Foregrounding the Servant: Interrogating the Representation of Domestic Servitude in Select Works of Pakistani Anglophone Fiction

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Abstract: Domestic servitude as an institution has been a salient, indispensable and ubiquitous, yet largely undiscerned and underrepresented part of South Asian lived experiences and has been integral to the formation and consolidation of class identities on either side of employer-servant dynamic. Much akin to their widespread prevalence in South Asia, servants have been a consistent presence in South Asian postcolonial literary oeuvres. A study of the depiction of literary servants alerts readers to the significance of these characters not just in terms of their diegetic functions- it provides crucial insights into the representational politics underlying any particular text. South Asian literary scholar Ambreen Hai has proposed a new generic category by the name "postcolonial servitude fiction" to refer to a budding corpus of Anglophone South Asian fiction which foregrounds servants as central protagonists, probe into the interiorities and subjectivities of these lower-class figures, illuminating various facets of domestic servitude hitherto unaddressed. By bringing the three texts namely *Salt and Saffron* (2000), "Surface of Glass and "Scar" into conversation with each other, this paper seeks to challenge and the rethink the established discourse surrounding domestic servants, and proposes revised and egalitarian modes of perceiving and understanding them.

Keywords: Domestic servitude, servitude fiction, Pakistani Anglophone literature, Kamila Shamsie

Domestic servitude as an institution has been a salient, indispensable and ubiquitous, yet largely undiscerned and underrepresented part of South Asian lived experiences. Literature produced within and about various parts of the Indian subcontinent are replete with references to servants, tracing their presence at least as far back as the Vedic period. The preponderance of a plethora of terms in subcontinental writings such as the "... Vedic *dasis* and the *bhritya* of the *Dharmashastras*...the *ghulam* of the Sultanate period, the *kaneez* and the *launda* of the mughal times… *naukars* and *chakars* of the colonial era to the all-inclusive category of the contemporary 'servant'…" (Sinha et al. 4) testifies to the uninterrupted and enduring history of domestic servitude in this region. Domestic servants have been known to perform a broad array of roles in varying capacities, that have included domestic, emotional, care-giving and at times sexual services. Domestic servitude still continues unabated within the subcontinent, having undergone great transformation in accordance with mutating socio-economic and politico-cultural contexts, right from the feudal times through to the modern capitalist and postcolonial era. As a "historically constructed labour relation", domestic servitude, besides being an absolutely essential component of the domestic existence of the middle and upper classes in the subcontinent, is also integral to the formation and consolidation of class identities on either side of employer-servant dynamic, with servants constituting a "distinct class" of "premodern" Others, in relation to whom, middle- and upper-class selfhood is defined and consti-

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tuted (Ray and Qayum 2). It is through a careful and fraught negotiation with this system of domination that the elites establish themselves as the custodians of the servant class and legitimize themselves "as the class destined" to bring modernity to the nation-states. As a "contact zone for disparate classes" operative within the closed confines of the home space away from purview of laws and regulations, servitude occasions the emergence of a diverse set of relations, experiences and affects (Hai 7). By bringing people separated by large socio-economic gulfs into physical proximity, servitude produces unsavoury experiences of humiliation, exploitation and distrust on one hand and intimacies, affections and interdependencies on the other. Domestic servitude in the Indian subcontinent denotes something far more expansive and layered than an occupational practice; it is a complex phenomenon encompassing "cultures of servitude" whereby "social relations of domination/subordination, dependency, and inequality are normalized and permeate both the domestic and public spheres" (Ray and Qayum 3).

It must be noted at this point that the term 'servant' is no way an indicator of a homogeneous category of people. Taking a cue from Ray and Qayum, this paper deploys the term 'servant' to denote individuals engaged in providing domestic services in lieu of some form of payment. Like any other conceptual category, servants too are marked by internal contradictions and hierarchies whereby identities of gender, caste, religion, ethnicity and age shape each individual's experience of servitude in unique ways. Despite these differences, being imbricated within the subcontinental cultures of servitude means that servants internalise certain behavioural expectations such as self-abasement, humility, ingratiation, abnegation and indignity.

Much akin to their widespread prevalence in South Asia, servants have been a consistent presence in South Asian postcolonial literary oeuvres. Although often portrayed as marginalized and peripheral figures consigned to the background of texts, literary servants are frequently called upon to perform key "cultural, political, aesthetic, thematic" functions within the world of the text (Hai 4). A study of the depiction of literary servants alerts readers to the significance of these characters not just in terms of their diegetic functions- it provides crucial insights into the representational politics underlying any particular text. Mostly written by authors from privileged socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, representations of servants are often coloured by the authors' elitist biases, resulting in portrayals that are largely stereotypical, derisive and essentializing, that further reinforce the society's entrenched perceptions of these figures as the uneducated, unrefined, lesser-than-human Other of the middle and the upper classes. South Asian literary scholar Ambreen Hai has proposed a new generic category by the name "postcolonial servitude fiction" to refer to a budding corpus of Anglophone South Asian fiction that "centers, explores, and elucidates the problems of contemporary servitude and strives to develop more self-aware, ethical, and egalitarian formal techniques and strategies of representation to do so" (5). By foregrounding servants as central protagonists, these narratives probe into the interiorities and subjectivities of these lower-class figures, illuminating various facets of domestic servitude hitherto unaddressed. This present paper takes for its study three Pakistani anglophone literary texts- one novel and two short stories, namely Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000), her short story "Surface of Glass" (2008) and, Aamina Ahmad's short story "Scar" (2008). By undertaking a close textual reading of Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* where the upper- class protagonist's identification of her own investment in her family's elitist biases and discriminatory attitudes pivots on a set of crucial interactions with a number of servant figures this paper examines how the novel self- critically evaluates and interrogates the elite class's reliance on servitude for its self-constitution. By closely reading the two short stories, both written from the perspective of two female servants, the paper delves into the uniquely individual experiences of shame, stigma, desire, aspiration, and power relations that characterize servitude. By bringing these three texts into conversation with each other, this paper seeks to challenge and the rethink the established discourse surrounding domestic servants, and proposes revised and egalitarian modes of perceiving and understanding them.

At this juncture, it becomes pertinent to explain the reason behind the selection of Pakistani Anglophone fictional texts as the objects for this paper's study. The foremost reason for choosing to study fiction written by Pakistani writers would be the dearth of available scholarship on representation of domestic servitude in literature produced by these writers, even though servants proliferate in fiction produced by this nation just as much as in the works of other Indian subcontinental regions. On a representational level, domestic servants are just as much underexplored, understudied, overlooked and invisibilized as their counterparts in, say, Indian Anglophone fiction. While the shared histories of the two nations indicate that they have both inherited similar systems of servitude that have been shaped and reshaped over several centuries, perhaps most markedly by the forces of British colonialism, the coexistence of feudalism alongside late-capitalism in present-day postcolonial Pakistan has led to the predominance of a "hybridized model of domestic labour relations" that combines "'pre-capitalist paternalism' with 'market forces'" (Zulfiqar 2). Feudalism still retains a stronghold in Pakistan where the landowning class wields significant power over the administrative, judiciary and military apparatuses of the nation. Despite successive governments' attempts at restricting the power and influence of the landowning classes in the newly formed nation of Pakistan, the system of feudal land ownership has never been abolished. While scholarly opinion regarding the existence of caste system in Pakistan similar to the one found in neighbouring India remains divided, social relations in rural Pakistan have always remained predicated upon a system of *biraderi*[1] or kinship relations that approximate the Indian caste system in its workings (Amirali 92). Within this social organization, the lower "untouchable" castes, comprising small farmers or poor landless peasants, have toiled on the agricultural lands and provided domestic service inside the households of the upper caste landowning families, sharing a sharply unequal, multigenerational quasi kinship bond (Zulfiqar 2). This demonstrates that caste and class-based identities have been fundamental to the structuring and organisation of domestic servitude in Pakistan. With the gradual replacement of older agricultural methods with capitalist production and waged labour and the concomitant urbanization in post 1980s Pakistan, these rural landless peasants moved to the cities in large numbers as migrant labourers, taking up the roles of paid domestic workers in middle- and upper-class urban homes. (Hai 150). Such a drastic socio-economic shift has meant that employment of domestic service is no longer solely the reserve of rural landed families but has been "integrated into the urban social fabric", so that urban employers of domestic service now comprise "not just landed families with rural ties residing in the cities, but also a wide range of business, professional and middle-classes without direct economic or kinship ties to the village…" (Amirali 83). The resulting hybridised model of domestic servitude fuses "elements of rural kinship-based landlord-servant relations with new forms of depersonalized labor arrangements" (Zulfiqar 2), replacing older forms of exploitations with newer ones and rendering domestic servants increasingly precarious and disposable with the threat of dismissal from service looming large.

Contrary to the widely held and perpetuated association of domestic work with the female gender, domestic service as an occupation has historically never been the sole domain of women in the Indian subcontinent. Male servants have been a constant fixture in Pakistan and have often been recruited to perform tasks conventionally designated as "'men's work'" such as "the roles of maali (gardener), driver, khansama (cook), naukar (male servant) and guard have been considered 'male' roles (at least since the colonial period) whereas care-work, nursing, laundry, dusting, serving, and housekeeping have been considered 'feminine' tasks "(Amirali 87). However, the allotment and distribution of domestic service does not follow such a fixed, straightforward, gendered logic at all times, but is rather determined on the basis of intersecting variables of skill, caste, gender and age of the particular servant to be hired.

Reading fictional work by a writer of Kamila Shamsie's reputation from an alternate vantage point has significant implications. As a cultural producer, her contribution to bringing global readership to the Pakistani Anglophone literary canon has been widely appreciated and consequently

her work has been subjected to much academic inquiry. Her first four novels, published in quick succession and largely set in "an elite Karachi of gated communities, private members' clubs, and exclusive beaches", closely coincide with her foray into journalistic writing that was prompted by her intention to provide "informed political and cultural commentary on Islam and Pakistan" in an effort to counter the gross misinformation about Pakistan and Pakistanis circulated by the global media during the War on Terror (Chambers 213; Tolan 2). While these four novels largely draw attention to a civilized class of Pakistani bourgeois elites, *Salt and Saffron*, most notably, is populated by a number of "minor, shadowy and generic" servant figures whose "psychologically and culturally remote" subjectivities remain underexplored within this novel as well as in scholarship on this text (Hai 51). A close analysis of such a canonical novel in tandem with two lesser known short stories that this paper considers to be examples of 'servitude fiction', one of which is authored by Shamsie herself, serves two purposes- firstly, it highlights a genre-based classism inherent in the differing literary treatment of domestic servants in the two different literary genres namely the novel and the short story; secondly, it seeks to supplement and in a way, upend existing modes of reading postcolonial Pakistani canonical texts, by investigating the novel from the perspectives of erstwhile invisibilized characters.

Decoding Servitude in Literary Texts

Salt and Saffron, a first-person narrative, in addition its myriad thematic concerns, encapsulates the protagonist Aliya's journey of self-critical evaluation of her own internalisation of her aristocratic family's class prejudices through her attempts to demystify her aunt Mariam's elopement with her family's cook Masood, an event that is shrouded in a cloak of humiliation and infamy. As a graduate from a college in the USA with extensive ties to an estranged arm of her family settled in the UK after their separation during the partition of 1947, Aliya, much akin to the author Shamsie herself, is equipped with a transnational "insider- outsider", "hyphenated or multiply-affiliated" perspective, that propels Aliya to gain a more nuanced understanding of these servants as individuals on one hand, and domestic servitude as an entrenched societal problem in post-colonial Pakistan on the other (Hai 143). However, as this paper will elucidate through this novel's analysis, such an understanding is only partially achieved since the novel falls short of delving into the inner consciousness of any of its servant characters. The servants' perspectives have only been made available in the novel through "reported dialogue… retold via an upper-class narrator" (52).

The distinction between the old feudal and the relatively liberalized outlook on domestic servitude is made manifest in the differing treatments of servants by Abida, Aliya's grandmother and the matriarch of the family, and Aliya respectively. While the novel maintains relative silence on Abida's education and upbringing, her aristocratic lineage provides grounds to make the educated assumption that she has been bred in the values of Muslim *sharafat*[2] which codified that a reformed Muslim household was one where "the domestic servants were appropriately distanced, shown their right place within the household hierarchy, and kept under constant observation". (Bashir 515). Her carefully maintained distance from servants and her non-attribution of any individuality to these figures is made evident in her comment "Family retainers were one thing, but what reason had I to look at other people's servants?" (Shamsie 25). Abida's lament for her aristocratic family's loss of former glory and the gradual waning of its illustriousness in a postcolonial Pakistan is expressed when she says, "I remember the days when servants were fired if their hands shook while they were serving food" (115). Such a statement firmly foregrounds the salience of servants in the assertion of the elite class's social standing. Her eschewal of verbal communication in favour of an authoritative gesture while summoning the family cook is another example of her attempt at consolidating her self-identity as the superior class by way of reinforcing the servant's subordinate status within the household hierarchy (115).

In contrast to Abida's overtly discriminatory attitudes to servant figures, the novel posits the subtler ways in which Aliya and her parents' generation participate in and conform to the society's entrenched cultures of servitude. As part of a modern urban elite society, Aliya and her parents distinguish themselves from their rural relatives on the basis of the degree of obsequiousness that they expect from servants. Her father being "struck by the deference" (152) of the servants on Jahangir's estate conveys that despite their reliance on domestic servants, Aliya's parents share a more liberalized outlook on servants. The novel is replete with references to Aliya's easy-going relationship with her family's servants and the occasional reversal of the employer-servant dynamic in the form of Aliya "chauffeuring" (186) Masood around or driving the gardener to the bus stop. Aliya's hesitant description of Masood as "virtually family" (187) conveys the upper class's deployment of kinship-based terms to designate domestic servants in order to frame this structurally unequal relationship as one of protection and dependency.

Aliya's fond description of her camaraderie with her former cook Masood is undercut with her admission- "English is the language of advancement in Karachi, and I taught Masood as much as was necessary to enable him to laugh at my jokes" (59). Such a statement is revelatory on two fronts- firstly it highlights that in conjunction with performing their assorted tasks, domestic servants are also burdened with providing affective labour for their employers' gratification; secondly, Aliya's gatekeeping of the language from her servant highlights her lack of intention in equipping him with a skill that may enhance his possibility of upward social mobility. English, in postcolonial contexts, acts as a "line of distinction based on based on linguistic discrimination" and "has continued to produced images of 'Self' and 'Other…'" (Rehman 130). As a language that is still largely the reserve of the upper classes in the postcolonial nations and is predominantly associated with the arrival of modernity in these regions, the dissemination of English to a lower-class servant threatens to confound the boundaries separating the elite employers and their premodern servants. However, the novel does provide Aliya with a redemptive opportunity when she protests against the benevolent pretensions of a distant feudal relative running for the elections: "And incidentally, in all your talk of the largesse you provide to these benighted souls, you never mentioned education. Masood so often said he wanted to learn to read and write English, and I never even offered to teach him" (Shamsie 150). While such poignant realisation of Aliya's embeddedness in cultures of domestic servitude comes from her retrospective evaluation of her interactions with Masood, Masood's own voice remains largely missing from the narrative. In the rare instances where Masood's words are made available to the reader via reported dialogue, they do not convey any protestation or discontent on his part against his subordinate status. Rather, Masood's comparison of his deftness in crafting delectable meals for Aliya's family with Ghalib's sublime verse-making relays Masood's satisfaction and sense of pride in serving Aliya's family (183).

Masood's silence in the novel is juxtaposed with the relatively greater agency that is wielded by another servant figure in the novel, namely the Hibiscus- Eating Ayah, the former caretaker of Aliya. On being informed of the Ayah's switching of her long-time employment for a more financially lucrative one, Aliya incredulously asks "You're leaving only because of money? (209). Aliya's question is followed by the Ayah's speedy retort, "Only because of money! I have two granddaughters. Their stepfather is a waster…You think I'm going to let my grandchildren grow up to be servants? (209-10). Such an assertive statement firmly foregrounds the Ayah as a desiring subject who views her occupation as a stepping stone to better social mobility for her descendants. Her aspirational stance and her "orientation towards the future" (Amirali 237) conveys her willingness to exert agency, however limited, amidst the uncertainties of her occupation and life in general. Her actions do not constitute a blatantly flagrant resistance against her employers but comprises a process of negotiation with the exploitative system of servitude, as is succinctly described by Uday Chandra:

> To resist in our narrower but arguably more robust sense of the term, is therefore, to minimally apprehend the conditions of one's subordination, to endure or withstand those conditions in everyday

> life, and act with sufficient intention and purpose to negotiate power relations from below in order to rework them in a more favourable or emancipatory direction (565).

While the novel's treatment of its servant figures, though somewhat distant, is generally sympathetic, in certain instances it verges on the comical, the *Niswaar*-spitting Ayah being a case in point. Her description indicates a caricaturish portrayal:

> … a wizened woman who convinced me [Aliya] that my family would suffer not a whit if I regularly took a small amount of money from my father's wallet and gave it to her for her supply of *niswaar*, that ghastly, green, tobacco-based concoction which she would spit out in my basin without properly swiliing out the spatter afterwards (Shamsie 207).

The employment of such a "ridiculing mode of representation" (Hai 97) is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, the labelling of this character as a thief draws upon and reinforces the pervasive and firmly entrenched notion of servants as thieves[3] and potential criminals. The imposition of such labels on servants not only demeans and dehumanizes them (a facet of servitude that is dealt with incisively in Amina Ahmad's "Scar" discussed later in this paper) but also has deleterious consequences such as loss of employment and social ostracization. Such labelling practices constitute a controlling mechanism whereby a servant is required to repeatedly provide evidence of their honesty and loyalty in order to ward off such negative preconceived notions. Secondly, the juxtaposition of the adult Ayah's pilfering tendencies with Aliya's childish innocence further heightens the depravity of the Ayah's crime and intensifies the readers' negative perception of the character. A novel's portrayal of servant characters cannot and should not strive to be positive at all times, just as in the depiction of any other character in a novel. However, it is imperative for any fictional work to exercise caution and sensitivity in order to not slip into familiar tropes of stereotypical representation while dealing with subaltern characters. Thirdly, the Ayah's "uncouthness" (Shamsie 207) and addiction to tobacco-based substances provides a sharp contrast against which the refinement and civilization of Aliya's bourgeoisie family is amplified.

The generic category of the short story has been deemed by some scholars to be uniquely suitable for the "intensive exploration of marginal figures" (Hai 146). Taking cues from the critical appraisals of the short story form made by writers Frank O'connor and R.K. Narayan, Ambreen Hai emphasises the genre's appropriateness in probing into the servant characters' psyches and illuminating their perspectives on the world around them. The short story's keen interest in "a submerged population group" (O'Connor 86) comprising figures such as "tramps, artists, lonely idealists, dreamers and spoiled priests" (88) coupled with its shorter length "where a whole lifetime must be crowded in a few minutes" (89) allows for a brief and intense exploration of the human psyche within a smaller expanse. A similar view regarding the short story's aptness for dealing with marginal lives is echoed by R. K. Narayan when he opines:

> … I realized that the short story is the best medium for utilizing the wealth of subjects available. A novel is a different proposition altogether, centralized as it is on a major theme, leaving out, necessarily, a great deal of the available material on the periphery. Short stories on the other hand, can cover a wider field by presenting concentrated miniatures of human experience in all its opulence (viii).

The two short stories namely "Surface of Glass" and "Scar" that are to be discussed in this section serve as prime examples of servitude fiction. Centered on two female domestic servants named Razia and Kaakee respectively whose stories are told through third-person narrative voices, these two fictional texts depict their marginal conditions and illuminate their complex subjectivities situated and shaped at the intersection of systemic, social,material conditions and inner turmoils.

"Surface of Glass" provides a glimpse into the micropolitics between servants working within the same household, by focusing on Razia's mounting suspicion against the newly employed cook. Razia, serving her employers in the capacity of an Ayah (caretaker for the children) and a house-

keeper is acutely aware of her lower placement within the servants' hierarchical order as compared to the cook. Her inferior positioning builds up misplaced resentment against her fellow worker that is captured succinctly in the words: "She also didn't know why the new cook hated her so much. But among all the not knowing there was this piece of knowing: that he did hate her" (Shamsie, "Surface of Glass" 316). The instability of Razia's current employment tenure is made painfully clear when the elder daughter of the family comments "Why do I need an ayah now at this age, when I am old enough for lipstick and even a little rouge?"(317) Razia's acute sense of shame in being reminded of her disposable status within the household that too within the cook's earshot is pithily but poignantly conveyed in her meek question- " so why did the daughter have to say it when he was listening?" (317)

Razia's sheer powerlessness against her employers' tacit threat of termination and her financial distress gets further redirected towards the cook who is held responsible for thwarting her son's promotion in a job. Dubbing the cook as the "devil's helpmate" (318), Razia pins the blame of her son's misfortune on the cook's imagined disruption of her prayer session by "smoothen[inge]ed the mat and let[ting] the devil sit on it" (317). In desperation, Razia reaches out to a village *hakim*, an Islamic spiritual healer and physician, to undo the effects of the cook's supposed black magic. A notable feature of Razia's speech and actions throughout the short story is her repeated use of religious rhetoric such as "Allah's will" (318), the Devil, and the incorporation of other concomitant religious gestures and practices. Alia Amirali's ethnographic study on Pakistani domestic servants' yields crucial insight in this regard:

> At the level of the self, religious discourse appears to be one of the core conceptual vocabularies deployed by my interlocutors to establish their place (and that of others) in the world, to elevate, ascribe, describe, and claim worth in moral and social terms, as individuals and as collectives (182).

This particular short story redeploys the existing stereotype of the servant as the backward and premodern Other entrenched in superstitions in order to invert the readers' gaze toward the steep socio-economic uncertainties that render these poor people precarious and the fundamentally flawed society that stigmatizes them. By turning to religiosity in order to offset her life's overwhelming odds, Razia makes use of possibly "the only form of social capital" (182) that is available to her as a servant.

Despite the contingent nature of her employment and being considered dispensable by her employers, Razia harbours a sense of paradoxical loyalty towards her employers and an earnest concern for their well-being. She blows "prayers around the house, both outside and inside" lest her employers also be the unwitting victims of the new cook's nefarious machinations (Shamsie, "Surface of Glass" 318). Her praying "twice around the bed of the younger daughter who didn't wear lipstick yet" betrays her maternal love for her employer's wards coupled with the painful realisation of the inevitability of her dismissal from service once the younger daughter grows old enough (318). Her engagement in praying for her son's promotion and her employers' family indicates, on her part, a dissolution of the boundary separating her own family and that of the employers. This act of praying for her employers' well-being suggests Razia's emotional commitment to the family that transcends beyond what the terms of her service dictate or her meagre salary can recompense.

Whereas "Surface of Glass" deals with the psychological turmoil of a domestic servant in her precarious occupation, Aamina Ahmad's "Scar" offers a profound exploration of a maidservant's daughter's growing awareness of her own place in the world vis-a-vis the erosion of her friendship with her employer's daughter, wrought by the enormous class divide between them. Once a playmate and close friend to the employer's daughter, Aalia whose secrets and teenage romantic fancies she had happily taken part in, Kaakee, now a young woman ruminates on how their lives' trajectories have diverged. The short story probes into a child Kaakee's awareness of the steeply unequal nature of their friendship:

> She remembered sitting in Aalia's room with her friends knowing, as she sat there, what a privilege it was to be included… She would sit on the floor, a little apart, ready to bring in the trolley with snacks for them… justifying her presence… It didn't matter. She was there" (Ahmad 351).

This passage explicates a young Kaakee's unencumbered attitude to this cross-class friendship and how any incipient sense of shame in the child's mind is overpowered by her euphoria in being privy to the activities and pastimes of her friend. Her naive hope in the permanence of this friendship is coupled with her internalisation of her own servile and subordinate status within the household owing to her being the child of a maidservant. The passage also highlights how the logic of spatial segregation is an important component of domestic servitude and is essential to the demarcation and maintenance of a boundary between an employer and their servant.

The narrative sensitively portrays Kaakee's feelings of shame and stigma in her identity as a servant that intensify as she steps into adulthood. These feelings of shame are conveyed in the story through references to subtle self-conscious gestures on Kaakee's part such as tugging at her Kameez or being hyper aware of her own body odour in Aalia's friend's presence. (348)

The story also engages with a servant's aspiration for a fulfilling domestic life, an aspect that remains somewhat missing from the two other narratives that this paper has studied. In Kaakee's case, her desire for marriage indicates a longing for companionship on one hand and a life of "personal freedom,mobility, leisure, socialising and autonomy" (Amirali 241) on the other, experiences that are denied to her in her life in servitude. Kaakee and her mother's yearning for "clean-looking men with six-weekly haircuts, a profession and Rs 2000 a month" (Ahmad 348) as a prospective husband for Kaakee is situated in a wider Pakistani social discourse where the ability to provide for a wife at home is held to be a desirable trait in a good husband. While Kaakee's desire for a marriage might appear counterproductive since it involves exchanging the exploitative institution of domestic servitude for the patriarchal institution of a marriage, this desire has to understood as situated in a context where marriage constitutes one of the few possible conduits available to escape the "gendered unfreedoms of everyday life" (Amirali 240). Marriage, in the South Asian context in general and the Pakistani context in particular, is considered to be an idealised goal for the majority of women across all classes, as is expressed in the narrative through the arrangements that are in full swing for Aalia's impending wedding. By foregrounding herself as a desiring being, Kaakee lays claim to a selfhood beyond her subservient status and urges the story's readers to recognise and consider her as a full human being.

In conjunction with being attentive to the inner psyche of Kaakee, the narrative also draws attention to a gritty reality of the lives of domestic servants. When an expensive necklace gifted by Aalia's in-laws goes missing, both Aalia and her mother suspect Kaakee to have stolen the piece of jewellery. Even before the blame is verbally pinned on her, Kaakee feels the surveilling gaze of her employers on her back- "She swallowed, there was only one explanation now for why the jewelry hadn't been found. She thought she could hear Baaji and Aalia talking softly to each other" (Ahmad 355). Despite her long association with Aalia's family," cleaning it [their house] since she was eight" (355), she is not afforded a chance to plead her innocence and is preemptively labelled a thief. The almost instant shift in Aalia's mother's demeanor towards Kaakee after the necklace goes missing signifies the volatility of the employer-servant relationship where the affective ties of trust, affection and intimacy can be withdrawn by the employer at any given moment, even without concrete proof of a servant's infraction. The combined feelings of shame, anger, betrayal, grief and helplessness transforms Kaakee's mental anguish into a physical sensation, manifesting as a "searing pain in her chest" (356). 'It is ironic enough that after the completion of the whole ordeal, instead of extending comfort to her own daughter, Kaakee's mother expresses gratitude towards Aalia's mother's munificence in not filing a police complaint against Kaakee (357). On one hand this demonstrates the absolute and utter power that an employer has the ability to wield on the life and destiny of a servant, and on the other it highlights the "expectations of servility, self- abasement, ingratiation, subordination, indignity" that are a part and parcel of a life in domestic servitude (Hai 6).

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to break fresh ground by re-reading a Pakistani anglophone canonical novel from the perspective of domestic servitude in conjunction with a close analysis of two short stories that exemplify the emerging category of servitude fiction. The reading of *Salt and Saffron* conducted in this paper has elucidated that despite domestic servitude not being one of the central thematic concerns of the novel, domestic servants essay a range of diegetic roles in shaping and interrogating the identities and class consciousnesses of the protagonist and her family. This demonstrates that employing the analytical lens of domestic servitude not only provides a valuable entry-point in expanding existing interpretations of canonical texts, it also interrogates classist modes of representation and paves the way for newer, more egalitarian modes to emerge. The analysis of the short stories "Surface of Glass" and "Scar" illuminates the inner consciousnesses of two servant figures. While literary servants may not be the exact reflections of real-world domestic servants, servitude fiction provides a crucial terrain for the expression and exploration of complex subjectivities of these otherwise invisibilized figures, in ways that might challenge and revise the homogenising and dominant perceptions about them.

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Notes

[1] *Biraderi* meaning 'brotherhood' is the local term used in Pakistan to designate patrilineal, endogamous kinship groups which form crucial structuring components in Pakistan's rural social order. Other closely linked terms include *zaat* (ancestry, caste) and *quom*(tribe, sect, nation). For more on *biraderi* as caste and class categorisation, see Channa, *Four Essays on Education, Caste and Collective Action in Rural Pakistan*.

[2] *Sharafat* primarily meaning 'respectability', an idea that was closely associated with Islamic reformism and Islamic modernity in pre-partition India. For more on *sharafat* as a codifying principle for gendered organisation of space, see Faisal Fatehali Devji.

[3] Such notion of servants as thieves is not just particular to the South Asian context, but has prevalence all around the world, such as in the case of migrant Irish women servants employed in the US (see Andrew Urban) or domestic servants in Greece (see Pothiti Hanzaroula).

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