

**Book Review**

**This House of Clay and Water**

By

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*This House of Clay and Water* draws the sketch of life's miseries in a third world country like Pakistan which is governed by rigid socio-religious obligations. The novel tells multiple stories at a time. One is of the women growing out of the stereotypical notions of morality into a substantially autonomous being. The other story is of the women who travels from being a blunt, autonomous, and self-sufficient women into a meek servant of societal norms. Also, a transgender's struggle at finding love and a child's account of suffering. Faiqa Masab through this novel highlight certain questions that are deliberately kept unanswered in our society. Moreover, the predicament of the human condition is caught artistically in her use of language and the vividness of cultural details. This review will discuss Mansab's use of language after a brief account of the pertinent themes and her details of Lahori culture.

The novel's main theme revolves around unquestioned oppression. It basically tells different stories of woe by interweaving the narratives of different people. Every character is shown undergoing different kind of oppression. One of the characters, named as Nida, goes through emotional oppression. She is married to the love of her life, yet she lives an abandoned and secluded life. On the other hand, another female character, Sasha, is oppressed and forced into a marriage of her nightmares. Then, Bhangi, a transgender, is relegated to the fringes of society through emotional as well as physical abuse. Lastly, Zoya, an adolescent girl, goes through the trauma of repeated sexual assault against her. All these images of pain and oppression unanimously expose the reality of life. From a woman to a transgender, from a transgender to a child, human beings from every single stratum are in pain and suffering. Moreover, the kinds of sufferings which Mansab highlights are always silenced under the loud noise of the motto of 'what people would think?' in Pakistani society. One cannot imagine a woman retaliating against her husband, or a transgender asking for basic rights, or a child trying to tell the story of her rape.

Oppression, in one way or the other, is always met with some kind of resistance or transgression. The story of Mansab's novel is not only about the sufferings but also about the journey towards liberation. The notion of oppression is, somehow similar in all the narratives of pain but the notion of liberation as a result of that oppression is starkly diversified. Nida's attempt to transcend beyond the torture cell of her house, lands her into a state of utter seclusion which, for Nida, is the best kind of liberation. She resists the oppressive mechanism through falling in love with a *Hijra*, and by having an illicit physical relationship. Whereas, Sasha's notion of liberation lies in the concept of being an obedient wife and an all-loving mother. Her mode of resistance is the use of her body as a site to claim her individuality through prostitution; however, she ends up being a devoted wife. Bhangi's mode of resistance is connected with Nida's, as they are continuing a

tabooed relationship. However, he is offered freedom in the form of death – a permanent break from the worldly pains. Therefore, Mansab can be called as the master of multiplicity as she does not confine her novel with an orthodox starting or ending. Her work is looking at the same theme through different angles providing insights into the nature of the issue.

The question of autonomy or agency arises here. The novel, clearly provides the reader with a poignant conclusion which makes one ask certain questions which are: is Mansab telling her readers that asserting an agency can lead to a frightening end? or is she against the struggles of the suppressed people in the face of power? These are a few questions that can be answered differently by different readers in accordance with their set of beliefs. However, on the part of Mansab, she forces the readers to ask the unaskable questions, such as the questions of faith and free will. She forces the readers to question the meaning of life. Is life simply a never-ending tale of misery? Do humans have any say in the workings of faith? Why humans have to suffer for something that was not their fault? These are some of the questions that Mansab forces her readers to ask.

Besides that, Mansab's detailed scrutiny of the workings of life is complemented by an equally eloquent use of language. Her writing combines humor, wit, emotions, sublimity, mundaneness, and transcendence. It is interesting to note how she brings life to the culture of Lahore through her words. The everyday life of Lahore is captured in such delineated manner, from the celebrations of Ramadan to the description of the prostitutes standing at the doors in Heera Mandi, is captured in a detailed manner. She also captures the essence of Lahori pun and sarcasm through language- making this work an insightful representation of Lahore.

In conclusion, Mansab's *This House of Clay and Water* is full of tragic renderings of reality. She captures the suffering and anguish that human being face through her simple, yet, captivating use of language. She weaves the stories of different individuals through the same thread of affliction. Moreover, the notion of morality closes its clutches against the sufferings of the characters to intensify the pain. The ultimate focus of Mansab's novel remains on the questions of faith and free-will till the end. However, she deliberately leaves these inquiries unanswered because answering them would not satisfy the reader's inquisitiveness. The reader is left with an open ending- a choice to interpret as he wishes.