

WOMEN IN PAKISTAN A SUBDOMINANT GROUP OF MUTED GROUP THEORY IN SABYN JAVERI'S, "HIJABISTAN."

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Abstract:

This study aims to highlight the issue of gender discrimination faced by women and treatment of men to them as a subdominant group based on patriarchic mindset in Pakistan. The major concern of research is to discuss the portrayal of identity crisis, gender bigotry, power of men dominated language and silencing of women in Hijabistan as a feminist discourse. This discourse is a collection of short stories written by Pakistani Feminist writer Sabyn Javeri giving an account of way women are treated in a patriarchic Pakistani society. This collection with all its protagonists being female is an eye opening, thought provoking and socially addressing piece of literature. This study will highlight the theme of suffering based on superior patriarchic mindset. Muted group theory is used as the theoretical framework of research. The selected discourse is analyzed using qualitative methods in light of the theory. The findings of study aim at pointing out reasons women face identity crisis due to silencing and dominance. It shows the association of language with establishing a dominant common discourse in practice. Study highlights women in Pakistan as a sub dominant group and the reasons behind this. It highlighted the portrayal of real life social issue in Pakistani literature and its importance.

Introduction:

Literature is a world of meanings and thoughts being projected by the writer to the world. This can be read and then analyzed deducing meaning of one's choice from it. As a tool or medium of expression language is used, in both of its forms oral and written. Language has played its role as a medium in different societies fulfilling aspirations and goals of individuals as well as promoting narrations through its expression (Dubey, 2021). The message thus given through writing and power of its language is undeniably strong. This amalgamation of language to create a narration through literature is impactful. Different south Asian writers have been writing about the issues of their region. They have used their writing to create a narrative for instance postcolonial literature has based colonization creating a concept among the people and going a message to the world.

Many Pakistani writers and mostly female writers have turned out to be feminist writers. Due to prevalent practice of patriarchal norms women feel threatened. Pakistan is ranked as 141st among a total of 142 countries in terms of economic opportunities provided and political participation seen by women, which depicts gender disparity (Hadi, 2017). These stats clearly legitimate the

claim of gender inequality in the country. In Pakistan the notion of dominant and non-dominant based on gender is such a common notion that the non-dominant itself is unaware of the exploitation it has to face due to it. Most women have surrendered to the hegemony of this gender bias. It is a common practice to label domestic chores and marriages as part of women's life and snatching away the opportunities of growth from them. Hence it is one major issue to be talked upon and writers take up this responsibility. In a society with patriarchy such as Pakistani society masculine language, power, logic and reasoning is considered superior to feminine emotions, sentiments, opinions or thoughts. Marginalization of women is caused by a force of men making them other and non-significant (Spivak: 1987).

This land has its own challenges and realities, the feminist claims of western feminist, might not cater to the needs of women of this part of the world. This need has encouraged the writer like Sabyn to write about their women. This study will see a particular aspect and will be focused on repression and exploitation of women in Sabyn Javeri's, collection of short stories titles, *Hijabistan*. It will be discussed in light of feminism and will be given a theoretical base using muted group theory. Gender Bigotry will be studied in relation to MGT and finding will be formed by examining elements of dominance in contemporary collection of short stories. The researcher will examine and carry out a qualitative study to explore and relate elements of muted group theory in *Hijabistan*. Qualitative research is generally based on the data; in this the theory emerges from the data rather than being imposed on it (Patton, 1990). *Hijabistan* has not been explored much however some studies have focused on elements of feminism in it. However, a connection with muted group theory will provide a wider lens view of its elements and themes.

Research question:

1. How has *Hijabistan* depicted the patriarchal dominance in Pakistani society and its contribution in silencing of women's voices?
2. In what ways does masculine-dominated language construct and reinforce women's subordinate identities in the selected text?
3. How does *Hijabistan* reflect the mechanisms of power and control described in Muted Group Theory?

Research objectives:

1. To examine the portrayal of women Marginalization in *Hijabistan* through the patriarchal structures and cultural norms.
2. To explore the relationship between gender, language, and identity formation in the selected stories and its impact on society.
3. To investigate the silencing and subordination of female characters due to patriarchal structures in light of Muted Group Theory.
4. To highlight the role of literature in challenging dominant patriarchal narratives in Pakistani society.

Literature review:

Pakistan is considered to be the third most dangerous country for women due to the prevailing trends of violence and subjugation of women (Bhattacharya, S. 2014). This violence is a necessary step by which patriarchal system has assured to maintain its existence. Gender inequality in Pakistan is deeply rooted in social, cultural, and institutional structures that privilege men and marginalize women This Patriarchal control and its institutionalization through gender bigotry have strengthened male control over women. Women are treated as a submissive group

and are explicated by males to prevail their hegemony. This problematic use of power, manipulation and degradation done on the name of gender bigotry can only end with the end of patriarchy. (Hadi, 2017) So in this way the patriarchal system and its prevalent trends are seen to be responsible for gender based exploitation in Pakistan. This unequal division of power causes malice in the society and damages the inferior considered gender.

Studies on gender and identity formation emphasize the role of socialization in shaping women's self-perception. Maccoby (2002) suggests that gender roles are learned through family, education, and media, influencing individuals' expectations and behaviors. In patriarchal societies, women are socialized to prioritize obedience, modesty, and domestic responsibilities, often at the expense of personal aspirations. In Pakistan not only at workplace or home but also in mainstream opportunities or business women are looked down upon. Researcher has highlighted the serious issues faced by Pakistani women even in entrepreneurship along with other fields. Women's entrepreneurship, properly exploited, has great potential as a tool for transforming Pakistani economy. However, most of the opportunities can't be availed by them and others fail to progress due to hindrances created in their ways (Mahmood et al., 2012). This reinforces their dependence on male family members and perpetuates gender inequality. Workplace discrimination further contributes to women's marginalization. Mahrukh et al. (2017) found that Pakistani women often face harassment, limited career progression, and exclusion from decision-making processes. Such practices discourage women from asserting themselves and promote silence as a survival strategy. Kelan (2009) similarly argues that organizational cultures often conceal discrimination under the guise of gender neutrality, making inequality more difficult to challenge.

Sexuality represents another domain where women's voices are suppressed. Little (2014) notes that sexuality is socially constructed through cultural and religious norms. In Pakistan, female sexuality is frequently associated with shame and immorality, while male sexuality is normalized. This double standard restricts women's bodily autonomy and reinforces male control. Bradby and Laing (2001) argue that popular culture and literature often reproduce these gendered stereotypes, further legitimizing unequal power relations.

Feminist scholars have highlighted the connection between language, power, and identity. Deveaux (1994) emphasizes that empowerment requires challenging dominant discourses that define women as passive and dependent. Similarly, Griffin (2003) explains that communication theories, including MGT, reveal how social hierarchies are maintained through everyday interactions. Women's limited access to authoritative language positions weakens their ability to resist oppression.

In literary studies, researchers have explored representations of women's suffering and resistance. Hussein (2017) analyzed women's oppression in dystopian and Middle Eastern literature, emphasizing the universality of patriarchal control. Mani (2016) highlights how Pakistani women writers depict ordinary female experiences to challenge dominant narratives. However, limited research has examined Javeri's Hijabistan through the perspective of Muted Group Theory.

Although previous studies have addressed gender discrimination, workplace inequality, and economic marginalization, there remains a gap in research linking literary representation with communication theory in the Pakistani context. This study addresses this gap by analyzing Hijabistan through MGT to demonstrate how linguistic practices, social norms, and cultural expectations collectively silence women and shape their identities.

Methodology and theoretical framework:

Muted Group Theory, developed by Edwin Ardener and Shirley Ardener, is employed as the theoretical framework for analyzing the selected literary text. This theory explains how dominant social groups control language and communication systems in ways that marginalize subordinate groups. As a result, the experiences, perspectives, and voices of less powerful groups remain underrepresented or distorted within dominant discourse.

The primary text selected for this study is *Hijabistan* by Sabyn Javeri, a contemporary collection of short stories in which all protagonists are female. The text offers a critical portrayal of women's lived experiences in Pakistani society, highlighting issues of silencing, marginalization, and restricted self-expression. Women's voices are often suppressed through social norms, cultural expectations, and institutional practices, which limit their participation in mainstream social, political, and media platforms. Consequently, women's contributions are frequently excluded from both traditional and digital forms of representation. Although women have increasingly resisted such marginalization and attempted to assert their voices, particularly during the last century, their struggle for recognition continues (Griffin, 2003).

Muted Group Theory (MGT) is widely used to examine communication patterns between dominant and subordinate groups and to analyze how power relations are maintained through language (Barkman, 2018). Within this framework, dominant groups shape linguistic norms and communicative practices according to their own experiences, thereby disadvantaging marginalized groups. In this study, MGT serves as an analytical tool to investigate how female characters in *Hijabistan* navigate, adapt to, and resist male-dominated discourse.

The research has a qualitative approach, specifically a descriptive qualitative design. Qualitative textual analysis is used to explore themes, linguistic patterns, and narrative structures that reflect women's muting and marginalization. This approach allows for an in-depth interpretation of characters' experiences and the socio-cultural meanings embedded within the text.

Feminism, in relation to Muted Group Theory, provides a critical lens for examining hierarchical social structures and the hegemony of dominant groups. It highlights how patriarchal systems systematically silence women and devalue their knowledge, experiences, and interpretations of reality. Due to the power exercised by dominant groups, the perspectives of subordinate groups are often ignored, minimized, or rendered invisible within mainstream discourse (Barkman, 2018). This marginalization results in identity conflicts, emotional suppression, and restricted agency among women.

According to Meares (2017), Muted Group Theory is based on four key principles. First, identity and reality are socially constructed and shaped by cultural and social contexts. Second, communication plays a central role in this construction, as language serves as the primary means through which individuals express and negotiate their experiences. Third, members of muted groups often adopt the communicative styles of dominant groups in order to be heard and accepted. Finally, the theory emphasizes that social change is possible through resistance, awareness, and the development of alternative forms of expression. By integrating Muted Group Theory with feminist perspectives, this study seeks to examine how language, power, and culture interact to silence women in *Hijabistan*, while also exploring the possibilities of resistance and empowerment within literary discourse.

Discussion:

Muted group or non-dominant group of the bigotry is silenced not just in their voice, rather their identity, opinions, thoughts, desires, pleasure all are made sure to be muted. There are multiple factors which play their role in creating and then making this bigotry prevail. Due to these reason men generally enact their power and as a result suppress women’s ideas. According to Muted group theory women perceive the world differently than men however their voice goes unheard so generally in imitate men to communicate their ideas. In this discussion we will see the way in which non dominant group and its oral as well as other narratives are muted based on ridicule, control and rituals done by the dominant group. These two groups are defined to be segregated on the basis of their gender. The term, “sex” is an individual’s biological makeup and it helps in understanding this concept. In light of scholar’s suggestion “gender” is a broader term and is inclusive of not only the physical makeup but also the socioeconomic status, development of psychology and culture etc. (Payne, 2001; Sultana, 2011). So, the bigotry caters to the definition of gender and in this bigotry women or individuals with an identity inclined towards women are the muted group.

They are silenced and their desires in term of general things have a restriction. They have to put a limit to what they could want or do. Men have the dominant group of the society may share quite a different collective understanding based on the difference of experience they get to have from the members of the other group. Men are allowed to do all the things very casually however when women want to do them their idea of it is silenced. Their wanting to wear something or say something has a barrier of standard. Female sexuality is associated to vulgarity instead of considering it to be a natural process. Their voice for themselves or for an opinion in a matter is insignificant and unheard. As a sub dominant group women are believed to protect their chastity and suppress their desires and sexual arousals. They have to behave an act like mere dummies with muted responses, which even where are there make no impact.

According to muted group theory men and women perceive the world in a different way. It happens because their experiences and perception are shaped in different ways. This division results in performance of different task by both of them in the society. There are still in this modern era gender specific activities and if a woman as non-dominant group desires to do something that isn’t related to her gender she would be silenced. It would be forbidden for her as if it could impose a threat to the wellbeing of society. A simple thing like riding a bike is not allowed to women even when they hold the license to do so however guys are allowed to ride it even when they are not eligible for it. The societal standards are hypocrite and they put a full stop to freedom of women. Freedom of wanting and doing simple things which are broadly associated to the dominate group. In this manner they fall a prey to restriction muting their opinion over this exploitation on hands of societal hypocrite standards. Sabyn ironically mentions this in her words:

“She frowned as she mounted the motorbike her fifteen-year-old brother was allowed to ride but was off limits to her.” (The date, p.12)

Table 1.1

Tags	Words
Repression	Off limits
Dominance	Allowed
Manipulation	N/A

Identity crisis	N/A
Silencing	Frowned

The word “off limits” reflects the repression of non-dominant group they are not allowed by the dominant group. Hence this power of allowing or refraining shows use of power by the dominant group. The word “frowned” used to show expression of women show how even when she is frustrated, she won’t say anything as if she has surrendered to this manipulation.

Mostly household chores are associated to women. The non-dominant group i.e. women are given less representation in public fields and are confined to work at home. Domestic chores are made to be their works. Women are not given the power of expression through media or communication rather they are compelled to do silencing jobs like cooking or sewing which explains the lack of representation.

“I was expected to bide my time learning the art of cooking and the craft of sewing. Both things bored me to tears.” (The Urge p.18)

Table 1.2

Tags	Words
Repression	Expected, bide
Dominance	N/A
Manipulation	Learning the art of cooking, craft of sewing
Identity crisis	N/A
Silencing	Bored me to tears.

In this use of language, the repression and element of imposing choices of society over the female can be clearly indicated. She is “expected” the word expected shows how she is thought to be doing something that is demanded from her. This act of “learning” according to expectation from her portrays repression and manipulation of her own choices. This substantiates the concept of muted group theory that women are expected to do specific tasks differentiated from the dominant group i.e. men.

Female sexuality is silenced; this is one factor in which women are silenced. According to MGT men as a dominant group enact its power in all the possible ways. They suppress ideas, meanings and even individuality of women. They make sure women and their ideas refrain from gaining public acceptance. An individual’s capacity for sexual feelings is seen to be sexuality. Individuals are socialized to sexual attitudes by their family, education system, peers, media, and religion. (Little, 2014, chp.12) Sexuality may be experienced and expressed in a variety of ways, including thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, practices, roles, and relationships. Female sexuality is associated to vulgarity instead of considering it to be a natural process; this has been manipulated by men. As a sub dominant group women are believed to protect their chastity and suppress their desires and sexual arousals.

Physical aspect of sexuality is a mutually connected phenomenon however even in these men endorse their power as Muted group theory explains that men suppress women to maintain their superiority. Women are made to think they are just made to be provided pleasure. Their own

feelings and emotions are associated to unconventional vulgar pleasure. This is how their psychology is controlled and their emotions are muted. Sometimes it is known by the victims but they surrender to it,

Sex is a mutual phenomenon called off as symbol of two souls connecting through a physical affection. In this process woman as a non-dominant group is seen to be muted. This is very important ideas to be understood as this is one major event in which men endorse their power and make women as dummy. This is how the non-dominant group does not even have a right to be equal participant in anything where dominant males are involved. In her story, “The date” she displays this by defining the actions of girl and in description of her emotional state as a commentary on it.

“She lay limp, like a newborn, stifling all desire and displaying only a bored disinterest to what was happening to her body.” (The date, p.8)

Table 1.3

Tags	Words
Repression	Stifling all desires
Dominance	N/A
Manipulation	Happening to her body
Identity crisis	Displaying
Silencing	Bored, disinterest

A process being explained through mechanical words like “happening” and “disinterest” show the level of pity in it. A process in which she is involved yet is “stifling the desire” and the expression stifling of all desires show repression of the dominant. However, she is silence on it she is bored and shows disinterest however cannot say anything about it.

Despite this one being the first time for the protagonist she can’t be thrilled or excited because that is not how it has to be. That is not how the parameters define it to be. And in order to fit in all those parameters she sacrifices her desires and puts a barrier for her sexuality to be displayed. The substantiation of the concept of enriched dominance of males in all the aspects as in sexuality prospers with the concept of marriage. Women are considered nothing but mere dummies to be controlled by their husbands. Their voice for wants or needs is silenced and guided to be followed when she would be married. It is done in turn to make a man protector of his women but this man turns out to be the controller. As muted group theory explains that power is a symbol of masculinity, men have the right of using force and displaying power. So, in marriages even he forces his desired restrictions on his women as in The Urge shopkeeper made his wife wear unwanted and extra clothes just to feed his insecurities. He locked her up rather giving her the wings she was always told about. Whenever she desired wings her aunt and mother told her this ‘It’s a woman’s fate,’ they would say in unison, like a pair of parrots. ‘Once you are married, you can do what you want.’ (The urge, p.19)

Table 1.4

Tags	Words
Repression	It’s a woman’s fate
Dominance	N/A
Manipulation	Once you are Married, you can do what you want

Identity crisis	N/A
Silencing	Once you are Married, you can do what you want

Language plays central role in creating a narrative and this narrative of women belonging to marriage is seen as her mother tells her, “Once you are married” this once shows how marriage is supposed to be the only goal of her mother for her. She is so desperate about it that she is associating other things to it. It shows how manipulation is done on the name of marriage. More over blaming suppression and repression on societal laws or fate is worst form of manipulation and repression and it is seen as she is told that “it is a women’s fate”.

However, this never happened and all her desires were simply being killed and she was mute. Men are taught to control from the beginning and this develops a psychology of dominance in them. This control and psychology when prevail in the marriage cause exploitation of individuality of the women. This is how muted group is made out of them when their opinion, choice and say are controlled by the dominant men. Muted group theory explains it that the voice of female is overtaken by males. Men do not value their opinion or choice. In this toxic environment marriage as a relation turns out to be a compromise between a dominating male and submissive woman. This relation is nothing but a burden and causes inevitable damage to the victims. There is nothing like communication between two because if a woman wants to be heard she must talk like men which is again not acceptable. Hence in turn there are numerous cases in which women accept being mute, they bear whatever comes their way but this relation leaves them with nothing but damaging memories. Sabyn has depicted a character in her story “Raadha” where Radha married her client who was apparently religious man called maulvi yet was a typical dominating man who she in turn broke up with. But her experience of marriage and commentary on it depicts reality of marriage in the region. It is similar to Anderine rich’s concept of marriage band in “Aunt Jennifer’s tigers.”

“Radha examined the old engagement ring on her finger. The marriage had lasted all of eight months but she still wore the ring. Not because it was precious or particularly pretty – instead, it was its coarseness that appealed to her. It was tight and slightly pinched her skin too.” (Radha, P.27)

Table 1.5

Tags	Words
Repression	Coarseness, tight, marriage
Dominance	N/A
Manipulation	Slightly pinched her skin
Identity crisis	N/A
Silencing	N/A

The “Coarseness” as an expression of her marriage band explains its weight. It was torture for her to bear the memories of that hard marriage and hence the phrase, “slightly pinched her skin” explains this torture in term of pain. Although it was now in the mind as memories however it was equivalent to any other physical pain and wound.

Marriage as a concept is not seen to be mutual, due to this disturbed psychology of society image of this relation is badly tarnished. Husband is thought to be the dominating figure exploiting her partner as she is a woman. This corrupted mindset has made an idea that really haunts the idea of marriage.

“Oye, then why are you acting like lovers if you are married?” The couple considered the irony of the man’s words and decided to stay silent” (Under the flyover, P.83)

This extract clearly substantiates the idea of corrupted power inculcated in minds of men considering authority over love or affection for women.

Table 1.6

Tags	Words
Repression	irony of man’s words
Dominance	N/A
Manipulation	Acting like lovers when married
Identity crisis	N/A
Silencing	Stay silent

Police man made ironical remarks that pointed out the prevalent psychology of people relating to marriage. This phrase, “acting like lovers when married” makes the manipulation of society and culture very clear. The biggest disaster is that the only reaction to this manipulation comes off as silence and the manipulate group prefers it over anything and stay mute.

Conclusion:

The identity of women in Pakistani society has frequently been questioned and subjected to crisis. Women have faced persistent discrimination and have been treated as a subordinate group based on their gender. The present study aims to provide a critical account of the discrimination experienced by women as a result of gender-based prejudice and their treatment as a muted group within a patriarchal social structure. The main objective of the study is to explore the dimensions of identity crisis faced by women and to identify the underlying factors of dominance that contribute to their marginalization. Through systematic analysis, the study narrows down key themes related to power, language, and social control. The application of Muted Group Theory reveals that women in Pakistan are consistently positioned as a subdominant group. Patriarchal social norms and misogynistic cultural practices emerge as primary causes of this marginalized treatment. As a result, women’s identities are often shaped, distorted, and manipulated within dominant discourse. The findings highlight the existence of gender-based bigotry and imbalanced power relations in society. They emphasize the central role of language in constructing and reinforcing social narratives. The study demonstrates how the use of specific words and expressions contributes to the normalization of women’s subordination within cultural discourse. The story *The Urge* illustrates the identity crisis produced by dominant social norms and restrictive notions of chastity, while *Radha* and *Under the Flyover* reveal problematic representations of marriage and the toxic control exercised by men within marital relationships.

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