

**Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review**

**Print ISSN: 3006-5887**

**Online ISSN: 3006-5895**

**<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>**

**EXPLORATION OF SOCIO-CULTURAL DEFORMITIES IN  
LAYOUT OF PAKISTANI SOCIETY THROUGH USMAN ALI'S  
THE GUILT**

**Aman Iftikhar<sup>\*1</sup>, Dr. Muazzam Sharif<sup>2</sup>**

*<sup>\*1</sup>M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan  
University Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan*

*<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan  
University Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.*

*<sup>\*1</sup>[amaniftikhar420@gmail.com](mailto:amaniftikhar420@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup>[sharifmuazzam@gmail.com](mailto:sharifmuazzam@gmail.com)*



## Abstract

*Postcolonial theory, a key aspect of literary studies, explores how colonialism shaped identities, power structures, and cultural narratives. The study is about the socio-cultural malformations that are built into the structure of Pakistani society as depicted in the play, *The Guilt*, by Usman Ali. The research method used in this study is qualitative research and the data analysis technique is close reading. Themes in this text are explored using post-colonial theory, feminist theory and grief studies. The study shows how *The Guilt* is used as a medium to criticize the state of Pakistani theatre post-colonial era, to make the audience aware of the social ills, which include vulgarism, lack of legality in the audience, political censorship under military dictatorship and the commercialization of art. The play's themes and emotions are rooted in the life of a sensitive artistic consciousness in Pakistan, casting a spotlight on the lives of stage actors whose experience is one of social hostility and institutional neglect. The paper also explores how Pakistani theatrical culture has been systematically undermined by postcolonial circumstances such as hybridity, identity crisis, and post-General Zia-ul-Haq era of military Islamisation. The symbolism of the mirror, the broken cycle, the old computer in Usman Ali's work is multifaceted and provides a rich ground for postcolonial analysis, suggesting themes of moral decay, generational disorientation, and the unfulfilled promise of Pakistani art. The study suggests that *The Guilt* is not only a play, but also a sociocultural document, which charts the deformities of postcolonial Pakistani society.*

**Keywords** *Post-colonialism, Marxism, Alterity, Resistance, Close Reading, Dominancy, Euro-centrism, Identity, Hybridity, Theatre.*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Modern literature of the colonizing era began during the Age of Discovery, which was spearheaded by the Portuguese, and initiated a set of changes that would alter societies, cultures and literary traditions around the world. The legacy of colonialism in Pakistan is deeply embedded in its social, cultural, and artistic practices, leaving a lasting impact on the country's overall identity. Theatre in Pakistan is a symptom of the deformities that have been created within the fabric of the social organism due to the postcolonial situation, in particular. The English foreign theatre cannot thrive without being modified in the Pakistani cultural context where the audience is imbued with stereotypical attitudes, generated by century-long colonial conditioning and post-colonial ideological struggle. Postcolonial literature, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1998) explain, is an ideal medium for contesting colonial knowledge production, an instrument of resistance to dominant narratives and the basis on which marginalized cultures can claim their histories and identities.

Play *The Guilt*, which was penned by Usman Ali, is one of the most important plays in the realm of Pakistani Anglophone theatre. The play reflects both the nuances of a society which is struggling to balance traditional attitudes with the needs of contemporary art forms and colonial history with the pressures of the new nation-state-building. The play was inspired by the tragic life and death of Murtaza Hassan, popularly known as "Mastana" a renowned stage actor who was mistreated by the authorities and the people of Pakistan who attended his theatrical performances. Ali's drama is about the nature of art in a society where art was not valued, art was not protected, theatre had become a place of obscenity in the eyes of conservative people and the nation's cultural life was destroyed by the heavy censorship exercised by the military government of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988).

Theatrical history is inextricably linked with Pakistan's colonial experience and post-colonial struggles. Theatre in South Asia began in the 5th to 3rd century BC, and was greatly affected by the Hindu culture and Sanskrit epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana. The Parsis started commercial theatre in the early part of

# Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

the 19th century and later Urdu theatre. Following partition in 1947, two streams of theatre emerged; one for the elite audience, with western adaptation, and the other was a form of folk, music and comedy for the masses. After the introduction of military rule, especially during the late tenure of Zia-ul-Haq, the theatrical content was heavily restricted and the state enforced censorship in keeping with Islamic principles with ordinances like Hudood and Zina Ordinance, thus ushering a cultural crisis that Ali's drama aims to capture and address.

## 1.2. Research Problem

The study problem of the study is related to socio-cultural deformities present in the layout of Pakistani society; as seen in *The Guilt* of Usman Ali. The deformities involve three aspects: religious, social and cultural. The religious aspect refers to the orthodox and extreme Islamic or Pan-Islamic position that a portion of the audience upholds that doesn't accept innovative and challenging theatrical material. The social dimension is related to the mentality of audiences from segregated parts of society which are incapable of absorbing complex artistic stories and react to them with abuse, indifference or moral condemnation. The cultural dimension is an emerging one in which the issue of 'Pakistanization' of English drama is explored and discussed, and is met with a lot of resistance in a society with strong colonial upbringing and postcolonial identity issues.

The play reveals many problems which have emerged from the lack of guidance, proper social mechanisms, open intellectual exchange in the elementary level of understanding art. The idea of "Pakistanizing" English drama is therefore a key research question, one that explores the possibility of making the most of forms and conventions acquired from the colonial past without falling into medievalism or obscenity. Furthermore, the play brings forth the issue of the total moral degeneration of the culture of theatre in Pakistan under the military rule and the commercialisation of theatre, which today has become an instrument for earning money rather than serving any purpose.

## 1.3. Research Questions

1. What factors hinder public acceptance of English theatre in Pakistan, as reflected in *The Guilt* by Usman Ali?
2. How do social norms, traditions, and colonial legacies influence the development of English theatre in Pakistan?
3. How does *The Guilt* represent the socio-cultural conditions shaping theatre in the postcolonial context?

## 1.4. Research Objectives

1. To analyze Pakistani society and colonial influences through the themes and characters in *The Guilt*.
2. To explore the role of English theatre as a postcolonial literary and cultural form in Pakistan.
3. To examine the contribution of Pakistani writers in shaping critical perspectives on art, culture, and society.

## 1.5. Significance of the Study

The importance of the research can be noted in its contribution towards the study of postcolonial literature, especially the study of Pakistani Anglophone drama which is an unexplored area of research. The study reveals the disastrous circumstances of artistic life in Pakistani society, shedding light on the manner in which the colonial history and the military censorship and hostility of the audience had distorted the Pakistan cultural and theatre scenes. The play and the analysis of it is a mirror that allows Pakistani society to reflect its deformities, especially the repression of sensitive artistic consciousness, and the enslavement of art to the demands of political expediency and moral conservatism. The study also makes a contribution to the understanding of the role of theatrical texts as documents of social critique, and provides a model for reading Pakistani drama from the intersecting perspectives of postcolonial theory, feminist critique and grief studies.

## 2. Literature Review

There has been an abundance of scholarship in postcolonial studies which has provided theoretical support for the study. Postcolonial theory, developed by key scholars like Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, looks at the time period following the Western colonialism and refocuses the project of reclaiming the history and agency of the people colonized by the West (Fanon, 1963; Said, 1978; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1988). As a group, these scholars believe that colonialism was not just an economic and political phenomenon, but also a cultural shift that transformed the cultural identity, literary traditions and psychological orientations of colonized nations. As argued by Spivak (1988), postcolonial studies offer a basic

# Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

challenge to social science, and propose "subaltern" alternatives to dominant Western paradigms of knowledge and research.

Said's *Orientalism* is still a key book to grasp the western portrayal of the ideals and cultures of the east, and how the bolstered the colonial ideology. Said shows how the inferiority, exoticism and irrationality of the East were used to explain colonial rule and how the process has been followed in literary, theatrical and cultural works by the postcolonial scholars. In the Pakistani context, the orientalist tradition can be seen how the art of theatre has been condemned as obscene by conservative masses who believed in the colonial moral frameworks and lower order of society by the theatrical performance which was perceived as such by the elite classes. According to Barry (2002), postcolonial writers bring a pre-colonial version of their country and culture into existence to challenge the colonialist ideology that had degraded indigenous culture.

The idea of hybridity proposed by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) is a very useful approach to the Pakistani theatre. Bhabha points out that colonization brought into native cultures the culture of the coloniser, and created a space of cultural encounter where neither side's culture has survived. It is a hybridization at the racial, cultural, and linguistic-political level, which results in new racial, cultural, and linguistic-political identities that are in-between and contested. In theatrical terms the hybridity is visible in the issue of 'Pakistanising' of English drama; which involves a negotiation between the colonial theatrical forms inherited and indigenous cultural expressions. From Bhabha's (1994) perspective, hybrid cultures and identities provoke fear on the part of the coloniser because they call into question the limits of cultural power.

In his article titled "Colonialism: Psychological Impact of Colonialism on the Colonized" that appeared in the journal *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, Dharmeshkumar Sunilbhai Patel states that colonialism was very much intertwined with psychological impacts on the colonized people and that it has left a lasting impact in the creation of hybrid literature and the critical reactions of the colonized people. Patel's analysis is based on Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), which he uses to make the claim that violent colonial rule gave rise to counter-cultural narratives that challenged the Western domination of literature and culture. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986) also illustrates how the imperial mode of speaking and writing, and its dominating power in the decolonized state, are manifested in language, literature and political and cultural life. Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel, *Things Fall Apart*, portrays the struggle of the Igbo for their identity within the colonial setting, whereas Pakistani artists also experience similar struggles for recognition in a postcolonial society that is formed by the legacy of colonial rule.

Tony Myers (2003) defines post-colonial literature as literature created by nations that have gained independence from colonial rule in the twentieth century, and that treats the political, cultural, economic and linguistic consequences of European colonialism. Postcolonial theory also acknowledges the polarities created by the colonial discourses, as Leela Gandhi (1998) maintains, and attempts to break down these hierarchies. In Pakistan, such oppositions have been played out in the theatre arena where the English dramatic tradition has been perceived as "civil", "respectable" and the popular theatrical performances as "vulgar" and "obscene".

Researchers like Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) have examined the theatrical aspect of postcolonial experience, which affects language, education, religion, artistic sensibilities and many other areas such as popular culture. They believe that postcolonialism is a response to, resistance to, and a challenge to the legacy of colonialism in cultural practice, such as theatre. As a genre of theatre, post-colonial drama explores the legacy of colonialism on culture, identity and communication, dissenting against dominant narratives and affirming the voices of the colonised (Lawson, 1992). Theatre groups in Pakistan like Ajoka Theatre, Tehrik-e-Niswan and Dastak have been very significant in engaging theatre as a means of resistance against the conservative ideology and political repression.

Abid Ali, in his research paper on the reflection of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty in Usman Ali's *The Guilt*, describes the play as an example of theatre that functions amidst conditions of war, terrorism, cruelty, and extremism, producing a chaotic and highly charged artistic environment. Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, which Stephen Barber describes as a vital but often impossible theatre, provides a critical lens through which to understand the raw and unmediated experiences that Ali's drama seeks to convey. Fareeha Zaheer's research on grief and abjection in Usman Ali's Anglophone plays applies Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's (1969) model of grief — comprising the stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance — to argue that Ali's plays function as meditations on loss, not only personal loss but the collective cultural loss associated with the decline of theatre in postcolonial Pakistan.

# **Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review**

**Print ISSN: 3006-5887**

**Online ISSN: 3006-5895**

Ahmed Raza Memon's analysis of *The Disorder of Things: Rethinking Social Critique in Postcolonial Pakistan* examines the complex entanglement of social orders within Pakistan that are interwoven with postcolonial aspects. Memon argues that many of Pakistan's political setups were supported by upper caste systems, and that the mighty British colonial legacy continues to haunt the era even after formal decolonization. Similarly, Ahmed, Tahir, and Bhatti (2022) document the attitudes towards theatre in Pakistan, noting that it has never been considered a respectable profession for women or for those belonging to lower social classes, a prejudice that has its roots in colonial social structures and that has been reinforced by postcolonial conservatism. The study of impoliteness strategies in Pakistani stage drama has also been addressed by Abbas, Rozina, and Suleiman (2011), who examine politeness and impoliteness as relational and dynamic phenomena in literary discourse, and by Alawawda and Hassan (2021), who analyze impoliteness in postcolonial dramatic texts. These studies provide a framework for understanding the use of crude humor, verbal aggression, and meta-disparagement in *The Guilt* as strategic tools for exposing and critiquing the deformities of Pakistani society.

The feminist dimension of postcolonial studies, particularly in relation to gender-based violence, rape, and patriarchal control, has been addressed by scholars such as Lee Ellis (1989), whose synthesized theory of rape argues that it is a pseudo-sexual act motivated by the male desire to maintain dominance and economic control over women. Etty Terem's *Women's Lives in Colonial and Post-Colonial Maghreb* applies feminist theory to examine the patriarchal behaviors of colonial powers and the cultural lag that persists in postcolonial societies with respect to women's rights. Deer (2015) argues that indigenous women experience heightened levels of sexual violence that span generations, while Crenshaw (1991) notes that anti-rape law and judicial reforms have not adequately addressed the needs of women of color. These feminist frameworks are relevant to the analysis of gender dynamics in *The Guilt*, which, while primarily concerned with theatrical decline, also comments on the broader social conditions of women in postcolonial Pakistani society.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1. Nature of the Study**

The research is qualitative in nature. As Schwartz (2007, p. 195) defines it, research methodology is a theory of how an inquiry should proceed, involving the analysis of assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry. Qualitative research is appropriate for the study because it allows for an in-depth examination of the social, cultural, and literary dimensions of Usman Ali's *The Guilt*, generating interpretations rather than measurements and focusing on meaning rather than quantity. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2003), research is something that people undertake in order to find out new things in a systematic way, thereby increasing their knowledge. The study follows the systematic approach by drawing on textual evidence, theoretical frameworks, and secondary scholarly sources to generate a coherent and well-supported analysis.

#### **3.2. Research Design**

The research design employed in the study is that of a case study, specifically a case study of Usman Ali's *The Guilt* as a representative text of Pakistani postcolonial Anglophone drama. Kumar and Rahman (2015) argue that theoretical frameworks are tools whereby scholars can methodically arrange their materials with an emphasis on specific areas, providing a structure that ensures logical and coherent research questions and well-supported findings. The case study design is appropriate here because it allows for a focused and detailed analysis of a single text while situating that text within its broader socio-cultural and historical context. The research design incorporates thematic analysis, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis as complementary methods for examining the characters, themes, symbols, and dialogue of the play.

#### **3.3. Data Collection Procedure**

The primary source of data for the research is the play *The Guilt* (2014) by Usman Ali, published by Sawan Publication, Lahore. The text is the focal point of the study and provides the evidence base for all claims regarding the socio-cultural deformities of Pakistani society as depicted in the drama. The secondary sources of data include published research papers, scholarly articles, theses, literary journals, and books related to postcolonial theory, Pakistani theatre, feminist theory, and grief studies. Key secondary sources include the works of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1998), Bhabha (1994), Said (1978), Fanon (1963), Spivak (1988), and several Pakistani and international scholars whose work bears directly on the themes of the play. Additionally,

# Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

interviews conducted with individuals from the Pakistani theatrical community, such as Sohail Ahmad and Agha Nasir, have been drawn upon as contextual sources.

### 3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

The primary method of data analysis employed in the study is close reading, a technique that involves an in-depth analysis of a text by attending carefully to its diction, syntax, imagery, and literary devices. Close reading allows the researcher to move beneath the surface of the text to access the author's intentions and the deeper meanings embedded in the narrative. Through the technique, the researcher examines the characters, themes, symbols, and dialogues of *The Guilt* to identify and analyze the socio-cultural deformities it documents. The technique of thematic analysis is also employed, identifying recurring themes and patterns in the text and using these to address the central research questions. Discourse analysis is applied to examine the impoliteness strategies and verbal aggression present in the dialogue of the play, analyzing how these function as tools of social critique.

### 3.5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study draws upon three primary theoretical traditions. The first is postcolonial theory, as developed by Said (1978), Bhabha (1994), Fanon (1963), and Spivak (1988), which provides the overarching interpretive lens for understanding the socio-cultural deformities of Pakistani society as depicted in *The Guilt*. The second theoretical tradition is feminist theory, particularly as applied to postcolonial contexts. Lee Ellis's (1989) synthesized theory of rape and Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) analysis of women's relegation to a sphere of immanence in *The Second Sex* provide the feminist grounding for the study's engagement with gender-based dimensions of postcolonial experience. The third theoretical tradition is grief studies, specifically Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's (1969) model of grief, which Fareeha Zaheer applies to Usman Ali's plays to understand how loss — personal, cultural, and theatrical — is processed and expressed in the drama.

## 4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The data analysis in this section examines the socio-cultural deformities present in Usman Ali's *The Guilt* through close reading, thematic analysis, and the application of the theoretical frameworks outlined above. The analysis is organized around the key themes and symbolic structures of the play, demonstrating how Ali's drama functions as a postcolonial critique of Pakistani society and its theatrical culture.

Usman Ali's *The Guilt* is structured around three central characters: Gamma (the father), Sheera (the elder son), and Billa (the younger son), all of whom are stage actors navigating the harsh realities of Pakistani theatrical life. The play begins with a female dancer performing on stage, an act that serves both to attract the audience and to establish the environment of vulgarity and social tension that pervades the drama. The play is set against the backdrop of a declining theatrical culture, with the characters surrounded by symbols of decay and frustration: an old computer on a new table, a broken bicycle, tools such as a blade, hammer, wrench, and nut, and a mirror. As Ali writes at the opening, the stage is characterized by a war-zone atmosphere, reflecting the political turmoil and social disintegration that have accompanied the postcolonial period in Pakistan.

The inspiration for the play, as Ali himself acknowledges, was the death of Murtaza Hassan, known as Mustana, a renowned Pakistani stage actor who was slapped by a policeman during a crackdown on Naz Theatre in 2004–2005. Mustana's mistreatment left him disheartened and led him to quit theatre entirely. When he fell ill and appealed to the Chief Minister of Punjab for financial assistance, he was ridiculed even on his deathbed. Ali uses Mustana's story as a metaphor for the broader condition of Pakistani theatre and its artists, who have been subjected to governmental neglect, audience hostility, and institutional abandonment. The death of Mustana thus serves as the catalyst for the play's meditation on guilt, loss, and the decline of artistic culture in postcolonial Pakistan.

The concept of grief, as elaborated through Kübler-Ross's (1969) model, is central to the play's thematic structure. According to Fareeha Zaheer's analysis, grief in Usman Ali's plays functions as a response to a loss that carries socio-psychic, cognitive, and behavioral implications. The five stages of grief — denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance — are all present in the drama, as the characters move through a range of emotional responses to the loss of theatrical dignity, artistic integrity, and social recognition. Sheera's guilt, in particular, represents the self-realization that comes at the end of the grief process: a recognition that the golden years of theatrical life have passed, that the stage has been reduced to a site of vulgarity, and that the audience's indifference and hostility have robbed art of its transformative power.

## Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

The symbolism employed by Ali in *The Guilt* is extraordinarily rich and layered. The mirror, which hangs above the sink and stove on stage, functions as a symbol of self-evaluation, identity, and the confrontation with the passage of time. When Sheera stands before the mirror to prepare for the show, he sees himself as an aged, ambitionless person who has spent the golden years of his life without producing quality material for the audience. As Kaleem Omar writes in *A Troubadour's Life*, "Age itself is a fearsome thing" (Omar, 130), and the mirror in Ali's play embodies this fearfulness, sending Sheera into a state of denial. The broken bicycle serves as another powerful symbol, with its circular shape reflecting the wheel of life — the cycle by which younger generations inevitably replace older ones. The bicycle's state of disrepair mirrors the actor's life, reaching old age and losing the youth and charm that once gave it value. The tools scattered across the stage — the blade, hammer, wrench, and nut — signify the labor of artistic struggle, while the portrait of Hrithik Roshan, an Indian actor, hanging on the wall reflects the cultural hybridity of Pakistani artistic sensibility, the deep fondness for Indian ideals that persists despite the political division of the subcontinent.

The aesthetic experience of the play is shaped significantly by the figure of the female dancer, whose movements serve both to attract the audience and to neutralize the harsh environment of the theatrical space. Ali writes with careful attention to the dancer's movements: "The dancer becomes straight, moves slowly towards the audience, with one leg crossing the other...freezes herself with the posture" (p. 23). Later, "She takes a quick turn...she becomes still...she spins her upper body...suddenly in such a manner as if she had never danced before" (p. 23). This vulgarity, as it might be seen by conservative audiences, performs a dual function: it keeps the audience engaged with the performance while simultaneously highlighting the extent to which Pakistani theatre has been reduced to spectacle rather than substance. It also draws attention to the objectification of female performers, who are labeled "Available and Undignified" by elite audiences who pay to watch but refuse to respect.

The relationship between the three characters is characterized by verbal aggression, crude humor, and a startling absence of emotional warmth. Their dialogue is marked by foul language, abusive exchanges, and a duality of character that oscillates between comedy and melancholy. Gamma, the father, mocks Sheera for his inability to produce quality literary work: "You or a woman with naked legs and a brute face" (Gamma, p. 10). Sheera addresses Billa with "Hello! Dog. How are you? She-male?" (Sheera, p. 18). These exchanges of impoliteness function not merely as markers of social dysfunction but as a strategic form of meta-disparagement, in which the characters critique the audience's expectations of crude humor and female sexual objectification. As Zillmann (1983) notes, disparaging humor involves mocking stereotypes and prejudices to generate laughter through derogatory content; in *The Guilt*, Ali deploys such humor ironically, turning it back upon the audience to expose its dehumanizing effects.

The political turmoil of Pakistani theatrical history forms the essential backdrop against which *The Guilt* must be understood. During the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq from 1977 to 1988, a period of enforced Islamization, Pakistani commercial theatre underwent a profound crisis. Zia-ul-Haq forcibly closed cinemas and theatres, imposed the Hudood and Zina Ordinances, and enforced censorship aligned with his interpretation of Islamic principles. This period saw a dramatic shift towards religiously themed content, the suppression of provocative artistic expression, and the marginalization of theatre groups such as Ajoka, Tehrik-e-Niswan, and Dastak, which engaged with political themes. The impact of this censorship was devastating: public theatres closed, artists left the country in exile, and the revenues of the entertainment industry collapsed. In the development of Pakistani theater under General Pervez Musharraf (1999–2008) and General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988), respectively representing philosophies of Moderate Liberalism and Military Islamism, theater censorship and the suppression of creative freedoms were direct consequences of their governance.

Ali's play also engages with the concept of postcolonial hybridity, as theorized by Homi K. Bhabha (1994). The play's characters inhabit a space that is neither fully traditional nor fully modern, neither Pakistani nor Western, neither dignified nor abject. Their language is a mixture of Urdu idioms, English theatrical conventions, and the crude vernacular of popular Pakistani stage performance. Their cultural references span from Hindi film actors like Hrithik Roshan to Greek theatrical traditions to the British colonial legacy of English drama. This hybridity, rather than being a source of creative richness, is presented in the play as a site of confusion, frustration, and identity crisis. The problem of "Pakistanizing" English drama, which Ali identifies as a central concern of his work, is precisely the problem of navigating this hybrid space without losing the distinctive character of Pakistani theatrical identity.

The moral collapse that Ali documents in *The Guilt* is also linked to the broader social deformities of postcolonial Pakistani society. The play exposes how the medieval mindsets of audiences, shaped by colonial conditioning and religious conservatism, have resisted the development of a genuinely challenging and transformative theatrical culture. As Sheera laments: “I wonder if people have any spit. Once, there was a vulgar honesty in the laughter of people...honest” (Sheera, p. 36). This observation reflects the play’s central thesis: that the deformation of theatrical culture is inseparable from the deformation of the society that produces it. The audience’s indifference, expressed in the disappearance of spectators halfway through the performance, mirrors the broader social indifference towards artistic expression that Ali sees as a symptom of postcolonial malaise. Theatre and performing arts have never enjoyed a meaningful status or authority within the cultural and religious value system of Pakistani society, and authorities have consistently failed to promote or preserve this art form.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestions

### 5.1. Conclusion

This research has examined the socio-cultural deformities of Pakistani society as depicted in Usman Ali’s *The Guilt*, demonstrating that the play functions as a rich postcolonial text that documents the decline of theatrical culture in Pakistan in the aftermath of colonization and the onset of military dictatorship. Through close reading and the application of postcolonial, feminist, and grief-studies frameworks, the analysis has shown that Ali’s drama operates on multiple levels simultaneously: as a meditation on loss and grief, as a critique of audience impoliteness and social conservatism, as a document of political censorship and institutional neglect, and as a deeply symbolic exploration of identity, time, and the commodification of art.

The characters of Gamma, Sheera, and Billa embody the deformities of a society that has failed to provide its artists with dignity, respect, or the conditions necessary for genuine creative flourishing. Their crude language, frustrated outbursts, and ambiguous identities are not merely individual pathologies but symptoms of a broader social malaise rooted in colonial history, military repression, and the persistent marginalization of artistic expression. The symbolism of the mirror, the broken bicycle, the aged computer, and the female dancer all converge to produce a portrait of a theatrical culture in terminal decline, unable to renew itself because the society that sustains it has not renewed its own values and priorities.

The play’s central theme of guilt, borrowed from the Shakespearean tradition of moral reckoning, is ultimately a collective guilt: the guilt of a society that has allowed its theatrical heritage to deteriorate, that has mistreated its artists, that has imposed censorship in the name of religion, and that has reduced art to a commodity without substance or soul. Usman Ali’s *The Guilt* is thus not only a critique of Pakistani theatre but a mirror held up to Pakistani society as a whole, challenging it to confront the consequences of its own deformities and to imagine the possibility of a more equitable and enlightened cultural life.

### 5.2. Suggestions

Based on the findings of this research, several suggestions are offered for future scholarly inquiry and practical action. Future studies should focus on the role of colonizers with respect to the people who were colonized, and should give sustained attention to the postcolonial effects on individuals’ lives after partition. Researchers engaging with similar topics are strongly advised to ground their work in a thorough knowledge of prior scholarship, as the field of Pakistani postcolonial dramatic studies remains relatively underexplored and would benefit greatly from sustained scholarly attention. It is further recommended that researchers draw on a wider range of primary sources beyond *The Guilt* itself, given the relative scarcity of resources on Pakistani Anglophone theatre, in order to build a more comprehensive picture of the theatrical landscape.

From a practical standpoint, institutions and cultural organizations in Pakistan should prioritize the promotion and preservation of theatrical art as a vital component of the national cultural heritage. The experiences documented in Ali’s play — the crackdowns on theatres, the humiliation of actors, the imposition of censorship, the disappearance of audiences — should serve as cautionary lessons for policymakers and cultural administrators. A genuine commitment to creating conditions in which theatrical art can flourish, free from political interference and social stigma, is essential if Pakistan is to realize the transformative potential of its theatrical tradition and to develop a genuinely democratic and pluralistic cultural life.

## References

Abbas, A. N., & Al-Majdawi, A. M. (2018). A pragmatic analysis of impoliteness in selected British social interviews. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 7(9), 536–542.

# Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

- Abbas, N. F., Rozina, R., & Suleiman, R. (2011). Politeness: Characterization and literary discourse. *Language in India*, 11, 569–585.
- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things fall apart*. Heinemann.
- Ahmed, S., Tahir, M., & Bhatti, M. S. (2022). Not for ‘respectable’ women: Attitudes towards theatre in Pakistan. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, 3(3), 378–391.
- Alawawda, M., & Hassan, A. (2021). Impoliteness in *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* by Drew Hayden Taylor. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 5(1), 195–202.
- Ali, U. (2014). *The guilt*. Sawan Publication.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1998). *Key concepts in post-colonial studies*. Routledge.
- Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (1989). *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. Routledge.
- Barry, P. (2002). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory* (2nd ed.). Manchester University Press.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Boulton, M. (1960). *The anatomy of drama*. Kalyani Publishers.
- Coetzee, J. M. (1999). *Disgrace*. Secker & Warburg.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1949). *The second sex* (H. M. Parshley, Trans.). Gallimard. (Original work published 1949)
- Deer, S. (2015). *The beginning and end of rape: Confronting sexual violence in Native America*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Ellis, L. (1989). *Theories of rape: Inquiries into the causes of sexual aggression*. Hemisphere Publishing.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1961)
- Gandhi, L. (1998). *Postcolonial theory: A critical introduction*. Columbia University Press.
- Gilbert, H., & Tompkins, J. (1996). *Post-colonial drama: Theory, practice, politics*. Routledge.
- Groth, N. A. (1979). *Men who rape: The psychology of the offender*. Plenum Press.
- Hoffman, E. T. A. (1969). *The tales of Hoffman*. University of Chicago Press.
- Khafaga, A. (2023). Beyond relational work: A psycho-pragmatic analysis of impoliteness in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1), 1–13.
- Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying*. Macmillan.
- Lawson, A. (1992). Postcolonial theory and the settler subject. *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 56, 20–36.
- Maguire, G. (2003). *Mirror mirror: A novel*. William Morrow.
- Myers, T. (2003). *Slavoj Žižek*. Routledge.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Heinemann.
- Omar, K. (n.d.). *A troubadour’s life*. [Publisher details unavailable].
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2003). *Research methods for business students* (3rd ed.). Pearson Education.
- Schwartz, M. A. (2007). The importance of stupidity in scientific research. *Journal of Cell Science*, 121(11), 1771.
- Shakespeare, W. (1623). *Macbeth*. [Original Folio publication].
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–313). University of Illinois Press.
- Talbot, I. (2012). *Pakistan: A new history*. Hurst & Company.
- Young, R. J. C. (2016). *Postcolonialism: An historical introduction* (2nd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Zaheer, F. (n.d.). *Social anarchism and abjection: Reading grief and guilt in Usman Ali’s Anglophone plays*. [Unpublished manuscript].
- Zillmann, D. (1983). Disparagement humor. In P. E. McGhee & J. H. Goldstein (Eds.), *Handbook of humor research* (Vol. 1, pp. 85–107). Springer.
- Zillmann, D. (1983). Disparagement humor. In P. E. McGhee & J. H. Goldstein (Eds.), *Handbook of humor research* (Vol. 1, pp. 85–107). Springer.

**Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review**

**Print ISSN: 3006-5887**

**Online ISSN: 3006-5895**

Koszalkowska, K., & Wróbel, M. (2019). The roles of disparagement humor. *Humour Studies*.

Brown, D. (2012). Meta-disparagement and the limits of the comedic. *Comedy Studies*, 3(1), 19–29.