

CHAPTER III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Intrinsic Elements

3.1.1 Characters and Characterization

3.1.1.1 Razia

Razia is the protagonist as well as the narrator in *Roses, in the Mouth of a Lion*. Razia is a queer Muslim Pakistani-American girl who lives in a working-class family in Corona, New York City in the 80s. She is described as having a skinny body and long dark frizzy hair that is always braided down her back. During her childhood years, she tends to completely obey her mother, who prohibits several things, like listening to music, talking to boys, cutting her hair, and missing any prayer (Rehman, 2022, p. 9). As she gets older, Razia ironically do all the things she once avoided so much, as well as other rebellious things like dancing, skipping school, trying alcohol, and loving another woman.

Razia is a smart kid and a chronic bookworm. Since elementary school, she has liked to visit libraries and borrowed books. Every time she has a chance to lend Aliza's books, she will do it over and over again. In her high school, she joins an English class that will discuss a new book every week. Besides her infatuation with books, Razia also ranks top of the class during her elementary and junior high school. This achievement is what got her into a top specialized high school in New York City. Unfortunately, because of how often she skips her

lessons, Razia begins to be unable to keep up in class. She hides her report cards from her parents and lies about how she is doing in school.

Her characterization is built by the author through narrations that are told using the first person point of view. They are mostly direct characterizations. Utilizing this point of view, the writer is able to understand how Razia perceives and sees the world around her on a deeper level. “My prayers kept me close to her, a thin thread, a kite string, keeping me from losing her, from losing everyone I loved deeply” (Rehman, 2022, p. 121). Through this line, the writer found that Razia has a deep love for her mother even though they seldom show affection toward each other openly.

3.1.1.2 Aliza

Aliza is Taslima’s older sister. This character is a deuteragonist. Her existence in this novel acts as the primary supporting character for the protagonist. People see her as a beautiful girl, but there is no exact description for her specific appearance. She is a sharp, witty, and pragmatic character from the way she responds to things. For instance, when Razia expresses how she doubts her intellectual ability to survive in a prestigious school, Aliza responds in a practical but somehow motivational way with a hint of humor: “Razia... you’re either smart or you’re not. If you passed the test to get in, that means you belong in Stuyvesant. Plus you wouldn’t last a day in John Bowne. You’d get eaten alive” (Rehman, 2022, p. 206).

She is also intelligent and an independent thinker. It is shown through her excellent understanding of how the patriarchal system works in their community, which is very rare among her peers. She also flatly rejects the familiar social expectation to marry a Pakistani man after graduating from school. She chooses to go to college without having to be tied down by marriage or engagement. Her character is made more complex by her unserious devotion to religion. It is seen when she chooses to eat a Hershey's kiss that she accidentally finds, even though it is still fasting time. She also openly says she rarely does prayers.

Her characterization is developed through several of her dialogues, for example, "Cultures that tie women's worth to their husband and children..." (Rehman, 2022, p. 132). It indirectly shows that Aliza is smart and educated. She can express her thoughts accordingly. Another indirect characterization of Aliza's character is through another character's thought about her, for example when Razia narrates "..., even though Aliza was really the one who put all the radical ideas into my head" (Rehman, 2022, p. 134).

3.1.1.3 Saima

Saima is Razia's childhood best friend. She is the deuteragonist. Her existence in this novel acts as the primary supporting character for the protagonist. There is no exact description that says about her appearance. Razia's and Saima's fathers turned out to be good friends from college. That's why both families are very close. Razia has known Saima since they were babies. They always play and explore the neighbourhood together. Saima, as a little girl, is described as quite

imaginative. She liked to make imaginary scenes with Razia using her dolls. “Saima’s Barbies could do anything: fly, swim, jump across valleys and ravines, have all kinds of adventure” (Rehman, 2022, p. 29).

She is also an obedient daughter. When Razia’s mother and her mother are having a feud, she chooses to listen to her mother’s command not to play with Razia ever again. She even stands on her ground after Razia attempts to reconnect and ignore the quarrel between their mothers. “I can’t hang out with you,” (Rehman, 2022, p. 48). As the story goes, their friendship really falls apart. They are no longer hanging out with each other after the seventh chapter. However, during the moments when they both meet, Saima still shows that she cares. It can be seen from the way Saima praises Razia’s beautiful recitation and congratulates Razia for having been accepted into a prestigious high school (Rehman, 2022, p. 141).

The author shows Saima’s personality through indirect characterization, which is mostly her speeches. For example, when Shahnaaz asks her about what she and Razia do. This is Saima’s answer, “None of your business” (Rehman, 2022, p. 8) For the context, both Saima and Razia do not really like Shahnaaz. While Razia does not say anything, Saima openly expresses her aversion. Other than that, her character is portrayed through the protagonist’s thoughts, for example, “Was it because Saima had become religious?” (Rehman, 2022, p. 146). It is a direct characterization which states that Saima has become a religious person.

3.1.1.4 Taslima

Taslima is Razia's best friend. She is the deuteragonist of the story. Her existence in this novel acts as the primary supporting character for the protagonist. She is a skinny girl with long black hair. Her cheekbones are sharp and her skin is smooth. She is described as playful and blunt. It can be seen from her reaction after Razia said she saw a blotch that looked like a dragon. "Taslima squinted at the spot. 'I swear, Razia, I don't know what you see. Are you sure you're not losing your mind?' It was mean, but the way she said it made me laugh." (Rehman, 2022, p. 91). She is also rebellious. This one time, Taslima and Razia go to a Quran reading with their mothers. These two finish reading their parts early, and Taslima gets another idea. "Let's go to my house... We could drive the Car" (Rehman, 2022, p. 92). Even when Razia hesitates to sneak off, Saima's adventurous and rebellious side takes charge. She is not afraid to push boundaries.

Taslima has a good sense of fashion. She displays a promising ability to be a clothing designer. "Taslima had worked to keep us "fashionative." She created outfits for us from whatever was at hand" (Rehman, 2022, p. 167). Her creative endeavor really strengthens Taslima and Razia's bonds as they go to the city park and wear the clothes she created. Her craft really does well when they notice that the specific style they have worn is being copied by a fashion magazine (Rehman, 2022).

The author reveals her character through indirect characterization. It is when the author implicitly tells the reader about the certain nature of a character. Taslima's character is specifically described through her own speech, for

example, “I swear, Razia, I don’t know what you see. Are you sure you’re not losing your mind?” (Rehman, 2022, p. 91). Beside that, her character is also revealed through the protagonist’s thoughts of her, such as the quotation on the previous paragraph which implicitly says that Taslima has a good sense of fashion.

3.1.1.5 Angela

Angela is Razia’s love interest. She is the deuteragonist of the story. Her existence in this novel acts as the primary supporting character for the protagonist. She was expressive in the way she dressed herself. She put on dark raspberry lipstick, black eyeliner, and a nose ring. She constantly wears a T-shirt and ripped jeans. Angela is also a very laid-back person. “She... glanced at the platform. “Yeah. Are you also taking this slow-ass Seven train?” “I am.” “Great. I’ll have some company besides the perverts” (Rehman, 2022, p. 180). She is not afraid to convey her messages in a brutally honest way without being pretentious at all although this was her first time talking to Razia.

Angela shows her disobedient side when they both get into a Ferry. The captain of the Ferry has offered them to have a little tour of the captain’s cabin. There is a monitor, controls, and buttons. Even though the captain has said not to touch anything, she still does it anyway. “Angela, who’d been secretly touching some of the controls, noticed what was going on and came over” (Rehman, 2022, p. 218). What happens later shows how unpredictable she is. Razia is offered by the captain to try a can of beer. Seeing this, Angela straight up takes the can and

drinks the whole thing. It shocks both Razia and the captain. It is unknown where she learns to do it. The author reveals this character through indirect characterization. The method is through speeches and the protagonist's thoughts.

3.1.2 Settings

3.1.2.1 Settings of Place

3.1.2.1.1 Corona, Queens

Many stories in this book take place in Corona, a small neighbourhood in the borough of Queens, New York State. It is the exact place where Paul Simon sang “*Goodbye to Rosie, the Queen of Corona*” in his song Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard. It is a place where Pakistani immigrants lived among one another. Razia and her parents live in Corona, as well as her friends and their families. The place is “a hand-me-down from the Italians” (Rehman, 2022, p. 14). Many Italian families lived in this neighborhood in the past. But as time went by, Pakistani people began to move in, build families, and completely fill this area while the Italians moved out. Only older Italian people are left out. Corona is also the checkpoint when a relative in America is planning to go to Pakistan. They would visit someone they know for a day or two before going back to their homeland, just like what Razia's long distant Aunty does.

3.1.2.1.2 Bethesda Fountain

Bethesda Fountain is a well-known spot in Central Park, New York. This fountain has the sculpture *Angel of the Waters* at its top and a large circular pool

surrounding it. This fountain became one of the chapters' names in the novel, which highlighted its own significance. This is where Razia wears revealing clothes for the first time in public. She put on an undershirt with a chador as a miniskirt and a dupatta around her neck. It is all styled by Taslima, who also wears her own clothing. They do a little photoshoot around the fountain while wearing these modish, unusual clothes. This place represents Razia's rebellion toward her cultural expectation of how women should dress themselves.

3.1.2.1.3 Stuyvesant

Stuyvesant is a public high school where Razia goes to. It is known as a prestigious school in New York State where all smart students are accepted. Razia's parents and people in their communities are proud of Razia for being able to get into this top school. It is the place where Razia first meets Angela, her love interest. They would go to the auditorium balcony and watch the theatre kids have their rehearsals. This school is the place where Razia and Angela begin to get to know each other and develop closeness. They usually go to a park near Stuyvesant to hang out with other friends too.

3.1.2.1.4 Staten Island Ferry

It is a free passenger service that runs between Manhattan and Staten Island. Razia and Angela take the ferry on the day of Razia's birthday. They even ride it twice because of how fun it is to enjoy scenic views of the Statue of Liberty and the Manhattan skyline. On this ferry, Razia has her first kiss from Angela. It

happens so suddenly. “I thought she was going to give me a birthday hug, but instead she kissed me on the lips” (Rehman, 2022, p. 219).

3.1.2.1.5 Angela’s House

Angela’s house is such an important place because this is the first time Razia has actually visited someone’s house other than members of her community. Here, she was able to get to know Angela even more. They bond over music and books. In this place, Angela has so many records, which all belong to her father. Piles of books are filling up everywhere. This house right away becomes a safe space for Razia. After they both tie the knot with one another, Angela’s house serves as a place to express their love more freely and release their sexual desire.

3.1.2.1.6 Grand Central

Grand Central Station is a commuter rail terminal in Manhattan, New York City. This is where Razia usually waited for the 7 train from New York to bring her to Corona. The name becomes the last chapter of the novel. Right after her parents threaten to fly her to Pakistan and marry her off to some Pakistani guy because they realize Razia is having a relationship with another girl, she runs away from home. Grand Central is where Razia ends up. She calls Angela to explain her situation. Angela then comes up, bringing some helpful things, like clothes and money, to help Razia. She tells Razia to live with her cousin in

Beverly. Grand Central is the last place Razia is at before she goes on her new journey, and also where the novel ends.

3.1.2.2 Settings of Time

Each story in the novel is set in the 80s, specifically in the years 1985 to 1989. The book itself is divided into five parts that are based on chronological order. They are Summer 1985, Fall 1985–Summer 1986, Fall 1987–Summer 1988, Fall 1988–Spring 1989, and Summer 1989. It tells the stories of Razia from when she was eleven to fifteen years old. The most advanced technology is a clock radio, from which Razia, Taslima, and Aliza listened to the latest, most popular music.

Because the setting of time happens in the past, the ideologies that are held and expressed by many characters in this novel are quite outdated; for example, women are supposed to get engaged before they get into college, child marriage, the prohibition of listening to music, watching TV, and talking to boys. These things are not only influenced by the periods of time these people exist, but also the characters' strong religious and cultural background. Some characters' mindsets might not be relevant to today's generation.

3.1.3 Conflicts

3.1.3.1 External Conflict

3.1.3.1.1 Interpersonal Conflict (Razia vs. Saima)

The conflict between Razia and Saima actually arises because their mothers are feuding. It stems from the accident when Saima's uncle, who works

in Razia's father's meat shop, has stolen some money. Razia's mother becomes angry and throws curses toward Saima's mother. They make an unspoken ultimatum of cutting their long-held family relationship and never letting their children play with each other again. Razia has once ignored this quarrel and comes to Saima's house. But unfortunately, her best friend decides to obey her mother and rejects Razia's attempt to reconnect. After that, they never hang out with each other. The strong bond that is once there has been broken.

3.1.3.1.2 Interpersonal Conflict (Razia vs. Angela)

The conflict between Razia and Angela occurs after Razia hears from Angela herself that she will go to prom with a guy named Ed. Razia and Angela are in a romantic relationship. They both know they love each other and have expressed this feeling physically, too. The fact that Angela, with a full conscience, decides to accept a boy's invitation to be his prom partner has made Razia so mad. Their argument comes to a point where Angela becomes disrespectful toward Razia's cultural background. She calls her family insular (narrow-minded) for not allowing her to have sleepovers with people outside of her community.

Furious at hearing this from Angela, Razia starts calling out Angela's people (who are white) for hating and killing anyone they thought is different. This statement is based on the incident that happens with her Pakistani friend's brother, who was burned alive by a bunch of white boys. Their argument then quickly turns to the topic of how Razia will not survive if she were ever mentioned in their lesbian relationship to her parents, stating sarcastically: "...,

my family wouldn't chop my head off" (Rehman, 2022, p. 246). This presses the last button inside Razia. She storms out of Angela's house for the last time, wishing it will hurt Angela for losing her.

3.1.3.1.3 Familial Conflict (Razia vs. Her Parents)

A big clash between Razia and her parents occurs at the end of the novel when Razia is caught having a romantic relationship with another woman. Her family—and most families in Corona—holds onto a religious belief that judges same-sex attraction as something sinful and forbidden. They are furious after finding out about her diary, which is filled with Razia's handwritten stories of her and Angela. One of the things she writes is that they both had kissed. Her father is deeply shocked by this and says that she will go to Hell (Rehman, 2022, p. 263), something he will never say to her daughter.

This incident is so big and impactful that her parents decided they will bring her to Pakistan to fix this matter. Razia, who feels defeated after being caught, is so distraught hearing this, believing that her parents will marry her off to some guy in that country. She loses her grip and screams at her parents: "No! I won't do it! I won't!" (Rehman, 2022, p. 265). Before her parents can respond to that, Razia runs away. She runs and runs past several houses in Corona, takes a train, and arrives at Grand Central, away from what her parents expect her to be.

3.1.3.1.4 Social Conflict (Razia's Community vs. Outsiders)

Razia and many women from her community usually wear a Pakistani traditional dress called a shalwar kameez. Kameez is a long shirt or tunic, while shalwar is a loose pair of trousers. This type of clothing was quite eccentric compared to the usual clothes worn by non-Pakistani-Americans, almost looking like pajamas even. One time, an accident happens associated with the way Razia dresses herself. Razia and Taslima are walking down the street, heading toward Razia's house, when suddenly a kid says something to her friends about them. "Look, it's the Pajama People!" (Rehman, 2022, p. 83). After that, a bunch of children begin to chant 'Pajama People' in unison toward them.

Razia is so dejected by this. It is the first time she has ever been bullied so openly because of her culture. This occurrence shows how visible cultural distinctions often ignite conflicts between different groups of people, which manifests in racist behaviour from the more privileged group. Razia is born in a marginalized community, Muslim Pakistani immigrants who live in America. Her identity is an easy target for discrimination. Even when Razia is a child, she has realized that hatred from Italian neighbors toward Pakistani people in Corona is something trivial. "...the look I saw from all the other Italians. A look of hate, saying: We were bad" (Rehman, 2022, p. 19).

3.1.3.2 Internal Conflict

3.1.3.2.1 Faith vs. Authenticity

The majority of Muslims forbid the act of homosexuality and see it as a disgusting behavior, including Razia's parents and people in her communities. Razia is constantly expected to be a good Muslim girl in front of her parents.

Therefore, this condition is clashing with the fact that her sexuality is labelled as a sin by her religion. It creates a deep inner conflict within Razia which is struggling to adjust her faith and the desire to be her true self. For instance, when Taslima indirectly says that it is haram for a woman to kiss another woman, Razia begins contemplating on this matter, realizing it has pinched something inside her (Rehman, 2022). She cannot believe that her friend thinks it is haram to kiss another girl. This creates an invisible yet solid conflict that Razia has to face as a girl who lives a double life.

3.2 Extrinsic Elements

3.2.1 Compulsory Heterosexuality in *Roses, in the Mouth of a Lion*

3.2.1.1 Traditional Gender Roles

Compulsory heterosexuality is a societal expectation imposed upon women by the patriarchal system that assumes heterosexuality as a natural preference (Rich, 1980). After reading Rich's essay, the writer found a correlation between compulsory heterosexuality and traditional gender roles. The mandate that women should have sexual interest in men stems from the idea that women require men's protection, whether physically, socially, or economically, to survive in life. Therefore, in return, women should center their physical, sexual, and emotional energies toward men. It represents what the traditional gender role for women looks like, where women have to be the caretakers of the families, doing all the domestic chores, providing sexual fulfillment, and giving attention and empathy only toward their husband. This imposition of institutionalized

heterosexual standards shapes the behavior and identity of women. Young women should learn how to be a 'good' feminine figure who, one day, will marry a man and serve their husband. This tenet would be held until these girls become adults and have their own families, except when they defy traditional gender roles.

In *Roses, in the Mouth of a Lion*, the reinforcement of traditional gender roles is seen through the practice of household chores. Because men are supposed to provide for their families, domestic labor becomes superfluous and is assumed to be out of their responsibility. Thus, women are left with a whole lot of chores at home by themselves. Here is, for instance: "While our mothers took the empty teacups to the kitchen, Saima's father turned on the VCR and put in a Bollywood movie..." (Rehman, 2022, p. 30). After Razia's and Saima's families have a big supper together, it is the wives' job to clean up after their mess. Razia's and Saima's mothers are the ones who collect dirty cups and plates, even though the men could have picked up their own dishes and brought them to the sink.

In a patriarchal society, it is customary for women to serve men. Their assigned gender role requires them to be the caregiver in the family. Most of their duties in the household are undertaken to satisfy men's needs, ranging from sexual, emotional, physical, and even creative. They are obliged to submit to male domination in the house because men have provided them with security and financial support. Therefore, domestic labor is exclusive to women. Some families even exhibit extreme gender roles where the men do not intervene with household chores at all, as what can be seen from the quotation above. It is normal for men

to treat their wives like servants who would do anything without needing any help.

This patriarchal norm of excluding men from any household work is somehow a way to exploit women in their own homes. They perform various types of domestic labor, such as cleaning the entire house, doing laundry, washing dishes, cooking, and caring for their children, without any help from their husbands (a.k.a. their life partner). It can be seen from this quote: “Safia cried day and night... My father started sleeping in my room so he could get some rest before work, and I slept in the bedroom with my mother and sister” (Rehman, 2022, p. 70). Razia’s baby sister is crying all night, so it is decided that she will swap rooms with her father. This is done to prevent her father, who would go to work in the morning, from losing any sleep. This creates the notion that caring for a crying baby at night is entirely the wife’s duty, while the father has nothing to do with it.

One would argue that a man has a job outside of the house to focus on; therefore, caring for a restless child is a woman’s obligation. However, a wife also has a plethora of household chores to do every day. She also has the same degree of responsibility as their husband. Women’s unpaid labor for their family is done out of love and moral duty, but it does not imply that men can ignore this truth and conclude that they do not have to take part in this matter. It is a collaborative work to tend to a house and a child. Instead of swapping bedrooms with her teenage child, Razia’s father should have helped his wife take care of their baby girl at night, in turn, so that both of them can have the fair sleep they need.

The conviction that men do not have to carry out any household chores occurs from an early age, indoctrinated by parents' distinct behavior toward their boys and girls. Let's see this example. "Aliza had fought the battle many times but had been outnumbered by the boys, who didn't want to do anything, and by their mother, who insisted Aliza needed to learn how to do housework for when she got married" (Rehman, 2022, p. 107). Aliza is frustrated by the fact that her male siblings do not have to do any housework, even the mere one, like picking up the dishes, while she is burdened with several chores. It shows how traditional gender roles and gender segregation have been reinforced in the smallest community—the family.

Children who begin to grow up are taught by their parents how to perform their roles as a man and a woman in a patriarchal society. This normally proceeds through giving more domestic chores to teenage girls and fewer (or even none) to teenage boys. The girls will be convinced to accept this fate by reminding them that one day they will be a wife and a mother, as happened to Aliza when she confronted her mother about this unfair treatment. Her mother's answer reiterated that domestic labor is inevitable for a wife, and she had to learn how to do the chores without any help. Boys are given less housework as a statement that it is not their responsibility to take care of the house because their role is to be a breadwinner.

These gender stereotypes are rooted in culture and religion. As the stories of this novel happened in a Pakistani-American community with a strong Islamic way of life, the existence of gender roles cannot be separated from its religious

background. It is strongly customary to see conservative Muslim families or people conforming to gender stereotypes or trying to maintain this old-fashioned norm. They even see a woman who obeys this norm as religious, and hence a good suitor to be someone to marry.

“But I knew ‘religious girl’ was code for something that had nothing to do with Allah. It had to do with how a girl did whatever her husband and the community said, how a girl wouldn’t question the way things were set up” (Rehman, 2022, p. 137). Razia, the protagonist, reflects on the term ‘religious girl’ after knowing that an acquaintance was searching for this kind of woman to be a candidate for their nephew to marry. This discourse suggests that religiosity in women is deeply interconnected with women’s subservience. They considered a woman to be ‘good,’ or other equivalent idioms, when this woman is submissive and obedient, especially toward the male authoritative figure (a.k.a. their husband). It can be presumed that ‘religion’ has put male dominance forward and taken this social condition as the basis of its morality, while pushing women to obey.

3.2.1.2 The Objectification of Women by Men

Compulsory heterosexuality expects women to be the sexual property of men (Rich, 1980). This mandate situates women as objects of male sexual gratification rather than as autonomous subjects with agency (Rich, 1980). It encourages objectification by conditioning women to prioritize male desire and validation. This created a power imbalance where men act as subjects and women

as passive objects. It limits the presence of women's desire and autonomy. The objectification oftentimes manifests through something called the 'male gaze,' where men are looking at women while also sexualizing and diminishing them.

“Without Saima, I was always alone on the streets. There were men on every corner. They hung around the sides of buildings and stared with the focused glares of wolves. They whistled and whispered dirty words. They knew they could overpower me. They knew it and I knew it. Whether I ignored them and said nothing or whether I got mad enough to scream, there was no winning. I'd feel dirty and stained, soiled, anytime I left my house” (Rehman, 2022, p. 50)

Razia begins to experience this objectification right after her puberty, when her body is changing more maturely. The transformation is primarily seen through her breasts, which are growing constantly. The visible presence of this female sexual object has attracted the male gaze. Razia suddenly becomes the prey of men's thirsty stares in her neighborhood. The period of walking down the streets without the need to feel distressed and self-conscious about her body has ended. She has to think about how her body will look before going outside to avoid the chance of being catcalled or gazed at sexually, which is impossible. Even though Razia never wears revealing clothes—she mostly wore baggy kameez—around those places, she is still being objectified constantly by those men.

Through the act of objectifying women's bodies, they establish male sexual access to women. Some men will openly degrade women's dignity by performatively gazing at their bodies and even sexually harassing them through the act of catcalling, involving whistles or unwanted sexually suggestive comments, or gestures toward women. They did it mostly with the intention of

bringing women under their control to make themselves feel superior. With this action, they would humiliate women to feel good about themselves.

What happens to Razia definitely makes her feel humiliated. The awareness that her body is being seen in a sexual way by a number of men is repulsive and unbearable. She realizes that these men try to overpower her, and they succeed. Razia knows that whether she keeps silent or confronts them makes no difference. She is still a mere walking object in these men's eyes. This occurrence has introduced her to a terrible feeling that she has never felt before, which is a sense of invisible dirtiness surrounding her body after being objectified by male strangers. Razia's experiences represent what women around the world have gone through. These suggest how hard it is for women to get away from the grip of objectification by men.

On top of that, the agents of this objectification are not only male adults, but also boys. It can be seen through the passage in this novel where Razia presumed that the reason boys began to follow her around was because of her new body. She had a more mature body with large breasts after puberty, something that might draw male teenagers who were at the dawn of their manhood. Taslima also experienced this objectification from teenage boys. Don't you remember when we went to Bahar's Valima and all her boy cousins were staring at you?" (Rehman, 2022, p. 104). Taslima was described as beautiful, but it didn't justify these boys' action to openly gaze at Taslima like she was some kind of object to watch. `

Female objectification by boys has a different overtone behind it. When a man is objectifying women, he does it as a symbol of domination over women. They cannot handle their overwhelming internal life of feelings, fears, and doubt, so they project these things onto something tangible. One of them is being a group of the opposite sex. They unconsciously displace their feelings onto girls and women, and perceive them as objects to be dismissed, a bunch of bodies to watch and fancy, while diminishing these girls' thoughts and personalities. Besides, it is also possible that their behavior is derived from the heavy influence of patriarchal structures, which demand women's submissiveness and objectification. One way or another, this act is harmful to normalize, especially without women's consent.

3.2.1.3 The Imposition of Heterosexual Marriage

In societies where people enforce heterosexuality, the idea of matrimony with men becomes customary for women, especially those who live in a deep-rooted patriarchal environment (Rich, 1980). Marriage performs as one of the primary mechanisms that maintains and forces compulsory heterosexuality. It legally, emotionally, and economically solidifies this political mandate for women to have a sexual orientation toward men. Marriage between opposite sexes acts as the final step to impose heterosexuality. And with this, women are expected by society to marry a man after they reach a certain age. Somehow, this phenomenon turns into a societal pressure that needs to be conformed to, or else these women would be labelled as deviant and problematic.

The enforcement of marriage in this novel is presented through the very social norm that is followed by people in the community where Razia lives. Among the diverse narratives that are told by the characters, there is a story of a young woman who resists getting married (Rehman, 2022). Her mother believes something is wrong with her daughter, so she brings her to an exorcist. Contemplating the mother's action, two assumptions are made here regarding why she thinks her daughter needs to get fixed. First, the mother believes every woman unquestionably wants to get married, and so should her daughter. Second, she thought her daughter's unwillingness to marry was unacceptable.

If the first assumption is right, it denotes how deeply compulsory heterosexuality has been embedded in society, to the point where all the women she encountered in life—except her daughter—exhibit total subservience to the idea of marriage. It also indicates she has a fossilized mindset that prevents her from digesting and accepting the fact that her daughter chooses not to marry. On the other hand, if the second assumption is right, it proves how society strongly imposes compulsory heterosexuality upon women through marriage, and that a woman's attempt to have agency over her own life is denied. They violate women's basic freedom to make choices for themselves. Interestingly, it is conducted by women too (mothers to daughters), who the writer assumed are doing so to protect their daughters. Nevertheless, both perspectives see women who refuse to get married as aberrant.

The negative view toward these kinds of women also manifested through what happens to Aliza. Disregarding the social norms in her community, she

chooses to go to college without any engagement. The people deem it controversial. They begin gossiping about Aliza, saying that she has been ruined by drugs and sex (Rehman, 2022, p. 200). This occurs because Aliza chooses not to marry or engage with a man before pursuing higher education far away from her neighborhood. Thus, they perceive Aliza as deviant. They create false narratives about her to justify their judgment. Through this behavior, these people presume that Aliza is wrong for making her own choice to resist marriage instead of following the old norm that commands women to at least get engaged before they leave their 'home.'

The behavior of these people also indicates how they thought that, for women, marriage is more important than education. One of them even questions Aliza about why she studies so much when it will not help her change diapers (Rehman, 2022). This statement reflects the character's preconception that Aliza will certainly get married. They believed marriage is inevitable for every woman, so they cannot wrap their head around Aliza's decision to prioritize education instead. They even blatantly told Aliza's mother that her daughter should have married, and proceeded to ask whether she has any plans for her unmarried daughter (Rehman, 2022). It signifies that society sometimes discredits women for having ambitions to pursue bigger things and minimizes them to the only norm they resist following.

The idea of marriage over education in this novel is also clearly seen through the case of child marriage. Shahnaaz is fifteen years old and still attends high school. But right after her brother dies, the parents decides to marry her off

to a young man, as they need someone to manage their business. This phenomenon is clearly a violation of human rights. Shahnaaz was less likely to remain in school after her marriage due to the new responsibilities to take care of her husband and their house. Her parents had diminished Shahnaaz's right to obtain compulsory education. It demonstrates how these people put marriage above all, without considering the consequences behind it.

Child marriage carries various harmful consequences for girls. Shahnaaz is the victim of domestic violence. She will put on makeup to hide the bruises. No one in the family knows, or if they do know, they do not say anything. Until one day, her husband is beating her up when acquaintances are in their house. Knowing what has happened, Razia's mother steps up to rescue Shahnaaz, while they do not seem to give deserving judgment to the husband's actions, as if it is a regular occurrence. People are silent and close their eyes even after knowing this abuse.

Considering these two different cases of Aliza and Shahnaaz, it can be postulated how the act of female agency seems way more unacceptable and alarming than men hitting their own wives. It indicates the confounding strength of intense patriarchal traditions that gripped one's culture. The mechanism of harmful internalized beliefs held by women that are implanted through intergenerational cycles of abuse by men has impacted them to somehow condone men's actions of domestic violence and perceive it as a natural part of marriage. Shahnaaz even secretly calls her husband after being rescued by Razia's mother.

Women are conditioned to be fully submissive even when they are treated unfairly, and at the same time, are expected to reduce their agency and autonomy.

Sometimes, the presence of this expectation alone is not enough to maintain conservative patriarchal structures of male dominance. Certain cultures even normalize forced marriage. Girls are married off without their consent to someone they do not choose. It nearly happens to Razia. Both of her parents find out that Razia is having a relationship with another girl. They read her diary, where she writes a lot about Angela. Her father is so dismayed that his hands shake while holding the notebook. He tells Razia that she is going to be burned in Hell—he never says such a thing to Razia before. Her father has decided they will all go back to Pakistan to fix this matter.

“I’d always thought my father understood me, but if he did, how could he ever think of marrying me off to someone I didn’t know? I knew he thought this was the way it was done. But for me? For me? I loved my father. I wanted to be the daughter he wanted me to be, but I couldn’t, couldn’t, couldn’t get married to a stranger from Pakistan” (Rehman, 2022, p. 265)

Razia knows her parents would marry her off to some guy in Pakistan to straighten her out, so right after she gets a grasp of her fractured reality, Razia runs away from home. When her parents’ decision is being reflected, it is derived from a deep sense of fear due to the realization that their own daughter is deviant. For the information, Razia’s parents are true worshipers who faithfully live their lives based on Islamic teachings, and homosexuality is regarded as forbidden according to the traditional interpretation of the Qur’an. It is difficult for them to accept that Razia is a lesbian because it means that their daughter has committed such a big sin. And the only solution they can think of is marriage to a man.

Through this social contract, they attempt to force heterosexuality on Razia. They presume that by securing Razia with a man in a matrimony, she will abandon her 'forbidden' desire and learn how to love a man. But that's not how sexual orientation works. No one could modify their sexual preference by choice. It is an essential part of a human being. Her parents' plan to impose male sexuality on Razia through forced marriage severely violates her human rights. If the marriage actually happens, it will not change her into a woman who has interest in men, but instead she will become a woman who suppresses her own desire for another woman.

3.2.1.4 The Erasure of Lesbian Existence

The erasure of lesbian existence may happen because lesbian existence is threatening compulsory heterosexuality norms. It hindered male control over women's sexuality and male access to women's bodies (Rich, 1980). This erasure manifests in various forms, ranging from trivializing relationships between women, invalidating lesbian identity, to violence directed at lesbian women.

In *Roses, in the Mouth of a Lion*, the manifestation of lesbian erasure occurs in several degrees. One of the mild ones is the act of labelling lesbian identity as something abnormal. "It's the first time one of us has kissed someone. I thought it was going to be a boy first, but of course, you can never do things normal." (Rehman, 2022, p. 227). Based on how Taslima internalizes the word 'normal,' there are two possible reasons why she thinks that Razia kissing a girl is not normal. First, she may perceive normal as the most common thing or the

majority, hence lesbianism that exists as a sexual minority is understandably abnormal. Second—which is likely this, she might perceive the word ‘normal’ based on what is appropriate within social norms.

If the second likelihood is true, it indicates how Taslima’s views on sexuality have been shaped by the norms largely conformed to by her community. She lives among conservative Muslim Pakistani-American people. These people are very faithful to Islamic beliefs. They are profoundly accustomed to heterosexual relationships, which consist of a man and a woman(s). Heteronormativity has been ingrained so deeply into these people’s minds that other sexual preferences which diverge from this predominantly believed Islamic dogma are seen as anomalous. From the previous quote, Taslima expresses her opposition to homosexuality in a playful manner. However, it does not dilute her tendency to see Razia’s action as something that should not have happened.

On one occasion, when she is told that Razia fought with Angela, this is how Taslima responded: “Well, at least you don’t have to be a lesbian anymore” (Rehman, 2022, p. 247). This statement confirms that she perceives Razia having a romantic relationship with a girl as something deviant. Taslima’s mindset is so fixed that her attempt to ease Razia’s discomfort is by framing lesbian identity in a negative light, as if there is a better option other than being a lesbian. She unconsciously denies Razia’s sexual identity. It is due to her embedded belief that a woman should have had romantic and sexual interest in men instead. This thought stems from conservative religious principles that perpetually encompass her life.

The influence of religious teachings on one's view of homosexuality is also seen through Taslima's reply after Razia tells her that she has kissed Angela. Taslima indirectly says that it is haram for a woman to kiss another woman (Rehman, 2022). Taslima's answer to Razia is deeply affected by religious dogma, which condemn same-sex attractions and label them as forbidden. From this, it can be learned how religion becomes one of the institutions that continuously enforces compulsory heterosexuality upon women and erases lesbian existence.

The attempt of lesbian erasure through religion is not only conducted by Razia's friend but also by her own father. After her father finds out about the diary containing Razia's desire toward Angela, he declares that she would be burned in Hell (Rehman, 2022, p. 263). He suddenly discerned her daughter as someone with moral sickness for having a relationship with another woman. The innocent love she has with Angela is marked as sinful and thus, intolerable, as it is haram according to conservative Islamic teachings. Her desire for another woman is silenced by her parents, who later plan to marry Razia off to a man in Pakistan (Rehman, 2022). Razia's identity is once again being delegitimized by the people she loves the most. Her agency as a woman to love whoever she wants to love is being shut down by the institution she has followed obediently.

The mechanism of punishing women for attempting to love another woman is also portrayed through violence directed toward homosexuals. Angela and Razia decide not to tell anyone in school about their relationship because gay people there—even the ones who are only rumored—are “treated badly”

(Rehman, 2022, p. 231). These actions could arise because of homophobia. They convey their hatred and disgust toward people who deviate from heteronormativity by hurting and humiliating them. It definitely adds up to the attempts to erase lesbian existence.

3.2.2 Women-Identified Experiences in *Roses, in the Mouth of a Lion*

3.2.2.1 Women-Identified Experiences between Razia and Angela

Razia and Angela's relationship represents the most intimate and transformative form of women-identified experiences ever happened to Razia. Through this, Razia undergoes a foreign but intense desire that she has never experienced before with anyone else. At first, she does not understand what this means, as lesbianism seems so unreachable yet suggestive. It is seen from the way her body reacts the first time she visits Angela's bedroom: "My heart started beating fast. My palms became sweaty. I didn't understand what was happening to my body" (Rehman, 2022, p. 187). This physical reaction is a signal for the hidden tension of what might happen between these two. Angela gradually becomes the subject of Razia's sexual awakening.

This process of sexual awakening starts with Razia having an innocent admiration for Angela. She is drawn to Angela's unique appearance, which included wild, black curly hair, blackberry lipstick, and thick black eyeliner (Rehman, 2022, p. 179). It develops into a more intense infatuation as Razia is experiencing bodily sensations every time Angela touches her. For instance, when Angela grabs her hand to pull her away from a bench, Razia feels "electricity"

move through her (Rehman, 2022, p. 191). Or when Angela's arm accidentally brushes against her chest, her body "shivered" (Rehman, 2022, p. 194) as if Razia cannot handle how much she longs for her.

This longing seems to be reciprocated when Angela quietly tells her in front of the Sappho sculpture that Razia is beautiful like this figure (Rehman, 2022, p. 196). Sappho is an ancient Greek poet who is widely known to be a prolific lesbian figure. Angela's gesture symbolizes her homoerotic desire toward Razia. She indirectly acknowledges the existence of historical lesbianism and attempts to relate Razia—her love interest—to this lesbian figure. Moreover, her words are quite impactful as it is the first time Razia has ever been called beautiful by somebody else, not even by her parents. Razia finally knows how it feels to be seen and recognized, especially by the person she fancies the most. After that, they gradually become attached without needing anyone else around (Rehman, 2022, p. 210).

This reaches a pivotal moment when Angela suddenly kisses Razia on the lips (Rehman, 2022, pp. 219-220). It happens during their ferry trip on Razia's birthday. They are drowned in each other's presence as they kiss. It is the first time Razia ever kisses anybody, and she deeply embraces this intense closeness. All the lines are blurred, and their friendly alliance converts into an erotic relationship. They begin to engage in sexual activities in Angela's house (Rehman, 2022, p. 231). Razia learns how joyful it is to be touched so dearly by someone she love and who loves her back. They both are madly in love and center

their care, affection, and gentleness toward each other. This relationship represents one expression of the lesbian continuum.

The lesbian continuum refers to the spectrum of women-identified experiences that is not only related to sexual desires (Rich, 1980, p. 27). It is a range of primary intensity between and among women that includes sexual partnership, friendship, communal bonds, emotional support, mentorship, political allies, and others. All women can be moving in and out of this extensive spectrum, no matter whether they identify themselves as lesbians or not. The relationship between Razia and Angela is part of this continuum. Although there is no exact quote that mentions sexual orientations—and it shouldn't be a problem—, their relationship exhibits an intimate bond between two women through bodily and emotional intimacy. It is still valid even though they hide their sapphic desire from people around them.

This act of hiding a lesbian relationship is one way in which the double life came into play. Women who engage in a relationship with another woman often live a double life. They are living their authentic life and loving who they want to love, but at the same time, following heteronormativity to disguise themselves. Razia is concealing her love life with Angela from her parents' radar. She never once mentions Angela's name around anyone in her community except her best friend, Taslima. It is dangerous to reveal her truth, as the people in her community are conservative Muslims who mostly thought matrimony is the solution for all problems. However, when it is only Razia and Angela, our main

character can fully be herself and express her desire openly without fear of being judged or punished.

3.2.2.2 Women-Identified Experiences between Razia and Saima

Razia and Saima are childhood best friends. They have been friends since they were babies (Rehman, 2022, p. 36). Razia mostly spends time with Saima and the other kids during the day. They like hanging out beneath the grapevines near Saima's house, discussing anything that sparked their interest. The neighborhood of Corona is their playground. They enjoy exploring around. Climbing fences is something regular and perfectly their expertise. Razia and Saima also have a sweet tooth. One time, they collect so many empty cans together to be traded for some money to buy candies. They have done a fun exploration here and there throughout their childhood.

Saima is an important figure in Razia's life. Their friendship is the first primary female intimacy Razia has experienced other than with her mother. At one point, Saima is the only friend who is approved of by Razia's mother (Rehman, 2022, p. 46). They share deep identification. Not only are they part of the Pakistani-American community, but they also have fathers who have been best friends since college, which becomes the reason why Razia and Taslima are close since they were little. They learn to protect each other. Razia even thinks: "Without Saima, who would I be brave for?" (Rehman, 2022, p. 37). This statement stems from an accident where Saima is almost being assaulted by a man (Rehman, 2022, p. 36). Fortunately, Razia is able to pull Saima away from the

place before it is too late. The quote above exhibits how strong their bond was, as Razia correlated the essence of her courageous act to Saima's presence.

The relationship between Razia and Saima is part of the lesbian continuum. Their bond allows Razia to identify herself with another girl on a deeper level, which is crucial to women-identified experiences. Rich (1980) even considers intimate girl friendship as one of the diverse examples of women's identification. Through this friendship, Razia is sheltered from the initial pressure of compulsory heterosexuality, where she is expected to like boys instead of having intimate bonds with girls. Besides, this fellowship also allow both Razia and Saima to exist authentically as they are without needing to perform for the male gaze. They concentrate their creativity around each other by creating women-centered spaces through shared imaginative worlds.

Their friendship is unfortunately put to an end because their mothers are having a feud. It is due to Saima's uncle, who works for Razia's father, having stolen some money. Because of this, Razia's family entirely cut ties with Saima's. This breakup is not easy for Razia, as she is still thinking about this sinking friendship after several years. Every time she meets Saima, she grieves for the bond that is lost between them. It is hard to accept the reality that she and Saima are not best friends anymore. "Somehow, it was not until then that I realized Saima and I would never be friends again. Her loss, the one I'd never allowed myself to believe, began to bleed" (Rehman, 2022, p. 150). It reveals how childhood friendships between girls are so intense and intimate that they last longer in their minds.

3.2.2.3 Women-Identified Experiences between Razia and Taslima

After the friendship breakup between her and Saima, Razia is introduced to a girl who later becomes her new best friend. The girl's name is Taslima. Taslima's family just moved into Corona, and their mothers are already hitting it off. It gives them chances to play together when their family visits each other. Together with Taslima, Razia experiences several amusing activities that are not allowed in her house, like listening to music and dancing. They also like to experiment with fashion together and even once wear clothes styled by Taslima in the city park, which are the most revealing things that Razia has ever worn. Taslima's influence challenges Razia to explore undiscovered territory within herself. Their shared experiences are significant factors in Razia's identity growth.

These shared girlhood experiences construct an emotionally intimate bond between Razia and Taslima. Rich (1980) stated that the lesbian continuum takes up various forms of primary intensity between women. Therefore, their friendship is part of this spectrum. Their platonic closeness helps Razia and Taslima to survive in such a restrictive environment. They can easily ease their minds by sharing any problems and secrets with each other. Here is the example: "Taslima always joked about it, but I knew, like me, she got frustrated by her mother's constant criticism" (Rehman, 2022, p. 90). They bond over the same struggle of constantly being criticized by their mothers. This identification automatically strengthens their friendship.

This friendship is a safe place for Razia. She can freely express who she is in front of Taslima. For example, after she and Angela kiss, she tells Taslima about it (Rehman, 2022, p. 221). That is such a major, dangerous secret to tell, but she feels safe enough to share this information with her best friend. Their bond also helps Razia to escape religious expectations. For the information, Razia is not allowed to listen to music by her parents. But in Taslima's house, she can easily listen to songs through Aliza's clock radio. She even has a favorite singer, George Michael. Along with Taslima, she dances through George's entire album—an activity that is seen as unpleasant and unnecessary for Muslim girls by conservatives at that time. Many activities they both engage in often challenge the norms that are followed within their community.

The friendship between Razia and Taslima operates as the early expression of resistance toward compulsory heterosexuality. When the norm expects girls to center their emotional energies toward boys, Razia and Taslima only focus on experiencing their friendship to the fullest. Their closeness and loyalty intrudes on the presumption that girls should direct affection to boys. Never once in the novel do they talk about any boy at all. They create such small female solidarity that teach them how to feel deeply for another girl. They also learn emotional vocabularies for platonic love and affection. It can be seen from the scene where Razia is having a sleepover in Taslima's house. This is how she described her feeling: "I drifted off, feeling the warmth of Aliza's and Taslima's bodies next to mine. Under the covers, a winter fire bloomed in my heart" (Rehman, 2022, p. 101). She centers women as her primary emotional intensity.

3.2.2.4 Women-Identified Experiences within the Community

Women in Razia's community have a very strong bond with one another. They are connected by the same religious and cultural background. These women are mostly Muslim Pakistani immigrants. They will hold a special event to meet their allies through religious practices. It is mostly seen when more and more people move into Corona after a mosque was built. Razia's mother begins to meet women who are as religious as her. They start to plan Vazes, a religious event where they pray together and read the entire Qur'an (Rehman, 2022). The Vazes are Razia's mother's favorites. Not only can she meet her friends and, at the same time, indulge in religion, but she is also able to temporarily escape from doing so many chores at home. It is told how her entire being glowed every time she arrives at the place where the Vazes were held (Rehman, 2022)

When women choose other women as allies and a community, they can gain the power to modify the social dynamic between the sexes and to liberate themselves and one another (Rich, 1980). The majority of these women are married. Therefore, they are expected to prioritize their husbands above anything as part of the patriarchal agenda. However, by building communal bonds among women, they challenge the preconception that wives should only focus on serving men's needs and interests. Their decision to come together at the Vazes acts as a form of survival against the heavy pressure of being a wife and mother in a patriarchal structure. These women subconsciously attempt to liberate themselves by celebrating women's bonding and identification through a women-identified experience.

This woman-identified experience is also reflected in the friendship established by Razia's mother with others. Before she had a feud with Saima's mother, they had a pretty good relationship. Saima's mother once visits and helps Razia's mother cover all the dishes and food before they both put roach bombs in every corner of the house (Rehman, 2022). She will not let Razia's mother do it alone, knowing the husband will not help. She even let Razia's family temporarily sleep in her family's house until the roach fog subsides. It is clear that Saima's mother does it out of love and care for their female friendship. Besides Saima's mother, it can be seen from her friendship with Taslima's mother. "It was only with Taslima's mother that my mother laughed" (Rehman, 2022, p. 81). This women-identified experience becomes a source of relief for Razia's mother, who was constantly pestered by all the domestic chores in her house.

The relief that women obtained through women-identified experiences is also seen after Shahnaaz's incident. It is told in the novel that Shahnaaz is having an argument with her husband in their room downstairs when some people, including Razia and her mother, visit their house (Rehman, 2022, p. 256). This couple is screaming at each other. Then out of nowhere, there is a thud. Everyone in the house becomes silent. The thud is repeated several times. It turns out that Shahnaaz is getting hit by her husband. Before someone is able to check on them, the husband flies out of the house from the back door. Realizing what has happened, Razia's mother quickly evacuates Shahnaaz to her house in solidarity. She lets Shahnaaz grieve over this unfortunate fate for days and gives her the helpful solace that she needs.

Razia's mother and Shahnaaz begin to do many things together in the house, like reading a book about Islamic sacred laws, watching TV shows, or gossiping about the characters in the show. She even teaches her how to cook. Razia's mother helps Shaahnaaz redirect her attention from the awful incident that has happened. On top of that, Razia's mother's quick decision to bring Shahnaaz in is the right action to stop the possibility of the continued violence. It is highly possible, as Shahnaaz indirectly confesses to Razia, that the incident is not the first time. The action to evacuate Shahnaaz from the family's house are heroic acts done by women for women.

3.2.3 Women-Identified Experiences as Resistance to Compulsory Heterosexuality

Through the concept of compulsory heterosexuality, Rich (1980) proposed that heterosexuality is not a 'natural' preference, but instead a mandate that was imposed upon women by institutions, such as family, religion, government, media, etc. The enforcement of heterosexuality allows men to have rights in accessing women's bodies, labor, economy, and emotions (Rich, 1980). Women become emotional and sexual objects for men. They are being convinced from an early age that sexual orientation and marriage with men is unavoidable, even when it is oppressive or dissatisfying. The consciousness of women is being controlled through the erasure of lesbian existence and the idealization of heterosexual romance and marriage. There is no space for them to explore and reflect on their innate sexuality without being indoctrinated with heterosexuality.

Several aspects of compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy can be seen as interrelated with each other. For example, the notion that women are expected to have total subservience to men and to prioritize their labor and sexuality toward men's interests aligns with patriarchy's traditional gender roles, or that women are the sexual property of men is in accord with the concept of women objectification, which indicates men's dominance over women, or that the enforcement of coupling between women and men aligns with patriarchal marriage. It shows how compulsory heterosexuality acts as the primary mechanism for patriarchy to maintain itself. Both compulsory heterosexuality and patriarchy are bound to control women

There are diverse ways in which women would resist male tyranny. One of them is through quiet resistance. Individuals who undertake this type of resistance neither seek to communicate their protests to public eyes nor have any political motive. Their main concern is to live an expressive life that aligns with who they are and what they value. This quiet resistance is what the writer found in the novel *Roses, in the Mouth of a Lion*.

Women in this novel attempt to resist compulsory heterosexuality through carrying out women-identified experience, or more specifically, female bonding. Rich (1980) hinted at kinds of women-identified experiences that may arise for this type of resistance, including the sharing of abundant inner life, intimate female friendship, the bonding against male tyranny, the mutual exchange of practical support between/among women, and so on. Not only does it break prohibition, but lesbian existence also rejects the compulsory way of life (Rich,

1980). By being a lesbian or having a lesbian relationship, one is directly or indirectly attacking male rights to access women.

Razia, our main character, engages in this ‘so-called’ deviant, sensually deprived, and pathological—labels given by heteronormative society—matter. She has a lesbian relationship with Angela. At first, they tend to hide the fact that they are together because most people around them perceive homosexuality as something negative. They both agree not to let anyone in Stuyvesant know, as there is a high possibility their schoolmates will treat them brutally. They mostly express their desire toward each other in Angela’s house. Razia believes that this house is “the only place we could be all over each other” (Rehman, 2022, p. 231). They even engage in sexual activity here. Angela’s house becomes a safe place where no one expects them to obey compulsory heterosexuality norms. Without any spectators, they are able to fully embrace who they really are.

However, it all changes after Razia and Angela visit the West Village. It is a neighborhood in New York that has a historical role in the LGBTQ+ movements. “There were rainbows everywhere...” (Rehman, 2022, p. 234). It is a common sight to see gay couples holding hands in public, as if being a homosexual is not seen as deviant by the local people there. Razia and Angela begin to hold hands while walking around that neighborhood. That is the first time they embrace their lesbian love in the open, and it seems they are addicted to living authentically. Soon, the intimacy they exhibit in the West Village starts to appear in other places. They are holding hands and resting their heads on each

other's shoulders on the train. It escalates into a braver act as they began to kiss on the lips when waiting for the train to come.

While holding hands can be trivialized as friend behavior, kissing between two girls is indeed a tangible proof that they are lesbians, or at least engage in a lesbian relationship. The way Razia and Angela openly express their love for one another outside of their safe places indicates that they reject the heteronormative way of life. When society around them is used to seeing the coupling between men and women, here they offer the innocent sight of the coupling between two women. Their lovely action challenges the norm that imposes compulsory heterosexuality upon everyone. However, they do not do it as a way to protest the oppressive system, but instead they genuinely do it to openly express who they really are. Rich (1980) presumed that when women choose another woman as their life partner, they are not just making an individual romantic choice, but they are also, consciously or not, performing an act of resistance.

Razia and Angela's lesbian identity and relationship become an act of resistance toward the compulsion that women should only couple with men. They have broken the taboo. There is an unwritten mandate made by our patriarchal society that women's bodies, emotions, and labor have to be available to men. By choosing each other as a romantic partner, Razia and Angela assert that their primary intimacy and physical self are not reserved for a man. While patriarchal society around them is used to being male-centered, their women-identified bonding brings something foreign, or deviant even, because they prioritize a woman's pleasure and erotic love instead of a man's. They break the taboo as they

find their true love in a lesbian relationship, when compulsory heterosexuality propagandizes people to believe that they have to be heterosexual.

Besides this lesbian relationship, another women-identified experience that the writer needs to point out is female friendship, whether it is between girls or adult women. The former one will be the focus first. Razia has two impactful friendships throughout her life. She becomes best friends with Saima and Taslima at separate times. Not only does it shape who she is as a person, but these friendships also act as resistance toward compulsory heterosexuality. Audre Lord (1984, in Rich, 1980) proposed that the erotic in lesbianism is actually integrated with female friendship and comradeship. She describes this eroticism as “the sharing of joy,” whether it is emotional, physical, or psychic. It is the empowering glee that makes women less wanting to experience powerlessness.

This powerlessness shows through a scene when Razia and Saima are collecting cans near the railroad. Razia sees a man with an open dangling penis walking slowly toward Saima (Rehman, 2022). At that moment, Razia freezes. She has no power to move her body or speak a single word. However, a sudden burst of energy comes over her. She fears for the safety of her best friend so much that she is able to surpass this powerlessness. She begins to throw all the cans in her hands and then grabs Saima’s arm to pull her from that area. This example shows how women could oppose their own powerlessness for the women they care deeply about. Razia even stated, “Without Saima, who would I be brave for?” (Rehman, 2022, p. 37). It indicates how she fears to death that she will lose her best friend.

Aside from the relationship between Razia and Saima, the friendship between Razia and Taslima is also worth noting. This friendship functions as a safe place for them to fully express their authentic self. Their relationship shows how female friendship helps women reject resignation and self-effacement. It is seen through their behavior to relate to each other's struggles of getting constant criticism from their mothers. They validate each other's experience, which makes the reality less depressing. Razia and Taslima also share emotional and physical joy. They do many joyful activities together, such as dancing, listening to their favorite music through Aliza's clock radio, having their hair cut, dressing up eccentrically, and doing a make-believe photoshoot in the city park.

All the things that happen between Razia and two of her best friends indicate that these women put their relationships with other women above men. When compulsory heterosexuality takes women's sexual and emotional energies away from themselves or other women and at the same time turns them to men, Razia and her best friends take that energy back by creating such a strong female bond. They resist the early stage of male right of access to them by choosing to spend their time and energy together. Razia and Taslima have never even talked about boys when they are spending time together, even though they are at the age where girls usually will have been obsessed with boys. They only focus on how to enrich their friendship while also accepting that their deepest emotional needs can be met by each other.

The emotional needs of married women can also be fulfilled by female friendship. The patriarchal system requires women in marriage to be 'everything'

for their husband, whether it is his best friend, his emotional support, his confidant, his attendant, his sexual gratifier, and so on. Sometimes it can be very exhausting physically and mentally. Female friendship between married women performs as a lifesaver for them to ease their emotional exhaustion and to find people with whom they can relate emotionally. It reflects on the friendship between Razia's mother and Taslima's mother. "...they talked on the phone almost every day... It was only with Taslima's mother that my mother laughed" (Rehman, 2022, p. 81).

Not only can they be each other's ears to share experiences and frustrations about their household, but these women are also connected so much that they become the source of each other's happiness. This friendship proves that a man is not sufficient to meet his wife's emotional and psychological needs. Through the primary intensity between them, Razia's and Taslima's mothers resist and break the mandate that a husband always has to have exclusive emotional access to their wife. They are moving in the lesbian continuum by spending their time together. They altered their devotion from the patriarchal institution to female solidarity.

Female solidarity in *Roses, in the Mouth of a Lion* can also be seen through the women-identified experience that exists at the communal level. It manifests through the bond between religious women in this novel. The community where Razia lives consists of Pakistani-American Muslims. Many of these people bond over that similar factor, especially the women. They will plan a religious party that is inclusive to any woman in the community who was willing

to come (Rehman, 2022). This religious party does not only function as a practice to get closer to God, but also as a way to meet other women with shared backgrounds. They generally perceive this religious event as something alleviating, where it will redirect their focus from the household they need to take care of to something more healing and social.

The communal bond between women is somehow able to resist compulsory heterosexuality. It moves the act of resistance from a private alternative to a structural one. This type of women-identified experience definitely involves many women. These women came together to find comfort, which unconsciously set off as the tangible ideal that withstands the mandate to always prioritize men. Patriarchal norms put women in male-centered households with a lot of chores and roles to satisfy their husbands, which can be tiring and isolating. That is why the chance to meet other women with shared experiences can be comforting. Besides, in a typical community, the social institutions will choose men as their authority figure, so this smaller community between Muslim women creates a parallel world where male authority simply does not exist. It abandons the patriarchal system that needs to be the center to function.