

Intersections of identity, religion and patriarchy in psychological development: A psychoanalytic study of Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*

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Abstract: Identity formation, a crucial aspect of personality development, is influenced by social, historical, cultural and psychological factors. In Afghanistan, religion and patriarchy function as two of the most powerful ideological institutions that shape identity. Understanding the complexities of identity formation in countries facing political instability, religious extremism and gender oppression remains pertinent today. The primary objective of the study is to explore how religion and patriarchy influence the psychological development of the characters in Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*. This study argues that these ideological structures force characters into subjectivities affecting their autonomy and perception of self. Grounded in psychoanalytic theory, the research employs Louis Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation and Erik Erikson's theory of identity formation to understand the formation of identities. By the close reading and qualitative analysis of the text, the study analyses how the novel reflects the social and psychological realities of Afghanistan. The novel is a microcosmic reflection of Afghanistan's complex socio-political landscape and successfully captures both the social as well as the psychological dimensions that shape Afghan identity.

Keywords: patriarchy, identity, religion, identity formation, psychological development, Afghanistan

Introduction

Identity formation, a foundational concept in exploring the growth, behaviour and social interaction, remains relevant across various disciplines. The historical, social, cultural and psychological factors that shape identity are beyond one's control. Among these myriad

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factors, the intersection of religion and patriarchy in constructing identity remains significant especially in societies where they are not mere cultural aspects but are institutionalized. Religion is a personal choice as well as a collective institution that defines and regulates human behaviour with an emphasis on morality. Patriarchy primarily functions as a framework to analyse gender relations. It is also a system of social organization that intersects with other forms of power such as religion to fortify gender inequality and regulate autonomy. Religion and patriarchy dictate socially accepted behaviour, thereby influencing thoughts and behaviours and impacting identity development.

Identity formation becomes very complicated in the context of Afghanistan, a nation grounded in the principles of Islam and the tribal code of Pashtuns, known as the *Pashtunwali*. Donald Wilber describes Afghan society as patriarchal, family oriented with an emphasis on toughness, self-respect, religious devotion, conservatism, love for freedom, honour and prestige (Wilber 1962, 4). Central to this cultural framework is the *Pashtunwali*, a code of honour that highlights the significance of *badal* (revenge), *nanawati* (compromise), *milamastia* (hospitality) - all of which are traditionally associated with male authority (Amoss 1965, 5). The *Pashtunwali* is important for the Pashtuns in particular and Afghan society in general, as it defines the Pashtun identity and Afghan social interactions.

The strategic location of Afghanistan at the crossroads of Central Asia has made it the highway of commerce as well as conquest making the country vulnerable to repeated cycles of foreign interventions and internal conflict. This geographic reality, coupled with stringent patriarchal and religious systems, has created a unique backdrop for identity formation. The political turmoil and decades of war and strife have transformed the lives and altered the collective consciousness as well as the individual psychological states of Afghans. Literary works depicting Afghan reality also reflect the complex psychological underpinnings shaped by Afghanistan's historical, social and political developments.

Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil*, published in 2008, offers an insight into the socio-political landscape of Afghanistan. Aslam classifies the novel as highly political: "From my viewpoint, all writing is political—even nonpolitical writing is political. Coming from Pakistan, and belonging to the Islamic world, I can't not be aware of how politics affects our daily lives, how it is not just dry legislations

and laws and statements. It's visceral" (Interview with Nadeem Aslam, Book Browse). The novel explores themes of war and violence, gender, religion, politics, geo political affairs, trauma and memory. The individual, regardless of the nationality, occupies a central role in the novel. The novel projects the plight of Afghanistan through its characters: Marcus Caldwell, an Englishman; David Town, an American; Lara, a Russian; and Casa, a Muslim fundamentalist who believes to be an Afghan but is, in fact, born to a Russian soldier and the daughter of an English man and an Afghan woman. People from otherwise distant parts of the world are brought together in Afghanistan and are connected by their common experiences. This reflects the strategic position of Afghanistan on the geopolitical map and draws attention to the competing interests of powers like Soviet Union and the US hold in its affairs. The studies done on *The Wasted Vigil* are often limited to understanding the postcolonial situation, religious extremism and patriarchy. There remains a significant gap in understanding the psychological burden imposed by religion and patriarchy.

Approaching the literary text as the representation of lived experiences, *The Wasted Vigil* becomes a location where the impact of religion and patriarchy on the psyche of the individual can be explored. Characters are victims of war and violence and the trauma experienced is rooted both in personal and cultural histories. External sociocultural factors penetrate deeply into the psyche of the characters fundamentally altering their self-perception. A thorough analysis of the novel enables to understand the intersections of religious ideologies and patriarchal institutions. Religion is central to the novel as it acts as a powerful oppressive tool inducing moral dilemmas and guilt. Religion, along with patriarchy, interpellates individuals into subjectivities by shaping the psychological responses and identity. Religion and patriarchy interfere with the healing process of the characters who are grappling with various personal loss.

This research paper argues that in *The Wasted Vigil*, religion and patriarchy, as dominant sociocultural forces, influence identity formation and psychological development of characters. The study situates the novel in the context of Afghanistan to examine the trauma generated by ideological structures that force characters into subjectivities compromising their autonomy and perception of the self. The study is grounded in psychoanalytic theory to understand characters' responses to internalized religious and cultural values.

Louis Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation provides the framework for understanding how dominant ideologies construct subjectivities and Erik Erikson's theory of identity formation helps to understand the growth and formation of identities. The soviet invasion, civil war, the Taliban reign and American interference provide the backdrop against which the individual's psychological development unfolds. *The Wasted Vigil* is a microcosm that reflects the macrocosmic reality of Afghanistan. Close reading and qualitative analysis of Nadeem Aslam's *The Wasted Vigil* facilitates comprehension of the intersection of identity, patriarchy and religion in the psychological struggles and responses of the characters.

Research methodology

This study combines Louis Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation with Erikson's developmental model to understand identity formation as a product of complex interplay between ideological structures and psychological processes. An integrated approach helps to identify dominant social structures and its impact on individuals by analysing psychological mechanisms through which the characters respond to ideological forces. Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses encompasses institutions such as family, education and religion that force the subject into "submission to the rules of the established order" (Althusser 2006, 89). Interpellation is a concept integral to understanding subject-formation. It is the process by which subjects unintentionally internalize the ideologies or values playing within a system, thereby forging an imaginary relationship to other people and society. The relationship is 'imaginary' as the actions of the subject are defined not by freedom but by the Ideological State Apparatuses (Birdwell 2017). In *The Wasted Vigil*, the patriarchal structures and religious institutions are the apparatuses that interpellate characters into premeditated subjects by restricting their agency. Highlighting the formation of subjectivities, Althusser (2006, 117) argues that "all ideologies hail or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects". Characters of the novel, especially Casa, are trapped within the web of religious and patriarchal control. They are transformed from autonomous individuals into subjects constrained by ideological expectations.

Erik Erikson's theory on identity formation helps to understand the psychological development of characters. He approaches identity as "a process and an outcome of human development – across the lifespan

but assuming centrality in the developmental stage of adolescence” (McLean and Syed 2015, 17). Personal identities are shaped by psychobiological as well as psychosocial factors (Erikson 1970, 732). Erikson situates identity formation in the context of psychosocial development and emphasizes the impact of physical, psychological, social and cultural factors on identity formation. Oppressive systems like patriarchy and fundamentalism significantly influence identity construction. Erikson proposed that personality is developed through eight systematic stages in life: trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative and guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation and ego vs integrity versus despair (Sigelman et al. 2019, 332). Each of these stages is distinguished by a positive attribute that enables to build strong personality. This study uses Erikson's fifth stage of development, identity versus role confusion that happens during adolescence to study Casa's psychological development. This stage marks the struggle to develop a coherent sense of self amidst societal pressures and expectations. Analysing Casa's character development stage reveals how the individuals steer through the conflict between personal desires and sociocultural demands.

Erikson identifies individual development as deeply intertwined with historical and social force. This makes his theory apt to analyse Afghanistan's context. As he notes “Youth, in particular, depends on the ideological coherence of the world it is meant to take over, and therefore is highly aware of whether the system is strong enough in its traditional form to be “confirmed” by the identity process, or sufficiently weakened to suggest renovation, reformation or revolution. Psychosocial identity, then, also has a psycho-historical side, and life histories are inextricably interwoven with history” (Erikson 1970, 732).

According to Erikson, adolescence is the time the youth experience identity crisis as they attempt to define themselves in terms of nationality, religion, gender etc. The psychological aspect of identity crisis is partly conscious and partly unconscious as the individual finds himself unified with the self and the choices provided by the society such as the values taught, relationships forged, sexuality explored. It is also marked by dynamic internal conflicts leading to a state of vulnerability but is grounded in the past and extends into the future (Ibid, 732). The social aspect of identity refers to the society or community in which one should belong by interacting, understanding,

assimilating, adapting and accepting the communal interactions and influences. In short, Erickson views identity as crucial to understand social and political change (Erikson 1968). The characters face a heightened identity crisis in Afghanistan's sociopolitical landscape dominated by religious and patriarchal ideologies.

Religion and construction of the self

This section argues that in *The Wasted Vigil* religion is not just a personal belief system but a force that influences the sense of self and characters' relationships with others. Religion does not remain in the background but serves as the central force that drives the development of individual subjectivity. It shapes the moral compass of characters while also functioning as a tool of ideological imposition and control. An exploration of Marcus, Qatrina, and Casa shows how religion manifests as a site of conflict and moulds identity through fear, submission, repression and forced compliance.

Psychoanalytic studies demonstrate the complex role of religion in identity formation. Religion's centrality in creating the sense of self and identity is theorized by psychoanalysts like Freud, Jung and Erikson. Each theorist throws light upon different dimensions of religious ideology's influence that shape subjectivity. Freud posits that religion stems from the biological and psychological need for meaning, protection and purpose (Freud 1928, 41). God embodies a protective father figure and moral authority. Freud compares religion to childhood neurosis, a temporary phase before going forth to rational and scientific understanding (Ibid, 76). This framework helps to understand characters that use religion as a psychological defense mechanism and not as a spiritual practice. Carl Jung's approach to religion is devoid of the intense skepticism of Freud. He associated religion and faith with reflections of archetypes from the collective unconscious which help the individual achieve self-realization through the process of individuation.

Efthimiadis-Keith, following Jungian theory, identifies five-stage model of individuation, and establishes a connection between religion and psychological growth. In the first stage, one's outlook to life, thoughts and values are determined by societal or community expectations. The second stage leads to self-exploration where the self begins to detach itself from collective identity and begins to create an identity. In the third stage, the individual tries to establish a moral code for oneself by critically examining established moral standards. The

fourth stage is when one begins to view the world more objectively, detached from predetermined and established standards leading to the fifth stage, where the conscious and unconscious selves merge leading the individual back into society with clear awareness of their identity (Efthimiades-Keith 2021, 56). Thus, the process of individuation leads to self-awareness and identity formation. The model of individuation is deeply tied to religion wherein in the first stage the individual identifies with the collective belief systems, rituals and doctrines which is then followed by doubt and questioning leading to the differentiation of personal moral responsibility from collective dogma and culminates in self-realization which parallels to mystical wholeness and salvation.

The process of individuation can be traced in the character development of Casa who grows up internalizing extremist doctrines and moral codes that define his sense of self. Later with his encounter with the Westerners, Marcus, David and Lara, forces him to confront the 'Other' making him witness the difference between the Taliban ideology and his own thoughts and emotions raising a tension between personal conscience and dogmatic law. Casa embodies the clash between the shadow and Self. Even though his psyche yearns for an integrated self, the religious dogma hinder his growth preventing him to reach the final stage of individuation.

Erik Erikson views religion as a psychosocial anchor that helps the adolescent to create a sense of self. The parental faith leads the child into organized religion which promotes healthy development through childlike surrender and trust. However, when religious ideologies become rigid or extremist in nature, it can hinder the psychological development. Schilbrack (2012, 98) approaches religion as an ideologically motivated social construction rooted in power and ideology. Aslam demonstrates this through his representation of clerics and warlords who use religious doctrine to justify violence and maintain patriarchal and political dominance.

The characters in *The Wasted Vigil* can be studied using these theories to understand the influence of religion on identity formation. Marcus, an Englishman who adopted Islam to eschew cultural objections against his decision to marry Qatrina, exemplifies the negotiation between faith, cultural belonging and identity. His conversion to Islam is a strategic adaptation to social expectations and not a demonstration of his faith. He adopted a religious persona as a response to external pressures, a temporary psychological

accommodation. After Qatrina's death, Marcus loses his purpose in life and becomes withdrawn. He stops the watches and clocks in the house and stills time. "In this way he removed the sense and measurement of time from his surroundings" (Aslam 2008, 40). His house becomes a psychological and spiritual space for mourning. Marcus represents a rational figure who navigates through his personal losses with dignity. His abandonment of Islamic practices after Qatrina's death shows that his act of religious conversion was always performative rather than transformative. It confirms Freud's analysis of religion as psychological necessity that can be abandoned when its protective function ends. Qatrina's life can be analysed through Jung's process of individuation where she moves from collective conformity towards creating an authentic selfhood through active resistance to religious orthodoxy. Her psychological development mirrors Jungian stages of development which begins with acute awareness of societal religious awareness, progresses through critical examination of established moral codes and ultimately achieving an objective worldview that prioritizes personal integrity. As a liberated woman in a patriarchal society, she is concerned about the political religious changes that were overtaking Afghanistan. Qatrina believes that "the cause of the destruction of Afghanistan... is the character and society of Afghans, of Islam" (Aslam 2008, 90). Unlike Marcus, Qatrina remains indifferent to the religious dogma. She challenges the collective expectation by officiating her marriage by a woman stating that the Quran does not mandate that only a man must conduct the wedding ceremony. Years later Qatrina is stoned to death by the Taliban for being an adulteress as they do not approve the wedding officiated by a woman. Her death reveals how religion facilitates male domination when spiritual practices become rigid ideological control. Qatrina is a strong female character who believes in her personal ideologies till her death. Her psychological disintegration in the novel can be interpreted as a psychological response to the repression and alienation imposed by the society and as a resistance against the dominating ideological structures. Her madness represents the psyche's resistance to the collective unconscious that prevents the completion of the natural process of individuation.

Casa's character can be analysed using the fifth stage of development in Erikson's theory of psychosocial development: Identity versus Role Confusion to understand the catastrophic impact of extremist religious indoctrination on adolescent development.

During this stage of development, adolescents explore values, relationships and seek to understand their role in society through self-introspection and internalization of values. The successful resolution of this stage should align identity with the positive attribute – fidelity, a coherent sense of self and commitment to personal values. However, Casa's rigorous jihadi training has severely compromised his ability to understand his role within society. His failure to achieve resolution of the fifth stage explains his inability to forge and sustain relationships.

Experimentation and exploration during adolescence are crucial in identity formation. Casa loses his parents at a young age and is trained in madrassas and jihadi training centres. The freedom to explore is denied to him as he is indoctrinated with extremist Islamic principles which focus not on the individual but Islam and the greater cause of Jihad. Casa's faith drives him forward and obscures the way he views reality. He struggles to find his true self within the chaotic thoughts that plague him. His training does not allow him to be open to others' ideas, opinions or way of life. The inner turmoil and confusion Casa experiences indicate his unresolved identity crisis. Casa's religious identity is threatened when he encounters Marcus and David. He does not know how to respond to the kindness of these westerners and fails to process the affection he feels for Duniya. Casa does not know how to confront true emotions. He is unable to process and integrate these emotions into his understanding of the self and hence blames himself for being weak and Duniya for not wearing a veil and distracting him. He ends up suppressing his true self and natural emotions. This situation demonstrates what Erikson identifies as the failure to achieve healthy identity integration. Instead of developing fidelity to authentic values Casa succumbs to external pressures. The developmental failure leads to ongoing psychological difficulties for Casa.

Casa's identity is further destabilized by the constant fear of surveillance. Erikson argues that unresolved identity crisis can result in over identification with other's expectations and external authorities (Erikson 1968, 18). Casa lives his life in fear - the fear of retribution. He feels that he is constantly watched by God and the handmen of God, the clerics and warlord for whom he works. Casa is powerless under the gaze of all of them. He is trained to hate women and Americans and has internalized the belief that even an act of kindness could threaten his life. Casa fails to understand who he really is. The only place he has felt safe is the house of Marcus. However, being there threatens his loyalty to jihad. His failure to construct a coherent

self demonstrates how extremist religious indoctrination can permanently damage the natural process of identity formation.

Interpellation and ideological control

Religious extremism in *The Wasted Vigil* shows how religion is manipulated as an ideological state apparatus to control and regulate individuals through ideological mechanisms that shape actions, affects the psyche, transform individuals into ideological subjects. Louis Althusser's concept of 'hailing' helps to understand the process by which individuals are 'hailed' into specific roles designed by dominant fundamentalist religious ideologies (Althusser 2006, 118). The focus on jihadi training camps exposes how individuals are manipulated and instrumentalized to assist in ideological control, as demonstrated through Casa's character, which reveals the impact of such ideological control on individual subjectivity. Religious indoctrination and militant training are used to erase individuality and conform to jihadist ideologies. Casa, as a young boy, is subjected to intense religious indoctrination in madrassas, institutions that function as primary sites of interpellation. Clerics systematically indoctrinated into children a meticulously orchestrated system of belief which instills guilt and fear. They deliver emotionally charged sermons, effectively combining weeping, threats and lamentations about the lost glory of Islam highlighting the decadence of men and disobedience of women as the reason for the fall of Islam (Aslam 2008, 219). Casa is trained to hate, kill and to suppress his emotions in the name of religious duty.

Casa is conditioned to believe that everything that he does is sanctioned by Islam. His callousness towards violence is sacralized through Quranic verses, transforming the sacred text into an ideological weapon. While he caresses his Kalashnikov, he remembers the verses from Koran "Allah sent down iron, so He in the unseen world may know who supports Him and His messengers" (Aslam 2008, 136). This instance demonstrates interpellation in action, the Holy Quran 'hails' Casa as a holy warrior and transforms his weapon into an instrument to justify violence as his spiritual duty. Casa and his comrades paste the Shabnama, threatening night letters, and justify their action by believing that "the Koran calls upon the Muslims to create alarm among non-believers" (Ibid.). Like madrassas, jihadi training camps too become Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses. At the jihadi training centers, it is taught that jihad is not "about one country – it is about the glory and aspirations of Islam" and "no true

Muslim should shrink from killing in cold blood" (Ibid, 123). Violence is normalized, sanctioned and sacralized and young children are trained to overcome fear and slit the throats of sheep and horses while reciting the verses from the Holy Quran. Casa's internalized learning legitimizes massacre of prisoners of war: "it is not for the prophet to have captives until he had spread the fear of slaughter in the land" (Ibid.). Casa, though the training in madrassas and jihadi camps, is interpellated into subject position where brutality is projected as divine service. The training erodes Casa's capacity for human connection. He is taught not to trust anyone as anyone could become the enemy according to the laws of the jihad. The resentment Casa feels within him when he sees an American or a woman is not organic but is programmed into him by ideological conditioning. When David helps Casa and Marcus welcomes him into his home, Casa does not know how to respond to these acts of compassion. Natural human response to compassion and kindness is overwritten by ideological ingraining that categorized all outsiders as enemies. His prejudices are a result of the imposed ideologies that has become an integral part of his outlook. He believes that he is not perpetrating terror but is following divine commandment. Thus, Casa's self becomes a perfect example of total subjugation to interpellation by extremist ideology.

The novel, though a historical comparison, highlights the ideological shift in Afghan society due to the apparatuses like jihad training. In 1980, when the Americans wanted to blow up the Salang Tunnel, no Afghan volunteered for the suicide mission as suicide was considered a sin. The Afghans did not believe that "the path would not fork at the moment of the explosion, sending the bomber to Paradise, the infidels to Hell. No, the Afghans told the Americans then, it would deliver both parties to Allah's Inferno" (Aslam 2008, 77). This represents the traditional Afghan Islamic understanding of the consequences of suicide. However, by the time of Casa, this original principle was distorted and replaced by the extremists who manipulated the scripture to serve political ends. Aslam uses this instance to exemplify the transformation of cultural understandings through the systematic deployment of Ideological state apparatuses to create compliant subjects for political agendas.

Patriarchy and gendered subjectivity

If religious interpellation conscripts Casa into a violent masculine subject, patriarchy exerts a similar hold over the female characters of

the novel, shaping their subjectivity through comparable mechanisms of fear and control. Identity formation is entwined with the sociocultural system of patriarchy.

Radical feminists look at all forms of exploitation and oppression as an extension of patriarchal subjugation of women. As American anthropologist Gayle Rubin (1997, 29) argues, “sex/gender system is a set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity and in which these transformed sexual needs are met”. Society creates and standardizes the masculine and feminine identities that serve patriarchal power structures. As Kate Millett argues in *Sexual Politics*, men have standardized power over women through systematic control of social, political and economic structures. In a society like Afghanistan, by enforcing religious values into cultural values, a new hierarchy of power relation is constructed. The Taliban and its strict laws restrict the freedom and movement of women, whereby religious doctrines are transformed into mechanism of gendered oppression. Political implications attached to the oppression of women are “not only hopelessly tainted but the very prototype of institutionalized inequality” (Millett 1977, 20). In the Afghan context, patriarchy acts as an ideological apparatus that has seeped into religion, family, society, the legal system and politics. Applying the concept of symbolic order propagated by Jacques Lacan allows to understanding the function of Afghan patriarchal structures as the “law of the Father”. The religious leaders, warlords and oppressive cultural traditions embody the law of the Father that regulate the freedom of women. Patriarchal and religious structures of Afghanistan, like Althusser’s ideological state apparatus, regulate identity formation through coercion, fear and shame. The women characters in the novel, Qatrina, Lara and Duniya are victims of patriarchal system. They are forced to internalize values enforced by patriarchy, thereby compromising the opportunity to construct an autonomous identity. Duniya is a 22-year-old woman who runs a small school in Usha. When she does not consent to be the third wife of the cleric, her school is closed down and she is accused of immoral behaviour. She continues to teach children, ignoring the warning issued. Duniya is forced to negotiate her identity as a teacher under the gaze of the patriarchal structure of power like the mosque and clergy. Duniya is subjected to dishonour and humiliation for asserting the right to education and rejecting forced marriage. Lara despite being an outsider becomes a victim of the Afghan patriarchal force. She is

brutally beaten by a young boy for lying down with her feet pointing toward the city of Mecca. In Afghanistan, everyone has “the right to make an example of an unwise Afghan woman, even a boy young enough to be her son” (Aslam 2008, 8). This serves as an instance of constrained female subjectivity in Afghanistan, where women's bodies become sites of collective surveillance and punishment. Resistance is also an essential aspect of identity formation for Afghan women facing difficult circumstances. Afghan women choose to end their lives in water instead of using a knife or a noose. “It is the final assertion of dignity, one last proclamation of their humanity. Why choose ropes or blades, the things used by men to overpower and kill animals?” (Aslam 2008, 132) They refuse to use weapons yielded by man as these represent man's power over others in a brutal manner. The symbolic choice becomes the final act of agency rejecting tools of masculine violence and choosing water, symbolic of life and rebirth. Qatrina's resistance demonstrates the most powerful challenge to Afghanistan's patriarchal symbolic order. Her intellectual capabilities, professional excellence and utter disregard to the man-made systems and rejection of traditional gender roles positions her as a threat to the patriarchal system and the religious doctrines. Qatrina's insistence on having a woman to officiate her marriage was a move that defied patriarchal religious hierarchy. She treats patients irrespective of the gender, advises young women against frequent pregnancies and saves books by nailing them to the ceiling to save them from being destroyed by the Taliban. Her actions offer a direct challenge to the Law of the father. Her execution by stoning by the Taliban shows how patriarchal structures resort to the interpellation of women into subject positions through violence to maintain control. The novel highlights Casa's identity formation to demonstrate how societal forces create male subjectivities just like female subjectivities. While women are interpellated into submissiveness, men like Casa are interpellated into roles that require suppression of emotions and violence. The jihadi training represents an extreme form of masculine identity formation that eliminates vulnerability and display of emotions. Casa's inability to understand the care of Marcus and gentleness of Duniya displays a masculinity damaged by ideological apparatuses.

Conclusion

This study has examined the intersections of dominant ideological structures, patriarchy and religion, in shaping the psychological

development and identity formation of characters. Aslam's representation of Afghanistan has great significance in contemporary scenario as Afghanistan still suffers under these dominant structures. They force characters into subjectivities by limiting their autonomy and distorting the sense of self. The oppressive systems sustain through social conditioning and internalization of ideologies. Religion and patriarchy forge the development of subjectivities through fear, submission and allegiance. *The Wasted Vigil* serves as a reflection of Afghanistan's struggle with oppressive ideological structures and offers hope through the characters that resist complete subjugation, retaining the capacity for agency and selfhood.

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