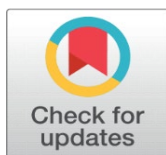
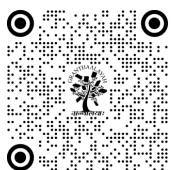


NAVIGATING IDENTITY AND AUTONOMY: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF TAHMIMA ANAM'S THE BONES OF GRACE

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ABSTRACT

This article paper the feminist themes in Tahmima Anam's *The Bones of Grace*, concentrating on the protagonist Zubaida's quest for self-discovery within the confines of cultural expectations and patriarchal conventions. The analysis utilises an intersectional framework to explore how gender, class, and cultural identity converge to influence Zubaida's experiences and choices. The novel questions conventional gender norms, emphasising the significance of personal agency and autonomy within a globalised framework. Anam highlights the intricacies of modern womanhood via Zubaida's challenges and strength, pushing for a more inclusive vision of feminism that embraces varied identities and experiences. The study contends that Anam's work both illustrates the obstacles encountered by women today and praises their potential for progress and strength.

Keywords: Feminism, Intersectionality, Identity, Autonomy, Cultural Expectations, Patriarchy, Tahmima Anam, *The Bones of Grace*, Contemporary Womanhood, Personal Agency

1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a socio-political and intellectual movement that promotes gender equality by confronting structural inequality and patriarchy. Feminism is founded on the principle that all persons, irrespective of gender, are entitled to equal rights and opportunities, and aims to deconstruct the historical frameworks that have oppressed women and non-binary individuals. This movement has progressed through multiple phases, each addressing specific issues—from suffrage and legal rights to more comprehensive social justice matters such as reproductive rights, employment equality, and intersectionality. Contemporary feminism acknowledges the significance of incorporating varied perspectives, comprehending the intersections of race, class, sexuality, and ability with gender-based oppression. Feminism serves as a transformative force, striving to attain equal rights while fostering a more inclusive and fair society that promotes respect and agency for all genders. It serves as both a theory of social transformation and a pragmatic framework for confronting the disparities that endure in various aspects of life.

Feminism, as both a movement and ideology, articulates several fundamental ideas designed to eradicate gender-based disparities and advance social justice. At the core of feminism is the claim that patriarchy—a system that favours males over women—establishes structural impediments that restrict women's rights, opportunities, and access to power.

Feminism posits that gender disparity is not an inherent phenomenon but rather a consequence of deeply rooted social, cultural, and political conventions that sustain male supremacy. It contests conventional gender norms that restrict both women and men, promoting autonomy and the right to self-determination free from societal coercion.

A major point in feminism is the necessity for economic equality. Feminists emphasise the enduring gender pay disparity, inadequate representation in leadership positions, and the devaluation of women's labour, encompassing unpaid domestic duties. They underscore reproductive rights, championing women's autonomy over their bodies and their entitlement to make informed decisions. Contemporary feminism examines the intersectionality of oppression, acknowledging that gender inequality intersects with other forms of discrimination, including race, class, and sexuality, leading to distinct experiences of marginalisation. Feminism aims to establish an inclusive and egalitarian society, where individuals are esteemed for their humanity rather than their adherence to gendered norms.

Tahmima Anam is a distinguished Bangladeshi-British author, recognised for her compelling narratives and examination of Bangladesh's socio-political history. Anam, born in 1975, was raised in Paris, New York, and Dhaka, shaping her cosmopolitan outlook. She debuted in literature with *A Golden Age* (2007), a novel set during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, which received the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book. This novel is a component of her esteemed Bengal Trilogy, which comprises *The Good Muslim* (2011) and *The Bones of Grace* (2016). Anam's oeuvre explores themes of familial bonds, identity, trauma, and perseverance, depicting the personal experiences of those ensnared in historical turmoil. She integrates personal accounts with extensive political frameworks, offering unique insights into human lives. Besides her novels, Anam is also an anthropologist and columnist, contributing to outlets such as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*.

In addition to her renowned Bengal Trilogy, Tahmima Anam has written *The Startup Wife* (2021), a novel that shifts from her previous historical themes to explore the modern realm of technology and entrepreneurship. The narrative centres on a young couple manoeuvring through the intricacies of the technology sector, exploring issues of creativity, gender dynamics, and the cultural obstacles of contemporary relationships. Anam's astute observations regarding the intersections of gender, technology, and societal norms are manifest in this piece, providing a satirical yet intellectually stimulating examination of startup culture. Besides her books, Anam has authored short stories, essays, and articles featured in prominent journals such as *Granta*, *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian*, demonstrating her flexibility as a writer. Her varied oeuvre persistently examines questions of identity, belonging, and the human condition, characterised by a unique voice that connects cultural contexts.

The Bones of Grace (2016) is the final installment in Tahmima Anam's Bengal Trilogy, examining themes of love, identity, and cultural dislocation within the context of a transforming Bangladesh. The story is on Zubaida, a Bangladeshi lady who manoeuvres through the intricacies of her personal and professional existence in the United States while contending with her cultural heritage. An analytical examination of the novel uncovers Anam's intricate depiction of the difficulties encountered by persons navigating the tension between traditional beliefs and contemporary ambitions. Zubaida's path exemplifies the quest for self-definition in a globalised context, where cultural expectations frequently conflict with individual aspirations. The story explores the interconnections of love, family, and obligation, particularly via Zubaida's interactions with her parents, her romantic partner, and her own ambitions.

Anam utilises a sophisticated, lyrical prose that conveys the emotional complexity of her characters and the socio-political landscape of Bangladesh. The examination of topics like migration, identity, and belonging aligns with current dialogues around diaspora experiences. Additionally, the novel critiques patriarchal systems, emphasising the constraints women encounter in both Eastern and Western contexts. Tahmima Anam carefully incorporates feminist themes throughout the narrative of *The Bones of Grace*, examining the complexities of women's lives at the intersections of culture, identity, and personal choice. Zubaida, the protagonist, represents the challenges faced by a contemporary Bangladeshi woman contending with familial and societal obligations while striving to fulfil her personal ambitions.

A significant feminist theme in the work is the confrontation of patriarchal hierarchies. Zubaida's journey illustrates the conflict between tradition and modernisation as she manages her connections with her parents, romantic partner, and personal aspirations. Anam challenges cultural conventions that prescribe women's roles and obligations, notably emphasising the pressure Zubaida endures to adhere to conventional expectations around marriage and family.

The work explores the concept of autonomy. Zubaida's pursuit of her aspirations, including her professional endeavours in the United States, epitomises a larger drive for autonomy and self-identification. Anam depicts the challenges women have in establishing their autonomy within a patriarchal structure, highlighting that genuine empowerment entails the liberty to make decisions that reflect one's principles and ambitions. Furthermore, Anam

explores the intricacies of cultural identity, highlighting the difficulties encountered by women in diasporic contexts. Zubaida's experiences illustrate the negotiation of cultural dualism as she endeavours to reconcile her Bangladeshi origin with her existence in the West. This examination of identity aligns with feminist theories on intersectionality, since Zubaida's journey underscores the interplay of gender, culture, and nationality in shaping personal experiences.

Intersectionality is a fundamental idea in feminism that analyses how different social identities—such as race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and age—interact and converge to influence personal experiences of oppression and privilege. The concept, introduced by researcher Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, emphasises that individuals' experiences are shaped not by a singular identity or category, but by the intersecting and interrelated characteristics of numerous identities.

Intersectionality fundamentally contests the notion of a monolithic feminist experience, acknowledging that women encounter oppression in diverse ways. A Black woman may encounter discrimination distinctively compared to a white woman owing to the intersecting impacts of racism and sexism. Intersectional feminism underscores the necessity of comprehending these intricate layers to tackle the systematic disparities impacting marginalised communities.

This perspective attacks conventional feminist movements that have predominantly focused on the experiences of white, middle-class women, frequently marginalising the voices and concerns of women from many backgrounds. Intersectionality promotes an inclusive feminism that accounts for race, class, and other social identities, aiming to foster a more thorough comprehension of gender injustice and its various expressions.

Intersectional feminism advocates for policies and activity that tackle the distinct issues encountered by women and marginalised groups, fostering social justice and equity across multiple identity dimensions. This approach enhances feminist discourse and promotes unity among many movements seeking systemic change, acknowledging that liberation is interrelated and must be pursued collectively. Intersectionality is an essential framework for analysing and addressing the intricacies of oppression, emphasising the necessity of inclusivity in the quest for gender equality.

In *The Bones of Grace*, Tahmima Anam adeptly utilises the notion of intersectionality to examine the complex experiences of women, particularly via the perspective of the protagonist, Zubaida. Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, highlights the interplay of diverse social identities—such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity—in shaping personal experiences and systems of oppression. Anam's account demonstrates how these overlapping identities impact Zubaida's path and the obstacles she encounters.

Zubaida's experience as a Bangladeshi lady residing in the United States underscores the intricacies of managing numerous cultural identities. She contends with the demands of her conventional upbringing while endeavouring to establish her independence in an unfamiliar environment. This dichotomy highlights the conflict between her traditional heritage and Western society norms, demonstrating how cultural identification influences her thoughts and decisions. Anam's depiction of Zubaida illustrates the challenges several women encounter in harmonising their heritage with contemporary expectations, underscoring that gender and nationality must be analysed in conjunction. The work explores themes of social class and economic disparity. Zubaida's educational and professional ambitions are at odds with the constraints placed on women in her country. Anam analyses the impact of socioeconomic status on women's prospects, highlighting the discrepancies encountered by individuals from varying backgrounds. The convergence of class and gender enhances the reader's comprehension of the systemic obstacles women face, hence complicating their pursuit of empowerment. The theme of love and relationships in the story underscores the convergence of gender and sexual identity. Zubaida's love decisions exemplify overarching societal constraints and expectations, demonstrating how partnerships can simultaneously empower and restrict women. Her journey of self-discovery entails negotiating love and companionship in accordance with her growing identity, elucidating the complexities of personal relationships within the framework of cultural and gender standards.

Zubaida's story in *The Bones of Grace* highlights the obstacles women have owing to intersecting identities while also celebrating their strength and agency in addressing these complications. Anam's examination of intersectionality highlights the significance of recognising the interplay between different forms of discrimination and privilege, so enhancing feminist discourse and expanding the dialogue concerning women's rights and identity on a worldwide scale: "You are not merely the aggregate of your components, but rather the entirety of your experiences" (Anam 21). This quotation encapsulates a fundamental subject of the novel: the notion that an individual's identity cannot be exclusively determined by their cultural heritage, gender, or societal roles. Rather, it is influenced by the whole of their experiences, decisions, and connections.

The concept underscores the significance of individual agency and the complex character of identity. Zubaida's journey in the story highlights her struggle with her identity as a Bangladeshi lady within a global framework. She encounters cultural expectations from her family and society that frequently clash with her ambitions and wishes. Anam posits that identity is not a static object but a fluid and developing phenomenon shaped by personal experiences, arguing that one is not the sum of your parts. This viewpoint corresponds with feminist and intersectional theories, which emphasise the need of acknowledging the intricacies of women's identities and the diverse influences that form their experiences. It contests simplistic interpretations of identity that overlook the complex realities experienced by individuals, especially those from marginalised communities: "At the core of every decision resides the burden of tradition and the desire for autonomy" (Anam 125). This line underscores the conflict between societal norms and individual ambitions. Zubaida's path exemplifies the challenge of reconciling her Bangladeshi ancestry with her personal aspirations. It demonstrates how choices are frequently shaped by parental responsibilities and the aspiration for autonomy, highlighting the intricacy of identity.

In *The Bones of Grace*, Tahmima Anam utilises a feminist lens to explore the intricacies of identity, cultural norms, and individual autonomy. The protagonist, Zubaida, represents the challenges encountered by modern women at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. Anam examines the influence of gender roles, familial duties, and society expectations on Zubaida's decisions and experiences, emphasising the limitations enforced by patriarchal systems.

The narrative emphasises the concept of autonomy, as Zubaida's journey illustrates her pursuit of self-definition among external expectations. Anam attacks cultural standards that prescribe women's duties, illustrating the protagonist's quest for autonomy as a crucial element of her identity. Anam highlights the significance of human agency and the necessity for women to voice their wants and objectives via Zubaida's experiences.

Intersectionality is an essential component of Anam's feminist story, as Zubaida's experiences are shaped by her cultural background, economic standing, and the intricacies of diaspora existence. The novel demonstrates the intersection of multiple identities, influencing individual experiences and emphasising the distinct obstacles encountered by women from varying backgrounds. Anam's depiction of Zubaida's challenges and victories enriches the discourse on feminism, promoting a more comprehensive understanding of gender and identity.

The Bones of Grace is a profound examination of feminist ideas, highlighting women's tenacity as they confront societal limitations and embrace their complex identities. Anam's novel exposes patriarchal frameworks that restrict women's options while celebrating their potential for growth, self-discovery, and empowerment.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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