

**WOMEN IDENTITY IN TAHMIMA ANAM'S *THE BONES OF GRACE*:
STRUGGLE AGAINST PATRIARCHY****Naufal Fadriansyah¹, Budyman² & Difa Alfari³**
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Keywords	Abstract
Women Literature Identity Patriarchal Society	<i>The purpose of this study is to investigate identity struggle in the patriarchal cultures that exist in the novel <i>The Bones of Grace</i>. The qualitative technique was used in this study, and the results are presented using a descriptive model. The case study approach was used in this study. The major source for this study is Tahmima Anam's novel <i>The Bones of Grace</i>, which was published in 2016.</i>
Corresponding Author Name Affiliation Country Email: Phone: (recommended using phone registered at Whatsapp)	<i>This study uncovers Zubaida's struggle to challenge patriarchal society. The patriarchal cultures put Zubaida through an assigned identity that is restraining and controlling. However, this study discovered that through a new identity that Zubaida constructed herself, she can form a resistance to the patriarchal system that oppresses her.</i>
	<i>Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui pergulatan identitas dalam budaya patriarki yang ada dalam novel <i>The Bones of Grace</i>. Teknik kualitatif digunakan dalam penelitian ini, dan hasilnya disajikan dengan menggunakan model deskriptif. Pendekatan studi kasus digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Sumber utama penelitian ini adalah novel <i>The Bones of Grace</i> karya Tahmima Anam yang terbit pada tahun 2016. Penelitian ini mengungkap perjuangan Zubaida dalam menantang masyarakat patriarki. Budaya patriarki menempatkan Zubaida melalui identitas yang bersifat mengekang dan mengendalikan. Namun penelitian ini menemukan bahwa melalui identitas baru yang dikonstruksi Zubaida, ia dapat melakukan perlawanan terhadap sistem patriarki yang menindasnya</i>

INTRODUCTION

Tahmima Anam's *The Bones of Grace* is the final novel of Anam's Bengal Trilogy. It explores the complexities of Zubaida's life and her quest for identity and roots. The story revolves around Zubaida Haque, an adopted daughter of a native Bengali family who live in a patriarchal environment. She always finds herself lost between two worlds. She feels torn by everything which she has to choose. She felt different kind of loyalty towards her motherland Bangladesh and America, from where she completed her study.

“Diana is the reason I left this town, and Diana is why I have returned. I think of her as a spirit of comings and goings, a beacon that leads me across continents and through time. I live in hope that she will lead me back to you.” (The Bones of Grace, p.8)

The title's *The Bones of Grace* refer to Ambulocetus Natans (Diana) - a distant ancestor of the whale that walked on land. It is symbolic of a lot of things that happen in the novel, including Zubaida's decision to swim or stay on land. The recurring image of the fossil, Diana, and the metaphor of digging serve as reminders that Zubaida's odyssey involves a search for her identity, for her roots. In these lines, the protagonist, Zubaida, addresses her lost lover Elijah about the decisions she has made in her life by defying culture and society, that she has finally concluded, after discovering her roots and identity, that identity is a continuous process that transforms over time. As a result, Zubaida is able to imagine an alternative sense of belonging, viewing her life as a continuum of things that are past and present at the same time.

This research use Stuart Hall's concept of 'cultural identity' will be presented. In Stuart Hall's theory of identity (1994), identity is anything fictitious or imagined about completeness (Angraini, 2014). An identity emerges as a result of hesitation, which is then filled by external pressures from each individual. Identity is an expression of that imagination as viewed by specific persons related to it. Hall and Du Gay (1996) said, identity is a structured representation that achieves its positive only via the restricted lens of the negative (Edensor, 2020). Before it can build itself, it must pass through the eye of the needle of the other. Perhaps, instead of conceiving of identity as a completed reality that new cultural practices portray, we might conceive of identity as a "production" that is never complete, always in process, and always created inside, not outside, representation. This viewpoint calls into question the very authority and validity that the phrase "cultural identity". According to Hall, identity is not a finished reality, but rather a "production" that is never finished and is always in the process (Jones et al., 2019). There are also essential areas of profound substantial difference that form 'what we truly are,' or rather 'what we have been,' since history has interfered, Hall stated. He also emphasized the role of power and ideology in shaping identity and argued that identities are often used as a means of social control and domination. He argued that identities can be both a source of resistance and a means of conformity, depending on the context in which they are formed and the ways in which they are used.

Aside from Halls, many other academics have defined identity theory. According to Buckingham (2008), identity is a nebulous and elusive concept. It has been used – arguably misused – in a variety of situations and for a variety of objectives, particularly in recent years (Oztok, 2016). Deng (1995) said the term identity refers to how individuals and groups define themselves and are characterized by others based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture (Irawan et al., 2018). Stryker (1980) said in his book ‘Self, Identity, and Movement’ that an identity is a collection of meanings associated with the roles that people play in the social system (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Jenkins (1996) stated identity refers to how people and collectivities define themselves in their social relationships with other individuals and collectivities (Brown, 2015). Identity is a subjective process in which the person determines which collectivity is its alter ego (Zaini, 2014). Hogg and Abrams (1988) stated that identity refers to people's ideas about who

they are, what kind of people they are, and how they connect to others (Kim et al., 2018). Katzenstein (1996) define that by convention, the term [identity] refers to jointly produced and changing perceptions of self and other (Vakil, 2018). Wendt (1992) said that identities are defined as relatively steady, role-specific self-understandings and expectations (Bayram, 2017). According to Wood and Smith (2005), identity is a complicated construct for oneself, and it is socially tied to how we believe about ourselves and how we expect other people's stigma against us, as well as how other people see it (Idaman & Kencana, 2021). Tajfel (1978) said that identity is defined as that element of an individual's self-concept that arises from knowledge of membership in a social group (or groups), as well as the value or emotional importance associated with that participation (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). And according to Mol (1978), the idea of identity is employed in the social sciences in two ways (Harrison Oppong, 2013). The first approach of thinking about identity is to consider its immutability, or at least the slowly evolving core of personality that appears in all parts of an individual's endeavors, regardless of the impacts of numerous role models. The second approach addresses the transient and flexible self when an individual moves from one social context to another, perhaps creating a somewhat new identity on each occasion. He goes on to say that the first conceptualization raises the question of identity's involuntary component, whilst the second raises the issue of identity's flexibility.

The purpose of this research is to discover how a patriarchal setting develops Zubaida's identity as a woman and how Zubaida reconstructs her identity as the solution. The findings of this study attempt to disclose if individual identity reconstruction can fight and liberate them from the identity values arising from binding community reconstruction, which in this case is Zubaida's new identity as a form of resistance to the patriarchal system.

METHOD

This study took a qualitative method. It is a strategy based on natural phenomena. The qualitative method seeks to describe a specific social issue by accurately reflecting reality. This study is provided in a descriptive model to provide an in-depth explanation of the findings. The case study technique was employed in this investigation. One common approach to conducting qualitative research is the case study, which involves an in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon within its real-world context. Case studies can be used to explore a variety of topics, including individual experiences, organizational processes, and social phenomena. A case study is a strategy that focuses on a specific object or occurrence in order to reveal the reality behind it (Mudjia, 2010).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Society's construction of Zubaida's identity

Zubaida Haque is a fictional character and the protagonist of Tahmima Anam's novel *The Bones of Grace*. She is a young woman of Bangladeshi descent who is studying paleoanthropology at a university in Boston. This novel highlights the struggles of the main character who cannot speak out her mind in the patriarchal society. Zubaida constructs her identity as a devout Muslim woman who obeys everything her parents say and is willing to be married off to someone she does not love. In the letter she wrote to Elijah, Zubaida refers to herself as an "Obedient Orphan". As an adopted child, Zubaida

always felt something was missing and lacking. That she was never completely "whole". Even though she is told as an educated and free-spirited woman, Zubaida is constrained by her culture and family. As a daughter, Zubaida cannot easily express what she wants/feels, there are obligations and expectations that are embedded indirectly for Zubaida: that as a woman in a patriarchal environment she is expected to marry a partner which has been determined by her family, and the aspect of adoption adds to the burden borne by Zubaida to be more obedient. Besides that, as an orphan whose origins are unknown, Zubaida feels alienated. At one point, She thought that she was nothing. That she was not really accepted in the society she had ever met. Zubaida feels that she is part of all the places she has been, but she is nowhere. Zubaida feels alien to her family and tries to find out her real parents, hoping to become "whole". Her ambition to find her real parents was metaphorized by her ambition to find the fossil of *Ambulocetus Natans* which she named Diana. *Ambulocetus* which means "walking whale" is a prehistoric animal of the cetacean order that was able to walk and swim which is said to be attracted to the "lure of the seas and the comforts of land" from the sediments of the ancient Tethys sea. The novel follows her journey as she tries to balance her studies and personal life with her cultural heritage and the expectations placed on her by her family. As a paleoanthropologist, Zubaida is interested in the study of human evolution and the origins of humankind. She becomes involved in a research project that involves the analysis of ancient bones found in Bangladesh, and this leads her to confront her own feelings about her identity and her relationship with her country of origin. Throughout the novel, Zubaida struggles with the expectations placed on her by her family and society, and she grapples with the challenges of living in two different cultures. She must also come to terms with the loss of her mother, who died during the Bangladesh War of Independence, and the complicated feelings she has about her father, who was involved in the war. As she navigates these challenges, Zubaida discovers her own strength and resilience and learns to embrace her identity and make her own choices.

In *The Bones of Grace*, Zubaida Haque's identity is constructed by society through the expectations and norms placed on her as a young woman of Bangladeshi descent living in the United States. As a member of a traditional Bengali family, Zubaida is expected to adhere to certain cultural norms and expectations, such as the importance of arranged marriages and the role of women in society. These cultural expectations often conflict with Zubaida's own desires and ambitions, and she struggles to find a balance between upholding her cultural traditions and pursuing her own dreams. In addition to cultural expectations, Zubaida is also subjected to societal expectations as a young woman living in the United States. She is expected to conform to certain norms and behaviors, and she must navigate the challenges of living in two different cultures. As she struggles to find her place in the world, Zubaida discovers her own strength and resilience and learns to embrace her identity and make her own choices. Overall, society plays a significant role in constructing Zubaida's identity by imposing expectations and norms on her that she must navigate and negotiate as she tries to find her place in the world. One of the main struggles that Zubaida faces is the conflict between her own desires and ambitions and the expectations placed on her by her family and society. As a young woman of Bangladeshi descent, she is expected to adhere to certain cultural norms and traditions, such as the importance of arranged marriages and the role of women in society. These expectations often conflict with Zubaida's own goals and dreams, and she must find a way to reconcile

these conflicting pressures. Another struggle that Zubaida faces is the loss of her mother, who died during the Bangladesh War of Independence. This tragedy has a profound impact on her sense of self and her relationship with her father, who was involved in the war. Zubaida must come to terms with her feelings about her mother's death and her father's role in the war, and she must find a way to move forward and create a new identity for herself.

Zubaida's identity is formed from traditional values that are still upheld by the traditional society in Bengali. Even though Zubaida admits that she is not bound by that society, her status as an adopted child makes her have a kind of extra obligation to be an obedient child and not disappoint her parents. Although Zubaida is a "free" and educated person she is still shackled by societal expectations, and it is very difficult to escape from these things because these things make up her childhood and ultimately her identity. As a girl whose past is unknown, she tries to hold on to the identity that has been this form because it is the only thing Zubaida has and knows about herself.

Zubaida's construction of identity

In *The Bones of Grace*, Zubaida Haque grapples with the expectations and norms placed on her by her family and society as she tries to construct her own identity. She faces several challenges as she tries to balance her cultural heritage with the expectations of the society in which she lives, and she must find a way to reconcile these conflicting pressures. As Zubaida navigates these challenges, she begins to embrace her heritage and explore her own identity more deeply. She becomes involved in a research project that involves the analysis of ancient bones found in Bangladesh, and this leads her to confront her own feelings about her identity and her relationship with her country of origin. Through this process, Zubaida discovers her own strength and resilience and learns to embrace her identity and make her own choices. She deals with the identity that society has pinned on her by searching for another Identity, her true self. She is trying to find her birth mother, who might give Zubaida a new identity and make her "complete". Zubaida's journey to find her identity in this novel is metaphorized by her obsession with digging up the fossils of *Ambulocetus Natans*. *Ambulocetus Natans* is referred to as the "walking whale" which is the ancestor of the modern whale species. This walking whale can walk and swim, so it lives between two different worlds, land and sea. This is similar to Zubaida, where she is in-between two intersections, her adoptive parents and the identity that has been assigned to her or her biological parents. Zubaida's obsession with completing the *Ambulocetus Natans* fossil to make it intact is at the same time her obsession to complete her identity which she considers incomplete.

After understanding her roots, Zubaida reconstructs her new identity with the understanding that she can never be "complete". She understands that identity will continue to evolve over time, and it is her present and how she shapes herself that plays the most part in her identity. In this way, Zubaida "let go" of the burdens of her past that bound and shackled her and focuses on the present. She accepts all the identities that have been pinned on her, but she does not let them bind and define her true self, she chooses for herself what identity represents her. Zubaida is a free spirit. She also finds support and guidance from her friends and mentors as she tries to construct her own identity. She forms close relationships with other women who are also struggling to find their place in the world, and they help and support each other as they navigate the challenges of living

in two different cultures. Ultimately, Zubaida learns to embrace her heritage and find her own place in the world. She makes her own choices and follows her own path, even when it means defying the expectations of her family and society. Through this process, she constructs a strong and meaningful sense of self that is grounded in her own values and experiences.

After an unfortunate event with her coworkers in Baluchistan, Zubaida goes to Bangladesh and marries Rashid. Despite her emotions for Elijah, a Native American, she was compelled by her adoptive parents to marry Rashid. Her marriage with Rashid fails, and she violates societal norm by divorcing him. Even though her foster parents and society see her decision as incorrect, she does it voluntarily. As a result, her identity alters, and she travels to Chittagong to produce a documentary about the lives of shipbreaking laborers on unknown beaches, where she meets Anwar and learns the most significant fact of her life. She is confronted with the realities of her existence after discovering her original mother, Fatema Ansar, and her twin sister, which is shockingly what she had been yearning for since she got her senses. As a result, Zubaida's identity alters as she searches for her origins.

In *The Bones of Grace*, patriarchy is represented through the expectations and norms placed on the female characters, particularly Zubaida Haque, the protagonist. As a young woman of Bangladeshi descent living in the United States, Zubaida is subject to societal expectations and norms shaped by patriarchy and traditional gender roles. She is expected to adhere to certain cultural traditions, such as the importance of arranged marriages and the role of women in society, and she must navigate the challenges of living in two different cultures. These expectations and norms are imposed on Zubaida and other female characters by male figures in their lives, such as their fathers and brothers, who hold power and authority within the family and society. In addition to the expectations and norms placed on female characters, patriarchy is represented in the novel through the power dynamics between men and women. Male characters often hold positions of power and authority, while female characters are often delegated to subservient roles. For example, Zubaida's father is a prominent politician, while her mother is expected to conform to traditional gender roles and support her husband's career.

Thanks to her new identity, Zubaida gets the freedom she longs for, which means she's free from the patriarchal system that holds her down. The patriarchal system is generally manifested in the social environment, which means it has been going on for generations. It will be difficult for someone to be separated from this system because these patriarchal norms have been attached since childhood, which has become normal so it is quite difficult to leave. The patriarchal system has become one unit that forms one's identity. In Zubaida's case, her new identity (or the process by which she forms her identity) ignores external factors and focuses on herself. Zubaida made herself the main focus in forming her identity instead of being pushed by society so that she could leave the patriarchal system easily and without feeling guilty. She discovers her own strength and resilience and learns to embrace her identity and make her own choices, she defies these expectations and challenges the traditional gender roles that have been imposed on her. She follows her own path and pursues her own goals and dreams, even when it means going against traditional cultural norms. Zubaida also finds support and guidance from her friends and mentors as she tries to construct her own identity and challenge traditional

gender roles. She forms close relationships with other women who are also struggling to find their place in the world, and they help and support each other as they navigate the challenges of living in two different cultures. In doing so, she asserts her own agency and autonomy and challenges patriarchy and traditional gender roles.

Discussion

Zubaida suffers from patriarchy and traditional gender roles as she tries to balance her cultural heritage with the expectations of the society in which she lives. She must navigate the challenges of living in two different cultures and find a way to reconcile the conflicting expectations and norms placed on her, while also dealing with the power dynamics between men and women that are shaped by patriarchy. The novel also explores how patriarchy can be internalized and how it can shape how women view themselves and their place in the world. Zubaida struggles with the expectations her family and society placed on her, and she must find a way to reconcile these conflicting pressures. She grapples with feelings of self-doubt and insecurity and must learn to embrace her own identity and make her own choices, even when it means defying traditional gender roles and expectations. In the end, after discovering her roots and identity, she comes to the conclusion that identity is never accomplished but rather a continuous process which transforms over time. Just as a species of walking whales eventually leave their comfort zone to start living in a new place, Zubaida chooses her hearts and steps in a new direction: divorcing her husband and returning to America. An action that indirectly reveals that her journey to find identity at the same time developing into resistance to the patriarchal system.

Zubaida represents the voice of Tahmima's struggle against patriarchal culture of her society, extending to the dominant Western culture over the third world countries. This study is complement to the study of [Hossain](#) (2022) that Tahmima voices the powerlessness of the developing countries against the aggressive expansion of neo-liberal economy.

CONCLUSION

In the book *The Bones of Grace*, Anam describes the issue of identity as an important problem experienced by Muslim women. As a young woman of Bangladeshi descent living in the United States, Zubaida is subject to many expectations and norms shaped by patriarchy and traditional gender roles. She is expected to adhere to certain cultural traditions, such as the importance of arranged marriages and the role of women in society, and she must navigate the challenges of living in two different cultures. However, as Zubaida discovers her strength and resilience and learns to embrace her identity and make her own choices, she defies these expectations. She challenges the traditional gender roles that have been imposed on her. She follows her path and pursues her own goals and dreams, even when it means going against conventional cultural norms. In doing so, she asserts her agency and autonomy and challenges patriarchy and traditional gender roles. Instead of a direct depiction of a woman who is constrained (unable to go to school, forced to marry early, etc.), which is a recurring theme in female Muslim literacy novels, Anam raises an invisible restraint, which at first glance depicts a free woman. Zubaida's character in this novel is educated, can travel, and has the career she wants. Zubaida is an

independent woman who can leave the things that suppress her. She was not forced to accept the oppression to survive, instead she received the oppression so that she would not lose her true self.

Anam presents the issue of identity in a complex manner. The identity that has been constructed by society is a burden that needs to be borne by individuals and the chains that bind them. In a society that is thick with patriarchy in this novel, Anam explores the burdens and challenges that need to be faced by these individuals. In researching identity in the patriarchal system, Anam does not present a strong patriarchal community like the Taliban in the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. Instead of a coercive system, Anam elevates society's expectations as the driving wheel and the binder of this patriarchal system. When Zubaida decided to leave the identity that society had pinned for her, Zubaida, at the same time, released the chains that bound her. Anam shows how Zubaida's struggle to form her new identity made her free from the patriarchal system, making Zubaida free.

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