

Repressed Voices: A Psychoanalytic Study of Marginalized Women in Fauzia Saeed's Taboo

Radia Ishfaq¹ and Mehwish Fatima^{2**}

Abstract

This study conducted a psychoanalytic examination of Fouzia Saeed's *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red-Light Area* (2015) using Sigmund Freud's core theoretical principles. While previous research on *Taboo* has primarily focused on sociological, ethnographic, or feminist analyses, no previous study has examined the text using Freud's psychoanalytic framework—particularly concepts of repression, the unconscious mind, defense mechanisms, libido and sexuality, and civilization and repression. To address this gap, the study used a qualitative thematic analysis based on Freudian theory to analyze how women in Shahi Mohalla experienced voice inhibition and the psychological effects of cultural shame and marginalization. The study found that suppression worked on both a cultural and individual level, silencing female agency while causing serious mental health issues such as identity fragmentation, internalized shame and conflict. This study, which combined literary analysis with Freudian psychology, produced a comprehensive understanding of the complicated interplay between outward social repression and internal mental turmoil in postcolonial South Asian environments. The findings helped to further interdisciplinary studies by reaffirming Freud's theory's usefulness in analyzing gendered subjectivity and trauma within non-Western cultural settings. Furthermore, this study provided a methodological framework for future research aimed at applying Western psychoanalytic ideas to localized gendered experiences in literature and ethnography. Finally, our study broadened the critical discussion on marginalized women's narratives by underlining the importance of adding psychological perspectives alongside sociocultural critiques in order to properly understand the hidden costs of cultural repression.

Keywords: Marginalized Women, Taboo, Gender Studies, Freud, Psychoanalysis, Repression South Asian Literature, Mental Health, Ethnographic interpretation

¹⁻² Department of English Language and Literature, The University of Faisalabad, Faisalabad – Pakistan

Introduction

In patriarchal countries, marginalized women's voices and experiences are frequently quiet or ignored, buried beneath layers of cultural stigma, moral judgment, and social neglect. These women are not only monetarily disadvantaged, but they also suffer from psychological issues such as shame, guilt, and social marginalization. Contemporary literature and academic studies have largely disregarded their inner emotional worlds, focusing on their external circumstances rather than their inside pain. However, a more complete understanding of their lives necessitates delving under the surface and investigating the emotional and psychological consequences of marginalization. One of Pakistan's most symbolic and socially complex sites exhibiting this state is Heera Mandi, also known as Shahi Mohalla, which is located in the heart of Lahore's Walled City. Heera Mandi was a famous cultural hub throughout the Mughal and later British colonial periods, with a reputation for exquisite traditions in classical music, kathak dance, and poetry. Women in this region, known as tawaifs, were previously highly recognized artists and performers who belonged to aristocratic cultural circles. However, throughout the years, Heera Mandi has seen a remarkable shift, from a sanctuary for artistic expression to one associated mostly with commercial sex. As colonial and postwar moral discourses altered, the region became highly stigmatized, and the women who worked there lost their dignity, agency, and artistic identity.

Today, the women of Heera Mandi are socially marginalized and constantly monitored, judged, and exploited. They are not given access to education, legal protection, healthcare, or social acceptability. Their voices are rarely heard outside of their district, and their emotional lives are kept hidden from the public eye. In this environment, Fauzia Saeed's ethnographic study, *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (2015), is essential for recording these women's daily reality, survival methods, and emotional challenges. Saeed's study humanizes their stories and contradicts mainstream narratives that cast them as victims or moral deviants. To investigate these hidden components of identity, this study employs Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, with a focus on the notions of repression and unconscious mind. Freud argued that repressed urges and unresolved conflicts continue to impact behavior and identity, often in symbolic or distorted ways. Using this perspective to examine *Taboo!* (2015), the study looks at how these women's psychological experiences such as shame, self-silencing, projection, and emotional fragmentation are influenced by both internal repression and external societal factors. The study seeks to understand how these women navigate complicated

emotional landscapes in response to being ostracized, silenced, and morally condemned by the very society that benefits from their existence.

This study examines the psychological realities of marginalized women in Fauzia Saeed's *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (2015) through the lens of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, with a focus on repression, defensive mechanisms, the unconscious mind, libido, sexuality, and civilization's repression. Women who live and work in marginalized areas like Lahore's Shahi Mohalla confront significant social stigma, repression, and psychological trauma, which are understudied in both literary and psychological studies. While Fouzia Saeed's *Taboo!* (2015) provides a vivid ethnographic depiction of these women's lived situations, there is a huge gap in research that uses psychoanalytic theory, namely Freud's notions, to study the underlying psychological processes affecting their experiences. The issue stems from a poor awareness of how cultural repression and taboo appear not just outside in social exclusion but also within in fractured identities, mental health challenges, and unconscious conflicts. This study intends to fill this gap by applying a psychoanalytic perspective to the stories of marginalized women in *Taboo!* (2015), enhancing understanding of their repressed voices and psychological suffering in culturally particular situations.

This work is noteworthy because it combines literary criticism, psychology, and gender studies by applying Freud's psychoanalytic theory to an ethnographic narrative from South Asia, so expanding the interpretative frameworks used to examine marginalized women. Unlike previous analyses, which focused mostly on the sociological and feminist components of Saeed's *Taboo!* (2015), this study takes a psychological approach, emphasizing the unconscious, repression, and internalized trauma. The findings shed light on how cultural taboos and societal denial cause psychological fissures, providing scientists with a strong theoretical foundation for studying the inner lives of marginalized women in circumstances where sexuality and morality are heavily policed. Furthermore, this study highlights Freudian theory's continued significance in postcolonial and gendered subjectivity studies, proposing interdisciplinary research approaches that connect Western psychoanalytic principles with localized experiences of gendered trauma. Finally, this study not only deepens the interpretation of Saeed's *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (2015), but it also invites future scholarship to use psychoanalytic methodologies to investigate marginalized voices in South Asian literary and ethnographic literary works.

The researcher focuses only on Fauzia Saeed's *Taboo! (2015)*, with chosen concepts from Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory primarily repression and the unconscious mind serving as the analytical lens. Broader Freudian categories, such as defensive mechanisms, the unconscious mind, Libido and Sexuality and the civilization and repression, are used to enrich the analysis of the Saeed's *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area (2015)*.

Review of the Literature

Dr. Fouzia Saeed's book *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area (2015)* provides a rare and sharp look into the lives of women involved in the sex trade, particularly in Lahore's notorious Heera Mandi. This study provides light on socio-cultural concerns surrounding prostitution, which is typically considered taboo in Pakistani society. Dr. Saeed, who has spent eight years immersing herself in this society, presents a detailed ethnographic assessment of the conditions, hardships, and psychological effects that women experience in this stigmatized profession. The book delves into not only structural oppression, but also the complicated relationships that exist within the red-light district, such as familial ties between mothers and daughters, the harsh reality of societal shame, and the economic and cultural reasons that sustain the prostitution cycle. Saeed's daring story has aroused debate and criticism, but it has also functioned as an important work for understanding the gendered dynamics of power and sexuality in Pakistani society. Prostitution and the marginalization of sex workers in Pakistan, particularly in locations such as Heera Mandi, have been investigated via a variety of perspectives. Zubair (2019) praises Dr. Saeed's boldness in delving into this forbidden subject, underlining her commitment to shedding light on the secret culture of Lahore's red-light area. Despite criticism, Saeed's work has sparked a discussion on the oppressive circumstances that keep women in the sex trade. The ethnographic interviews in Saeed's book provide firsthand stories of the lives of prostitutes, their families, and pimps, providing a unique viewpoint on this underrepresented part of society (Zubair, 2019).

Building on Saeed's discoveries, Iftikhar et al. (2023) examine the bond between mother and daughter in prostitution through the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Their research highlights the impact of patriarchal society on relationships in the sex trade, as mothers frequently push their daughters to sacrifice personal needs for economic survival. This repression of desire is analyzed in light

of Lacan's theory of the Real, which represents the severe socio-symbolic order that perpetuates patriarchy in these cultures (Iftikhar et al., 2023). The authors argue that cultural expectations of beauty and economic security frequently trump mother love, further separating girls from their true selves.

Similarly, Iftikhar et al. (2024) investigate the concept of sisterhood among sex workers, focusing on how prostitution breaks down connections among women who are obliged to hide their impulses in the face of patriarchal dominance. Their research again employs Lacanian theory to demonstrate how these women's lives are impacted by their experiences in the red-light district, reinforcing the notion of a fractured sisterhood in which mutual support is frequently eclipsed by competitiveness and survival instincts (Iftikhar et al., 2024).

Khan and Qadir (2024) examine the socio-cultural and patriarchal systems that drive women into prostitution and trafficking. They claim that in Pakistani society, the difference between "pure" and "polluted" women not only molds prostitution perceptions, but also leads to these women's legal and social marginalization. They support feminist activity as a critical step in dismantling these deeply embedded societal standards (Khan & Qadir, 2024).

Jamil (2023) situates Heera Mandi in the greater urban and cultural landscape of Lahore, investigating how the red-light area fits into the city's history and postcolonial development. This study focuses on the interplay of power, patriarchy, and urban growth, highlighting how the area's cultural heritage is connected with the challenges of underprivileged people, particularly women in prostitution (Jamil, 2023).

The intersectionality of prostitution, patriarchal systems, and sex workers' subaltern status is a topic of ongoing research. Haleem (2024) investigates the marginalized identities of sex workers using literary and historical research, concentrating on their place as subaltern figures in South Asian culture. The study portrays prostitution as a profession immersed in both historical and contemporary oppression, delving into queerness and subaltern viewpoints on the sex trade (Haleem, 2024). This is consistent with Walsh et al. (2024), who research violence against women (VAW) in Pakistan, namely forced prostitution and the systematic violence that women confront in red-light districts.

Krishnakumar (2025) provides a distinct perspective by investigating the identities of sex workers in India, emphasizing the importance of local understandings of identity as opposed to global preconceptions. This work helps to broaden our understanding of sex worker collectives and their resistance to both local and global oppressive regimes (Krishnakumar, 2025).

Although research on sex work in South Asia, notably Pakistan, has gained pace, there is a notable gap in the application of psychoanalytic theories to *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (2015). While many studies have looked into the socioeconomic and patriarchal elements that influence prostitution, very few have used Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic lens, particularly on notions like repression, the unconscious, and the impact of early trauma. This study aims to address this gap by employing Freud's theories of repression and the unconscious to better comprehend the hidden psychological components of sex workers' lives, which have not been investigated in prior studies of the novel. Using Freud's framework, this study seeks to investigate the emotional and psychological mechanisms that contribute to the marginalization and subjugation of women in Heera Mandi, providing new insights into their behavior, identity formation, and coping mechanisms within a deeply repressive society.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative analytical approach to investigate the psychological and social aspects of Fouzia Saeed's *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (2015). Qualitative analysis was suitable for this study because it allowed for a thorough assessment of complex textual narratives, concentrating on subjective experiences, cultural settings, and symbolic interpretations. The analysis was based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which included key concepts such as repression, the unconscious mind, defensive mechanisms, libido and sexuality, and civilization's repression of primal needs. These ideas provided a theoretical framework for critically interrogating the text, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how marginalized women's voices were stifled, as well as how this suppression affected their mental health and identity development. The study used thematical textual analysis to interpret the emotional and psychological aspects of *Taboo!* (2015), connecting the ethnographic story with psychoanalytic concepts to highlight the junction of individual trauma and cultural repression. This methodological framework enabled a thorough examination of internal psychic

processes within the socio-cultural context of Shahi Mohalla, adding to interdisciplinary scholarship that connects literature, psychology, and gender studies. This lens uncovers not only emotional tragedy, but also the silent resistance that exists within socially limited lives.

Theoretical Framework

This study examines Fozia Saeed's *Taboo!* (2015) using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory (1917), with a focus on unconscious processes, repression, defensive mechanisms, Libido and Sexuality and the civilization and repression. Freud's concepts about how society imposes repression to maintain order at the expense of personal happiness are critical to understanding the characters' psychological and social interactions. Freud's ideas give a solid foundation for delving into the novel's psychological and social dynamics. This study, based on psychoanalytic critique, employs these frameworks to go beyond surface-level analysis and identify the psychological processes influencing the characters and their interactions in *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light District* (2015).

❖ Repression

Freud identified suppression as a fundamental mechanism in both normal psychological functioning and the development of neurological disorders. According to, repression is "the forgetting or ignoring of unpleasant realities... where a person refuses to become aware of an intolerable idea"(Freud, 1915, p. 148). According to Freud, repression occurs when the mind puts painful or inappropriate thoughts aside, preventing us from confronting them consciously. It's a basic defense mechanism that keeps us going, but it can also cause mental problems if utilized excessively. In *Taboo!* (2015), this mechanism represents how society suppresses the presence and humanity of sex workers, and how these women internalize the guilt imposed on them.

❖ The Unconscious Mind

Freud defined the unconscious as the part of the mind that contains repressed desires, primordial cravings, and unsolved conflicts. These contents are dynamic and desire expression, even if only symbolically: "The unconscious system contains contents that are actively kept out of consciousness by the process of repression" (Freud, 1915, p. 161). According to Freud, the unconscious mind retains suppressed drives and conflicts that we are unaware of, yet these concealed thoughts remain

alive and attempt to manifest themselves, even if only indirectly or symbolically. In *Taboo!* (2015), the women's silences, disjointed tales, and symbolic resistance indicate unconscious emotional processes that resist societal manipulation.

❖ Defense Mechanisms

Defense mechanisms are unconscious tactics used by the ego to overcome conflicts between the id's desires and the superego's moral limitations. Freud describes these as "ways in which the ego protects itself against painful affects" (Freud, 1937, p. 252). According to Freud, defense mechanisms are unconscious systems used by the ego to protect us from emotional suffering when there is a conflict between what the id desires and what the superego believes is proper or wrong. In *Taboo!* (2015), women use denial, rationalization, and relocation to exist in a culture that condemns them. These psychological shields reflect the community's overall duplicity and denial.

❖ Libido and Sexuality

Freud describes the libido as the psychological force that drives sexual and life instincts: "The libido is the energy of the sexual instincts as a whole... and repressed sexual impulses always seek symbolic or distorted outlets" (Freud, 1906, p. 104). According to Freud, libido is the mental energy that drives our sexual wants; when these desires are suppressed, they manifest in hidden or symbolic forms. The novel's emphasis on sexual duplicity, double standards, and suppressed desire mirrors this suppression. These women's sexuality is publicly vilified but secretly consumed, reflecting a society that is deeply divided about its own desires.

❖ Civilization and Repression

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud (1930) contends that the cornerstone of any civilized society is the repression of human wants. "Civilization demands renunciation of instinct... and in doing so creates dissatisfaction" (Freud, 1930, p. 45). Freud asserts that in order for civilization to work, people must abandon their basic inclinations, particularly selfish or sexual ones, which lead to inner frustration and misery. The women in *Taboo!* (2015) are victims of this repression; they are vital to the social order but are marginalized, producing a dichotomy of visibility and erasure, inclusion and exclusion.

Analysis and Discussion

This chapter examines Fouzia Saeed's *Taboo: The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (2015) through the theoretical lens of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework. It investigates how psychological mechanisms of repression, the unconscious mind, defensive mechanisms, libido and sexuality, and civilization's moral standards influence the lived experiences and mental health of women in Lahore's Shahi Mohalla. The analysis is designed to represent two crucial components under each theoretical concept: the suppression of female voices within socio-cultural and institutional contexts, as well as the resulting psychological and emotional consequences. Using authentic quotations from the text, this chapter connects Freud's fundamental concepts to the stories of key characters such as Chanda, Laila, Faiza, and Pami's mother, revealing how societal stigma and internal psychic struggles intersect in the women's journeys through marginalization and identity.

❖ Repression

Repression is a fundamental aspect of Freudian psychoanalysis, defined as an unconscious mental process in which painful or socially unacceptable thoughts and impulses are pushed out of conscious awareness in order to maintain psychological balance (Freud, 1915). However, Freud highlighted that repression does not eliminate these contents, but rather allows them to manifest indirectly, resulting in emotional tension and psychological conflict. Repression in *Taboo !* (2015) displays itself both at the societal level, where prostitution is prohibited and women's voices are ignored, and within the individual, where women internalize shame and silencing. This dual-level repression serves to preserve current power structures while causing psychological injury to the repressed subjects.

❖ Chanda's Repressed Voice: Silence and Social Stigma

Chanda says, "When we get angry at a woman, we call her 'gashti.'" This system has reduced us to the level of a bloody swear word." Saeed (2015, p. 313) emphasizes the method of social repression through language and cultural taboos. The phrase "gashti" is a linguistic weapon that not only marginalizes but also criminalizes female identity, effectively silencing their voices in public debate. According to Freud's (1915) theory, such suppression works by imposing social standards while silencing opposing or stigmatized identities. Chanda's story reveals this silence by

exposing how language and cultural categorization act as instruments of repression, denying women visibility and agency.

❖ **Mental Health Effects on Chanda: Internalized Shame and Emotional Exhaustion**

Freud (1915) observed that repressed content frequently resurfaces in disguised forms such as anxiety, wrath, or emotional withdrawal. Chanda's resentment against other women in the Mohalla can be explained as displacement, in which her internalized guilt and pain manifest as aggressiveness (Freud, 1937). Her lament, "This system has given us such low status..." (Saeed, 2015, p. 313), demonstrates the weight of internalized stigma, which leads to chronic emotional fatigue and numbness. Freud's later work (1930) linked such repression to symptoms of sadness and social alienation, shedding light on the serious mental health effects of living in chronic social rejection and internal conflict.

❖ **The Unconscious Mind**

Freud (1915) defined the unconscious mind as a reservoir for suppressed desires, primordial urges, and unresolved conflicts that, while invisible to consciousness, impact behavior and emotional life. In *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (2015), women like Laila and Faiza symbolize subconscious forms of resistance and repression, illustrating the conflict between socially imposed rules and secret impulses.

❖ **Unconscious resistance in Laila: Flirtation as Symbolic Rebellion**

Laila's humorous remark, "You look very angry today, ustad ji" (Saeed, 2015, p. 45), represents an unconscious assertion of autonomy within a patriarchal framework that limits female agency. According to Freud (1915), such indirect expressions are typical of the unconscious mind, allowing repressed urges to emerge in socially acceptable or camouflaged forms. Laila's behavior reveals a psychological struggle between submission and resistance, demonstrating subtle kinds of rebellion inscribed in unconscious processes.

❖ **Psychological Fragmentation in Faiza: Conflict of Desire and Morality**

Faiza's statement, "Good girls don't do that" (Saeed, 2015, p. 99), refers to Freud's (1923) idea of the superego the internalized social conscience that enforces moral rules through guilt and repression. Faiza has internal psychic conflict, split between

true wants and rigorous moral prescriptions, which leads to repression and guilt. Freud (1915) described such tensions as key to neurotic distress, which revealed itself in Faiza's emotional instability, indecision, and identity fracture. Her tale exemplifies the psychological toll imposed by the unconscious battle to balance desire and social expectations.

❖ **Defense Mechanisms**

Defense mechanisms are unconscious approaches that the ego uses to handle anxiety caused by conflicts between instinctive impulses and social realities (Freud, 1937). In *Taboo!* (2015), characters like Pami's mother and Faiza use displacement and rationalization to deal with pain and societal injustice.

❖ **Pami's Mother's Rationalization: Emotional Avoidance via External Blame**

Pami's mother's statement, "Police harassment has really forced her into the house" (Saeed, 2015, p. 245), is an example of rationalization, a defense strategy in which uncomfortable truths are reframed to decrease emotional discomfort (Freud, 1937). This psychological shield provides momentary relief but may result in emotional detachment and grief repression. Freud warned that long-term avoidance through reasoning might worsen anxiety and prevent emotional restoration.

❖ **Displacement in Faiza: Redirecting Anger to Other Women**

Faiza's furious accusation, "They've turned us into a bloody swear word" (Saeed, 2015, p. 313), exemplifies displacement, in which resentment and dissatisfaction are directed away from patriarchal rulers and toward fellow women (Freud, 1937). This internalized misogyny causes social fragmentation and emotional isolation, exacerbating psychiatric discomfort. Freud recognized displacement as a double-edged defense that provides momentary respite while perpetuating neurotic conflict.

❖ **Libido and Sexuality**

According to Freud's (1905) theory of libido, sexual energy is a basic drive that, when repressed, appears in distorted social and psychological forms. *Taboo!* (2015) commodifies and suppresses women's sexuality, so influencing their psychological experience and social identity.

❖ **Sexual Commodification in Laila's Dance Performances**

Laila's dance performances are described as "amplifying the sexual gestures" (Saeed, 2015, p. 18), demonstrating Freud's theory that suppressed sexual energy transforms into socially sanctioned but distorted representations. This commodification separates women from true sexual expression, turning desire into economic survival, and reducing their bodies to objects for male consumption.

❖ **Emotional Estrangement in Chanda: The Paradox of Desire and Despised**

According to Chanda, "They never talk to the press about the corrupting influence of men..." (Saeed, 2015, p. 304), indicating a cultural double standard where male desire is suppressed publicly but shifted to women. Freud (1930) claimed that such repression causes communal neurosis. Chanda's mental health mirrors this tension: she suffers from resentment, a shattered identity, and emotional tiredness as a result of her dual role as desired and excluded.

❖ **Civilization and Repression**

According to Freud (1930), civilization relies on the suppression of instinctive desires to maintain social order, yet this process causes psychological strain and neurosis. *Taboo!* (2015) situates this dynamic within Shahi Mohalla, where social morality silences women's reality in order to maintain a normative hierarchy.

❖ **Institutional Silence in Amjad Shah: Maintaining Social Morality via Repression**

According to Saeed (2015, p. 10), when something is extensively socialized, it appears natural. This aligns with Freud's (1930) theory that social norms become internalized and appear natural, masking their manufactured origin. Amjad Shah responded, "The place is taboo, so what do you expect?" (Saeed, 2015, p. 10) exhibits institutional repression by silencing women's experiences in order to maintain society moral facades.

❖ **Emotional Paralysis in Amjad Shah: The Psychological Burden of Denial**

Amjad's silence when asked, "Who has a stake in their activities?" (Saeed, 2015, p. 13) exemplifies Freud's (1930) theory of repressed guilt appearing as avoidance and emotional detachment. His strict moral posture and emotional numbness represent

the neurotic repercussions of maintaining a repressive and hypocritical social structure. Freud's psychoanalytic theory provides an important foundation for analyzing the complicated psychological and social repression that women face in *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (2015). The dual focus on suppressed voices and mental health consequences demonstrates how societal taboos and internal psychic conflict interact in shaping identity, behavior, and emotional well-being.

The study here, demonstrates, via a detailed analysis of characters such as Chanda, Laila, Faiza, and Pami's mother, that suppression serves not just as a form of social control but also as a source of severe psychological pain. The case of Shahi Mohalla demonstrates how civilization's desire for suppression perpetuates cycles of exclusion and neurosis, emphasizing the critical need for empathy and societal reform. Analysis and discussion chapter not only meets the research objectives but also serves as a cohesive analytical bridge between theoretical understanding and textual representation by shedding light on the women's emotional suffering, fragmented identities, and psychic conflicts in Shahi Mohalla. Shahi Mohalla, also known as Heera Mandi, is located in the ancient city of Lahore. It has long been a cultural and performative area, usually connected with music and dancing, but has been reduced to a symbol of moral disgrace due to its affiliation with sex industry.

In *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (2015), Saeed reframes the area as a complex social environment where survival, exploitation, resistance, and identity converge. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory particularly his concepts of repression, the unconscious mind, defense mechanisms, libido and sexuality, and the tension between civilization and repression this chapter has shown how the women of Shahi Mohalla deal with the psychological burden imposed by societal denial and hypocrisy. The story demonstrates how internal tensions and emotional trauma are molded not just by human experience, but also by larger cultural and moral systems that aim to suppress desire while relying on the exact system they criticize. Shahi Mohalla is thus more than just a physical site; it is also a narrative arena in which the psychological and cultural effects of repression become visible, necessitating both empathy and critical reflection.

Findings and Results

This study uncovers several important discoveries that add to existing scholarship by combining literary analysis with psychological and gender theory using a nuanced Freudian psychoanalytic lens. First, it reveals how repression in *Taboo!* (2015) serves as both a societal strategy for silencing marginalized women and an internal psychic drive that causes emotional struggle and identity fragmentation. The analysis shows that the women's narratives are laced with unconscious wants and defense mechanisms like rationalization and displacement, which affect their coping methods in the face of systematic oppression. These findings contribute to feminist and sociological readings by highlighting the intricate interplay of external social pressures and interior psychological dynamics, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of marginalized women's lived experiences.

Second, the study situates Freud's psychoanalytic theory in a postcolonial and South Asian context, demonstrating its enduring relevance outside Western settings. By applying Freud's notions to *Taboo!* (2015), the study demonstrates how traditional psychoanalysis may reveal culturally particular forms of repression, desire, and trauma, bridging the disciplinary divide between psychology, literature, and cultural studies. This approach establishes a methodological framework for future researchers interested in investigating the psychological dimensions of gendered violence and marginalization in non-Western societies, enriching academic discourse with interdisciplinary perspectives that address both internal and external aspects of trauma.

Finally, the findings call for a reevaluation of disadvantaged voices in South Asian literature and ethnography using psychoanalytic approaches. This study's emphasis on internal struggle, unconscious desire, and cultural repression opens up new possibilities for interpreting oppression and resistance tales. It advocates for more interdisciplinary research that blends psychoanalysis, postcolonial, and feminist theory to investigate the psychological costs of cultural taboos. This promotes an inclusive scholarly debate that not only broadens literary interpretation but also increases understanding of gendered trauma in both global and regional contexts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study looked at how marginalized women are represented in Fauzia Saeed's *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area* (2015) is viewed via Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic lens, with a special emphasis on the themes of repression, the unconscious mind, and psychological conflict. This study indicates that Fauzia Saeed's *Taboo!* (2015) is an important literary work for exploring the linkages of social repression, unconscious psychological conflict, and mental health difficulties faced by underprivileged women in South Asia. Applying Freud's psychoanalytic notions indicates that suppression silences women's voices, fractures their identities, and causes deep emotional pain. The women's lived experiences in Shahi Mohalla demonstrate how cultural taboos surrounding sexuality and morality cause long-term psychological traumas, emphasizing the importance of incorporating psychological theory into literary and cultural analysis. Furthermore, this study confirms the relevance and flexibility of Freud's psychoanalytic paradigm for evaluating gendered trauma in non-Western postcolonial situations.

Freud's theory of repression explains the characters' emotional disintegration, as their identities and desires are buried in order to meet the demands of a hypocritical society. Unresolved inner conflict causes the women to unconsciously project shame, guilt, and fear onto others, resulting in anxiety, denial, and displacement. According to Freud (1915), the unconscious mind contains these repressed contents, which continue to exert influence, often emerging as symbolic forms. Characters like Laila and Faiz show how unresolved psychic tension shows as illogical conduct and emotional instability. Furthermore, the defense strategies used by these individual's rationalization, repression, and sublimation showcase their attempts to survive psychologically in an atmosphere of relentless moral policing and social rejection.

This study fills a critical gap in current studies by combining psychoanalysis with ethnographic and literary tales, emphasizing how internalized repression and unconscious urges form identity and resistance. This synthesis of theory and text improves our understanding of marginalized women's experiences, encouraging scholars to use similar methods in future study on gender, trauma, and cultural repression. Finally, this study calls for more nuanced and compassionate engagement with disadvantaged voices in literature and social debate. It encourages academics, psychologists, and cultural theorists to collaborate in exploring the

hidden mental costs of social injustice and contributing to frameworks that promote healing, representation, and social justice. This study emphasizes the necessity of identifying the unconscious influences that drive human behavior and provides a more empathetic perspective on the lives of the marginalized.

References

- Billig, M. (1999). *Freudian repression: Conversation creating the unconscious*. Cambridge University Press.
- Blank, T. P. L. I. *The Ego and the Id* Sigmund Freud.
- Faheem, A., & Basharat, A. (2020). Comparative Discourses on Language variation: A Study on Prostitutes in the Novels of Indo-Pak. *UW Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(1), 71-98.
- Freud, A. (2018). *The ego and the mechanisms of Defence*. Routledge.
- Freud, S., & Strachey, J. (1986). *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: I: The sexual aberrations*. Essential papers on object relations, 5-39.
- Freud, S., & Strachey, J. E. (1964). *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*.
- Haleem, A. (2024). Prostitution and the Intersection of Subalternity and Queerness: A Comparative Study of Daughters of the Brothel: Stories from Delhi's Red-light District and *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area*. *Creative Flight*, 5(2), 218.
- Iftikhar, H., & Asif, F. (2024). Psychoanalytic Exploration of Sisterhood among Brown's *The Dancing Girls of Lahore* and Saeed's *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area*. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 8(2), 482-492.
- Iftikhar, H., Zaidi, S. D. B., & Ehsan, R. (2023). Psychoanalytic Exploration of Motherhood among Brown's *The Dancing Girls of Lahore* and Saeed's *Taboo! The Hidden Culture of a Red Light Area*. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(4), 4586-4597.
- Jamil, M. (2023). *Gendered urban imaginations: literary representations of Lahore and Heera Mandi* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Khan, F. S., & Qadir, S. A. (2024). Patriarchy, Power and Prostitution in Lahore's Red Light District: A Feminist Study of Fouzia Saeed's *Taboo*. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 18(3), 63-73.
- Krishnakumar, J. (2025). *Playgrounds of Resistance: A Patchwork Ethnography of Sex Workers' Sociopolitical Collectivization in South & West India* (Doctoral dissertation, SOAS University of London).
- McLeod, S. A. (2016). Id, ego and superego. *Simply Psychology*, 3, 1-4.
- Naz, K. (2021). Notion of Repression in Modern Society: A Comparative Analysis of Sigmund Freud and Herbert Marcuse. *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 2(4), 201-214.
- Saeed, F. (2015). *Taboo! The hidden culture of a red light area*. Made for Success Publishing.
- Walsh, C., Naqvi, R. H., & Ibrar, M. (2024). Sex is a taboo but sexual violence is common: An exploratory study of sexual violence among domestic violence shelter residents in Pakistan. *Transformative Social Work*, 2(2).
- Westerink, H. (2021). *A dark trace: Sigmund Freud on the sense of guilt* (p. 320). Leuven University Press.
- Zubair, H. B. (2019). *Taboo by Fouzia Saeed: Book Review*. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies*, 1(4), 220-222.

Article Information:

<i>Received</i>	28-Feb-2025
<i>Revised</i>	3-May-2025
<i>Accepted</i>	20-May-2025
<i>Published</i>	15-Jun-2025

Declarations:

Authors' Contribution:

- All authors **Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions. Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The authors agree to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

• **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

• **Funding Sources:** NIL

Correspondence:

Mehwish Fatima

mehwishfatima.eng@tuf.edu.pk
