I wish I did"–is the manifestation of the fact that, notwithstanding the absence of possible alternatives in the framework of structural forces, Ali still has moral consciousness and an inherent tendency towards independence. This is the subtlety of the understanding of impulsive choices in marginalization, which are not symptomatic of moral apathy and mental inability but a tragic understanding of impossibility. Ali realizes that wearing a suicide vest is against his principles and this action finally destroys his future; but the overlapping forces force him to go along. His so-called impulsive act to join terrorism is, in reality, the result of a long, methodical, eradication of any alternatives, developed by the confluence of the pressures of the classes, sex, familial responsibility, and ideological subjugation.

Intersectionality becomes essential to explain the reasons as to why Ali cannot simply refuse to act. An individualistic analytic construct can indicate that he may have agency when the well-being of the family is not a priority but his own well-being. This kind of an inference ignores the reality that masculine identity is at any rate produced through the primacy of familial guarding; economic continuity depends on whether Mir continues to patronize or not; and the deep-rooted religious

and cultural ideologies make abandoning the family an impossible moral imperative. These restraints are not additive but multiplicative and each is strengthening the others to bring about an ontological totality that destroys substantive choice and the pretext of democratic decision-making. The silent recognition of choicelessness by Ali, therefore, emerges as the most no-go statement of the role of marginalization in the novel, the simultaneous circumscription of material choices and the colonization of consciousness.

Gender Oppression and Emotional Deprivation: Mona's Transgressive Intimacy

The character of Mona theatricalizes the continued gender-based marginality at the upper levels of privilege, carving out its own structures of circumscribed choice and acting out. Despite having material prosperity, she goes through extreme loneliness in her marriage with Bilal and inferiority in the hierarchical system of the family of her husband. The motive of her wanting to have an extra-marital affair with Ali is the result of a refined collision between privilege and opprobrium:

Despite the million rules of society and religion they were breaking, it all seemed right. Sitting now in the midst of so many people, right next to her husband, she couldn't turn her mind away from that first encounter a week ago... She had worn ordinary lawn clothes, a print so dull that it would have blended in with the shirts of half of the middle-class women of Lahore. (p. 204)

This quote sheds some light on the psychological storm created by the clash of ideological forces. The term million rules of society and religion prefigures the normative complexes, which restrict the behavior of females, not only the religious taboo against adultery, but also the social expectations of the behavior of higher-class women, the honor machinery that makes female sexuality a communal burden, and the gendered discourses which cause women to be loyal towards their husbands regardless of their treatment. This transgression of Mona, then, is a transgression of a code, making her decision in the case significantly more transgressive and psychologically penitential than mere rule-breaking.

Yet the phrase "it all seemed right" betrays an emotional deprivation filled with patriarchal marital relationships that creates an intense desire towards recognition, to the extent that transgression is morally right even though internalised sanctions have been imposed. This observation fits in the idea developed by Baumeister and Vohs (2016), which suggests the idea of depleted self-regulatory resources: years of emotional neglect, subordination to her mother-in-law Nighat, and lack of intimacy with Bilal drain Mona of her ability to resist immediate emotive contact. Her impulsive decision to meet Ali is then not spontaneous, but the result of prolonged deprivation, of which the need of the mind overshadows the social controls internalized.

Her dressing up, his carefulness with the disguise, in wearing a bit of prosaic lawn clothes to pass as one of the girls of the middle classes, indicates a certain degree of class-consciousness in her transgression. Mona is aware that her social standing as an upper-class makes her recognizable, making the affair a bigger vice against family honor. Taking on a face of a lower-class on a temporary basis, she proves the working reality of intersectionality: her gender generates transgression, and her social status as being able to break social norms with her gender grants her the thrill of danger. Therefore, she has to navigate the two dimensions at the same time, and find a strategy to balance the emotional demands with risk reduction by her privileged identity. The choice is consequently not a rashly impulsive one but a rational maneuvering within overlapping constraints although there is a latent driving force that is exacerbated by long-term emotional exhaustion.

The theory of interpellation presented by Althusser gives an insight into the inner conflict that Mona experiences. She has been proclaimed a respectable wife, a dutiful daughter-in-law and a woman of status-subject positions which entrench particular imperatives of behavior. Her affair is a momentary denial of these interpellation but her anxieties, her disguise of tact and the accent on those rules violated go to show her that she is, nevertheless, a partial product of the ideologies she challenges. She is not able to just choose liberation; her subjectivity is shaped by the patriarchal and class-based ideology which makes transgression not only the existential need to survive emotionally, but also the transgression of the values inculcated. The speed of her affair, how she goes through meeting to intimacy in a week, is not blind passion, but a cognitive overload in the process of balancing the conflicting demands: the deprivation of emotion and the obligations of society, her desire to be recognized and her fear of being uncovered, and asserting her independence and her experienced subordination.

Mona and Bilal after the latter physically assaults her depicts the way violence works to bind patriarchal authority when the male dominance is threatened:

You raised your hand against me... You kicked me, the mother of your children. You kicked me until I collapsed, and if that wasn't enough, you then abandoned me like a dog. That is not okay. That is not okay (p. 151).

The scene in which Bilal erupts into violence and is responding to an alleged transgression by Mona is an example of immediate assertive patriarchal power. The unthinking, rushy attack, kicking till I fell, proves the way male identity in patriarchy takes on the challenge, instead of discussing it, with violence in the moment. However, this impulsiveness is not random but, on the contrary, systematic: the establishment of the gender hierarchy with the help of violence which is approved and, at the same time, silently accepted by the patriarchal order. As a result, the rage of Bilal is a loss of his own ego and of a structural scale, where the intertwined social analysis causes the apparently spontaneous emotional reactions to take the form of a pattern, which replicates gender oppression.

The insistence of the repetition as Mona repeats it, "that is not okay. That is not okay"- reveals the hardship in expressing abuse in an ideological system that legitimizes the violence of men on wives. The implication of mirroring is that she tries to persuade herself as well as Bilal against internalized beliefs that can offer him an excuse of the violence being a reasonable reaction to her sin or a frenzied outburst instead of a direct attack. The example of this phenomenon is the inner workings of ideology, in which even the victims of violence cannot call their experience violence rather than a justified punishment or an unfortunate accident.

Intersectionality shows how Mona is not a privilege in terms of gendered violence and that it proves that there is a tense coexistence of a class privilege and gender oppression in her lived life. Her financial dependence on the family wealth of her husband, the fears about her social standing in case of a divorce, and the ingrained belief about the obligation to the husband are all limiting her repertoire of possible reactions. Contrary to women who have little money and cannot afford the material means to leave abusive marriage, Mona theoretically has financial means to escape. However, overlapping class expectations (the norm of the upper-class of not divorcing), family issues (the orientation of the mother-in-law with Bilal), and gender ideologies (the quality of a forgiving wife) create equally strong restrictions. Although her position of classes gives her the voice that could have charged violence as not acceptable, the intersection of gender and the family systems prevents her power to transform the cognition into action.

The mention of the ‘mother of your children’ highlights one of the few spheres in which women can gain value and safety in their patriarchies, maternity. But even this capital does not avoid violence, thus revealing the vulnerability of all women despite their conformity to approved roles. The spontaneous confrontation of Mona when she faces the power against danger is a symbol of courage and anxiety. Her outburst is also impulsive in the sense that it is not very much strategically calculated, but largely influenced by emotion; theoretically, it may also trigger more aggression. However, her impulsivity is not a personal vice but an act of survival in her life, which has been complicated by the compounded traumas of the marital violence, the subordination of a family, and the conditioning of an ideology that has made her be silent till this point.

The overlap of surveillance, gender control, and reproductive autonomy is made very clear in a pregnancy crisis of Mona:

Her hand reached over to her belly. She was not yet determined as to whether she would keep it. She estimated that she was two months pregnant, but was too terrified to visit a doctor in Lahore. The danger of a leakage was too high. She would go where she would be checked somewhere in Karachi but to date, Bilal had not allowed her to move out of his sight. Terror threats, he said (p. 240).

This passage is a depiction of the intersection of gender, classes, religion, and family honor to restrain reproductive autonomy, which leads to paralysis instead of a choice that is true and definite and demonstrates how marginalization can strip a woman of any discernable decision-making agency. The conditional act, as in hand ventured, carries with it a sense of uncertainty and fear, something had not yet been decided, carries an obstacle to thought that is created by conflicting forces. Mona is not indecisive, therefore, the opposite of impulsive, but rather its complement: both of them are failures of deliberative rationality to act in the face of excessive pressures.

Though she is theoretically empowered by her class privilege to have abortion or prenatal care, her social status makes the pursuit of care a potentially risky matter since it would publicize her affair, and would be an insult to the family. This situation is a masterpiece of intersectionality, which argues that privilege in one dimension (class) does not eliminate the presence of other forms of oppression (gender) or intersecting with it creates specific vulnerabilities. Women of upper classes in Pakistan do not face a lack of resources, but have other types of limitations: too much policing and too much investment in preserving respectability as a quality that defines the family rank on the social ladder. Thus, the wealth of Mona is a dangerous trap instead of a strategic tool because her living body becomes a place of family glory which needs to be strictly guarded.

The fear that the word getting out is an expression of realistic evaluation of the threat of sexual transgression by women on the reputation of the family as a whole. According to honour-based systems, the body of women is not a personal property but a collective one and hence the extramarital pregnancy is a family crisis instead of an individual decision. This is magnified by the religious teachings which present the extramarital pregnancy as a sign of great sin whereas the gender ideologies tend to put the blame on women, a phenomenon which is disproportionately higher in this case. Such overlapping systems of belief literally make Mona unable to consider her options: abortion is a foreign concept since religious and cultural rules make it almost unthinkable, but the continuation of a pregnancy inevitably makes her situation clear.

Bilal, citing his security against terror threats, as a reason to monitor him, is an example of the working of the patriarchal control in the name of the good-natured care. His inability to allow her

out of his sight also includes real security issues within a city that is dealing with terrorism and also serves as a control system of gender in which he refuses to give Mona access to healthcare or the ability to make her own decisions. The ambiguity is symbolic of the mechanism of intersecting power relations in that genuine dangers (terrorism) are used as the excuse to dominate (keep an eye on the wife) and therefore the resistance is rather seen as ungratefulness or stupidity than a valid resistance. The Ideological State Apparatus rationale by Althusser explains how the family functions and the protection and control are inseparably bound in such a manner that female subordination is as palatable as nurture.

The paralysis of Mona, her inability to make a decision, to take care of herself, to relocate is a form of marginalization that is exerted by the means of complete control instead of compelling her to make an impulsive decision. However, such paralysis is bound to trigger a rash decision as the pregnancy develops: to continue to term and face exposure, to get an abortion under unsafe circumstances, or to continue the paralysis until the choices have disappeared. Intersectionality demonstrates that this unsustainable state of affairs follows the overlap of gender (the control over the female body), class (the necessity of preserving the respectability), religion (the stigmatization of abortion), and family (the establishment of the collective honor). In this way, the complexity of a single-axis analysis is unable to explain why a wealthy woman does not have reproductive autonomy; only a broad consideration of overlapping restrictions uncovers the wholeness of control that undermines the meaning of choice.

Ideological Manipulation and Symbolic Violence: Mir Rabiullah's Control

The character of Mir Rabiullah is the best example showing how people who have the authority use the weaknesses created by the disadvantaged by dint of the marginalization to use ideological manipulation and material coercion to influence them to do as they want at the moment. This is revealed through his recruitment strategies: a complex intersection of religious ideology, dominance of classes, and gendered expectations:

Rabiullah had a sudden idea. He spread his arms. 'As a token of my appreciation of what you're about to do, Usman, you may spend some time with these girls. Bring your friends too.' 'But Mir Sahab,' one of the girls gasped, 'they are animals. We were only instructed to—' 'Silence,' Rabiullah shouted. 'You will do as I say or I shall have you stoned to death. And not a word to anyone.' Usman's eyes went wide with hunger (pp.112–113).

This text unfolds a set of overlapping marginalization, showing the way power is exercised in relation to their manipulation. The female bodies in the room become transactional reward in Paternal exchange as their voices and autonomy are wiped off altogether. The fact that Mir suggests them as an incentive to commit suicide bombardment, his sudden idea, is the final objectification of the female body, which serves as currency to gain the male martyrdom. The radical gender marginalization in this case makes women exist only as use-values, serving as an instrument to male gratification as well as to the spread of male-dominated political agendas.

The gasp of the protesting woman, who says that they are animals, momentarily enhances the female viewpoint, which means that these women were just taught to render services that were not limited to sexual access to a group of men. That implies a ladder of exploitation where women submit themselves to some types of objectifications and retain their opposition to others, however, in the circumstances of marginalization, even the bare minimum lines disappear. The violent response of Mir, the threat of stoning, uses the religious law as the power weapon in gender control, thus, demonstrating the idea of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) as elaborated by Althusser.

Religion ideology is reused as an instrument of complete control, destroying the remaining freedom of women by the threat of execution by religious law.

Intersectionality reveals stratified marginalization: these women are poor (and therefore work in the organization of Mir), women (who are subordinate to men), and possibly come with the background that limits the chances of getting a job. Their economic status makes them dependent economically, their gender makes them vulnerable sexually and their work in a militarized religious organization made them subjects to an ideological power that justifies their exploitation. Mir systematically takes advantage of each of the three dimensions at the same time. The lack of economic autonomy makes it impossible to leave, the lack of gender makes it possible to exploit sexually, and the lack of religious power makes silence unbreakable by means of menacing through stoning.

The response of Usman who says that his eyes are opened with hunger is a demonstration of how marginalized men end up being complicit to their oppression of marginalized women. Since Usman is a member on the periphery of a suicide attack, he represents his own marginalization: he got lured into the terrorism business by poverty, ideological indoctrination and the promise of becoming a martyr. But his social and gender position in comparison to such women lends him a deviant power that allows sexual exploitation. This is the implication of intersectionality that oppression and privilege are not dualistic; Usman is now both a victim (of being exploited by classes and used politically by Mir) and an oppressor (of women, whom he now values with a sexual offer).

The impulsive offer by Mir, which is referred to as a 'sudden idea', expresses the opportunistic exploitation, but it lives in the systematic patterns of patriarchal militarism that rewards male violence with feminine bodies. A political ideology that views the sexual availability of women as a proper compensation to the political violence of men organizes this impulsivity. Gender, authority of classes, religion, political violence coming together form a totalitarian state where women are denied voice, protection and choices. They are so completely marginalized that they exist as exchange value only between men; the importance of the desires and even the safety to them is completely unimportant to the political calculations of Mir.

Corruption and Systemic Violence: Bilal's Compromised Position

Even the privileged figures like Bilal are faced with forced choices in the corrupt institutional nexus of Pakistan, but the qualitative nature of their marginalization is not the same as the situation in the lower-class actors: 'Do you know what that bastard policeman charged me for carrying [you] away from [the] crime scene? One million rupees and a week's supply of whores. He's made a pimp out of me. Do I look like a pimp to you?' (p. 178).

The anger of Bilal shows the humiliating experience of being pushed into the position of pimp, bribe-payer that does not fit the identity of his social class and his masculine dignity. The ability to pay the one-million-rupee bribe illustrates the privilege of the classes that the characters like Ali would not be able to pay as they do not have the means to get out of legal situations. However, the demand of the bribe of its own reveals how corruption creates marginalization even on the rich in a dysfunctional state apparatus. Although Bilal has economic capital and is not politically powerful to say no to the police extortion, it demonstrates that his class privilege provides him with options but not immunity against the systemic violence.

The gendered aspect of the bribe, where one has to a week supply of whores, works on various planes. First, it induces Bilal into conspiracy of sexual exploitation by making him get women to police. It breaks his self-concept of being a respectable gentleman of upper classes, one who hires

but does not purchase sex workers. Second, it subjugates him to police power, thus feminising him. In spite of his wealth and status, he is forced into a state of degradation, which temporarily puts him in the position of women or other classes. The loss of dignity is protested by his rhetorical question, which is Do I look like a pimp? his belonging to the appropriate class and gender identity is challenged by the forces that place him as a victim of the desires and lusts of others.

Intersectionality shows how corruption and classes, as well as genders, intersect to bring out unique manners of degradation. To poor citizens, corruption by police brings about direct violence or incarceration, which they cannot buy their way out. To wealthy men like Bilal, it brings embarrassing trades off that pressurize compliance with exploitation as a way of maintaining a semblance of consent. He is coerced into making a decision to pay and procure; this is through the threat of arresting his wife. His privilege in a class provides choices not available to poor characters, but they are still limited by the system pressure that compels him to take do not act in accordance with his principles and self-concept.

The text also presents the utter marginalization of the so-called whores they require as a bribe, women who are totally objectified, addressed by their category as commercial sex, but not as individuals. They are completely marginalized: appearing only as commodified exchange value in the exchanges between men (the police and Bilal), their experiences in the text are done away with, reflecting the social reality itself on which it is based. This shows that the interaction between gender and class creates hierarchies even among the oppressed: poor women who are sex workers are exploited by the police, customers like Bilal who are forced to acquire them, and even the economic system as a whole which creates the circumstances that force them to provide the labor.

The fact that Bilal barely thinks about his acceptance of these conditions upon the response to a necessity to protect Mona against arrest after the bombing can be used as a illustration of how even the most privileged actors can be influenced by the forces to make decisions that are limited by a need to protect Mona. Being able to choose is an option due to his socioeconomic privilege, but state corruption, gender-based responsibility to his wife, and time-sensitive decision (Mona might face arrest by the police at any moment) force him into a quick, unthoughtful decision. This is an illustration of how as much as the privilege of the classes increases the options, it cannot be used to eliminate the structural violence that permeates the entire citizenry of the corrupt sovereign structures. Intersectionality explains why his wealth is not a sufficient shield: it crosses with political ineffectiveness against police force and gender responsibility to defend his wife, so the freedom of action is restricted and a concession is required.

Climactic Collision: Simultaneous Revelations

The point of culmination in the novel summarizes how overlapping marginalization breeds disastrous, impulsive situations:

I 'm pregnant,' Mona declared at the same time as Ali said, 'I am wearing a bomb.' They both stared at each other, lost for words. 'A bomb?' Mona whispered. 'Pregnant? With my baby?' Ali asked her weakly, his face draining of colour. (p.256)

This bilateral revelation is at the intersection of various paths of marginalization and it generates an equivalence between personal and political violence. The bomb vest Ali wears is the pinnacle of class marginalization (poverty forces him to be dependent on Mir), family (the need to protect mother and brother), and ideological manipulation (religious authority makes the refusal to do so impossible). The conception of Mona is the material expression of gender discrimination

(restricted feelings in marriage), social classes (the necessity to be respectable), and a frequently transgressive effort at independence (an affair as a way of not being controlled by patriarchy). The concurrent confessions of the two contrasts these overlapping oppressions and suggests that interpersonal relations and political violence cannot be separated because they are two manifestations of the same structural violence.

The parallel in structure is created by the simultaneity, which means that pregnancy and suicide bombing are the results of constrained choice. Both events are also impulsive actions that are done under overlapping pressures that render deliberative reason ineffective. The affair that led to Mona being pregnant was not a carefully thought out escape out of the union but rather an act of desperation out of emotional deprivation which was ran inconsiderately despite apparent dangers. The decision to wear the bomb vest was not a voluntary political promise but a compelled response to pressure supported by the threats to his family as Ali was obliged to do. However, both characters suffer disastrous repercussions that will mark the rest of their lives (however short) to prove that marginalization does not only result in constraint but also tragedy.

The term lost for words sums up the inexpressiveness of the catastrophic experience which is expressed by the theorists of trauma like Whitehead (2004). Both characters have been driven by cross pressures to a point where they cannot use language-where their lives are greater than they can be articulated and understood what has happened. This language failure is a reflection of their failure in decision: as they were unable to convey their situations in an adequate way, they were also unable to deliberate on their decisions in an adequate way. The origin of impulsivity and inarticulateness lies in the same factor, which is a strong sense of marginalization that overrides individually both in a cognitive and emotional ability to process information and react intelligibly. The two are equally shocked when Mona whispers that there is a bomb, and Ali asks her whether she is pregnant or not. With my baby? --brings it out that although they were as one, both were in their own kind of crisis, by being marginalized in different ways. The entrapment of Ali, as a class by Mir and the isolation of Mir and Mona as gender in marriage did not allow them to find the support of each other and even plan together. Intersectionality clarifies this ineffective solidarity: their social statuses caused them different limitations that put even each other in another isolated place. Ali was not able to reveal his entrapment due to masculine pride and family duty since vulnerability was a shameful feeling; Mona was not able to reveal pregnancy due to gender norms and consider her the bearer of reproductive sins.

The somatic aspect of crisis is evidenced by the detail that Ali face draining of colour is an indication that he is in physical shock. His response to the news is visceral, which indicates that the pregnancy is not just a complication, but a crash of impossible futures: he is about to die as a result of suicide bombing, but at the same time he is getting news about the birth of a child. The impossibility in time, the bomb will kill him today, the pregnancy will project nine months in the future, the impossibility of the future is absolute, which is produced by marginalization. Both characters have been set into the situation in which the future itself becomes unthinkable not because of nihilism but because of overlapping restrictions, futures have been brutally removed to only leave devastating presents.

This climax, therefore, proves the main argument of the study on impulsive decisions in marginalization. Both the pregnancy and the bomb are the consequences of the decisions made at the moment of duress, when one has no time or possibilities to think over the decisions made. Both were a result of overlapping oppressions that left only transgressive and dangerous directions. And both now mingle in creating complete disaster, implying individual impulsive action, the result of

different marginalization, can be combined with a result that is far more disastrous than the individual results. Intersectionality has shown the oppression to be not only at the individual level but also at relationship level, killing solidarity, collective resistance, by isolating the individuals in different but interdependent crises, which make them less able to support or act in concert.

Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that impulsive decisions in Awais Khan's *In the Company of Strangers* emerge systematically from intersecting forms of social marginalization rather than from individual moral failings or psychological weaknesses. Using the intersectionality framework of Kimberle Crenshaw and the analysis of ideological hegemony of Louis Althusser, the question clarifies how intersecting forms of oppression, based on class, gender, family status, and ideological supremacy, precondition the emergence of rapid and pressured decision-making as an inevitable reaction to unsustainable positions.

The three main characters in the narrative represent different aspects of such a relationship. The trajectory of Ali shows that economic marginalization having been supported by family responsibility and masculine norms results in desperate decisions such as spending extravagant money on buying unnecessary things to show off, taking risky offers and later giving in to violent requests. His so-called impulsive behavior is, as a matter of fact, a limited rationalization, which takes place due to a systematic contraction of valid alternatives. The experience of the foreground of mona predicts how the oppression of gender remains in the privileged of the class, which generates an emotional loss that leads to transgressive intimacy, the crisis of pregnancy as well as an inability to make reproductive choices. Her unthinkingness does not mean that she is weak morally but is a drained self-control in the face of continuous patriarchal dominance. The manipulation of Mir Rabiullah is a good example of how leaders take advantage of the lack of power of others in the symbolic way of violence under pretext of care, and they can implement ideological and physical pressure to make them submit.

Intersectionality, in such cases, is invaluable in the process of understanding impulsive behavior. The one-axis research that only looks at the class or gender does not provide a reason that a given character could decide to take a particular decision at a specific time. It is the overlapping between several marginalizing categories that instigates the special vulnerabilities and limitations that annihilate deliberative decision-making. Ali does not only face poverty, but poverty by itself coupled with family responsibility, manhood requirements, and lack of state facilities. Mona is not only facing gender oppression, but gendered oppression covered by the class expectations, family surveillance and religious dogma. The intersections create new types of marginalization that create particular behavioral patterns.

The implications of the findings of the study to the fields of knowledge in literature are enormous. To begin with, the behavior of acting on impulse in texts cannot be assumed as a flaw of character rather it is a textual manifestation of structural violence; apparently illogical decisions can be the most powerful responses in highly restrictive situations. Second, the study shows that the methodological merit of intersectionality with other critical theories is that it captures both external structural limitations as well as internal ideological influence of marginalization. Third, the paper demonstrates the use of psychological motifs in the contemporary Pakistani literature, which relies on social critique, in that the consciousness has been sculpted by the overlapping power structures, instead of being independent internalized states.

With respect to the Pakistani society in general the novel insinuates that pockets cannot be separated of the structural milieu that produces them. In cases where marginalized people

implement self-destructive actions, the responsibility is largely vested on the social systems that breed unsustainable scenarios as opposed to the actions of the individuals themselves. Any policy effort that tries to focus on the individualized psychology or moral education but ignores structural marginalization will be bound to fail, failing to understand the nature of constrained agency. Intervention needs to change the overlapping systems which include economic inequality, patriarchal family dynamics, ideologized religious beliefs as control mechanisms and state corruption which narrow possible options until only dangerous courses are available.

The tragic ending of the novel, which is a violent death, relationship destruction, and that of an untimely death, proves the human price of continuing interacting systems of oppression. The decision to commit suicide bombing by Ali, the untenable reproductive crisis for Mona and the breakup of their would-be relationship are all decisions that were made under duress in systems that neither were created nor had control over. They are victims and their persecution cannot be blamed on their judgment but the society which created their impossibilities. Describing individual acts of impulsivity as signs of a larger system malfunction and not as agents of social disorder, Khan would encourage readers to look beyond the behavior of individuals to the structural violence that characterizes them.

Further studies can take this question in a number of ways. The literature of impulsive decision-making in South Asian literature could be compared and the questions posed could be whether similar trends are apparent in other national literatures or whether the literature of Pakistani encounter with terrorism presents distinctive manifestations of confined choice. Research into other Pakistani novels may help establish whether Khan uses intersectional marginalization in accordance with the current trends in fiction or this is an exception. Literary studies in conjunction with psychological studies could come up with more advanced versions of examining how texts portray decision-making in a pressurized situation, thus adding to the interpretation of literature and empirical research of the actual behavioral response to marginalization.

Another line of inquiry is the gender-based approach, that is, the ways in which Pakistani women authors address the issue of female impulsivity in contrast to male authors like Khan, which could help disclose other patterns of understanding the limited agency of women. Comparative analyses might be made in terms of wealth, examining impulsivity between wealthy and poor characters, whether the choices made are of similar types in marginalized conditions or that the constraints faced by the poor population are produced by qualitatively different constraints on choices due to class privilege. Lastly, reader-response studies may explore the question of whether intersectional reading practices can create a stronger sense of empathy with characters whose behavior seems unintelligible or even morally abhorrent, and thus are important to highlight the pedagogical gains in intersectionality education using literature.

Finally, in his work, *In the Company of Strangers*, the author assumes that true freedom cannot be attained by sheer strength of will or ethical strength, thus it must be the change in the social forms that systematically diminish the freedom of choice. The novel avoids moralising in characterization of people who have to operate in impossible conditions and rather dwells on a critical analysis of society that breeds the impossibilities. The work by Khan, in both its aesthetic success and its political action, is both a product of artistic accomplishment and a political action, using literary form to unveil the violence of structure, and to proclaim the transformation necessary in society. The hurried choices that propel the action are not failures of personality but are symptoms of systemic malfunction the malfunction of the Pakistani society in supplying all its

people with material security, psychological safety, and real autonomy in order to exercise genuine deliberative choice.

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