

**RESEARCH PAPER****A Modern Feministic Analysis of Hanif Kureishi's *A Terrible Story*****<sup>1</sup>Zakeria Kamal \* and <sup>2</sup>Shafqat Hussain**

1. BS Student, Department of English Literature & Applied Linguistics, University of Science & Technology Bannu, KP, Pakistan
2. BS Student, Department of English Literature & Applied Linguistics, University of Science & Technology Bannu, KP, Pakistan

**\*Corresponding Author**      zakariakamal4451@gamil.com**ABSTRACT**

The present study is intended to unfold feminist themes and societal narratives in the short story *A Terrible Story* by Hanif Kureishi with specific reference to Pakistani society. Moreover, the current study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research using an eclectic theory of Liberal Feminism by Langermann and Brantley (In Ritzer and Goodmann, 2004) that aims to explore Julie's actions and their resulting impacts on society and her personal life. Liberal Feminism claims to hold the values of freedom of expression, choice, individuality, and equality. The central character Julie fearlessly attempts to exercise the above-mentioned rights and values against her husband "Jake" specifically and against society in general. The findings illustrate that Julie, being a married woman, breaks the mould and leaves a pressing lesson for the women of patriarchal societies. Besides, the understudy story can also be analyzed through the Marxist and Psychoanalytical lenses whose elements are traceable in the text.

**Keywords:**      A Terrible Story, Hanif Kureishi, Liberal Feminism, Pakistani Society, Women**Introduction**

Pakistani Literature in English occupies a lofty room in the international arena as it introduced some prominent writers to the world who expanded the body of Pakistani Literature in English through their unique verses and composition as well as multifaceted social themes of Pakistani society. In fiction, Hanif Kureishi is an eminent prose writer who produced great works which are full of social, political, cultural, and economic details and themes. One such work entitled *A Terrible Story*, which is a short story in which the writer attempts to deal with the pressing issues of feminism that have gripped the world and Pakistani society particularly. In this connection, Kureishi very keenly addresses the right to expression, choice, and individuality of the female gender in a patriarchal society via the central character Julie. Thus, the above short story will be thoroughly investigated through the theory of Liberal Feminism by Langermann & Brantley as it deals with the said values and traits of feminism.

**Hanif Kureishi**

Hanif Kureishi is taken to be the pressing voice of the post-colonial diaspora in Britain especially and of Pakistani Literature in English generally. He is frequently seen as controversial for teasing his family members in his works. Even his sister condemned and challenged this depiction in a letter to the "*The Guardian*" in 1998. His work "*My Son the Fantastic*" is the best example in this regard. (Gilbert, 2001, P.15). Kureishi's works carry the ethnic background of his community as a responsibility but at times, he is often seen shunning his ethnic identity either because of his wealthy status or of no strong feelings and links toward his paternal country Pakistan. Only twice, he has visited Pakistan. His works contain strong differences between the new migrants like Ravi in "*Borderline*" or Changez in "*The Buddha*", and those who have given birth in Britain. His desire to present things

realistically derives actually from the pressing social issues and their exposition to the general audiences. (Gilbert, 2001, p.17).

In Kureishi's opinion, societies overlap with each other in terms of similarities and differences and that is why most of his stories propagate a musical trend that is both cultural and historical. This is because the main aim is to invite the reader's attention to interpret and evaluate these stories more personally. (Kaleta, 1998, p.6). Kureishi's attempt to portray a hybrid culture with stories of immigrants and British society as a whole is a unique one. Most of his characters are confronted with reality: political hypocrisy, economic distress, racial, and ethnic prejudice etc. White Johnny in his famous novel *"My Beautiful Laundrette"*, Clint in *"London Kills Me"*, Changez in *"Buddha of Suburbia"*, and Chad in *"The Black Album"* are some of the characters that seek to escape their native streets to find opportunities in some exotic lands. (Kaleta, 2010, p.234). Hanif Kureishi, in his stories, presents the bleak picture of family relationships, street crimes, gangs and violence, sex and drug dealings, and love and prejudices. (ibid, 2010).

Some of his famous novels include *"Intimacy"* 1998, *"My Son the Fantastic"* 2001, *"Gabriel's Gift"* 2008, *"Something to Tell You"*, etc. Kureishi's short stories collection comprises *"Love in a Blue Time"*, London: Faber & Faber 1997, the 1999 *"Midnight All Day"*, *"Collected Essays"* 2011, and *"Love+Hate: Stories and Essays"*, London: Faber & Faber". His plays include *"Outskirts, London"*, and *"Borderline, London"* 1981, etc. (British Council, n.d.).

### **The Short Story: A Terrible Story**

The two bosom friends, Jack and Eric had a casual meeting at a local "Jazz Café" in Comeden. Eric had left his home after an intensive brawl with his wife over a political debate. Jake too delivered a complaint about his wife's unfriendly treatment towards him which had forced him to spend his day strolling along the river. At the moment, Jake seemed quite disturbed and older than his friend. Turning to the main point, Eric inquired about Jake's wife's temperament who had recently begun therapy with the Jungain. Jake responded that the trainer slept with his patients and that his wife invariably wished to study psychology which is surely, if not always, a sign of mental disorder in his opinion. He also stated that Julie had an obsession with dresses. Afterwards, both discussed the arrangement of music according to their moods. Jake shared that his mother passed away a little while before and that Julie has a likeness for the therapist because he is intelligent and receptive in her view. He said that he had warned her about the therapists' misdoings and the subsequent complaint to the authorities, but the problem was with his family's well-being, his two young daughters. In the end, Jake was thrown out of his own home. Julie eventually left for France along with the kids. Furthermore, Jake could not disclose their deteriorated marital state to his daughters and returned to England to see his mother's grave. Additionally, to keep his livelihood, he sold his Audi car and bought a second-hand Astra because Julie had also emptied their joint bank account. Julie returned to London in an agonized state. The therapist, who blamed her for his wife's suicide had left her. At last, she again fled to France and Jake's friend Eric returned to his own home kissing his family and thanking his calm marital state.

### **Literature Review**

The history of Pakistani Literature in English has invariably been a subject of controversy because of the migrated writers who own their origin as Pakistani or who shun the idea of being called Pakistanis. (Yaqoob, 2020). In this sense, Zulfikar Ghose, a Pakistani-American author did not show consent to the categorization of literature but still, critics believe that literature should serve the cause of nationalism. Taking this notion into account, Pakistani Literature in English gained tremendous room in the international arena. (Rahman,1991, p.21).

Considering the genre of short stories in Pakistani English Literature, it was first introduced in Saadat Hassan Manto (1912-1955) and Syed Waliullah times, and later on, other prominent short story writers came up with their works such as Zulfikar Ghose's "*The Zoo*" which dealt with existential nihilism, Qaisra Sheraz's "*A Pair of Jeans*" was concerned with the significance of clothing in the Pakistani society and how it depicts one's modesty. "*Nawabdin Electrician*" by Daniyal Mueenuddin dealt with the evil of corruption and Rukhsana Ahmad's "*The Gatekeeper's Wife*" highlighted poverty as the mighty evil of Pakistani society. (Junaid, 2021).

In the same way, Hanif Kureishi is also a famed figure in Pakistani English Literature whose short stories fiction address the conundrums of feminism, mid-life crisis, male depression, isolation, anxiety, and failed negotiations of masculinity. Many of his short stories portray the image of a strong woman in the face of competing male gender. His first collection of short stories entitled "*Love in a Blue Time*" (1997) contains numerous female characters who have mostly competed with their male counterparts. One evident precedent of this is his "*D'accord, Baby*" in which Billy's masculine identity is severely unsettled by his wife Nicola. Being in an extramarital affair, she follows her sexual desires and refuses to render an explanation to her husband. (Schotz,2013).

In "*Nightlight*", the protagonist's attempt to divorce his liberated and successful wife, and eventually slip into bodily sex with another girl without being able to have a cordial conversation with her indicates his inferiority before the female gender. Similarly, the protagonist "Jake" of the understudy story *A Terrible Story* seems to lost the woman he still loves and has wanted more than any other. Jake's wife Julie epitomizes the way gender relations have altered over time. Her assertion of the right to freely follow her sexual desires by exercising an extramarital affair and thereby distancing ways from her husband is an indication of the momentum gained by the female gender. This choice of freedom to have the right to freely exercise her will is a dominant tacit in Hanif Kureishi's short stories fiction. (Schotz,2013)

Hanif Kureishi was born on Dec 5, 1954, to a Pakistani father named Rafiushan and a British mother named Andrey. Kureishi made his ethnic Asian Community as a subject to write about and presented himself as a spokesperson for the recurrent themes of Pakistani and Asian English Literature. (Gilbert, 2001, p.13).

## **Feminism**

Feminism is said to be the approach as well as the ideology to discuss a range of issues such as equality between genders, gender identity, gender expression, sex and more importantly, sexuality as deemed via social theories and political activism. Historically, feminism's roots go back to the times of critical examination of inequality between genders. (Eastern Kentucky University, n. d.).

Mary Wollstonecraft's "*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 1792*", and the 1848 "*Seneca Falls Convention*" etc are some of the early works and conferences that called for complete legal equality with men in different spheres of life. Subsequently, the *Woman Suffrage Movement* gained momentum in the United States and in the United Kingdom where women ultimately got access to the right to vote in 1918 and 1920 respectively. Afterwards, the second wave of feminism emerged that focused on the limited nature of women's participation in the workplace and their confinement to household activities. Following that trend, a third wave of feminism appeared in the late 20th century to challenge middle-class white feminists and to broaden further feminism's motives and goals in areas of race, creed, economic and social status, and physical and sexual preference etc. (Britannica, 2023).

## Liberal Feminism

Modern Feminist Theory by Langermann and Brentley (in Ritzer and Goodmann, 2004) is a recent addition to the already established principles and beliefs of feminist theory. Although many of the notions seem identical to the previous ones, still the writers have taken a painstaking task to bring some appealing changes in this field. According to Langermann and Brantley (ibid, 2004), men and women are considered separate in societies not only differently but also unequally, especially women are less accessible to material resources, social status, power and self-actualization in comparison to their male counterparts who mainly share their social location based on their class status, race superiority, occupation, ethnic sacredness, educational background and learning, national prestigiousness, or, and other any socially vital factors.

Langermann and Brantley (ibid, 2004) state that liberal feminism appeals to the notions of gender inequality as it claims it as a first and foremost priority. More importantly, this claim has its roots in the document "*Declaration of Independence*" of the United States which explicitly states that all men and women are born equal and that they are granted certain unalienable rights by their Creator. Undoubtedly, those among these are the right to live life freely, liberty, and ultimately, the pursuit of happiness. (Diastuti, 2014).

In Rorintulus and Rorintulus's study (as cited in Rorintulus, et al., 2022) women should embrace the idea of motivation by other characters in literary genres such as short stories or novels that explicitly or implicitly reveal gender inequalities. For example, in the 19th-century American short stories, American Indian Women played crucial roles as community leaders and equal rights activists in shaping feminist narratives.

## Material and Methods

The data for this study are extracted from statements and conversations of the characters in the text of the said story and then thoroughly analyzed and critically evaluated by applying the Modern Feminist Theory by Langermann and Brantley. Different relevant study materials such as scholarly articles, books, opinions, and other related sources to Hanif Kureishi, his works, and to Liberal Feminism concerning Pakistani society are accumulated by minute reading and note taking of the available details for this article. Various electronic tools such as Google Scholar, different web pages, and websites are employed to collect immense amounts of data. Articles and other relevant information are searched by typing the above-mentioned keywords.

## Results and Discussion

Langermann and Brantley in their book entitled (Ritzer and Goodmann, 2004) clearly state that Liberal Feminism appeals tremendously to the values of freedom of expression, choice, individualism, and equality. The understudy story *A Terrible Story* contains all these values in different instances within the text.

### Statement (1)

**"You don't speak at the right time, when we want to hear you! You're never receptive! You're a fool!" P.1**

The above extract indicates the expressive mood of Julie in the face of her husband. She gains the courage to remind her husband of his inability to respond at the right time and thereby scolds him. The word "fool" here represents the authoritative nature of women in the spheres of self-expression within social and other cultural circumstances which is one of the prime objectives of Liberal Feminism. Moreover, this core value of freedom of expression has led to the formation of various feminist movements on national and world

levels. One such precedent is the “*Me Too*” movement which immensely sought to bring awareness against sexual abuse, harassment, and rape culture. Headed by Tarana Burke, an American feminist activist from New York, the participants and proponents energetically voiced their wearisome experiences and sufferings of sexual molestation.

In the same way, Pakistani society has too bold voices of female self-expression in movements like “*Aurat March*” which has the controversial slogan of “*Mara Jism, Mari Marzi*” means “*My Body, My Choice*”, that demands bodily autonomy and protests against gender-based violence. Dr. Rubina Saigol (2020), an eminent Pakistani feminist scholar writes that these new feminists have even voiced their demands to challenge the private spheres of life where patriarchy usually prevails. In her words, this current fourth wave is indulged in objecting and deconstructing the private spheres of family, community, and society entirely and mainstreaming gender identities and sexual expression.

### **Statement (2)**

**“My wife had always wanted to study so I agreed to support her while she had therapy and trained to be a psychologist...” P.3**

The above statement is the sheer representation of liberty that Julie exercises in choosing psychology as the field of study and thereby coerces Jack to finally assent to her terms and conditions. Julie longs to pursue a prestigious career in a society that is wholeheartedly fascinating. Likewise, in the same context, voices are relentlessly rising in support of job liberty and job opportunities for women in Pakistani society. Essentially, much of today’s discussion revolves around getting women empowered in the job sector and because of this, the female gender has shown itself successful in having its dream jobs in a usually patriarchal society to a great extent.

Samman and Santos (2009) opine that an increase in women's literacy rate is correlated with women being able to be independent, spend money, as well as can have the freedom to move.

Kabir (2005) illustrates... (as cited in Shahzad, 2021, p.28) in another research that education contributes to enhancing cognitive ability, and thus affects women's capacity to reflect and act on the conditions in their lives. Shahzad (2021) in her study also highlights the progress made by women in educational and job areas. According to her, the literacy rate of women has been ameliorated from 12.5 in 1975 to 39.2 in 2004 in Pakistan. Similarly, in the following decades, the women's overall enrollment rate increased to 70% at the primary level. Eventually, this improvement further multiplied the contributions of women in labor and job markets.

### **Statement (3)**

**“Julie has an obsession for dresses...she claims what she wears makes her mood, so she has filled the flat with them” P.3**

The above lines convey a message of freedom of choice in choosing and buying what Julie admires the most. According to Langermann and Brantley, this freedom of choice is the core theme of Liberal Feminism. Julie exercises this choice because of having a job and thus financial independence in fulfilling her desires to buy whatever suits her mood.

This phenomenon has also its roots in Pakistani society where the everyday topic of discussion among women remains centred around shoes and dresses. Due to modernization and women's empowerment, an immense change has been observed in the ancient traditional ways of choice and selection of dresses.

Dutt et al., (2016) assert...(as cited in Shahzad, 2021, p.29) that when women earn an income, they can gain both financial independence and a greater sense of agency over their lives. Thus, this change would ultimately affect the woman's voice within the household and her income will no doubt, surge her bargaining power which would render energy to her influences regarding household choices.

#### **Statement (4)**

**“She knew about the theory of idealizing the therapist. She said it wasn't just that she was, in fact, actually sleeping with him” P.4**

In the above extract, it has been showcased that Julie is obsessed with choosing absolute individualism which, according to Langermann and Brantley (In Ritzer and Goodman, 2004) is an appealing value of Liberal Feminism. Julie claims individualism in the sense that she valiantly idealizes and then blatantly declares to share a bed with the therapist. Being a married woman, she dares to challenge her husband's authority by exercising an extramarital affair and thereby claims the equality of man and woman in freedom of choosing their mate to pursue happiness.

#### **Statement (5)**

**“She told me that I had to find my own place as soon as possible. Well, I was quite sick after hearing this” P.4**

As mentioned earlier that freedom in spheres of life is a central idea of Liberal Feminism. In this regard, the above statement is evidence of Julie's excessive expression in commanding her husband Jake to find for himself a separate shelter. The impact of feminism is evident here in the sense that Julie, being a female gender has actually commenced to raise questions and challenge male superiority by pointing out their higher status and arrogance in always dictating the opposite gender.

In Pakistan too, such phenomena are common to be observed. Zargar (2022) in his analysis writes that the younger generation is looking for alternative feminist futures and that the following woman marches in Pakistan were a jarring reality of women crossing and breaking all the bars between them and their male counterparts.

#### **Statement (6)**

**“Almost the moment Mother died I came back straight away. I had a feeling, you know. When I got home, my wife had left, with the girls” P.4**

On the one hand, the above statement arouses sympathetic feelings towards Jake's painful state, yet on the other hand, it depicts lucidly the right of liberty that Julie has employed to have a free life from the shackles of family and marital status. She has finally taken the courage to flee far away to fulfill her sexual desires and thus in doing so, she has exhibited utter individualism even disregarding the death of Jake's mother who is ironically, an identical gender to her.

Saif and Raza (2022) in their study find that women's freedom and liberty are required to be endorsed as a treatment for diminishing oppression in a male-dominated society. In the case of marriages, women are largely taken to be silent and oppressed in the face of their husband's aggression.

**Statement (7)**

**“Julie was hostile, almost insane with hatred... she was cold and formal, as if talking to someone she didn’t know... her eyes were dead now, Eric” P.5**

According to Langermann and Brantley (In Ritzer and Goodmann, 2004), Liberal Feminism appeals to the values of freedom, choice, equality, and individualism which are vividly displayed in the above extract. Although, Jake has been a victim of his wife’s harsh treatment in the sense that her feelings are now dead for him. And that the dissatisfactory state of their relationship in which they are locked is completely miserable, but Julie! by expressing her liberty and individualism, strives to portray a portrait of an independent woman who resolves to dismantle the patriarchal rules amidst the turbulent family clashes. Her hostile temperament prompts her to become almost alien to the past relationship by embracing the values of individualism and equality.

In the context of Pakistani society, relationships are somewhat cordial and serene at the beginning of marital life, but as time goes by, these often convert into conflicts and scuffles due to weak financial statuses, mistreatments, oppressions, disobediences, and verbal abuses, etc. In such circumstances, women often tend to lose ground and face divorce threats, but the current scenario has altered this status quo. The female entity has now seen heroic even disregarding the international fences as in the case of Seema Haider, who, being a mother of four children, broke the mould and travelled to India to meet her lover named Sachin. Similarly, to tie the numbers, a married woman named Anju eloped from India to meet her Pakistani social media friend Sana Ullah. All these events and incidents indicate a new trend and change in the conservative thinking of the female gender who are now taking the lead.

**Statement (8)**

**“...that someone you think you know intimately has changed beyond your recognition” P.5**

The above statement sheds light on Jake’s miserable state inflicted by her wife. It vividly shows us the liberated choices made by Julie as a result of the feminist manifesto. The liberal feminist values appeal to her inner instincts by stimulating the desire to alter her selfhood beyond recognition which ultimately paves the way for liberty and independence in her relationship. Additionally, this further adds vibrance to her rigid personality as shaped by independent thinking and staunch decisions in the face of patriarchal challenges.

In the context of Pakistani society, this phenomenon has recurrently been observed and experienced, especially in the elite community. People often alter their choices when confronted with unfruitful relationships and in this regard, the Pakistani elite female community is often charged with pushing the Western values and consequently endangering the conservative Islamist norms and ideologies. However, the majority of the female gender has resisted this concept by propagating liberal feminist principles and values. Although, in such a path, they are frequently encountered by patriarchal attacks, but still, have not yet preferred to remain tightlipped on issues and rights like freedom of expression, choice, individuality, etc. Likewise, Davis and William (2019, p.1) claim that individualist values of autonomy and self-determination actually transcend identities and thus serve to legitimize women’s goals and choices. Both argue that individualism promotes gender equality for two reasons. First, the values of Liberal Feminism such as autonomy, creativity, self-expression, and ethos of individual rights are inherently egalitarian which as a result, tend to support the understanding of women as autonomous individuals and equal to men. Second, the writers’ experiments suggest that individualism reduces the strength of family ties as evident in the under-discussion case.

**Statement (9)**

**“It was her fault. He was inexperienced and she had seduced him when he was most vulnerable and open to female flattery” P.8**

The above-quoted lines are the continuation of Julie’s extreme exercise of individuality which, although renders her a dominant role and huge satisfaction, but on the other side, it has tremendously affected the lives of others. Apparently, the above statement is a citation to the therapist’s anxious and heart-wrenching situation brought up by his lover Julie. He complains about Julie’s dealing and thus voices his innocence in attracting her. Similarly, Julie! who is excited by feminist choices of freedom and individuality, does not care much about the rest of the world. She is merely the sheer lover of selfhood shunning others' circumstances.

The under-discussion story plainly rendered us the knowledge about suppressed values, patriarchal exercises, basic fundamental rights, different concealed psychological factors of the main characters and other involved circumstances. All these resulted in the deterioration of family relationships, personal stresses, and eventually in the utter exercise of liberal feminist values. It also showcased to us how individual choices play a significant role in personal and private life and how they can transform the past or affect the present and future.

**Conclusion**

This short story *A Terrible Story* by Hanif Kureishi has critically been analyzed and evaluated via a Modern Liberal Feminist Theory by Langermann and Brantley which explicitly revealed to us the core values of freedom of expression, choice, individuality, and equality. Julie, despite being the mother of four children and an occupant of the patriarchal society, bravely smashed the traditional stereotypes attributed to women. In expressing her selfhood, she dared to challenge male dominance and thereby exercised individualism and freedom of choice to fulfil her exotic desires, to choose her soul mate, and eventually to equalize herself to that of the male gender. Besides, by exclusive references to Pakistani society, the study found a deep understanding of the idea of Liberal Feminism and women empowerment in different spheres of life.

**Recommendations**

To have multidimensional research on the understudy story, future scholars are hereby encouraged to closely read and critically search the Marxist and Psychoanalytic elements and details in the text of the story as it can be approached and analyzed via both these ways.



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