

Received : 15 July 2024, Accepted: 20 August 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13748369>

## **Domestic Realism: A Study of Mimesis and Verisimilitude in Shazaf Fatima Haider's How it Happened**

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### **Abstract**

In literature, the portrayal of human life and society as they are having been significantly influenced by realism. Balzac established it, and numerous writers, including Tolstoy, Gogol, Eliot had elevated it to prominence. Pakistani English literature also employs the same legacy. Shazaf Fatima Haider effectively employs this realism in her book and encourages readers to communicate the characteristics of Pakistani society. Additionally, the aim of this paper is to emphasize the factors that Haider has incorporated into her book that are consistent with reality. This has been accomplished by employing two concepts of realism; Mimesis and Verisimilitude. In Pakistani society, particularly in the household, marriage, education, and religion are prioritized over human rights. This is the primary concern of Haider's book and this paper as well. In domestic spheres, people are obligated to adhere to their religious beliefs only rather than look for an excellence guy or girl in the course of marriage. Additionally, women are still regarded as inferior to males, a practice that has persisted since ancient times. Additionally, Haider intends to raise awareness of a fact that grants equal status to all human beings and cautions against the unnecessary use of religion by presenting all of these facts. Haider's realistic portrayal of such genuine issues existing in Pakistani society makes her novel more considerable especially for young generation.

**Keywords:** Literary realism, domesticity, Mimesis, Verisimilitude, Pakistani English Fiction

## Introduction

The reality of society and characters is accurately depicted in realist literature. Realism has been employed by numerous authors to create the illusion that their narratives and characters are relatable to the general populace (Stern, 2021). A narrative or character that is grounded in reality is not obscured or minimized; rather, it is depicted through language. For example, in his most renowned short story, *The Overcoat*, Gogol establishes Akaky Akakievich (Girsang et al., 2023). Realism endeavored to offer an impartial representation of humanity, abandoning the elevated language of romanticism. The emergence of the English novel as a product of realism was influenced by a variety of factors, including the presence of female readers, the accumulation of affluence, compulsory education, and journalism. Wealthy women who had leisure time became ardent readers, and literacy rates were elevated by compulsory education (Knoepflmacher, 2024). The novel was popularized by journalism, which published serialized stories in periodicals. The novel became a widely supported medium as a result of these developments, as well as advancements in printing, public health, leisure time, and transportation. In contrast to romance, which emphasizes subjective, heroic narratives, the novel objectively portrays the daily lives of ordinary individuals, prioritizing character over action. The objective of novelists is to convey authentic human experiences, particularly those of the lower and middle classes, in a language that is both relatable and commonplace (Anjaria, 2017).

The aim of this paper is to elucidate the domestic reality that Haider has presented in his book, which is characterized by realism as a fundamental factor. Haider has provided a detailed account of the complexities of Pakistani society, particularly in the context of families, and the significant role that the diverse attitudes of family members play in addressing various issues. This paper will provide a more comprehensive explanation of the degree to which the primary events and characters in Haider's book are accurate. Shazaf Fatima Haider's "How it Happened" provides a perceptive depiction of Pakistani family life, with a particular emphasis on the generational conflicts and traditions that exist within the Bandian family of Bhakuraj village. The narrative, which is recounted from the viewpoint of 15-year-old Saleha Bandian, emphasizes the conservative Shia values of the family and the marriages of her older siblings, Haroon and Zeba. The matriarch, Dadi, is the central figure in

the narrative. She is responsible for matchmaking but encounters challenges with contemporary concepts such as cross-sector love nuptials. Haider humorously illustrates the intricacies of familial dynamics in Pakistani society, emphasizing the tension between tradition and change (Haider, 2012).

## Literature Review

Balzac was a pioneer of realism, with the objective of capturing the complete spectrum of French society in *La Comédie humaine*. Nevertheless, literary realism emerged in the 1850s, influenced by the aesthetic of painter Courbet (Stowe, 2014). *Le Réalisme* (1857) was the work of journalist Champfleury, who popularized Courbet's approach in literature by promoting the prominence of ordinary characters in novels. *Madame Bovary* (1857) by Gustave Flaubert was the pinnacle of realism, as it provided a meticulous depiction of the bourgeois lifestyle. Other significant realist works include *Germinie Lacerteux* (1864) by the Goncourt brothers and Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1870). Balzac's *The Black Sheep* is a prime example of realist literature, as it vividly portrays the societal constraints, familial dynamics, and ambition of 19th-century France. The novel is centered on the antagonism between brothers Joseph and Philippe Bridau, which contrasts Joseph's unscrupulous ambition with Philippe's moral integrity. The work is a compelling analysis of human nature and familial relationships, as Balzac's detailed character development and exploration of social class illuminate the brutal realities of the era. Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) addresses the themes of morality, identity, and race (Goldstein, 2009). The profundity of realism's emphasis on common people and social issues is enhanced by Twain's use of vernacular language and satire, which critiques societal hypocrisy and slavery.

A foundational work of modern Chinese literature, *Diary of a Madman* (1918) by Lu Xun critiques Confucianism and societal decay by depicting a man's descent into lunacy. It is presented as a diary, which reveals the oppressive structures of early 20th-century China by exposing societal maladies with an objective tone (Liu, 2022). *The Portrait of a Lady*, a work by Henry James, delves into the themes of personal freedom and societal expectations by following the journey of Isabel Archer, an autonomous American woman who is in search of self-discovery in Europe. The novel is renowned for its social insight and psychological profundity, as it meticulously analyzes the motivations of its characters, providing a rich

depiction of upper-class society in the late 19th century (Nadvi, 2023). The *Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin explores the tension between the societal restrictions placed on women and their aspirations for autonomy. The novel's depiction of Edna Pontellier's defiance against social norms, which followed her voyage of self-discovery, sparked controversy and harsh criticism. Initially disregarded, it is now acknowledged as a significant work of realist and feminist literature (Kornasky, 2021).

In order to investigate social values, Batool et al. (2022) examine Haider's novel *How it Happened* within the field of linguistics, which primarily employs code-switching as a methodology. The study determined that the author's utilization of code-switching in the selected work was both an inventive and artistic approach to elucidate the shared conventions of the social order. These linguistic phenomena are indicative of societal and linguistic norms, while linguistic changes are indicative of broader cultural transformations. Yasir & Hashmi (2020) have employed the stylistic analysis technique to analyze Haider's novel from a feminist perspective. In order to perform feminist stylistics analysis, he has implemented Sara Mill's framework. The research has determined that gender stereotypes are perpetuated by both males and women. In Pakistan, women encounter substantial obstacles when endeavoring to fulfill traditional responsibilities. The protagonist of the novel, a female character, frequently employs misogynistic remarks to disparage her female counterparts. In order to address these issues, it is imperative that women take the lead and raise awareness of their rights. Consequently, the empowerment of women may contribute to the establishment of an organic society. Tabassum (2021) has adopted the same concept of women's empowerment in her examination of Haider's fiction. The diversity of her research was to investigate the suppression of women within a socio-cultural context that differed from Yasir's scholastic approach. This investigation implements a textual analysis methodology to illuminate the circumstances of Pakistani women who encounter patriarchal and discriminatory cultural norms in their daily lives. The author employs bold characters as symbols of cultural deviation and self-determination to deconstruct the appalling exploitation of Pakistani women. The objective of this research is to increase awareness of the cultural imbalance and to provide Pakistani women with the necessary rights and justice to enable them to survive in their own country. Nevertheless, Zahid's et al. (2023) objective was to elucidate the cultural transition in Haider's fiction. This paper examines the manner in which women have been and have been depicted in comparable circumstances in light of the current

circumstances. The author's account has been used to analyze the cultural shifts that have occurred in a society where women's roles have evolved but the past still persists. The work addresses serious subjects in a humorous manner, without endorsing any particular perspective, as per her research. The newer generation is challenging the societal norms, as evidenced by Haider's work. The tensions between traditional values and modern perspectives are underscored by Khadija Majeed et al. in their analysis of the ironic and nostalgic aspects of the Pakistani family system in Haider's *How It Happened*. The novel critiques outdated cultural norms, notably regarding arranged marriages, and illustrates the generational clash sparked by the younger generation's desire for change. Ishfaq & Saddique (2022) underscore that the conflict arises from the rigid traditions upheld by the family matriarch, Dadi, whose authoritative methods provoke rebellion among youth like Zeba and Haroon, who advocate for progress and new ideas. The authors contend that the older generation's inflexibility exacerbates the generational gap. Qamar & Shaheen (2024) explore inter-sectarian love in the novel, noting that while it presents a patriarchal structure, it permits the younger generation some autonomy within limits.

### **Mimesis and Verisimilitude: A theoretical approach**

Mimesis is the representation of reality through art, while Verisimilitude is the presentation of life in a manner that is believed, and these are important concepts in the interpretation of realism (Cremona, 2020). While both theories prioritize realism, they are technically distinct. These two hypotheses will be used to interpret Haider's book. Mimesis is the term used to describe the act of presenting a story and its characters in a manner that is authentic to everyday life, while verisimilitude is the term used to describe the act of presenting the characters in a manner that is believable to the reader (Stoehr, 1969), (Halliwell, 2012). Both of these concepts are of paramount significance in the context of realism. Haider has effectively implemented both of these concepts in his book. Certain elements of his characters' narratives either accurately represent the reality of Pakistani society or are presented in a manner that is believable. The interpretation of Haider's book will be based on these two aspects, only domestic matters will be considered. Afterward, the cases that are either plausible or true will be selected and clarified through the use of context. Additionally, all arguments will be predicated on the primary events and characters depicted

in the book. In addition to these, no additional information regarding literature will be provided.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

Haider presents exceptional decorum when discussing the significant and prevalent concerns that plague Pakistani families. A more detailed account of the manner in which marriage is discussed in Pakistani households is featured among them. The narrator initially characterizes his grandmother's marriage as "three times." The most critical factor in a marriage is not a girl's character, but her physical attributes. A local obstetrician recollects her inferiority complex, stating, "I was not fair like a milk, but like an old paper (p. 3)". In Pakistani society, a young woman is never permitted to express her preference or be requested to do so prior to her marriage. Haider asserts that "all good girls marry boys of their mothers' choice." Consequently, it is mandatory for all girls to marry in accordance with their parents' preferences. Superstitious individuals regard a girl as the cause of her spouse's death when her husband passes away. Given that mortality is an inevitable aspect of all existence, it is incumbent upon those who have entered this world to fulfill their obligations and depart. Haider adeptly illustrates the preposterous notion that a young widow was once preparing bread for her mother-in-law on a coal stove, while her mother-in-law was employing her daughters-in-law as slaves. There is mourning in the home of a lady who marries a loved one of her own volition. Haider provides an example of a girl who flees her home to marry a boy, stating that "her mother attempted suicide and her father was unable to appear in public (p. 7)."

In a manner that is reminiscent of every domestic narrative, Haider emphasizes the fundamental responsibilities of a Pakistani family. In a middle-class family, the spouse is regarded as the primary and significant member of the household; consequently, the other family members are rendered insignificant in his absence. Sisters serve their siblings, first daughters serve their fathers, and wives serve their husbands after marriage. Haider's use of these examples makes a genuine impression that not only advocates for women's equal rights but also discusses the role of women in society.

Women are regarded as a child-producing machine in conjunction with their siblings, fathers, and husbands. She is an infant, yet she simultaneously fulfills the duty of caring for an additional child in her womb. Similar to a grandmother who has given birth to nine offspring within the span of 15 years. As Zainab Phuppo is extremely proud of her five sons and considers it fortunate not to have a daughter, women themselves are disappointed by the birth of daughters and are proud of their sons. In the same vein, Dadi consistently commends Haroon and, conversely, does not give the girls of the home much consideration.

The pursuit of the "ideal partner" has been established by the specific family in domestic spheres. For example, the novel's portrayal of a middle-class family initially recognizes a religious resemblance. They are of the opinion that a harmonious existence can be achieved by partnering with someone who shares their religious beliefs. Dadi declared that Haroon's wife must be "Syedda" and from the Bandians family, as a strong connection could be formed between individuals of the same family and religious beliefs. This demonstrates the impact of personal values and relationships on the domestic context of families. The second most prominent quality is "full virginity," which indicates that the boy's family anticipated a female chastity, a common concern in a patriarchal society. This appears to be a market-driven approach to marriage, with the female as the object. Then, "she must be qualified to obtain employment, but she must not desire employment (p. 33)," a paradox that is prevalent in middle-class families who desired their daughters to be highly educated while maintaining control over the household. Additionally, the novel presents Haider's perspective on masculine domination. Most importantly, their parents were also members of a Nobel-winning profession, such as a lawyer, doctor, or engineer. Haider endeavors to depict a prevalent situation that is observed and experienced in modern societies through this form of manifestation.

In addition to marriage, gender discrimination is also prevalent in households. The majority of families in Pakistani society are unaware of and do not endeavor to comprehend the equal rights of human beings. They believe that the sex is equivalent, meaning that men are superior to women, and that women are merely servants of men. Haider's book also demonstrates this unequal attitude. For instance, the grandmother exclusively sings Aaron's songs and accords him greater respect than the females of the household. Aaron is granted a princely status that is not commensurate with his abilities, while his daughters who are more

educated are not accorded the same status. In the same vein, Zainab Phaphu is exceedingly proud of her five sons; however, she does not regret her lack of a daughter (p. 12). This is a prevalent practice in households in Pakistan. There is no distinction between the cognitive processes of men and women. In other words, the legacy of an antiquated notion that males are more significant is being perpetuated. Moreover, the predilection of a son for a relationship is accommodated, while daughters are used as scapegoats for a relationship.

Education is also regarded from a highly sensitive perspective. One of Haroun's primary criteria for selecting a partner was that she attends an all-girls institution, as depicted in the novel. Additionally, the girl is capable of performing Haroon's duties regardless of her lack of employment. While the sisters were restricted to school, additional arrangements were made for Haroon to pursue her education abroad. Moreover, Haider presents the story with great seriousness if only the identities of the characters are discussed. She recounts the narrative of a Shia family, in which all members are bestowed with names that are customary among Shia individuals. For example, the matriarch objects to the name "Ayesha" for one of the girls. It also recommends that the appellation be altered.

## **Conclusion**

In her book, Haider employs both concepts; Mimesis and Verisimilitude on a frequent basis, which not only establishes a sense of reality but also lends credibility. The majority of the components suggest that this is the case. For instance, the Shia religion mandates that Shia family characters have names and relationships. All of this is a daily occurrence in Pakistani society, where individuals are extremely dedicated to their religion and make a concerted effort to avoid all other religions. The grandmother's initial response to a boy from a Shia household falling in love with a girl from another religion is that the girl will be required to convert to Shia and change her name. Additionally, she will be given a name that is typically assigned to females from Shia families.

In addition to the names, the marriage matters are also presented in the manner that is typically observed in households. In other words, there are numerous prerequisites for a lady to be married, including her fairness and beauty. Conversely, a child is content with his mere existence. In the same vein, a girl's moral character is assessed according to whether she married by her own volition or by the volition of her parents. A virgin girl's residence is



comparable to a marketplace, where individuals advertise their preferences and aversions. Additionally, marriage is significantly influenced by religion. The quality of the relationship or the degree of affection between the female and the boy are irrelevant. The initial and most critical prerequisite is that both individuals adhere to the same religion. In light of this, additional conditions are assessed. In addition to these, education, family, and class are also attentively examined. For instance, a girl who is exclusively educated in a females' school should not be interested in literature, and her father's department should be highly regarded.

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