

Intersecting Identities: A Critical Examination of Sixsmith's *Ayesha's Gift***Muhammad Raies¹, Kiran Jamil², Rashid Ali³, Usman Ullah⁴**^{1,2,3,4} MPhil in English Literature and Linguistics, Northern University Nowshera.Email: muhammadraiespk123@gmail.com, kiranjameel850@gmail.com,
rashidalibsenglish@gmail.com, uk121619@gmail.com**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v3i3.1074>**Abstract**

This study explores the struggles of Ayesha, the protagonist, as she seeks the truth behind her father's death, officially declared a suicide. Guided by Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality (1989), the research examines how overlapping identities—race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, and cultural background—shape her experiences. Employing a qualitative, text-based approach, the study reveals Ayesha's confrontation with systemic oppression and patriarchal dominance in Pakistan, where her intrusion is met with hostility, threats, and violence. Simultaneously, her life in Britain, marked by alienation and racial prejudice, intensifies her sense of displacement. Ultimately, both nations fail to offer her belonging, forcing her into a crisis of identity. This analysis highlights how intersectional forces amplify marginalization and complicate questions of home and identity for diasporic women.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Identity Crisis, Patriarchy, Diaspora, Marginalization, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Cultural Displacement.

Introduction

Feminism, black feminism, critical race theory, Intersectional Praxis and social movements such as civil rights movements, women liberation movement and so on, serve as a precursor to the theory Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) coined and proposed by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. It's a proposition/premise for understanding how various features of a person's identity (such as gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, religion, cultural background etc.) intersect and interact with each other, leading to unique experiences of discrimination. Intersectionality has created a new caste system. It is centered on issues of color, discrimination, prejudice, violence, and grouping based on social class, race, and sex. The interconnected nature of social classification mixes multiple identities, including racial identity, sexuality, disability, nationality, and gender. These identities intersect and as a result, it leads to discrimination, oppression, and persecution. Each form of racial and gender inequality reinforces the others. Therefore, they strengthen identity politics and encourage exclusion on the basis of gender, class, and skin tone. The institution of slavery has profoundly molded the question of gender disparity in American society. During slavery, women of diverse colors were exposed to double exploitation. On one hand as women and on the other as ethnically marginalized individuals. They became prime targets of physical violence, sexual exploitation and unpaid labor. African American literature, such as *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison and *Incidents in the Life of a*

Slave Girl (1861) by Harriet Jacobs are two distinguished works. They underscore the overwhelming impacts of slavery. These influences have shaped generations of black individuals. The experiences of black females as enslaved workers and sufferers of sexual exploitation are extremely worrying. These selected works brightly divulge the horrendous fact of slavery. The slavery kept Black people, predominantly females, imprisoned in figurative steel cages for epochs. The current passage inspects these two works to reveal how Black women were abused, oppressed, sexually abused, and demeaned (Saraswathy, 2020). Initially this theory was proposed to gain greater insight into the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups particularly the predicament of black women. However, this theory can be expanded to include the experiences of women particularly those having background other than white. One such study case is the novel *Ayesha's Gift* (Sixsmith, 2018) by Martin Sixsmith. Though the story is based on a real life event, however the novel fictionalized its true version with some changes. The novel portrays the main character Ayesha who is the protagonist. She was born in Pakistan and lived and settled in Britain. The violent death of her father during his visit to his hometown in Karachi compelled her to travel to Pakistan from her tranquil existence in Britain in order to find out the exact cause of his death. Upon arriving there, she is targeted, threatened with violence and death and oppressed through different tactics. Despite spending her grown up years in Britain, the British authorities there too are treating her as an outsider and more importantly bothersome. Eventually, she feels hopeless with both countries; the one where she was born in and ancestrally felt connected with and the other where she spent her grown up years, settled and adopted to, culturally. Thus she is left disconnected and displaced. Third Space, according to Bhabha (1994) becomes relevant and pertinent in terms of the position the main character finds their self in.

Discrimination

Discrimination the unjustified treatment meted out to an individual or group on the basis of features such as race, gender, religion, age, disability, or the origin of nationality. This includes unfair actions, conduct, or policies, all of which result in unequal opportunities and outcomes. Discrimination can occur in various contexts including employment, education, housing, and public services. There are various forms of discrimination.

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination is the biased treatment of a particular section of people on the basis of their gender or sex. It leads to unequal opportunities and consequences in various areas including employment, workplace, education, and social roles. While it can affect anyone, however, women and gender minorities are at the receiving end of frequently suffering the most substantial repercussions. Thus the wider social and economic discriminations continue. Fostering parity, equity, justice and the implementation of certain policies for a more inclusive and all-encompassing society are necessary steps for tackling gender discrimination.

Racial Discrimination

Racial discrimination signifies the unjustified treatment of people owing to their racial or ethnic background. This type of discrimination is evident in numerous ways including hurdles in access to quality education, inequalities in employment opportunities, housing and healthcare. It involves discriminatory attitudes, labelling, and complete inequalities that lead to the detriment of a certain racial or ethnic group. Racial discrimination can have substantial social, economic, and psychological implications such as prolonging the cycles of disparity and unfairness. In order to address these issues, vigorous efforts and actions are required to encourage equity, raise

responsiveness, and enforce policies and regulations that guard against discriminatory actions and practices.

Age Discrimination

Age discrimination refers to the prejudicial conduct towards individuals on the basis of their age. Aged adults or younger workers are often targeted in this type of discrimination. It can happen in numerous settings such as workplace, public places, healthcare, social relations etc. In service, it may include employing prejudices and biases, uneven wage, inadequate advancement opportunities and being disregarded for developing and promotion. Age discrimination can affect the self esteem and confidence, job satisfaction, and overall happiness of an individual in a negative way. Addressing this issue requires endorsing age diversity, employing wide-ranging policies, and raising awareness regarding the worth of all.

Religious Discrimination

Religious discrimination is the discriminatory treatment of individuals owing to their religious practices or beliefs. It can be evident in multiple forms, such as exclusion from employment, rejection of services, or persecution in social settings. This kind of discrimination can disturb the ability of people to practice their faith openly and freely. This can lead to social and economic difficulties. Religious discrimination may also include labeling and negative biases against certain religious groups. Battling this issue necessitates fostering forbearance and patience, effecting protective laws, and promotion of an inclusive atmosphere that appreciates and values various beliefs.

Disability

Treating individuals unfairly and unjustly due physical or mental infirmities is termed as disability discrimination. This can be evident in several ways, such as obstacles in acquiring education, employment, public services, and social activities. People who are physically or mentally challenged may face hurdles such as lack decent lodgings, social humiliation, and barring from availing opportunities. Disability discrimination not only hampers access to resources but also affects individuals' self-respect and value of life. Addressing this problem requires fostering respect and kindness, extending support and special care towards special persons. They should be provided with a favorable environment where they should not feel deprived or discriminated.

National Origin Discrimination

This type of discrimination includes the unjust treatment of a person or community owing to their country of origin. Discrimination of this kind can occur in numerous contexts, such as housing, education and public life. Bias is often demonstrated in hiring practices, availing opportunities, attitudes based on language, cultural background and birthplace of an individual. National origin discrimination can promote substantial social and economic difficulties for affected individuals and communities. Addressing this type includes encouraging respect for diversity, executing anti-discrimination laws, and nurturing tolerance and inclusive environments that acknowledge rights of all backgrounds.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a framework that deals with how various social identities including race, sexuality, gender, class, religion and ability overlap and form distinctive experiences of discrimination or privilege. It was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s. This theory stresses that an individual does not suffer oppression or privilege in segregation. Instead these identities interact in complex ways that can amplify or mitigate one another. For instance, a black

female may face more hurdles than a white lady or a black guy. It is on account of the overlapping impacts of sexism and racism. Intersectionality helps to bring to the fore the significance of considering multiple factors in social justice work, policy-making, and activism. It ensures that the voices and experiences of those at the intersections are heard and their plight addressed. It is different from traditional form of discrimination in a sense that rather than emphasizing a single facet, this approach studies the coming together of various aspects of a person's identity contributing towards their disadvantage.

Statement of the Problem

Ayesha's Gift (2018) by Sixsmith is based on a true story of a daughter's quest for finding the cause of her father's death. She is unable to believe the narrative that her father has committed suicide. Upon arriving in Pakistan, Ayesha is confronted with various hurdles and obstacles. The prevailing troubles make her feel abandoned, alienated and emotionally dislocated.

Research Objectives

1. To explore the protagonist Ayesha as a victim of intersecting identities in Sixsmith's *Ayesha's Gift*.
2. To find out Ayesha's sufferings from identity crisis due to Intersectionality in Sixsmith's *Ayesha's Gift*.

Research Questions

1. How does the novel depict Ayesha as a victim of intersecting identities in *Ayesha's Gift*?
2. What are the ways in which Ayesha suffers from an identity crisis due to Intersectionality in *Ayesha's Gift*?

Literature Review

The concept of **intersectionality**, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, has become a pivotal framework in feminist theory and related disciplines for analyzing how overlapping social identities—such as gender, race, class, religion, and sexuality—produce unique experiences of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 2013). This review synthesizes the historical development of intersectionality and its applications in literature, gender studies, and social discourse, identifying gaps and directions for further research.

From Single-Axis to Multi-Dimensional Discrimination

Earlier feminist discourse primarily approached discrimination through a single-axis framework, often focusing solely on gender while disregarding the compounded impact of race, class, and other social categories (Stasz, 1976). Such an approach obscured the nuanced realities of women situated at the crossroads of multiple marginalized identities (Oswald, 2023). Scholars argue that this narrow focus limited the effectiveness of feminist movements in addressing systemic inequities comprehensively.

Gender Discrimination and Its Evolution

Historically, gender discrimination manifested through exclusion of women from political, educational, and economic spaces (Stasz, 1976). Although significant progress was achieved during the second-wave feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, contemporary societies still exhibit gender-based disparities, notably in labor markets and leadership positions (Oswald, 2023). Additionally, gender-based violence remains pervasive, affecting one in three women globally. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified gender inequities, with women being disproportionately impacted by job losses and wage reductions (Dang & Nguyen, 2020).

Emergence and Scope of Intersectionality

Intersectionality emerged from Black feminist scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s as a corrective to essentialist feminist frameworks that prioritized white, middle-class women's experiences (Hill Collins, 1999b). This theoretical model emphasizes simultaneity, inclusivity, and complexity in analyzing oppression (Carastathis, 2014). It has since been adopted across disciplines, including law, sociology, and organizational studies, for examining systemic inequities and power dynamics (Atewologun & Doyin, 2018). Despite its popularity, scholars critique intersectionality for its static metaphors and individual-centric analyses, suggesting a need for approaches that integrate structural and affective dimensions of power (Grabham, 2008).

Intersectionality in Literature

Literary representations offer critical insights into intersectional identities and social marginalization. Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison foreground the dual burdens of racism and sexism faced by Black women, portraying resilience through cultural memory and communal solidarity (Marshall, 1984; Morrison, 1993). Contemporary works such as Bernardine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other* (2019) and Elif Shafak's *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019) engage intersectionality to depict the lived realities of women navigating systemic oppression (Strauss, 2023; Wandira et al., 2023). Similarly, Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* (1993) and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) illustrate how intersecting hierarchies of gender, religion, and class perpetuate subjugation (Paudyal, 2021; Siddiqui & Abbas, 2024). Studies also highlight intersectionality in postcolonial contexts, such as the concubine system in Indonesian literature and gendered violence in Kurdish society, revealing localized expressions of systemic power (Mukti et al., 2023; Omar, 2024). Furthermore, texts like Mohammed Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) and Okky Mandasari's *The Years of the Voiceless* (2011) interrogate the compounded oppression of women in South Asian and Southeast Asian societies (Dasgupta, 2021; Istiadah et al., 2021).

Critiques and Future Directions

Although intersectionality has transformed feminist and critical race studies, its widespread yet uneven application raises concerns about conceptual dilution (Carastathis, 2014). Scholars advocate for integrating intersectionality with emerging frameworks—such as affect theory and systemic analyses—to capture the dynamic interplay of power, identity, and emotion in contemporary societies (Brown & Ahmed, 2017). Future research should also explore intersectionality's role in shaping digital discourse, global migration narratives, and transnational feminist movements.

Methodology

This study is purely qualitative in essence. Text-based analysis method has been opted by the researcher for this research. The present study intends to explore Ayesha's Gift (2018) by Sixsmith through Crenshaw's theory of Intersectionality. Descriptive research design has been utilized in the present study. Two sources of data collection have been used in the conduction of this study. These two sources are: primary data and secondary data. This research study is concerned with the area of literature. So the text of the novel, Ayesha's Gift (2018) serves as a primary source for this study. Important dialogues, quotations and narration pieces will be dealt with thoroughly to justify the stance taken by the researcher. Journals, articles by writers of prominence, essays, online sources such as internet, various websites, and online books and magazines have been availed for collecting secondary data to help further expound the predicament of the protagonist who is facing

multifaceted discrimination as a result of the interaction and intersection of various aspects of the protagonist's identity such as gender, color, religion, culture, language, origin etc.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers have chosen the theory of Intersectionality proposed by Kimberle Crenshaw. She mentioned it in her ground-breaking essay 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex' in 1989 (Crenshaw, 1989). According to her, intersectionality is a metaphor for comprehending the confluence of problems of inequality and disadvantage in various forms targeting the most marginalized individual or community of a society, based on race, gender, religion, color, class, sexuality, cultural background and so on. Discrimination is not just limited to gender or racial difference rather different features of a person identity interact and intersect resulting in unique experiences of disadvantage and suffering. Intersectionality theory perceives and analyses discrimination from a more nuanced perspective than Feminism or Racism previously had. In the light of this theory, the experiences of Ayesha, the protagonist of the novel (Sixsmith, 2018), in both countries Pakistan, the one where she was born, and Britain, where she was raised and settled, will be examined. Writer's artistic achievement, and how it is achieved through language will be dealt with thoroughly.

Findings

The analysis of *Ayesha's Gift* (2018) through Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality reveals how the protagonist's identity is shaped by the complex and overlapping forces of race, gender, nationality, culture, and class. Ayesha's experiences in both Britain and Pakistan highlight systemic injustices and the persistence of institutional and cultural oppression. She feels rejected in both Pakistan and Britain due to Intersectionality. In Britain, she confronts institutional racism and privilege tied to nationality, while in Pakistan she struggles against patriarchal norms and societal expectations, both of which compound her marginalization. These intersecting pressures lead to a profound identity crisis as she navigates the emotional burden of balancing cultural loyalty with a desire for independence. Her decision to marry Peter exemplifies how personal choices can be heavily influenced by systemic and emotional constraints. Despite these challenges, Ayesha's resilience and determination to uncover the truth about her father's death symbolize her refusal to be silenced and her fight for autonomy. The novel ultimately serves as a powerful commentary on the necessity of intersectional analysis in understanding the full scope of oppression, emphasizing the importance of resisting rigid identity constructs and dismantling exclusionary systems in the pursuit of justice and equity.

Conclusions

Applying Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality to *Ayesha's Gift* (2018) discloses a rich and subtle understanding of the protagonist's struggles. Which is formed by the interaction of identity, power, and oppression. The story exposes the overlapping systems of marginalization that are entrenched in race, gender, culture, nationality, and class. It also very effectively depicts how they intersect and interconnect. Upon their encounter are produced exceptional and compounded challenges for Ayesha. She comes across this bitter experience the moment she sets out on a journey to discover the truth about her father's untimely and shocking death. The experiences of Ayesha in both Pakistan and Britain depict systemic injustices and cultural divergences. These reflect the wider social and institutional prejudices that leave non-white and non-Western individuals as "other." She is disappointed with the British Foreign Office's discriminatory attitude. Her experiences with British FCO show how institutional racism and nationality-based privilege interact and intersect to sustain systemic inequality. In the same way, her experiences

within Pakistan demonstrates how male-controlled structures and inflexible cultural expectations further complicates her situation. This consequently pushes her further into an identity crisis. The novel further highlights the emotional burden that Ayesha suffer as a hybrid individual. She tries to navigate the conflicting expectations of loyalty to her traditions. She also desires to proclaim her independence. The tension between generational expectations and personal agency is further highlighted through her guilt for having abandoned her Pakistani origin together with her noncompliance of traditional matrimonial arrangements. This conflict is further intensified by the susceptibility she experiences as a woman while opposing powerful societal forces. These include cultural norms that give primacy to family honor over individual autonomies. Moreover, the decision of Ayesha to marry Peter serves as an important event in intersectional analysis which reflects the systemic constraints, pressure of emotional vulnerability and cultural and societal expectations. This choice of Ayesha is accompanied both by her guilt and sense of personal freedom. By taking Intersectionality theory into account, *Ayesha's Gift* (2018) makes the voices of those marginalized due to intersectionality heard. Furthermore, it also emphasizes the importance of criticizing and uprooting these structures in order to foster a more just society. This analysis contributes to modern literary criticism. It does so by showcasing the significance of intersectionality as an instrument to dissect and cut open the experiences of characters inside the diverse institutional, social and cultural structures. Finally, the novel offers a poignant exploration of identity and resilience. It reveals how the intersections and compounding of culture, race, and gender shape and affect individual lives. Ayesha's story highlights the enduring strength required to steer out and challenge systemic disparities. Consequently, the readers are left with a profound reflection on the power of truth, justice, and independence and autonomy. Her journey is not only full of challenges but also acts as a testimony to the possibility of carving a path forward in the face of crushing hardships and adversity.

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