Self-Identity In Context: A Transitivity-Based Analysis Of Lakshmi's Evolution in *The Henna Artist* by Alka Joshi

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

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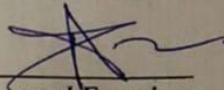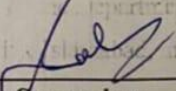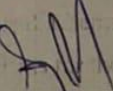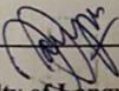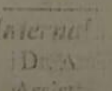
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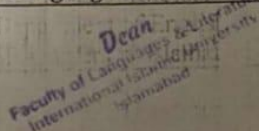
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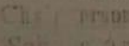
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents

Rehan Khalid

And

Tasneem Rehan

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First of all, I am grateful to Almighty Allah for his endless blessings. I express my deep gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Salma Kalim, for her encouragement, support, and constructive feedback throughout my thesis work. In addition, special thanks and love to my family and friends who constantly supported me throughout the journey.

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Abstract

This study investigates how language encodes identity transformation in Alka Joshi's The Henna Artist (2020) through the framework of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), focusing on transitivity processes. By examining how female subjectivity is negotiated, constrained, and eventually redefined in patriarchal contexts, the research demonstrates that linguistic choices both reflect and shape struggles for agency. Data was drawn from selected passages of the novel depicting the protagonist Lakshmi's trajectory, segmented into clauses and analyzed according to six transitivity processes—Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioral, and Existential. Analysis revealed that changes in the distribution of these processes trace Lakshmi's shifting roles from objectified subject to empowered agent, a transformation that unfolds across three stages of subjugation, negotiation, and empowerment. Findings revealed a clear progression in Lakshmi's linguistic representation: from subjugation, where clauses depict her as controlled and defined by absence and external labels, to negotiation, where mental and verbal processes signal emerging thought and cautious speech, and finally to empowerment, where she assumes the roles of Actor, Senser, and Sayer. This trajectory demonstrates how agency is gradually inscribed in the grammar itself, as identity shifts from externally imposed object to autonomous subject through the convergence of action, cognition, and voice. Taken together, these findings indicate that resistance in The Henna Artist is not only thematic but linguistically embedded at the level of clause structure. Patriarchal power is dismantled clause by clause, as Lakshmi's grammar transforms from passivity to agency. By integrating SFL with feminist literary analysis, this research highlights how linguistic patterns provide a powerful lens for tracing identity transformation in literary texts.

Keywords: Transitivity analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, identity transformation, *The Henna Artist*, gender and selfhood, patriarchal society.

Chapter 1 Introduction

For ages, literature has been acknowledged as one of the most deep and timeless forms of expression, analysis, and preservation of the intricacies of human life and experience. It is much more than just telling stories or providing entertainment for an audience; rather, it serves as a potent framework for interpretation that helps writers and readers address issues that are central to human life, such as identity, personal growth, and the distribution of power in society. Literary works provide opportunities for contemplation on the conflicts that endure between personal agency and the common principles or customs imposed by communities, cultures, and historical periods because of their varied narrative voices, well-crafted plotlines, and deeply nuanced characters.

Literature helps readers understand how ideas of selfhood are not static or fixed but are instead continually being created, disputed, and altered within changing social and cultural contexts by dramatizing conflicts, difficulties, and internal struggles. In this sense, literature serves as windows onto the political, historical, and cultural forces that form people's lives in addition to serving as mirrors of those lives. Literature sheds light on how people deal with these factors, balancing their sense of identity and belonging while defying or submitting to outside demands (Wolfreys et al., 2016).

Literature continues to be a vital resource for examining the changing debates of identity in society because of its exceptional ability to unite the intimate and the recent, the personal and the social. It guarantees that people's hardships, goals, and changes are preserved for future generations to access as examples of human complexity, resiliency, and inventiveness.

Central to this exploration is the role of language. Novelists, in particular, do not merely narrate experiences but employ language as an instrument to represent internal conflicts and trajectories of growth. Through stylistic choices, dialogue, description, and interior monologues, authors reveal the contradictions between social expectations and personal aspirations (Leech, 2014). Language thus functions as more than a vehicle for narrative; it becomes a mechanism through which identity is negotiated, resilience articulated, and transformation imagined. Studying how language mediates such negotiations enables a deeper understanding of how literature encodes selfhood and its contestations.

Despite the recognition that literature encodes identity through narrative, traditional literary analysis has often privileged thematic interpretation what stories mean over systematic linguistic inquiry into how those meanings are constructed (Hough, 2018). This leaves a gap in scholarship: the processes by which language itself encodes selfhood and its transformations remain underexplored. Recent developments in linguistic stylistics and discourse analysis, however, suggest productive directions. In particular, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a rigorous framework for examining how language both reflects and shapes reality. Within SFL, the transitivity system is especially significant because it categorizes experiences into processes of doing, thinking, being, and feeling (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). By analyzing how characters are positioned within these processes, scholars can trace how identities are linguistically constructed through agency, passivity, and interaction (Bloor & Bloor, 2013; Banks, 2019). Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by Michael Halliday, offers one of the most influential frameworks for linking language to meaning. SFL views language not merely as a set of formal structures but as a social semiotic system where meaning is always produced in context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). A key aspect of SFL is the transitivity system, which categorizes clauses into process types such as material (doing), mental (thinking), relational (being), verbal (saying), behavioral, and existential. These processes encode experiences, actions, perceptions, and states of being, thereby shaping how reality is represented linguistically. Transitivity analysis allows critics to trace how characters' identities are constructed through their actions, feelings, and interactions, making it a particularly useful tool for studying identity in literature (Topping, 1968).

Applying transitivity to literature is especially powerful when examining issues of self-identity. Characters' linguistic expressions often mirror their shifting psychological states: helplessness may be encoded in clauses that emphasize passivity, while empowerment emerges through processes that highlight agency and decision-making. In this way, transitivity enables scholars to observe how language maps trajectories of identity, revealing the interplay of personal agency, cultural pressure, and social negotiation. Such a framework not only enriches literary interpretation but also situates it within systematic linguistic analysis.

While scholars have applied SFL to literary texts, its potential for feminist literary criticism, particularly in postcolonial South Asian contexts, remains underdeveloped. Identity transformation in women's narratives is often discussed thematically, but less attention has been given to how such transformation is encoded linguistically through processes.

Alka Joshi's *The Henna Artist* (2020) offers a particularly compelling case for such inquiry. Set in post-independence Jaipur of the 1950s, the novel follows Lakshmi, a gifted henna artist who escapes an abusive marriage and seeks autonomy in a patriarchal society. Lakshmi's evolution from vulnerability to empowerment captures the multifaceted negotiation of women's identity within South Asian cultural traditions (Dr. Muhammad Ajmal et al., 2024). The novel not only narrates Lakshmi's external struggles but also foregrounds her internal conflicts, rendering it highly suitable for a transitivity-based study of selfhood. Examining the linguistic construction of Lakshmi's identity allows us to see how language encodes her agency, aspirations, and resilience, while also illuminating broader questions about women's negotiation of identity within traditional patriarchal structures (Leonard, 2013).

The objective of this study is to analyze how self-identity is represented and negotiated in *The Henna Artist* through the linguistic framework of transitivity. Specifically, the research investigates how Lakshmi's journey of self-discovery, agency, and empowerment is encoded in the processes, participants, and circumstances of the novel's clauses (White et al., 2010). By examining her interactions, decisions, and linguistic patterns, the study seeks to explain how she navigates cultural conventions, societal expectations, and personal aspirations. The broader aim is to highlight the relationship between language, culture, and identity construction, showing how self-consciousness and agency enable individuals to subvert and redefine social limits (Butler, 2021).

The significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary contribution. By bringing together literary interpretation, feminist inquiry, and systemic functional linguistics, it offers a fresh lens on the construction of women's selfhood in postcolonial South Asia. The analysis not only enriches our understanding of *The Henna Artist* but also demonstrates the value of linguistic tools for feminist literary criticism and discourse studies. More broadly, this research contributes to ongoing debates about identity, agency, and cultural negotiation in societies marked by tradition and transformation, offering insight into how language both constrains and empowers subjects within patriarchal contexts (McCann & Kim, 2016).

1.1 Statement of the problem

Research in literary and cultural studies has long acknowledged the centrality of identity negotiation in traditional societies, particularly where rigid customs and patriarchal structures constrain self-expression. However, much of this scholarship has emphasized thematic and symbolic interpretation, offering rich insights but often lacking a systematic,

linguistically grounded framework for analyzing how identity is represented and transformed within texts. This creates a methodological gap in tracing character development through replicable, language-based analysis.

This study seeks to fill that gap by applying Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) transitivity system to analyze self-identity construction in Alka Joshi's The Henna Artist (2020). The novel, situated in post-independence Jaipur, dramatizes Lakshmi's emergence from vulnerability within a patriarchal, culturally traditional environment into a position of agency and empowerment. The question is not only how her identity is narrated but how it is linguistically encoded. Transitivity analysis which categorizes clauses into material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential processes allow us to observe when Lakshmi is portrayed as an active agent or when she is acted upon (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1989). By tracking patterns of these processes across stages of her personal evolution, the study renders visible the shifting degrees of Lakshmi's agency, emotional stance, and social positioning. By revealing how Joshi's novel encodes Lakshmi's struggles and empowerment, this research bridges literary interpretation with linguistic analysis and broadens feminist and postcolonial understandings of identity.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To analyze the transitivity processes in The Henna Artist to trace how Lakshmi's character is linguistically constructed as moving from helplessness and despair toward self-discovery, identity negotiation, and empowerment.
2. To examine how the linguistic representations of Lakshmi's experiences mirror, reproduce, or resist the broader patriarchal, caste-based, and cultural structures that shaped women's lives in mid-twentieth-century India.

1.3 Research Questions

Q1.   How are transitivity processes in The Henna Artist used to linguistically construct Lakshmi's transformation from helplessness and despair to self-discovery, identity negotiation, and empowerment?

Q2.   In what ways do the linguistic representations of Lakshmi's transformation in The Henna Artist reflect, reinforce, or challenge the patriarchal, caste-based, and cultural structures that shaped women's lives in mid-twentieth-century India?

1.4 Significance of the Study

First, this study addresses a methodological gap in literary and cultural studies by

moving beyond thematic and symbolic interpretation of identity. While previous scholarship has richly examined identity negotiation under patriarchy, it has rarely employed a systematic, linguistically grounded framework for analyzing how identity is encoded in texts. By applying Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and its transitivity system, the research introduces a replicable model that connects literary interpretation with linguistic analysis.

Second, the study provides a new perspective on Alka Joshi's The Henna Artist, a novel that has received acclaim for its vivid portrayal of post-independence Indian society. Instead of reading the novel only for its narrative and cultural content, this research reveals how Lakshmi's identity is linguistically performed through specific transitivity patterns. This adds depth to our understanding of Joshi's work and situates it within broader debates about identity formation in postcolonial literature.

Third, the research demonstrates the analytical value of transitivity analysis for literary studies. By categorizing Lakshmi's experiences into material, mental, relational, and other processes, the study makes visible her shifting degrees of agency, emotional stance, and social positioning. This methodological approach not only strengthens the analysis of this particular novel but also serv0es as a framework that can be applied to other texts exploring identity, gender, and transformation.

Finally, the study's integrated approach contributes to the interdisciplinary dialogue between linguistics and literary studies. It shows that literature does not merely reflect identity but actively constructs it through language. This insight has broader implications for how we study narratives of transformation, suggesting that linguistic analysis can deepen and complement traditional literary criticism.

1.4 Delimitations of the Study:

This study is delimited to the analysis of Alka Joshi's novel The Henna Artist (2020), with a specific focus on the protagonist Lakshmi. The research does not attempt a comparative analysis with other literary texts, nor does it seek to cover all possible linguistic frameworks. Instead, it is confined to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the transitivity framework, as the primary analytical tool.

Furthermore, while transitivity theory encompasses both process types and participant roles, this study emphasizes process types only (Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, Behavioral, and Existential). The reason for this delimitation is to focus on how processes reflect Lakshmi's transformation and negotiation of self-identity, rather than expanding into a

more syntactic or participant-role-based account.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into five main chapters, each systematically contributing to the central aim of the study:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction**

  Provides the background, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, delimitations, and structure of the thesis. It situates the study within the field of literature and linguistics, focusing on identity and transitivity.

- **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

  Examines relevant scholarship on identity, transformation, and Systemic Functional Linguistics, with particular emphasis on transitivity studies in literature.

- **Chapter 3: Methodology**

  Outlines the research design, data selection, and analytical framework. It explains how transitivity analysis is applied to *The Henna Artist*.

- **Chapter 4: Analysis**

  Presents the detailed transitivity analysis of Lakshmi's journey across narrative stages. It examines how linguistic choices encode her agency, self-perception, and negotiation with cultural norms.

- **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion s**

  Summarizes and interprets the findings in light of the research questions. It highlights the study's contributions, discusses implications, identifies limitations, and offers recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2   Literature Review

This chapter provides a critical overview of research on identity, language, and literary portrayal, engaging with psychological, sociological, feminist, and postcolonial perspectives. It demonstrates how these frameworks shape understandings of subjectivity and selfhood in texts. Particular attention is given to linguistic approaches, especially systemic functional linguistics and transitivity analysis, as tools for examining character identity. The review also identifies limitations in existing scholarship and positions the present study within broader debates while addressing key research gaps.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Identity and Literature:

The study of identity in literature has long been informed by a range of theoretical perspectives that seek to explain how individuals and communities construct, negotiate, and transform their sense of self through narrative. Literary texts not only represent identity but also function as sites where cultural, social, and political meanings of identity are contested and reimagined. Drawing from psychoanalytic, poststructuralist, feminist, postcolonial, and sociolinguistic frameworks, scholars have examined how language, form, and representation shape subjectivity while reflecting broader structures of power and resistance. These perspectives highlight the interplay between personal experience and collective positioning, illustrating how identity emerges as a dynamic process rather than a static essence. In this way, literature provides both a mirror of existing identities and a laboratory for imagining alternative modes of being, belonging, and becoming.

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity development (1968) remains foundational in understanding identity as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a fixed trait. He argued that adolescence is the critical stage where individuals confront the challenge of synthesizing personal experiences with social roles and cultural expectations, a process that continues across the lifespan (Erikson, 1968). At this stage, which he termed "identity versus role confusion," the individual faces the psychosocial task of achieving a coherent sense of self. Success leads to identity consolidation, while failure results in confusion, instability, and a fragmented sense of belonging.

Erikson defined identity as "the accrued confidence that the inner sameness and continuity prepared in the past are matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" (Erikson, 1968). This suggests that identity is not an isolated psychological construct but a psychosocial phenomenon, situated at the intersection of internal perception and external validation. The formation of identity, therefore, requires both a sense of personal

continuity and recognition from significant others in one's social environment. Erikson (1980) later emphasized that identity is never fully achieved; rather, it undergoes continual revision and renegotiation throughout adulthood as individuals adapt to new cultural, historical, and interpersonal circumstances.

Building on Erikson's framework, Kroger (2007) explains that the centrality of crisis in identity formation makes the theory especially powerful for examining human development. She argues that crises of selfhood are not necessarily pathological but represent opportunities for growth and redefinition (p. 73). Similarly, McAdams (2001) highlights Erikson's lasting contribution in linking the personal and the cultural, observing that identity functions as "a psychosocial construct, situated at the interface between the self and society" (p. 117). This recognition positions identity as both individual and collective, internal and external, stable yet constantly in process (Gurba et al., 2022).

Scholars have also noted that Erikson's emphasis on development across the lifespan situates identity as fluid, with each stage of life presenting new challenges to coherence and continuity (Mitchell et al., 2021). Unlike earlier essentialist theories that treated identity as fixed, Erikson demonstrated that the self is always becoming, shaped by the interplay of psychological needs and social conditions. His model thus laid the foundation for subsequent theories, such as Marcia's (1980) identity statuses, which elaborated on the mechanisms of exploration and commitment inherent in Erikson's stage of identity versus role confusion.

By foregrounding identity as developmental, relational, and open to crisis, Erikson provided a framework that continues to influence psychology, sociology, and literary studies. His theory underscores that identity is not static but an ongoing negotiation between personal continuity and social change, making it a critical foundation for analyzing how selfhood is constructed and transformed in diverse contexts.

Stuart Hall (1990, 1996) expanded the discussion by theorizing identity as a cultural construct, emphasizing its fluidity, contingency, and historical embeddedness. Stuart Hall (1996), in his influential essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, distinguishes between two conceptions of identity (Gooden & Hackett, 2020). The first, rooted in essentialist traditions, assumes identity to be a singular, stable "one true self" that unites people across time and space. Such a view presumes continuity and authenticity, privileging origins as the anchor of identity. The second conception, which Hall himself advances, defines identity as "not an essence but a positioning" (p. 226). Here, identity is subject to "the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power" and is always in a process of "constant transformation" (p. 225). Rather than being discovered, identity is produced through difference, through what we

"become" as much as through what we "are." This notion of identity as becoming foregrounds its instability and relationality. Individuals, groups, and indeed literary characters are never complete or fully knowable but are continually shaped by negotiation between past and present, self and other, individual agency and structural constraint. Hall's formulation helps scholars to how subjectivities are constructed in moments of transition, displacement, or re-articulation. For literary studies, these insights are particularly generative. Novels and narratives rarely portray identity as settled; instead, they dramatize its provisional character. Protagonists are frequently situated within contexts of social hierarchy, migration, gendered expectation, or political upheaval, all of which require them to negotiate their identities in motion. In this way, characters can be read as enactments of Hall's "becoming," illustrating how identity is narrated, contested, and reconstituted through experience, dialogue, and historical change.

Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 2021) introduced the influential notion of performativity, which radically redefined understandings of gender and identity. Butler argued that gender identity is not a pre-given or innate essence but rather a repeated set of discursive acts linguistic, bodily, and behavioral that collectively create the *illusion* of stability (Butler, 2021). According to her theory, gender is not something one "is" but something one *does*, enacted through continual performance of socially sanctioned norms. These performances, repeated over time, consolidate the appearance of a coherent gender identity, even though it is fundamentally unstable and contingent.

Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) challenged the essentialist view that biological sex naturally determines gender roles, instead proposing that both sex and gender are discursively constructed. She suggested that identity categories are not natural but regulated through normative frameworks that govern social recognition. This makes identity a site of power: one becomes intelligible as a subject only by conforming to established norms of gender and sexuality (Butler, 2021). However, because norms are sustained only through repetition, they are also open to disruption. By performing gender differently, individuals can subvert hegemonic structures and expose their constructedness.

In her later work *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler elaborated on this theory, emphasizing that materiality itself is discursively produced and that power operates through what bodies are rendered visible or invisible. She argued that gender identity is a performative effect of discourse rather than an ontological core. The performative view makes identity inherently precarious, revealing that what seems natural is in fact sustained by social repetition and institutional power. This notion of precarious identity has been highly

influential across feminist, queer, and literary studies, allowing scholars to explore how narratives dramatize the fragility and instability of subjectivity.

Scholars have applied Butler's framework widely in literary criticism. Salih (2002) highlights that Butler's concept of performativity provides a valuable lens to analyze how literature both reproduces and destabilizes normative gender roles. Characters' speech, bodily gestures, and symbolic actions can be read as performances that either conform to or resist social scripts of femininity and masculinity. Similarly, Lloyd (1999) emphasizes the political implications of Butler's theory, noting that the subversion of performativity in texts often opens spaces for imagining alternative subjectivities. In narrative fiction, characters may destabilize norms by "doing gender" differently, thereby revealing the constructed nature of identity categories.

Butler's performativity framework thus shifts the focus from identity as representation to identity as enactment. Rather than treating characters' identities as static, literature becomes a stage where identity is constantly performed, reiterated, and contested. As Butler (1990, p. 33) herself noted, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." In this sense, novels, plays, and other literary forms become key spaces where the performative dimension of identity is dramatized, exposing how subjectivity is constituted through power, discourse, and repetition.

 Homi Bhabha's postcolonial theory, particularly his concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and the "third space" (1994), provides another influential perspective on identity in literature. Bhabha argued that colonial and postcolonial encounters generate hybrid identities that disrupt fixed binaries of colonizer and colonized. Literature becomes a key site where these hybridities are narrated, dramatized, and negotiated, often highlighting ambivalence, negotiation, and resistance. His framework has been especially useful in analyzing diasporic and transnational writing, where identity is represented as fractured, ambivalent, and constantly in translation. Through Bhabha's lens, literature demonstrates the transformative potential of identity as it emerges in cultural contact zones (Chandra, 2012).

Taken together, the contributions of Erikson, Hall, Butler, and Bhabha reveal that identity is a complex, multifaceted construct shaped by psychological development, cultural positioning, performative repetition, and postcolonial negotiation. Erikson foregrounds the developmental and psychosocial dimensions of identity, situating it within the crises of becoming and belonging across the lifespan. Hall emphasizes its cultural and historical contingency, framing identity as a site of difference and transformation rather than stability.

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Butler highlights its performative character, showing how identities are enacted and potentially subverted through discursive practices. Bhabha, in turn, underscores its hybridity, stressing how cultural contact zones generate fluid, ambivalent forms of subjectivity. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that identity in literature cannot be reduced to a singular essence but must be understood as dynamic, contested, and continually reconstructed. For literary studies, these theories provide a robust framework for examining how narratives dramatize struggles of selfhood, how characters embody tensions between individual agency and structural constraint, and how texts become spaces where new possibilities of being and belonging are imagined.

2.2 Tropes of Women's Transformation in South Asian and Diasporic Fiction

In Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* (1950), the trope of transformation emerges through survival and ethical agency in the violent context of Partition. The protagonist, Puro, begins as a young woman full of romantic aspirations but becomes a victim of abduction and forced marriage across religious lines. Initially rendered helpless, she eventually undergoes a profound shift in identity, not by escaping but by embracing a new form of belonging in Rashid's household. Her ultimate refusal to return to her natal home reflects not passivity but an assertion of ethical choice; she claims dignity through acceptance of her altered condition. Critics such as Urvashi Butalia (1998) and Harleen Singh (2010) interpret this refusal as a rewriting of victimhood, where survival itself becomes a feminist act. In this way, the novel frames transformation not as liberation but as resilience within trauma, complicating conventional tropes of empowerment (Anjali Gera Roy, 2019).

In Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980), women's transformation is represented as resistance to normative expectations of marriage and domesticity (Alwan, 2023). The protagonist, Bim, is introduced as a caretaker who has sacrificed personal ambition to remain in the family home, tending to her autistic brother and her absent siblings' affairs. While she is initially positioned as a character of self-denial, her journey reveals a different form of agency: she reclaims her solitude as self-possession and intellectual independence rather than deprivation. Through introspection and historical memory, Bim transforms her role from one of burden to one of chosen responsibility, reframing her life not as failed but as autonomous. Meenakshi Mukherjee (1995) observes that Desai challenges the trope of marriage as fulfillment, offering instead a narrative of fulfillment in intellectual and ethical selfhood. Transformation here is inward, subtle, and deeply resistant to societal scripts for female success.

In Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories* (1997, trans. Gayatri Spivak), transformation is dramatized as embodied defiance against patriarchal and state violence. The most iconic figure is Dopdi Mejhen in *Draupadi*, a tribal revolutionary captured, tortured, and raped in police custody. Instead of collapsing into silence, Dopdi confronts her captors naked and unashamed, weaponizing her violated body as an assertion of power. Her transformation is radical: from hunted victim to revolutionary subject who reverses the terms of shame and vulnerability. Spivak's (1997) introduction famously interprets this as a rewriting of subaltern silence into defiance, where empowerment resides not in survival or return but in resistance. The story transforms the trope of victimization into one of militant agency, marking a decisive departure from more domestic modes of women's empowerment in earlier Indian fiction (Spivak, 2001).

In Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996), diasporic transformation unfolds through the negotiation of hybrid identities in Britain. Meena Kumar, the protagonist, grows up in a Midlands mining village as one of the few South Asian children, balancing the cultural expectations of her Punjabi family with the desire to belong among her white peers. Initially, she internalizes shame and alienation, but through friendship, rebellion, and storytelling, she learns to claim her own hybrid position. The narrative arc emphasizes the adolescent's shift from marginal outsider to someone who sees value in her difference and heritage. Susheila Nasta (2002) notes that Syal adapts the European *bildungsroman* to diasporic South Asian contexts, portraying transformation not as assimilation but as reconciliation between competing cultural worlds. Thus, identity itself becomes the site of empowerment in diaspora (Upstone, 2013).

In Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* (2001), the trope of transformation is rooted in solidarity and storytelling among women. Akhila, a forty-five-year-old single woman who has always lived for her family, embarks on a solitary train journey where she encounters five other women in the ladies' compartment. Listening to their stories of love, loss, betrayal, and defiance, she begins to imagine alternative ways of living outside of her long-practiced duty and restraint. Her transformation is catalyzed by community and narrative exchange: solidarity gives her the courage to reframe her life as her own. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan (2003) reads the coupé as a microcosm of feminist pedagogy, where listening and speaking generate new subjectivities. Nair thus reshapes empowerment as a collective, dialogic process rather than an isolated act of resistance (Mitra, 2023).

In Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), the transformation of women is mapped through migration and their eventual economic and emotional self-assertion (Hiddleston, 2005).

Nazneen arrives in London as a teenage bride, dependent on her older husband and isolated in an alien culture. For much of the novel, she is depicted as docile and resigned, yet her journey traces a gradual awakening through exposure to new ideas, relationships, and labor. When she eventually defies her husband and chooses to remain in London with her daughters, her transformation is complete: she claims her own agency by rejecting both blind tradition and male control. Critics such as Lisa Lau (2009) argue that the novel risks reinforcing Western tropes of the "liberated immigrant woman," while Claire Chambers (2011) emphasizes its subtle rendering of ambivalence and surveillance within diasporic life. Transformation here emerges through migration and choice, situated between cultures and ideologies (Sedef Ozoguz, 2023).

In Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003), transformation is articulated as the redefinition of home and belonging in diaspora. Ashima, uprooted from Calcutta, initially struggles with alienation in the United States, but across decades she becomes a figure who embraces transnational belonging, imagining "home" not as singular but as layered and mobile. Her son Gogol, meanwhile, undergoes his own transformation from rejecting his heritage to reinterpreting it as a source of identity after loss and estrangement. Both mother and son embody different facets of diasporic empowerment: Ashima through acceptance of multiplicity, Gogol through reconciliation with fractured identity. Vijay Mishra (2007) highlights Lahiri's contribution to theorizing the "diasporic imaginary," where transformation lies not in assimilation but in crafting belonging across geographies. This positions Lahiri's work as a central text in the trajectory of diasporic women's writing (Friedman, 2008).

In Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017), transformation is dramatized through political resistance and defiance in a diasporic Muslim context. Aneeka, one of the central figures, begins as a sister fiercely loyal to her disgraced brother Parvaiz, who is radicalized and dies abroad. As the novel unfolds, she transforms into a figure of public defiance, challenging both the British state's security apparatus and communal pressures that demand silence. Her arc reframes empowerment as political subjectivity: she claims her voice not in the domestic or romantic sphere but in the arena of justice and sovereignty. Claire Chambers (2018) reads *Home Fire* as a diasporic rewriting of *Antigone*, foregrounding how transformation for South Asian women in Britain is inseparable from political struggle. Shamsie thus extends the trope of empowerment into explicitly civic and global registers (Ahmed, 2020).

In Alka Joshi's *The Henna Artist* (2020), transformation is anchored in craft, indigenous knowledge, and economic self-fashioning. Lakshmi escapes an abusive marriage

and reinvents herself in Jaipur as a sought-after henna artist and herbal healer. Her artistry is not only aesthetically pleasing but also a source of independence, enabling her to move within elite households and command respect. Yet her autonomy is precarious, challenged by caste hierarchies, gender expectations, and her responsibility to her younger sister. Critics such as Anita Mannur (2021) observe that Joshi's work re-centers empowerment not in migration or solidarity but in local craft economies, presenting indigenous skill as a global feminist trope. Lakshmi's journey from victimhood to economic agent exemplifies how postcolonial women's fiction increasingly foregrounds everyday labor as a site of transformation (Dr. Muhammad Ajmal et al., 2024).

Across these texts, women's transformation tropes evolve chronologically: from survival amid Partition (*Pinjar*), to refusal of domestic norms (*Clear Light of Day*), to revolutionary defiance (*Breast Stories*), to hybrid diasporic identity (*Anita and Me*), to solidarity among women (*Ladies Coupé*), to negotiation through migration (*Brick Lane*), to transnational belonging (*The Namesake*), to political resistance (*Home Fire*), and finally, to empowerment through craft and indigenous knowledge (*The Henna Artist*). Taken together, they demonstrate how South Asian women's literature has progressively expanded the registers of empowerment, from private survival to public political agency, from victimhood to self-authored futures (Alexander, 2011).

2.3 Linguistic Approaches to Literature

Literary studies have always placed a strong emphasis on the relationship between language and literature. Scholars increasingly view literature as a unique form of linguistic communication as well as an aesthetic or creative endeavor. According to this viewpoint, literary works are viewed as structured language usages in which formal arrangements, meanings, and patterns are all inextricably linked to the creation of meaning. Thus, literary approaches to literature prioritize methodical examination, taking into account how linguistic decisions influence meaning and artistic impact.

Stylistics, narratology, discourse analysis, corpora stylistics, and systemic functional linguistics (SFL) are some of the primary topics that have developed under this broad perspective. Each of them offers distinct approaches and structures for analyzing literary language, and they have all been influenced by prominent theoretical writings, pioneering thinkers, and real-world applications that keep enhancing literary analysis.

2.3.1 Stylistics: Language and Interpretation:

In its widest definition, stylistics is the study of language style and has become an essential tool for the methodical examination of literary works. It is based on the idea that

literary language is patterned rather than random and that by analyzing these patterns, one can gain understanding of both the aesthetic and interpretive aspects of literature. One of the most important books in this area is *Style in Fiction* by Leech and Short (2007), which shows how literary interpretation can be directly linked to thorough linguistic description, offering a framework that combines critical insight with linguistic accuracy. In a comparable manner, Wales (2014) positions stylistics as a field that connects scientific research with the evaluative concerns of interpretation by defining it as a mediation discipline, a bridge between linguistics and literary appraisal. Building on this, Simpson (2004, 2014) highlights the interpretive power of stylistics by demonstrating how it sheds light on point of view, deixis, narrative perspective, and other elements that organize readers' interactions with texts. This argument is furthered by Jeffries and McIntyre (2010), who emphasize that stylistics reveals the ideological dimensions of texts in addition to accounting for formal choices. They do this by revealing how linguistic structures shape representations of character, theme, and meaning in ways that either reflect or challenge cultural values.

In light of these advances, stylistics has given academics a set of transdisciplinary, rigorous, and reproducible tools. It illustrates how even the smallest linguistic elements, like the choice of pronoun, the placement of clauses, or the cadence of a phrase, may have significant aesthetic effects and ideological significance. By doing this, stylistics highlights the interdependence of language, meaning, and perception while also advancing the comprehension of literature as art and placing literary works within broader historical, cultural, and political contexts.

2.3.2 Narratology: The Structures of Storytelling:

One of the most significant linguistic approaches in literary studies is narrative analysis, with an emphasis on the mechanics, structures, and purposes of narrative. Fundamentally, narratology studies the construction of stories and the ways in which their formal structure influences interpretation. Gérard Genette, a prominent pioneer in this discipline, developed a systematic framework in his groundbreaking work *Narrative Discourse* (1980) by establishing terms that are still fundamental for examining the ways in which tales are told: focalization, storytelling voice, and narrative temporality (Gee, 1986). Scholars can distinguish between who sees and who talks in a story, how time is structured, and how narrative perspective shapes readers' understanding of events by using these categories.

Following Genette's structuralist framework, other academics have developed narratology in a variety of ways. A thorough resource that clarifies important terms and ideas, Prince's *Dictionary of Narratology* (2003) makes the subject more approachable for both academics

and students (Prince, 2019). By placing narrative within mental processes and arguing that storytelling is not just a literary genre but also a basic means of human communication and sense-making, Herman's *Basic Elements of Narrative* (2009) expands the scope. By focusing on experientiality and contending that narratives are most effectively explained in relation to the ways readers intellectually and emotionally experience storyworlds, Fludernik's Towards a *'Natural' Narratology* (2009) expands on this viewpoint.

Narratology has been crucial to literary studies because it has shed light on how viewpoints, temporality, and narrative styles affect how readers interact with fictional worlds, characters, and plots. Its ideas have proven particularly useful when analyzing novels and short tales, where changes in narrative voice, time manipulation, and focalization all have a significant impact on meaning. Scholars can discover how the structure of narrative itself directs interpretation, resulting in aesthetic, intellectual, and emotional impacts, by using narratology, which provides a defined terminology and set of analytical methods.

2.3.3   Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Discourse analysis, which is often defined as the study of language use in context, focuses on how meaning is shaped by lengthy passages of text and interaction as well as by individual words or sentences. It gives academics the means to examine how character voices are developed, how coherence and cohesiveness are attained, and how dialogue and narrative exchanges serve to produce many levels of meaning in literary studies. Discourse analysis thus goes beyond cursory description to reveal the fundamental patterns and communication techniques used in texts.

Norman Fairclough has had a particularly significant impact on the development of this viewpoint through his writings, including *Analysing Discourse* (2003), *Discourse and Social Change* (1992), and *Language and Power* (1989). His contributions highlight the notion that discourse is an oral tradition that both supports and reflects ideology rather than being neutral. For literary studies, where writings can be interpreted as engaging with, challenging, or opposing larger cultural discourses, this realization has proven essential. Other academics have expanded discourse-based approaches in literary contexts. Gee's An *Introduction to Discourse Analysis* (2014) highlights the method's adaptability by applying similar principles to both literature and education, while Toolan's Narrative: *A Critical Linguistic Introduction* (2001) illustrates how discourse analysis can shed light on narrative organization (Banta, 2012).

As a more overtly political development of discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA) examines how language encodes, reinforces, or subverts systems of inequality and

power. When analyzing how novels, plays, and poetry interact with prevailing notions concerning ethnicity, gender, class, and other social categories, CDA has proven especially helpful in literary contexts. Through examining the ways in which these ideologies are incorporated into narrative language, whether covertly through the use of pronouns and imagery or overtly through the portrayal of characters, CDA contributes to the understanding of literature's dual function as an artistic medium and a site of ideological conflict. By doing this, it emphasizes the political relevance of literature and its capacity to either support or challenge societal structures.

2.3.4 Corpus Stylistics: Computational Approaches:

Corpus stylistics represents a more recent development, applying computational techniques to the study of literature. Biber, Conrad, and Reppen's *Corpus Linguistics* (1998) provided methodological foundations, while Mahlberg's *Corpus Stylistics and Dickens's Fiction* (2013) showcased the approach in literary contexts (Mahlberg, 2013; Reppen, 2006). Corpus stylistics allows for large-scale analyses of patterns keywords, collocations, and concordances that are difficult to detect through close reading. For instance, Mahlberg and McIntyre (2011) revealed recurring lexical patterns in Dickens that contribute to his distinctive narrative style. Similarly, Baker's *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis* (2006) highlights how corpus tools can uncover ideological features of texts (Upton & Cohen, 2009). By offering empirical validation for stylistic insights, corpus stylistics enriches literary interpretation and facilitates discoveries in authorial style and intertextuality.

2.3.5 Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL):

Among linguistic frameworks, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by M.A.K. Halliday, has been especially influential in literary studies. Halliday's *Explorations in the Functions of Language* (1973), *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (1994), and with Matthiessen, *Halliday's Introduction to Functional Grammar* (2014) establish SFL as a theory of language as a resource for meaning-making (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Central to SFL is the notion of metafunctions ideational, interpersonal, and textual, which together explain how texts construct experience, relationships, and coherence.

Halliday's (1971) landmark study of William Golding's *The Inheritors* used transitivity analysis to reveal how the linguistic representation of processes reflected the Neanderthals' distinct worldview. Fowler's *Linguistic Criticism* (1996) further demonstrated the potential of SFL for ideological analysis, while later scholars such as Simpson (2004) and Cummings & Simmons (2013) applied SFL to themes of power, gender, and repression in

modern literature (Fowler, 2013). Eggins (2004) emphasizes that SFL provides not only descriptive depth but also critical insights into identity and ideology in texts.

Taken together, these linguistic approaches, stylistics, narratology, discourse analysis, corpus stylistics, and systemic functional linguistics demonstrate the richness of studying literature through language. Each orientation emphasizes different dimensions: stylistics focuses on style and interpretation, narratology on narrative structures, discourse analysis on ideology and power, corpus stylistics on empirical textual patterns, and SFL on functional meaning-making. What unites them is the conviction that language is central to literature, and that systematic linguistic analysis reveals interpretive and ideological dimensions often missed by impressionistic criticism.

2.4 Tansitivity as a Tool for Representation:

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), pioneered by Halliday (1994), remains one of the most influential frameworks for understanding language as a resource for meaning-making rather than a set of prescriptive rules. Unlike formalist approaches, which isolate grammatical categories, SFG conceptualizes grammar as a system of choices that speakers and writers use to construct social reality. In this sense, SFG is inherently functional, concerned less with correctness than with how linguistic resources enact experience, relationships, and textual coherence. Halliday identified three broad metafunctions operating simultaneously in language: the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual. The ideational metafunction, in particular, is central to discourse and literary analysis because it captures how language encodes and organizes human experience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013).

Within the ideational metafunction, the system of transitivity provides a fine-grained model for examining how texts represent reality. Importantly, transitivity in SFG departs from the traditional grammatical sense of verb valency and instead describes the semantic classification of processes into material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential types. Each process type brings distinct dimensions of experience into focus: material processes highlight action and agency, mental processes foreground perception and thought, relational processes encode states and identities, verbal processes construct communication, while behavioral and existential processes capture marginal experiences of human life (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Coffin, 2013).

Through these processes, participants are assigned specific roles that linguistically position them as agents, experiencers, or affected entities. In doing so, transitivity does not merely "describe" actions; it interprets and constructs how individuals, groups, and institutions are situated within social and cultural contexts.

Similarly, O'Halloran (2003) argued that the choice of process types in narrative discourse guides readers' perception of characters' inner states and social roles, reinforcing or challenging normative values. Nguyen (2012), focusing on feminist stylistics, demonstrated that the systematic analysis of processes and participants provides evidence for how women are linguistically marginalized in texts, often positioned as passive goals rather than active agents. More recently, studies such as Koussouhon and Allagbe (2013) on African and diasporic literatures have shown that transitivity analysis is particularly useful in exploring gendered representation, where female characters' identities are discursively shaped through patterned linguistic roles (Nguyen, 2014).

This perspective has been reinforced by research in South Asian and related postcolonial contexts, where questions of identity, power, and representation are central. For example, Qadir and Noor (2015) analyzed English fiction from the region and argued that transitivity choices reveal how colonial and patriarchal ideologies are naturalized through grammar. Similarly, Yaqoob and Mahmood (2016) highlighted that in contemporary South Asian novels, female characters are frequently depicted through mental and relational processes that stress emotion and dependence rather than agency. These findings resonate with broader feminist critiques of literary discourse, where language is treated as a site where social roles are not only reflected but actively constructed (Lazar, 2014).

Beyond gender, transitivity has also been applied to uncovering how broader social identities are negotiated. For example, Iwamoto (2014) examined immigrant narratives and showed that relational and existential processes are often employed to construct marginality and displacement, while material processes function to highlight resistance and agency. In a similar vein, Ghani and Anwar (2019) demonstrated how transitivity in political texts represents national identity, often foregrounding collective "we" as actors in material processes, thereby fostering solidarity and unity. Such scholarship underscores the fact that transitivity analysis is not a purely linguistic exercise but a critical interpretive tool that links grammar to ideology, identity, and power structures.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that transitivity is not simply a technical description of verb types but a means of uncovering how texts construct reality and ideology. In literary studies, this allows us to see how characters are discursively positioned in ways that reinforce or resist cultural norms. The strength of SFG, and particularly its ideational metafunction, lies in its capacity to reveal how even the smallest grammatical choices bear interpretive weight. Far from being a neutral tool, transitivity is a critical lens that exposes how social and cultural meanings are inscribed into narrative form. This makes it especially

suitable for the present research, which seeks to explore how identity and transformation are discursively represented in South Asian fiction.

   For the present study, which focuses on self-identity and women's struggles in *The Henna Artist*, the transitivity framework provides a systematic way to examine how the protagonist's journey is linguistically constructed. By tracing shifts in process types, whether she is portrayed as an agent of her transformation or as a passive recipient of societal pressures, the analysis reveals the deeper ideological currents embedded in the text. This approach makes SFG, and specifically its transitivity system, a powerful framework for exploring the intersections of language, identity, and gender in literary discourse.

2.5 Scholarship on Transitivity Analysis

   Halliday's language model argues that the language used by those in power influences the beliefs and behavior of minority and marginalized groups. Specifically, when writers depict the struggles of women, the language they use can shape the character of the female protagonist. Critics have observed that authors often use different language and vocabulary to describe male and female characters, creating distinct images of each gender. Through transitivity, women's mental and physical well -being can be effectively portrayed in literature. For instance, Paras (2016) conducted a study on social and cultural factors contributing to honor killing especially in the context of Pakistan. The study demonstrated that however the physical health issues faced by women are addressed, there was a significant neglect in the social pressures as well as psychological stress that triggers women's sufferings. This highlights the importance of language in shaping our understanding of gender roles and the experience of marginalized groups in Society. In another study, Dr. Abd Al-Rahman (2020) employed a transitivity framework to study John Maxwell Coetzee's novel Foe to identify dominant processes and their respective functions. The researcher found that the author used material processes in the novel for conveying the experiential function of language, particularly in depicting physical actions of characters, events, entities, and the outside world. Furthermore, it highlights the novel's focus on exploring character actions and events that unfold within the story.

   Based on Halliday's theory of transitivity, Ameer Sultan, Shahid Abbas, and Shahid Hussain analyzed the narrative development and the psychological and emotional development of the protagonist in "Home They Brought Her Warrior Dead (Sultan et al., 2023)." Their work is important because it presents a critical and objective measure to investigate the meanings buried within the text by probing the relationship between the schematic structure of the text and cultural context, and between the grammatical system and

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metafunctions. The researchers discovered that the material processes were prevalent in the text, capturing the physical occurrences and actions that propel the narrative. The processes emphasized the concrete experiences and actions of the characters, especially the reactions of the protagonist to the events leading to her husband's death. Moreover, mental processes were also commonly employed to describe the internal emotional and psychological states of the protagonist, demonstrating her sorrow, reflection, and subsequent emotional change. Their findings suggest that material processes highlight the active and passive functions of characters in the narrative, whereas mental processes reveal the inner world of the protagonist. The interaction of these processes discloses how the emotional experience of the main character is directly connected with her relationship with other characters and the environment. This in-depth transitivity analysis illustrates how language options form the representation of individual and cultural issues in the text, providing an insight into the deeper meaning of the text.

Similarly, Monica Intan Sari aimed to find out how different processes affect Oscar Wilde's writing style in his short story "The Happy Prince" (Ruggaber, 2025). Sari mentioned that Wilde's professional experiences as a journalist, editor, and critic contributed to his style of writing. Sari pointed out vivid depiction, aesthetic features, conversational tone, repetitive tendency, and explicit vocabulary as major characteristics of Wilde's writing (Eka Sari et al., 2021).

Similarly, Xindi Zheng (2021) investigated the transitivity structure of scholarly research articles to examine various process types to construct experiential meaning in academic discourse. Zheng's study examined the distribution of process types across various sections of research articles, including the abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, and conclusion. State some key findings about processes. His research findings highlighted that the transitivity structure of research articles reflects their informative and objective nature, as well as their interpersonal qualities. Farah Rauf in her paper Transitivity Analysis of Mariam's Character in "A Thousand Splendid Suns" investigated the character of the protagonist Mariam through the same framework of Halliday's transitivity theory. By doing analysis of important events of Mariam's life she reveals that Mariam has been assigned mental processes more than the verbal, material and relational processes. But towards the end of the novel, there is a significant change in the employment of material processes that imply the passing of power from one to another. The study reveals the evolution of Mariam's character from an innocent and naive girl to an empowered woman who controls her own destiny (Alsheavi et al., 2024).

Nguyen's (2021) work uses Halliday's transitivity theory to investigate the construction of the main protagonist's personality in Hoa Pham's "Heroic Mother" (Huston, 1985). The aim is to clarify the way the text employs language in representing and constructing the character of the protagonist. Nguyen's study proves that transitivity analysis offers rich and subtle evidence for reader interpretations of "Heroic Mother." With linguistic evidence, the readers can more clearly see the meaning of the text, especially in relation to the actions and the experiences of the protagonist. Nguyen's analysis shows that linguistic selection in the text closely correlates with the meaning being expressed about the protagonist, a heroic mother. For instance, material processes are often utilized to describe the actions, or inactions, of the protagonist, showing her routine and the physical solitude that she suffers. Such selection emphasizes her boredom and loneliness. Mental processes, however, are utilized to examine her inner feelings and thoughts, uncovering her emotional condition and the abandonment she suffers from her family. Nguyen's research conclusions show that the protagonist is characterized as a solitary and bored character who is given inadequate attention from her family members. The characterization of her alone activities through material processes and the use of mental processes to demonstrate her emotional duress come together to present an all-encompassing picture of her suffering. This precise transitivity analysis enables readers to comprehend the richness of the protagonist's personality and the emotional subtleties of her actions, making them better understand the thematic aspects of the story. The research by Ihsan Ali, Abdullah Mukhtar, Ayesha Mansoor, and Mahnoor Butt (2021) analyzed Nelson Mandela's political speeches using Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, with emphasis on the ideational meta-functions in order to comprehend the success of Mandela's political discourse.

Their research shows that Mandela's speeches used material processes to a large extent to bring attention to actions and events, thus stressing his active participation in the fight against apartheid and his dedication to social change. Through the repeated use of material processes, Mandela was able to convey a sense of action and movement, which appealed to his audience and further cemented his reputation as an active leader. Moreover, the research determined that Mandela's use of relational processes functioned to make connections and comparisons, usually focusing on the similarities and differences between various social conditions or groups. These processes enabled Mandela to express his vision of equality and justice, thus enhancing the rhetorical force of his speech. Mental processes were also an important characteristic of Mandela's speeches, which were a reflection of his analytical and contemplative demeanor. These processes enabled him to express his

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convictions, emotions, and ideas, thus gaining an even more intense emotional appeal for his listeners. This utilization of cognitive processes not only made Mandela human but also added motivation force to his speeches by incorporating his personal understanding and experience. The application of various process types for strategy, the researchers illustrated how Mandela's choice of language helped make his speeches effective in inspiring and mobilizing his listeners.

Weixuan Shi and Zheng Gu (2022) studied the British Queen's speech before Parliament through the lens of transitivity to identify the speech's linguistic features and further improve understanding of its content and linguistic organization. Four major process types of speech were found by the study: relational, mental, existential, and material processes, where material processes are the largest percentage. Shi and Gu's research shows how transitivity analysis can bring out the strategic deployment of linguistic elements to carry certain messages and emphases in the Queen's speech.

Afsheen Ekhteyar and Tariq Umrani's (2021) research utilized Halliday's transitivity system to analyze the linguistic cues employed in Pakistani print media in representing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Their comparative analysis was concerned with the language utilized in two English dailies to signify CPEC, to discover the characteristics and methods involved in the representation. The findings indicated that both dailies represented CPEC as an economically relevant matter of national significance, indicating a benevolent agenda for the project. The investigation demonstrated that material processes were extensively utilized to signify the concrete advantages and advancements related to CPEC. These processes highlighted construction, development, and economic activities associated with the project, framing it as a source of national growth and prosperity. In addition, relational processes were often used to create CPEC's significance and its contribution to the country. These processes shaped CPEC as an important and advantageous project, often correlating it with national development, economic stability, and bilateral strategic partnerships between China and Pakistan.

The study further established that verbal processes were utilized in presenting statements by officials, experts, and stakeholders to support the positive narrative on CPEC. These processes accorded legitimacy and credibility to the representation, justifying the agenda of supporting the project. Main observations from Ekhteyar and Umrani's research suggest that the papers employed strategic language options to project a positive representation of CPEC, highlighting its economic importance and national significance. This transitivity analysis points towards how language tactics can shape the representation of

landmark national projects in newspapers.

However, a systemic analysis of news structures in two chosen printed media, Newsweek and the Kayhan International, is conducted by Yaghoobi (2009) using Halliday's transitivity analysis method. Yaghoobi's study demonstrates that the representation of Hizbullah and Israeli forces by two distinct and ideologically opposed printed media were opposed to each other by identifying processes and the roles of participants involved in those processes. These transitivity analyses represent only a small sample of the numerous ways that language patterns, in particular transitivity, can express the ideology and meaning of a literary work. In short, the previous scholar worked on narrative style, emotional growth, writing style, personality, political discourse's effectiveness, and linguistic features.

2.6 Tracing Character through Transitivity:

Transitivity offers a potent analytical framework for examining how characters and identities are linguistically constructed in literary discourse. Characters are not fixed entities; rather, they acquire meaning through the patterned deployment of processes, participants, and circumstances within a narrative (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). By mapping these patterns, scholars can trace how language ideologically shapes agency, action, and subjectivity. For instance, protagonists frequently aligned with material processes actions of doing, creating, or resisting are construed as dynamic, assertive, and capable of influencing their environment. In contrast, those associated primarily with mental processes thinking, sensing, or desiring tend to be represented as introspective, constrained, or reactive (Eder, 2010). The selection of process types is therefore far from neutral; it is a deliberate narrative strategy that shapes readers' perceptions of psychological depth, agency, and social positioning.

This analytical lens is especially revealing in the study of female subjectivities within patriarchal or postcolonial contexts. Mills (2008) observes that women in literature are frequently confined to relational and existential processes grammatical constructions of "being" rather than "doing" which positions them as passive bearers of identity categories and mirrors broader societal ideologies about gender roles. In South Asian fiction, for example, female characters often appear primarily as "wives," "mothers," or "daughters" through relational processes, while male characters dominate material processes, reflecting socially endorsed agency (Kayani et al., 2025). Transitivity analysis thus exposes these textual asymmetries and their ideological underpinnings, revealing how literature naturalizes or critiques hierarchical gender norms.

Studies have demonstrated that transitivity analysis can both describe and critique these patterns. O'Halloran (2003) shows how female characters can be mapped as either

agents of resistance or objects of oppression depending on whether they are associated with material or relational processes. Pakistani scholarship (e.g., Faraj-Allah Ibrahim Abd Al-Qader, 2020; Wahab, 2021) further illustrates how women's silenced or passive roles are linguistically encoded through relational clauses, whereas acts of rebellion or autonomy are signaled by shifts to material processes. Such patterns reveal that character construction is inherently ideological, embedding narratives of oppression, resilience, and negotiation into the grammar of the text itself.

Crucially, transitivity foregrounds the fluidity of identity, showing characters as contested rather than static subjects. A female protagonist's movement from relational clauses ("she was a wife, she was a servant") to material processes ("she worked, she fought, she escaped") signals transformation, empowerment, and resistance against dominant social norms. By tracking these linguistic shifts across the narrative, transitivity allows scholars to trace the trajectory of character development and identity formation with precision.

In sum, transitivity functions as more than a descriptive tool; it is a critical lens that exposes the ideological architecture of literary texts. It demonstrates how narratives encode power dynamics between men and women, colonizers and colonized, masters and servants and how these dynamics are reinforced or contested through discourse. As Halliday (1994) notes, grammar is "a theory of human experience," and in literature, that experience is deeply entwined with identity, ideology, and resistance. Thus, analyzing character and identity through transitivity enables a nuanced understanding of how literature both mirrors and interrogates the sociocultural realities from which it emerges.

2.7 Scholarly Perspectives on "The Henna Artist":

The Henna Artist by Alka Joshi, published in 2020, has garnered significant scholarly interest for its portrayal of women's lives in post-colonial India and its exploration of themes such as identity, empowerment, and cultural heritage. According to Ali, Ahmad, and Zeba's research on Alka Joshi's The Henna Artist, the novel is a powerful exploration of post-independence India through the eyes of its protagonist, Lakshmi, a skilled henna artist. The study emphasizes how Lakshmi's work, applying henna to women across diverse socio-economic backgrounds, reveals the complexities of Indian life during this transformative period. Despite facing numerous challenges, Lakshmi's drive for self-sufficiency and personal growth shines through, mirroring the beauty and intricacy of her henna creations. The research highlights how The Henna Artist offers a vivid and immersive experience, akin to a kaleidoscope of color and emotion. Joshi's debut novel is praised for its rich narrative,

capturing the tensions between tradition and modernity in a society undergoing rapid change. The book's ability to engage readers with its compelling plot and dynamic character development is noted, as it maintains a sense of intrigue and anticipation throughout. Ali, Ahmad, and Zeba commend Joshi for crafting a tale that not only entertains but also provides profound insights into the struggles and aspirations of a woman navigating a complex social landscape. Their analysis underscores the novel's ability to captivate the heart and mind, making it a notable contribution to contemporary literature.

Leah Franqui argued that "Joshi's vivid descriptions draw readers into her captivating narrative by transporting them to the sensory environment of India, complete with colorful saris, odorous cooking flames, and horse-drawn tongas." "Excellent, vibrant, light-hearted, and incredibly expressive and beautiful. The Henna Artist is an opulent, intricately detailed story with intriguing characters. (Leah Franqui). Tom Barbash noted that "Daring, ambitious, and masterfully written, The Henna Artist explores class, identity, love, and deceit in post-independence India in ten years. The wide variety of people will make a lasting impression on you (Tom Barbash). Sujata Massey said that "The protagonist, balancing unbelievable loads with her many gifts; the many other characters, each so colorful and nuanced, everyone essential to the convoluted and delicate story!" Sandra Scofield, author of "The Last Draft," exclaimed that "All that a great novel needs may be found here!"

According to Erin McGraw. Rajasthan, bygone era becomes a romantic and old world under the skillful guidance of Alka Joshi. The Henna Artist is crammed full of incredibly detailed traditions, environments, and characters. I'm looking forward to Alka Joshi's upcoming masterpiece" (Sujata Massey). "The Henna Artist" is a delicious, vintage tale of unending heartache. When I studied fairy tales as a child, I willingly lived in a world full of strong princesses, talking birds, magical beverages, orphans, melancholy princesses, wise servants, and dangerous poisons. Lakshmi's knowledge of spices, roots, oils, and barks drew me in. Joshi's story is fascinating, and I'm a little jealous of the person who gets to keep the talking bird. "Namaste!" he shouts. "Hello! Welcome!" says Laura McNeal.

Johnson (2021) explores how The Henna Artist employs narrative techniques to construct the protagonist Lakshmi's identity. Johnson argues that the novel's use of first-person narration and flashbacks provides a nuanced portrayal of Lakshmi's personal and social struggles, illustrating her journey towards self-realization and autonomy. The study highlights how Lakshmi's identity evolves through her interactions with various characters and societal expectations (Lewis, 2022).

Patel (2022) examines how The Henna Artist addresses gender dynamics and female

empowerment in post-colonial India. Patel argues that the novel challenges traditional gender roles by portraying Lakshmi as a strong, independent woman who defies societal constraints. The study discusses how Lakshmi's profession as a henna artist symbolizes her resistance to patriarchal norms and her quest for personal agency. Gupta (2023) analyzes the interplay between cultural heritage and modernity in The Henna Artist. Gupta's study explores how the novel represents traditional practices, such as henna art, within the context of modern Indian society. The study emphasizes how Joshi invokes cultural symbols in order to broach themes of heritage and identity, bridging the past with the present.

Sharma (2021) studies the historical as well as the social context which is portrayed through The Henna Artist. The study by Sharma is concerned with how the novel portrays the socio-political situations of 1950s India, such as issues of caste, class, and gender. The research offers an understanding of how Joshi employs historical backgrounds to enhance the reader's knowledge of the characters' aspirations and challenges. Mehta (2022) discusses the issue of female friendship in The Henna Artist.

The research analyzes the interactions between Lakshmi and other women characters, including her sister and her clients, and how these interactions help Lakshmi develop and learn about herself. Mehta argues that the novel portrays female friendship as a source of support and empowerment. Singh (2023) applies an intersectional lens to The Henna Artist, analyzing how various factors such as gender, class, and cultural identity intersect to shape Lakshmi's experiences. Singh's research demonstrates how Joshi's novel provides a complex portrayal of identity, reflecting the multifaceted nature of Lakshmi's personal and social challenges. Verma (2021) examines the influence of colonial heritage on the characters of The Henna Artist. The research analyzes how colonialism has shaped social structures and individual identities in post-colonial India, with a specific focus on the lingering effects on female characters. Verma explains how the novel portrays the continued struggles associated with colonial history and its influence on contemporary Indian society. These studies provide a wide variety of insights into The Henna Artist, pointing out its contributions to the discussion on identity, gender, culture, and historical context. While there has been some research in the past that has discussed the cultural injustices and societal pressures on women, there remains a substantial knowledge gap concerning the complex role that language takes in shaping the identity of a woman.

Violence or abuse against women covers far more than physical injury; in some cases, it has also included sexual, psychological, cognitive, and traumatic situations. This research emphasizes the way in which gender roles play a deeply involved role in identity

construction, pointing to the difficulties faced by women in juggling societal norms. Lakshmi's figure illustrates the difficulty of reconciling individual ambitions with cultural expectations, showing the limitations placed by gendered expectations. The prior research has pointed towards the central role played by South Asian women in building communities, social reform, and political movements. The women have not been silent recipients of social change but have also played active roles, sometimes within the boundaries of their cultural systems, in bringing about constructive changes.

2.8 Research Gap:

While transitivity analysis has been widely employed in literary studies to reveal how language constructs ideology, identity, and social power, much of this research has focused on Western canonical texts such as *Lord of the Flies* (Spitz, 1970)*, Jane Eyre,* and *1984* (Simpson, 2003; Wang, 2010). Although these studies have demonstrated the utility of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) for tracing character development, narrative viewpoint, and ideological positioning, there is a notable underrepresentation of South Asian literature, particularly texts by women writers. Despite the growing recognition of feminist literary criticism in highlighting issues of gender and representation, transitivity as a tool has rarely been integrated into analyses of South Asian women's fiction.

This gap is significant because South Asian women's narratives often grapple with distinct socio-cultural realities, including patriarchal constraints, postcolonial legacies, and diasporic experiences. Contemporary novels such as Alka Joshi's The Henna Artist (2020) vividly portray female agency, identity negotiation, and empowerment, yet most existing scholarship emphasizes cultural, postcolonial, and feminist readings without examining the linguistic strategies through which protagonists construct and transform their identities. By applying transitivity analysis to Lakshmi's trajectory, the current study addresses this lacuna, offering an interdisciplinary approach that bridges systemic functional linguistics and feminist literary criticism. In doing so, it aims to illuminate how language mediates identity, agency, and resistance in South Asian women's fiction.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted to investigate how Lakshmi's transformation is linguistically constructed in *The Henna Artist*. It explains the qualitative design of the study, the purposive sampling strategy used for text selection, and the procedures for transitivity analysis within the Systemic Functional Linguistics framework. By detailing research design, sampling, data analysis, and theoretical grounding, the chapter establishes a rigorous basis for examining how language encodes agency, identity, and resistance

3.1. Research Design: Qualitative Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative research design, as it focuses on the interpretive exploration of language, identity, and character construction within Alka Joshi's *The Henna Artist* (2020). Qualitative research is particularly suited for investigating how meanings are produced and negotiated in texts, since it emphasizes interpretation, contextualization, and depth of understanding (Cresswell & Sullivan, 2018; Fryer, 2006). Unlike quantitative designs, which prioritize measurement and generalization, qualitative inquiry seeks to uncover how social realities, cultural identities, and personal transformations are represented and constructed. In literary studies, this means examining not only what is narrated but also how language encodes social roles, relationships, and identities (Martin, 2022; Lane, 2006).

The relevance of qualitative research to the present study lies in its focus on textual interpretation and meaning-making. By employing transitivity analysis within Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013), the study investigates how Lakshmi's self-identity is linguistically represented through processes, participants, and circumstances. This approach allows for a fine-grained exploration of pivotal moments in the narrative, such as her encounters with societal expectations, her internal conflicts, and her moments of transformation. Close reading and clause-level analysis of selected passages provide insights into how Joshi constructs Lakshmi's agency and identity, aligning directly with the research questions.

Furthermore, qualitative literary analysis benefits from thematic interpretation and narrative inquiry, which complement transitivity analysis by highlighting recurrent patterns of selfhood, gender, and cultural negotiation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Brooks, 2015). For example, the identification of recurring process types in Lakshmi's discourse can be thematically linked to issues of resistance, conformity, or empowerment. By integrating narrative and thematic perspectives with linguistic tools, the research design ensures both

depth and rigor.

To enhance trustworthiness and validity, strategies such as reflexivity, triangulation, and peer debriefing are incorporated (Agostinho, 2005; Glaser, 2007). Reflexivity requires the researcher to acknowledge personal assumptions and positionality, ensuring transparency in interpretation. Triangulation is achieved by situating the linguistic analysis within broader cultural and feminist critiques of South Asian women's identity, drawing on existing scholarship in postcolonial and gender studies. These measures strengthen the credibility of the analysis while minimizing researcher bias (Norton, 1997).

Thus, a qualitative design is the most appropriate framework for this study, as it not only facilitates close linguistic analysis but also situates the findings within wider discourses of identity, gender, and culture. By examining Lakshmi's identity construction in *The Henna Artist* through transitivity analysis, this design contributes both to linguistic stylistics and to the feminist literary exploration of South Asian women's narratives.

3.2 Text Selection and Sampling Procedure:

This study employed purposive sampling to select passages from Alka Joshi's *The Henna Artist* (2020). Purposive sampling is a widely recognized method in qualitative research that involves deliberately choosing data most relevant to the research questions (Patton et al., 2015). It is particularly suitable when the aim is not generalization but rather an in-depth exploration of meaning (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

In the context of this research, purposive sampling was essential because the objective is to investigate how Lakshmi's identity is linguistically constructed and transformed. Instead of analyzing every line of the novel, only passages with clear relevance to themes of helplessness, despair, self-discovery, and development were selected. This ensured that the data directly reflected the protagonist's transformation and aligned with the study's analytical focus on transitivity processes.

The selected passages included:

- **Dialogues** that revealed Lakshmi's negotiations with others.
- **Narrative descriptions** highlight her status and struggles.
- **Internal monologues** expressing her thoughts, fears, and aspirations.

Passages describing environmental settings or events unrelated to identity were excluded, as they did not contribute to answering the research questions. This targeted strategy ensured both methodological clarity and depth of analysis, making purposive sampling the most appropriate choice.

To ensure systematic analysis, the novel was divided into three distinct stages that reflect Lakshmi's trajectory from helplessness to empowerment. This stage-based segmentation provided the framework for data selection and analysis, enabling the study to trace linguistic shifts in relation to character development. The division also ensured that key narrative developments were aligned with the research focus on identity construction and transformation. Table 1 below outlines the stages, chapters covered, and the central themes that guided the analysis.

Table 1. Sample Transitivity Analysis Across Process Types

Stage	Chapters Covered	Key Developments / Themes
Stage One: Helplessness and Despair	Prologue, Part One (Ch. 1–2)	Traumatic past: abusive marriage, abandonment Vulnerability and limited autonomy Early struggles to survive and find independence
Stage Two: Self-Discovery and Identity Negotiation	Part One (Ch. 3–6), Part Two (Ch. 7–9), Part Three (Ch 10–13)	Builds a career as a henna artist Establishes independence in Jaipur Negotiates personal relationships (clients, Radha, Hari) Balances societal expectations with personal choices
Stage Three: Empowerment	Part Three (Ch. 14–17), Part Four (Ch. 18–22), Epilogue	Secures Radha's and unborn child's future- Makes decisive choices about her life Gains autonomy, respect, and recognition Moves to Shimla, continuing professional and personal fulfillment

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure:

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research method since it seeks to uncover patterns of meaning and identity construction embedded in language (Starcher et al., 2018). A descriptive approach is appropriate because it involves defining, organizing, categorizing,

and explaining linguistic data in detail (Cheung & Hew, 2009).

Within this framework, transitivity analysis-a subset of the ideational metafunction in Systemic Functional Grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013) is employed as the primary analytical tool. This approach focuses on how experience is encoded in language through processes, participants, and circumstances. By applying this framework, the study explores how Lakshmi is linguistically represented as active, passive, agentive, or constrained at different stages of the narrative.

To illustrate this method, Table 2 presents a sample of the transitivity analysis, showing how specific clauses were analyzed and interpreted in light of Lakshmi's developmental stages.

Table 2. Sample Transitivity Analysis

Stage	Passage	Process Type	Analysis / Interpretation
Stage 1: Helplessness & Despair	"I ran away from Hari because he wanted to control every aspect of my life…"	Material Process	Highlights Lakshmi's physical act of escape, showing her lack of control and the oppressive power Hari exerted over her.
	"I had left my husband, left my village, and come to this city with nothing but the clothes on my back and my henna paste."	Material + Relational Processes	The act of leaving (material) underscores desperation, while the relational clause ("with nothing but…") emphasizes her fragile identity and low social standing.
Stage 2: Self-Discovery & Negotiation	"I felt the weight of duty on me. I had to sacrifice my aspirations to safeguard Radha…"	Mental + Material Processes	Expresses inner conflict (mental: "felt") and external action (material: "sacrifice"), showing how her self-discovery emerges through negotiation of roles.
	"No matter how much henna I sold or how many clients I had, I was still just a woman…"	Relational Process	Defines her identity within restrictive gender roles; the phrase "was still just a woman" signals how society

			categorizes her despite her economic efforts.
Stage 3: Transformation & Redemption	"I am more than my past; I am the creator of my destiny."	Relational + Material Processes	The relational clause ("I am more than…") redefines her identity, while the material clause ("creator of my destiny") asserts empowerment and agency.
	"I had finally learned that true strength came from acknowledging my weakness and leaning on the people who cared for me."	Mental + Relational Processes	Mental process ("learned") signals reflection, while relational process ("strength came from…") redefines weakness as part of strength, showing redemption through interdependence.

By incorporating such tables within the analysis, the study not only documents linguistic patterns but also demonstrates how particular process types (material, mental, relational) dominate different stages of Lakshmi's journey. For example, Stage 1 is marked by material processes of escape and survival, Stage 2 by mental and relational processes of negotiation, and Stage 3 by empowering relational and reflective clauses. These patterns provide systematic evidence for tracing Lakshmi's transformation and directly address the study's objectives.

3.4 Theoretical Framework:

Transitivity describes how meaning is construed through three key components: processes, participants, and circumstances (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013).

- **Processes**, expressed through verbs, represent types of experiences such as doing (material), thinking (mental), being (relational), saying (verbal), behaving (behavioral), and existing (existential).
- **Participants** are the entities involved in these processes; such as actors, goals, or sensers, while circumstances (e.g., time, place, manner, cause) provide contextual information. Together, these elements reveal how agency, identity, and experience are linguistically constructed. As Bloor and Bloor (2013)

emphasize, clauses are not merely grammatical structures but meaning-making units that construe reality, positioning individuals in specific social roles.

Types of processes:

In transitivity, there are six types of processes which are as follows:

1.   Material Process
2.   Mental Process
3.   Relational Process
4.   Verbal Process
5.   Behavioral Process
6.   Existential Process

1. Material Process:

Along with verbal and mental processes, material processes are one of the three main categories of processes in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Events and activities that cause noticeable changes in the social or physical world are referred to as material processes. Stated differently, they explain what individuals or objects do and how those activities affect their environment. The actor, which refers to the unit doing the action; the process, which indicates the action itself; and the aim, which defines the entity receiving or impacted by the action, are the three fundamental components that structurally constitute a material process.

The transitivity principle, which describes how actions are encoded and portrayed in phrase structures, is used to study these processes within the SFL framework. In this sense, transitivity refers to the linguistic realization of an action's actor, process, and aim rather than only the existence of an object as in traditional grammar. According to this illustration, material processes can be classified as intransitive when they do not directly influence another entity (e.g., "He ran") or transitive when they are aimed at a goal (e.g., "She painted the wall"). Because they show how language depicts agency, causation, and the alteration of reality inside discourse, material processes are therefore an essential component of SFL analysis.

2. Mental Process:

Along with verbal and material processes, mental processes are one of the three main categories of processes in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Mental processes concentrate on the inner realm of consciousness, whereas material processes depict events and activities in the outside world. They include cognitive (thinking, knowing, or comprehending), affectional (liking, fearing, or desiring), and perceptual (seeing and hearing)

processes. In this way, mental processes are essential for expressing people's inner experiences and how they see, understand, and react to their environment.

In terms of structure, there are two primary actors in mental processes: the phenomena, which is the thing that is sensed, considered, or felt, and the senser, who is a mental being going through the process. For example, in the sentence "She remembered the story," the story is the phenomena and she is the senser. Though in a more abstract sense, mental processes also display transitivity, much like material processes do. According to this theory, transitivity is the degree to which mental activity spreads toward a phenomenon (for example, "He loves music") or stays internal in the absence of a clearly defined object (for example, "She worries").

Mental processes emphasize the subjective aspect of language by storing perception, thought, and emotion processes. They offer a vital linguistic lens for examining viewpoint and subjectivity in both daily discourse and literary works by shedding light on how texts depict characters' consciousness, feelings, and attitudes.

3. Relational process:

The relational process in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) relates to having and being processes. Relational processes are mostly focused on creating relationships between entities, as opposed to material processes, which record acts and occurrences, or mental processes, which convey consciousness and interior experience. These procedures are used to define, identify, or characterize participants in a clause, as explained by Halliday and Matthiessen (1989). Stated differently, relational processes are employed to denote roles and states of being, assign attributes, define identities, and describe traits (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1989).

Crucially, relational processes are understood as means of interpreting one element in connection to another within the context of existence or identity rather than as conscious activities. For instance, the process associates the sky (carrier) with the quality blue in the sentence "The sky is blue." Likewise, the algorithm recognizes Ali (token) as possessing the identity of the captain (value) in "Ali is the captain."

Relational processes are further divided into three general categories: circumstantial (which expresses where, when, or how something is, like "The book is on the table"), possessive (which expresses what something has, like "The house has a garden"), and intensive (which expresses what something is, like "She is kind"). Furthermore, Halliday and Matthiessen differentiate between two primary modes of relational processes: identifying, in

which one participant is equated with another in order to define or specify identity (e.g., "Sara is the leader"), and attributive, in which a characteristic is assigned to a participant (e.g., "The boy is tall").

In order to comprehend how language creates identity, attributes, and connections between possession and situation, relational processes are essential. They give texts the linguistic tools they need to categorize experiences, explain the world, and symbolically depict states of being.

4. Verbal Process:

Verbal processes are those that reflect speaking, communication, or symbolic interchange in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Verbal processes encompass the function of language as a vehicle for information transfer, concept expression, or interaction, in contrast to material processes, which highlight physical acts, or cognitive operations, which emphasize perception and thought. In addition to direct speech, they also include reporting, quoting, asking, and even symbolic communication methods like writing or signaling.

Verbal processes usually consist of three main structural elements. The first is the act of saying or communicating itself, which is referred to as the process. The person who is in charge of creating the speech or message is known as the sayer. The individual who receives, hears, or perceives the communication is the third party. To symbolize the content of what is spoken, a fourth element the verbiage is frequently included. For instance, the instructor acts as the sayer, the students as the receivers, the lesson as the verbiage, and explained as the verbal process in the sentence "The teacher explained the lesson to the students."

Since they show how speech builds relationships, transmits authority, and creates discussion, verbal processes are important in both regular conversation and literary works. They play a crucial role in character development and narrative style in literature in particular because reporting speech choices (such as direct, indirect, or free indirect discourse) can highlight power dynamics, change readers' perceptions of character interactions, and affect viewpoint.

5. Behavioral process:

Behavioral processes fall somewhere between material and mental processes in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). They focus on behaviors or actions that are usually performed by living things, such people or animals. Behavioral processes emphasize behavior's external manifestations, which can be physical activity, bodily actions, or even psychological states. This is in contrast to material processes, which concentrate on concrete

actions that result in physical change in the environment, or mental processes, which represent the insides of consciousness.

In terms of structure, there are typically two primary players in behavioral processes: the behavior, which stands in for the action itself, and the behaver, which is the living thing carrying out the action. In certain instances, these procedures could also involve a third party called the phenomenon, which describes the target of the conduct. Differentiating between transitive and intransitive behavioral processes where the action doesn't reach to another entity and transitive processes which involve both a behaver and a goal is crucial. The phrase "The dog chased the cat," for instance, is a transitive behavioral process since the dog acts as the behaver, the process is being pursued, and the cat is the objective. On the other hand, the process in "The children played" is an example of an intransitive behavioural process since it lacks a clear objective.

Researchers can learn more about how language represents behaviors that are more about expressing patterns of behavior, physical performance, or semi-psychological moods than they are about changing the outside world by using transitivity to analyze behavioral processes. Understanding how texts depict animate beings whether they be literary characters, discourse topics, or social actors in real-life situations through their observable behaviors and the ways in which those behaviors contribute to the construction of meaning is made easier with the help of this type of analysis.

6. Existential Process

Existential processes are those that convey possession or existence according to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). They serve as indicators of the presence or occurrence of a specific entity, event, or state of being within a given context. The two main elements of existential clauses are the existent, which is the thing, object, or state that is claimed to exist, and the process of existence, which is frequently manifested through verbs like be, exist, or occur. For instance, the process is was and the existing is a storm in the sentence "There was a storm." Existential processes are mostly focused on asserting presence or occurrence, as opposed to relational processes, which define or identify.

Because Lakshmi's path is influenced by both the narrative events that unfold and the linguistic patterns that are used to textually construct her existence, struggles, bargaining, and transformations, this approach is especially pertinent to the current study of *The Henna Artist*. The existence or lack of chances, limitations, and relationships that affect Lakshmi's identity and social positioning are encoded in the novel through existential processes.

Transitivity analysis, a fundamental component of SFL, has been shown in earlier research to offer important insights into the ideological positioning of characters in literary texts (Fowler, 2013; Pearce, 2012). Using this approach, the current study investigates how Lakshmi is linguistically represented, whether as empowered or confined, active or passive, and how these representations align with Jaipur's larger cultural and social beliefs of the 1950s.

Therefore, the transitivity system and theoretical framework of SFL provide more than merely structural tools for analyzing grammar. Additionally, it serves as an interpretive link between the micro-level linguistic decisions and the macro-level literary issues, demonstrating how linguistic patterns support the *Henna Artist's* themes of cultural ideology, identity, and empowerment. Thus, the study illustrates the ability of SFL to provide light on the deeper social and ideological implications included in literary texts in addition to describing language mechanics.

Chapter 4: Analysis

This chapter presents the detailed analysis of Alka Joshi's The Henna Artist using the transitivity framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. It examines how different process types material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential encode Lakshmi's transformation across the three narrative stages. By tracing linguistic shifts from passivity to agency, the analysis highlights how grammar reflects the protagonist's evolving identity. The chapter is structured to align closely with the research questions, ensuring that each stage of analysis contributes directly to the study's overarching aims.

4.1 Stage One: Lakshmi's Helplessness and Despair:

Plot Overview

The opening stage of *The Henna Artist* situates Lakshmi and Radha in a world marked by vulnerability, stigma, and coercion. Radha, still a child, is burdened with a reputation she cannot control, her identity reduced to a symbol of misfortune by the community around her. Orphaned and unprotected, she grows up under the constant weight of hostility and exclusion, her future framed by the threats and judgments of others rather than by her own choices. Lakshmi's early memories mirror this same pattern of dispossession. Forced into marriage as an adolescent, her life trajectory is shaped by poverty and parental desperation rather than personal agency. Even after she escapes to Jaipur and begins to establish herself as a henna artist, her independence remains precarious, dependent on carefully navigating elite households and suppressing the traumas of her past.

This fragile balance is shattered when her estranged husband resurfaces, carrying with him both the threat of exposure and the authority to reclaim her as his possession. His reappearance not only endangers Lakshmi's hard-earned autonomy but also brings Radha into her care, revealing the younger girl's own suffering within cycles of violence and neglect. Together, the sisters must confront grief, secrecy, and the heavy burden of responsibility.

Stage one, therefore, is defined by helplessness and suppression. Both sisters are shown as subjects of patriarchal and social domination: their bodies controlled, their identities externally imposed, and their voices silenced. It is against this backdrop of oppression that Lakshmi's struggle for self-definition and resistance begins to take shape in the subsequent stages of the narrative.

4.1.1 Transitivity Analysis:

4.1.1.1 Material Process:

 In Stage One of *The Henna Artist*, material clauses present Lakshmi's life as one governed by coercion rather than agency. These processes consistently place her, and in the Prologue, Radha, as Goals of others' actions rather than as Actors initiating change. In Hallidayan terms, the grammar encodes their displacement from the role of "doers" into those "done to," embedding subjugation within the very structure of narration.

Radha's experience at the outset exemplifies this pattern. She is shown in fear of villagers who threaten to "pull her out by her hair," an image of physical violence that renders her powerless. Even when she acts picking up a stone and throwing it at her brother-in-law the gesture arises from desperation, a reaction against danger rather than an assertion of power. These clauses demonstrate how female futures are shaped not by individual choice but by communal hostility and patriarchal control.

Lakshmi's memories reinforce this grammar of compulsion. At fifteen, she recalls being "turned out from [her] village to marry," the clause casting her as disposable, expelled from childhood into an unwanted adulthood by her parents' poverty and social obligation. She is grammatically framed as the one expelled, her agency erased even as her future is determined.

Her marriage intensifies this lack of control. Hari dominates the material processes through violence and restraint: he beats, locks, and drags her, verbs that inscribe patriarchal authority onto her body. Even her resistance is rewritten as subjugation "pulled back whenever [she] tried to resist" a structure that grammatically erases agency by making her effort the trigger for further coercion.

Her in-laws replicate this pattern within the domestic sphere. She is "pushed into household labor," "excluded from family decisions," and "punished for speaking out." Each process reveals how work, participation, and speech are forcibly taken from her. Even her artistry, which might otherwise suggest independence, is reduced to labor extracted for others: "her hands were forced to create designs for others." Creativity here becomes exploitation, reinforcing the denial of self-determination.

At the societal level, material processes also represent Lakshmi's exclusion, depicting systemic forces that actively withhold opportunities and restrict mobility. Clauses such as "my opportunities were snatched away" and "I was denied entry into certain spaces" show how education, social participation, and freedom of movement are presented not as rights but

as privileges deliberately withheld.

Abandonment itself is expressed materially. She is "left with nothing but [her] clothes," the verb left portraying her not as an autonomous subject but as an object discarded, stripped of dignity and security.

Together, these material clauses construct a pattern of coercion and dispossession. Whether in family, marriage, domestic labor, or society, Lakshmi and Radha are grammatically positioned as objects of action rather than initiators of it. The narrative thus encodes their helplessness, situating them in a world where their lives are defined not by chosen action but by enforced subjugation.

Table 3 Transitivity Analysis of Material Process

Clause No.	Clause	Participant I (Actor)	Process (Material)	Participant II (Goal)	Circumstance
C1	"Afraid to make a sound for fear they would come inside and pull her out by her hair." (Prologue)	Villagers (Actor)	pull (Material)	the girl (Goal)	out by her hair (Manner)
C2	"Her father…had abandoned them six months ago, and shortly after, he drowned in a shallow pool of water." (Prologue)	Father (Actor)	abandoned/ drowned (Material)	family / himself (Goal)	Location: riverbank
C3	"Every day for the past week, the girl had lain in wait on the outskirts of the village for the postman." (Prologue)	Girl (Actor)	lain in wait (Material)	postman (Goal)	Location: outskirts of village
C4	"He finally handed over the thick onionskin envelope	Postman (Actor)	handed over (Material)	envelope (Goal)	Recipient: the girl

	addressed to her parents." (Prologue)			
C5	"She picks up a small stone and throws it at him." (Prologue)	Radha (Actor)	picks up / throws (Material)	stone → brother-in-law (Goal)	Location: clearing
C6	"At fifteen, I'd been turned out from my village to marry when my parents could no longer afford to feed me." (Part One, Ch. 1)	Parents (Actor)	turned out (Material)	Lakshmi (Goal)	Cause: no longer afford
C7	"I was painting a large fig, plump and sensual, split in half." (Part One, Ch. 1)	Lakshmi (Actor)	painting (Material)	fig design (Goal)	Location: on Parvati's soles
C8	"I rubbed my palms together to warm the oil, then reached for her hands to rub off the dried henna paste." (Part One, Ch. 1)	Lakshmi (Actor)	rubbed/reached (Material)	palms / hands / henna paste (Goal)	—
C9	"I removed the last of the paste from her hands." (Part One, Ch. 1)	Lakshmi (Actor)	removed (Material)	henna paste (Goal)	Location: from Parvati's hands
C10	"I tossed the bills onto the terrazzo floor the way he had tossed his meager earnings on the floor of our hut." (Part One, Ch. 2)	Lakshmi / Hari (Actors)	tossed (Material)	bills/earnings (Goal)	Location: floor

C11	"He walked to the plastered wall, rubbed his palm flat against it." (Part One, Ch. 2)	Hari (Actor)	rubbed (Material)	plastered wall (Goal)	Location: house interior
C12	"He fished a matchbox out of his pocket and tossed it at my feet." (Part One, Ch. 2)	Hari (Actor)	fished/tossed (Material)	matchbox (Goal)	Location: at Lakshmi's feet
C13	"I struck a match and held it to the girl's face." (Part One, Ch. 2)	Lakshmi (Actor)	struck/held (Material)	match (Goal)	Location: girl's face
C14	"I removed my woolen shawl and tucked it around her thin body." (Part One, Ch. 2)	Lakshmi (Actor)	removed/tucked (Material)	shawl (Goal)	Recipient: Radha
C15	"I shook Radha's shoulder to wake her." (Part One, Ch. 2)	Lakshmi (Actor)	shook (Material)	Radha's shoulder (Goal)	Purpose: to wake her

4.1.1.2 Mental Processes:

If material processes depict the external compulsion of Lakshmi's life, mental processes reveal how oppression colonizes her inner world. In Stage One, Lakshmi is consistently the Senser, but what she senses is not freedom or possibility. Instead, her mental experiences are dominated by fear, confusion, grief, envy, and fleeting resistance. The grammar positions her emotions as tightly regulated by patriarchal expectations, poverty, and trauma, showing that her inner life is as controlled as her physical one.

Fear emerges as the most pervasive theme. Lakshmi recalls moments where she "turned away, afraid she was about to drop to her knees," a reaction not to physical violence but to the shame of impropriety. Similarly, she admits, "I was afraid my hand might shake" and "I was afraid she would see the eagerness in mine." These clauses show how fear

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functions as self-surveillance, governing her gestures and even the possibility of revealing ambition.

Confusion and disorientation dominate her reflections when Hari re-enters her life. She acknowledges, "I had to think to figure out a way to meet him away from here," not as empowered planning but as survival calculation. Her cognition is again unsettled when she admits, "I was still trying to recover from the shock of seeing Hari, of learning that the three people who were once so dear to me were no more." In these clauses, the processes of thought are framed not as control but as paralysis, with trauma overwhelming clarity.

Her inner world is also marked by despair and resignation. She admits, "I was getting too far ahead of myself," curtailing her own hope for a better life out of fear of disappointment. Only rarely does resistance appear, as when she asserts, "I would make no apologies." Even this is presented as exceptional an isolated clause of defiance against a backdrop of habitual submission.

Envy enters her consciousness as a recognition of systemic injustice. She confesses, "I envied them their easy camaraderie, the freedom with which the laborer and merchant castes moved about at night." The irony is stark: despite her higher caste, she lacks the freedoms enjoyed by those socially ranked beneath her, exposing the contradictions of gender and class in her society.

Finally, empathy emerges in her reflections about Radha. She wonders, "I wondered if Radha had ever worn shoes in her life," positioning herself as the Senser of another's deprivation. This moment links her private despair to the suffering of her sister, underscoring the generational continuity of poverty and subjugation.

Together, these clauses present Lakshmi's mental world as one of psychological imprisonment. She is grammatically the Senser, but the Phenomena fear, confusion, envy, despair are determined by external forces. The language of thought and emotion encodes a life in which even imagination and empathy are bounded by structures of inequality and oppression.

Table 4 Transitivity Analysis of Mental Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Participant I (Senser)	Process (Mental)	Participant II (Phenomenon)	Circumstance
C1	"I turned away, afraid she was about to drop to her knees." (Part One, Ch. 1)	Lakshmi	afraid (Affective : emotion)	Lala's possible humiliation	—
C2	"I was afraid my hand might shake." (Part One, Ch. 1)	Lakshmi	afraid (Affective : emotion)	her hand might shake	—
C3	"I was afraid she would see the eagerness in mine." (Part One, Ch. 1)	Lakshmi	afraid (Affective : emotion)	eagerness in her eyes being noticed	—
C4	"I had to think to figure out a way to meet him away from here." (Part One, Ch. 2)	Lakshmi	think/figure out (Cognitive)	a way to meet Hari elsewhere	Location: place (away from here)
C5	"I was still trying to recover from the shock of seeing Hari, of learning that the three people who were once so dear to me were no more." (Part One, Ch. 2)	Lakshmi	trying to recover (Cognitive/Perceptive)	shock of seeing Hari + news of her parents' deaths	—
C6	"I was getting too far ahead of myself." (Part One, Ch. 1)	Lakshmi	getting ahead (Cognitive/Reflective)	her own hopeful imagination	—
C7	"I would make no apologies." (Part One, Ch. 2)	Lakshmi	resolve (Cognitive/Volitional)	refusal to apologize	—

C8	"I envied them their easy camaraderie, the freedom with which the laborer and merchant castes moved about at night." (Part One, Ch. 1)	Lakshmi	envied (Affective : emotion)	camaraderie and freedom of laborers	Time: night
C9	"I wondered if Radha had ever worn shoes in her life." (Part One, Ch. 2)	Lakshmi	wondered (Cognitive)	whether Radha had worn shoes	—

4.1.1.3 Relational Processes:

Lakshmi's story in the opening stage of *The Henna Artist* shows how her identity is rarely claimed by herself. Instead, it is assigned, affirmed, or imposed by others. Relational processes consistently construct her not as someone who *does*, but as someone who *is*. She is cast as the Carrier of attributes that diminish her value, restrict her possibilities, and confine her within the categories dictated by patriarchy. In this way, the grammar of "being" becomes the grammar of oppression.

From the very beginning, she is marked by stigma. The women of the village spit and mutter, "to protect them from the Bad Luck Girl," and soon after shout, "There goes the Bad Luck Girl!" Here, Lakshmi is reduced to a label rather than recognized as an individual. The relational clause equates her entire identity with misfortune, transforming her into the embodiment of disaster. This name erases her personal qualities and inscribes her instead with collective blame for the community's suffering.

This reduction continues into adulthood. Lakshmi acknowledges, "I was childless and, therefore, a subject of pity." The relational process defines her worth through absence, not presence. Her identity is constructed not around her skill or independence, but around what she lacks children. The attribute "childless" functions as a marker of deficiency, while "subject of pity" positions her permanently below others, as an object of condescension rather than respect.

Hari reinforces this same relational pattern. He asserts, "We're still married. You are still my wife." In this clause, Lakshmi is not recognized as an autonomous woman but as a possession, her identity bound to a marriage she no longer values. His taunt "Even your name is a lie, Lakshmi. Not a Goddess of Wealth, are you?" further strips her of symbolic

dignity. A name associated with prosperity and divine abundance is inverted, redefining her as the opposite. The relational process here enacts humiliation, questioning not only her worth but her right to her own name.

The most cutting example comes with the judgment, "…a barren wife is a thing of shame." In this clause, Lakshmi is wholly reduced to "a barren wife," with her entire being equated to "shame." The process is totalizing: she is not merely described as shamed but linguistically constructed as shame itself. Her individuality disappears under the patriarchal demand for fertility, replaced by the language of disgrace.

Taken together, these relational processes reveal that Lakshmi's identity in Stage One is never self-determined. She becomes "Bad Luck Girl," "childless," "wife," "not a Goddess," "barren wife" all terms imposed by others, each reducing her to deficiency or stigma. Linguistically, relational clauses encode her dependency and devaluation. She does not choose who she is; instead, her identity is overwritten by the voices of family, husband, and community. Stage One thus portrays the depth of her entrapment, where language itself denies her the space for self-definition.

Table 5 Transitivity Analysis of Relational Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Carrier / Identified	Relational Process	Attribute/ Identifier	Circumstance
C1	"There was no one to protect her now." (Prologue)	Radha	was (Relational: attributive)	without protection	–
C2	"There goes the Bad Luck Girl!" (Prologue)	Radha	goes (Relational: identifying)	"Bad Luck Girl"	–
C3	"At fifteen, I'd been turned out from my village to marry when	Lakshmi	been turned out (Relational: attributive/identity)	child bride, dependent daughter	when parents could no longer feed me (Cause)

	my parents could no longer afford to feed me." (Ch. 1)				
C4	"We're still married. You are still my wife." (Ch. 2)	Lakshmi	are (Relational: identifying)	wife (Hari as Sayer/Assigner)	–
C5	"In the eyes of Jaipur's elite, I was now a fallen Brahmin." (Ch. 1)	Lakshmi	was (Relational: attributive)	fallen Brahmin	in the eyes of Jaipur's elite (Angle)
C6	"Even your name is a lie, Lakshmi. Not a Goddess of Wealth, are you?" (Ch. 2)	Lakshmi	is / are (Relational: identifying)	"not a Goddess of Wealth"	–
C7	"I was childless and, therefore, a subject of pity." (Ch. 1)	Lakshmi	was (Relational: attributive)	childless; subject of pity	–

C8	"I was nobody's older sister!" (Ch. 2)	Lakshmi	was (Relational: identifying)	nobody's sister	–
C9	"She's Brahmin." (Ch. 1)	Sheela Sharma	is (Relational: identifying)	Brahmin	–
C10	"Your life was meant for grander things." (Ch. 1)	Parvati (Lakshmi defining her)	was meant (Relational: attributive)	grander things	–
C11	"I was thirty years old, born during British rule and used to aspersions being cast on my parentage." (Ch. 1)	Lakshmi	was (Relational: attributive)	thirty years old, subject to aspersions	during British rule (Time)
C12	"Radha, skinny as a neem twig, was standing in the shadows." (Ch. 2)	Radha	was (Relational: attributive)	skinny as a neem twig	in the shadows

4.1.1.4 Verbal Processes:

Verbal processes in the early chapters of *The Henna Artist* highlight that Lakshmi's world is structured by the speech of others rather than her own. Commands and declarations become tools of control that confine her actions, while evaluations spoken about her reduce her identity to qualities defined by patriarchal norms. Lakshmi's own voice, when it emerges, is faint and inward, showing her limited agency in a world dominated by others' words.

One striking example occurs in the Prologue, when the village women loudly proclaim, "There goes the Bad Luck Girl! The year she was born, locusts ate the wheat!" Radha's identity here is not self-spoken but verbally constructed by others. She is defined through curses and blame, reduced to a symbol of misfortune. The gossipers' collective voice functions as judgment, fixing her place in the social order and silencing her before she can even speak.

Later, Hari employs speech as an act of control. His declaration, "We're still married. You are still my wife," operates not only as a relational claim but as a verbal assertion of ownership. Through language, he attempts to override Lakshmi's independence, binding her to him despite her resistance. His further taunt "Even your name is a lie, Lakshmi. Not a Goddess of Wealth, are you?" turns words into weapons of humiliation, stripping her of symbolic dignity and undermining her achievements. Here, speech is not dialogue but domination.

Lakshmi's own voice, in contrast, is calculated and defensive. When she speaks to Parvati, she uses careful deference: "Your life was meant for grander things. Who else could throw such lavish parties for politicians?" On the surface, her words flatter Parvati, but beneath the politeness lies strategic self-preservation. Her speech is shaped by caution, designed to maintain access and avoid provocation, rather than to assert equality.
Even in private, Lakshmi's words are constrained. When she whispers to Mr. Pandey, "There's a man across the road. He's smoking a beedi. Would you please give this to him? It would not be proper for me to meet him alone..." her voice is cautious, almost pleading. She cannot address Hari directly, forced instead to rely on intermediaries. Her language is mediated, filtered, and restricted, revealing how even private speech reflects her lack of freedom.

Taken together, these verbal processes demonstrate the irregularity of power in the novel's early stages. Others' voices whether village women gossiping, Hari declaring

ownership, or Parvati issuing commands are loud, forceful, and directive. Lakshmi's voice is soft, careful, or diverted, revealing that she is spoken for more often than she is allowed to speak. Through this imbalance, the novel shows how language itself functions as an instrument of patriarchy: it silences, controls, and binds Lakshmi, ensuring that even her words remain marked by fear, caution, and subordination.

Table 6 Transitivity Analysis of Verbal Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Sayer	Process (Verbal)	Receiver/ Target	Circumstance / Function
C1	"There goes the Bad Luck Girl! The year she was born, locusts ate the wheat!" (Prologue)	Village women (Sayers)	said / proclaimed	Radha (Target of speech)	Function: verbal labeling / identity imposed
C2	"We're still married. You are still my wife." (Ch. 2)	Hari (Sayer)	declared	Lakshmi (Receiver)	Verbal assertion of marital control
C3	"Even your name is a lie, Lakshmi. Not a Goddess of Wealth, are you?" (Ch. 2)	Hari (Sayer)	accused / said	Lakshmi (Target)	Attack on dignity / verbal undermining
C4	"Your life was meant for grander things. Who else could throw such lavish parties for politicians?" (Ch. 1)	Lakshmi (Sayer)	said / affirmed	Parvati (Receiver)	Strategic deference / self-preservation
C5	"There's a man across the road. He's smoking a beedi. Would you please give this to him? It would not be proper for me to meet him alone..." (Ch. 1)	Lakshmi (Sayer)	whispered / requested	Mr. Pandey (Receiver, intermediary)	Cautious request / mediated speech

C6	"Forget the tea, Lakshmi! Tell me about the girl or I'll wipe my feet on this towel and ruin the last hour's work." (Ch. 1)	Parvati (Sayer)	commanded	Lakshmi (Receiver)	Directive, controlling tone
C7	"Shabash, Lakshmi! Always on the days you've done my henna, Samir can't stay away from my bed." (Ch. 1)	Parvati (Sayer)	exclaimed	Lakshmi (Receiver)	Verbal reinforcement of Lakshmi's role / sexualized evaluation
C8	"Cooking can make the hands so dry, don't you think? If you'd like, I can rub some geranium oil on them tomorrow." (Ch. 1)	Lakshmi (Sayer)	suggested / offered	– (Implied listener)	Polite offer / service-oriented speech

4.1.1.5 Behavioral and Existential Processes

If material processes reveal how others acted upon Lakshmi and Radha, and mental processes show their inner despair, the behavioral and existential processes highlight how oppression became inscribed onto their bodies and their very existence. These processes capture instinctive, involuntary reactions trembling, twitching, blushing, or speaking in a rush that show vulnerability. Alongside these, existential clauses mark what is absent in their world: freedom, safety, comfort, and even basic protection. Together, they expose powerlessness as both embodied and structural.

Behavioral processes dominate the depictions of vulnerability in these early chapters. In the Prologue, when Radha hides from the village women, we are told she had "remained perfectly still within the four mud walls." This stillness is not strength but paralysis, showing her fear of discovery. Similarly, she "held his gaze without blinking," a bodily act that reveals both defiance and fragility her entire survival depends on a stare she

cannot sustain forever. Fear shows itself again when "she could feel her heart flutter wildly in her breast." The trembling of her lips, blanching at Parvati's command, and looking imploringly with a quivering lip are bodily registers of fear that betray a lack of control.

Lakshmi, too, is shown reacting physically to threats. She recalls, "My heart was beating wildly, and I tried to calm my breathing," a scene where her body betrays her even as she attempts to master it. Later, the confrontation with Hari triggers involuntary responses: "My shoulders twitched" and "My eyes teared." Even Radha's voice escapes beyond her control, when "her words came out in a rush," exposing nervousness and lack of composure. These behavioral processes highlight how fear and subjugation erupt unconsciously from the body, demonstrating powerlessness not through choice but through instinctive reaction.

Existential clauses further reinforce this condition by emphasizing absence rather than presence. The text stresses that "There was no one to protect her now," situating Radha's existence in abandonment. Similarly, Lakshmi later acknowledges, "There is no freedom for women like me," reducing her condition to a universal inevitability. Silence itself becomes oppressive when the narrative states, "There was silence in the room," symbolizing not only the absence of sound but the silencing of women. Scarcity dominates their world: "There is hunger in the village" portrays deprivation as constant. Finally, Munchi tells Radha bluntly, "There was nothing here for you now," denying her any sense of belonging.

Through these behavioral and existential processes, the novel encodes helplessness in two ways: in the trembling body that cannot resist and, in the world, described only through what is missing. Lakshmi and Radha are neither actors nor choosers here; they react instinctively or exist in absence. The body becomes a site of exposure quivering, crying, twitching while language of existence frames their lives in lack. Together, these processes strip them of agency, showing that their early worlds were shaped not by action but by reaction, not by presence but by absence.

Table 7 Transitivity Analysis of Behavioral and Existential Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Participant I	Process Type	Process	Participant II	Circumstance
C1	"She had remained perfectly still within the four	Radha	Behavioral	remained still	–	within the four mud walls (Location: place)

	mud walls." (Prologue)				
C2	"She held his gaze without blinking." (Prologue)	Radha	Behavioral	held (without blinking)	his gaze	–
C3	"She could feel her heart flutter wildly in her breast." (Prologue)	Radha	Behavioral (physiological)	feel flutter	her heart	in her breast (Location: place)
C4	"The girl's lower lip trembled." (Ch. 1)	The girl (Lala's niece)	Behavioral	trembled	lower lip	–
C5	"The girl blanched." (Ch. 1)	The girl	Behavioral	blanched	–	–
C6	"She looked imploringly at me, her lip trembling." (Ch. 1)	The girl	Behavioral	looked imploringly / lip trembling	–	–
C7	"My heart was beating wildly, and I tried to calm my breathing." (Ch. 1)	Lakshmi	Behavioral (physiological)	beating / calm	my heart, my breathing	–
C8	"My shoulders twitched." (Ch. 2)	Lakshmi	Behavioral	twitched	shoulders	–
C9	"My eyes teared." (Ch. 2)	Lakshmi	Behavioral	teared	eyes	–
C10	"Her words came out in a	Radha	Behavioral (verbal	came out	her words	in a rush (Manner)

	rush." (Ch. 2)		reaction)			
C11	"There was no one to protect her now." (Prologue)	–	Existential	was	no one (Existent)	to protect her (Purpose), now (Time)
C12	"There is no freedom for women like me." (Ch. 2)	–	Existential	is	no freedom (Existent)	for women like me (Beneficiary)
C13	"There was silence in the room." (Prologue)	–	Existential	was	silence (Existent)	in the room (Location: place)
C14	"There is hunger in the village." (Prologue)	–	Existential	is	hunger (Existent)	in the village (Location: place)
C15	"There was nothing here for you now." (Prologue)	–	Existential	was	nothing (Existent)	here (Location: place), for you (Beneficiary), now (Time)

4.1.2 Interpretation:

The analysis of Stage One demonstrates how Lakshmi's early life is linguistically constructed as one of helplessness, silence, and subordination. Transitivity patterns, choices of process types, and recurring clause structures collectively encode her absence of agency. These linguistic forms are not arbitrary: they are shaped by, and simultaneously reflect, the social and cultural constraints of her time, while also providing insight into her psychological state of fear, despair, and endurance.

The Stage One demonstrates how Lakshmi's (and Radha's, in the Prologue) early lives are linguistically constructed as defined by helplessness, silence, and subordination. Transitivity choices and recurring clause patterns encode their absence of agency. These linguistic features are not random they mirror the cultural and patriarchal constraints of mid-twentieth-century India and reveal the emotional toll of fear, despair, and endurance.

4.1.2.1 Linguistic Patterns Encoding Lack of Agency:

The transitivity patterns of Stage One reveal how Lakshmi and Radha are consistently denied agency. Material processes cast them primarily as Goals rather than Actors, showing that actions are done to them rather than initiated by them. Radha is threatened with violence when villagers might "pull her out by her hair," while Lakshmi recalls being "turned out from [her] village to marry" against her will. In marriage, Hari's domination is inscribed through processes such as "beat" and "locked," which situate Lakshmi's body as the repeated site of coercion. These structures grammatically encode a life in which her future is dictated by others.

Relational processes reinforce this lack of self-definition by reducing Lakshmi to externally imposed identities. She becomes "the Bad Luck Girl," "a fallen Brahmin," or "still [his] wife," all attributes that erase individuality and position her as a possession, a burden, or a social failure. The grammar of being, rather than affirming her selfhood, continually redefines her through stigma and dependency.

Verbal processes illustrate how speech operates as a mechanism of power. Radha is publicly condemned by villagers who name her as cursed, while Hari weaponizes language to humiliate Lakshmi, declaring that "even [her] name is a lie." In contrast, Lakshmi's own speech is hesitant, deferential, or mediated, as in her praise of Parvati's grandeur or her whispered requests for Mr. Pandey to act on her behalf. This asymmetry between authoritative declarations from others and her own cautious utterances shows how dialogue itself encodes hierarchy and silencing.

Mental and behavioral processes uncover an inner world shaped by fear and despair. Lakshmi repeatedly registers anxiety "I was afraid my hand might shake" and "I was afraid she would see the eagerness in mine." Her cognition is overwhelmed when she struggles to "recover from the shock of seeing Hari," revealing how trauma produces confusion rather than clarity. Behavioral clauses such as trembling lips or lowered gazes embody submission, showing how vulnerability is inscribed on the body itself.

Finally, existential processes portray her reality as defined by absence. Clauses such as "There was no one to protect her now" or the implicit "There was no escape" eliminate agency entirely, representing her world through what is missing freedom, safety, or protection rather than through her participation in it.

4.1.2.2 Connection to Social and Cultural Constraints:

These linguistic encodings mirror the cultural conditions of mid-twentieth-century India. In rural communities, girls could be expelled from their homes and forced into

marriage as acts of economic survival. Within patriarchal households, husbands exercised disciplinary authority without recourse, and women's value was measured in terms of caste purity, fertility, and obedience. The villagers' labeling of Radha as "Bad Luck Girl" reveals how superstition and communal judgment stigmatized female existence. Lakshmi's designations "wife," "fallen Brahmin," "childless" expose the ways identity was rooted not in individuality but in patriarchal expectations of social roles.

The cumulative effect of these linguistic structures is psychological imprisonment. Lakshmi and Radha are grammatically and socially constructed as passive: others act, define, and speak, while they are positioned as Goals, Carriers, or Receivers. Their mental and behavioral clauses narrate fear, despair, and longing rather than autonomy or decision-making. Thus, the language of Stage One encodes oppression at multiple levels physical, emotional, and psychological demonstrating how deeply patriarchy governs both the external world of action and the internal world of thought.

Table 8 Process Types and Functions in Stage One

Process Type	Clause Example	Function in Depicting Helplessness
Material	"At fifteen, I'd been turned out from my village to marry when my parents could no longer afford to feed me." (Ch. 1)	Positions Lakshmi as the Goal of others' actions, showing marriage as coercion and abandonment of choice.
Relational	"In the eyes of Jaipur's elite, I was now a fallen Brahmin." (Ch. 1)	Lakshmi is defined through caste degradation, reducing her status socially.
Verbal	"Even your name is a lie, Lakshmi. Not a Goddess of Wealth, are you?" (Ch. 2)	Speech is weaponized to attack her dignity; words diminish her achievements.
Mental	"I was afraid my hand might shake." (Ch. 1)	Fear dominates her inner world, showing how even her body betrays her anxiety.
Behavioral	"Her lips trembled." (Ch. 1)	Bodily reaction conveys inner fear and vulnerability without speech.

| Existential | "There was no one to protect her now." (Prologue) | Absence encoded as fact; helplessness depicted as lack of protection or support. |

4.2 Stage Two: Self-Discovery and Negotiation of Identity:

Plot Overview:

In this stage, the narrative shifts from Lakshmi's silenced and powerless beginnings to a period where she actively negotiates her place within Jaipur's social and cultural fabric. As she builds her career as a sought-after henna artist, she gains entry into elite households, using her skill, tact, and foresight to establish a reputation that offers both financial independence and social visibility. Alongside her professional growth, Lakshmi navigates complex relationships with Parvati, whose patronage opens opportunities but also demands delicate flattery and diplomacy; with Malik, who becomes both helper and confidant; and with Radha, whose arrival forces Lakshmi to confront her own past and take on new responsibilities as a guardian and mentor. The balance of power remains precarious: while Lakshmi achieves agency through artistry and strategy, her independence is continually tested by patriarchal authority, social scandal, and the weight of family expectations. This stage highlights the negotiation between her self-made identity and the identities imposed upon her, revealing both her resilience and her vulnerability in a world that offers her freedom only conditionally.

4.2.1 Transitivity Analysis:

4.2.1.1 Material Process:

The transitivity patterns in Stage Two construct Lakshmi as the initiator of action, in contrast to Stage One where her existence was largely narrated through the actions of others. The material clauses emphasize her independence, skill, and resilience by presenting her as the Actor in processes of creation, provision, and resistance. These actions not only display her artistry but also signal her growing authority and identity as a self-made woman. Lakshmi's artistry is central to this transformation. She recalls, *"I rubbed my palms together to warm the oil, then reached for her hands to rub off the dried henna paste."* In another moment, she notes, *"The design I'd painted on her hands began to emerge."* Similarly, *"I gave no attention to her needling as I removed the last of the paste from her hands"* and *"I pulled a mirror from my satchel and held it to the arch of her right foot so she could see the*

tiny wasp I'd painted next to the fig." These clauses highlight her deliberate and skilful movements, where the material processes of rubbing, painting, removing, and holding not only produce art but also control how it is perceived.

Her economic discipline and independence are also framed materially. She asserts, *"Over time, I had saved a great deal and was so close to getting what I wanted a house of my own."* The clause, *"I could pay for my lodging, eat well and send a little money home to my parents,"* situates her as the provider. Each verb saved, pay, eat, send underscores her self-sufficiency and her role in sustaining both herself and her family.

Lakshmi's material clauses also encode acts of nurture and mentorship. She observes, *"I took a handful of rice from one of the sacks and released a steady stream of grains from my palm to create the inner circle. Around this circle, I drew a lotus flower with eight enormous petals."* Similarly, her words, *"I removed three muslin sachets from the folds of my sari and set them in his palm,"* and *"I opened a tiffin with the lemon slices I had candied the night before,"* reflect care in both artistry and provision. Her artistic processes extend further: *"I drew intertwining branches down each finger, thumb and toe"* and *"I surrounded each leaf with tiny dots around the edges."* Through these clauses, Lakshmi appears as a nurturer and guide, actively shaping both material and relational environments.
Her protective and caregiving actions are equally evident. She recalls, *"I ushered them inside the room before Mrs. Iyengar woke up"* and *"I rushed to her. 'Radha, please get up.'"* These material actions mark her role as protector, demonstrating responsibility not only in craft and economy but also in personal relationships.

Finally, material clauses underscore her resistance and defiance. In confrontation, she narrates, *"I straightened my shoulders and slid the pouch back in her direction,"* and, *"I seized her forearm… I thrust her forearm away from me."* Even in quiet moments, her material actions assert ownership: *"I lit lamps along the edges of the walls so I could admire the mosaic on my floor one last time. I circled the room, thought of the hours I spent planning the design."* These clauses frame her body as a site of agency, no longer subjected but instead asserting boundaries and claiming space.

Together, these material clauses mark a decisive transformation in Lakshmi's representation. Where Stage One reduced her to the passive Goal of others' actions, Stage Two presents her as the Actor whose doing defines the narrative. The processes of rubbing, painting, saving, drawing, ushering, sliding, seizing, and lighting depict her as a woman who builds her world through her own hands. In linguistic terms, material processes now inscribe agency, affirming her identity as an independent subject negotiating survival, artistry, and

dignity on her own terms.

Table 9 Transitivity Analysis of Material Process

Clause No.	Clause	Participant I (Actor)	Process (Material)	Participant II (Goal)	Circumstance
C1	"I rubbed my palms together to warm the oil, then reached for her hands to rub off the dried henna paste." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Lakshmi	rubbed / reached / rub off	oil, hands, henna paste	—
C2	"The design I'd painted on her hands began to emerge." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Lakshmi	painted	design	Goal: on hands
C3	"I gave no attention to her needling as I removed the last of the paste from her hands." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Lakshmi	removed	paste	Location: from hands
C4	"Over time, I had saved a great deal and was so close to getting what I wanted a house of my own." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Lakshmi	saved / getting	money / house	—
C5	"I took a handful of rice from one of the sacks and released	Lakshmi	took / released / drew	rice / lotus flower	Location: courtyard

	a steady stream of grains from my palm to create the inner circle. Around this circle, I drew a lotus flower with eight enormous petals." (Part One, Ch. 6)				
C6	"I pulled a mirror from my satchel and held it to the arch of her right foot so she could see the tiny wasp I'd painted next to the fig." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Lakshmi	pulled / held / painted	mirror / wasp design	Location: client's foot
C7	"I removed three muslin sachets from the folds of my sari and set them in his palm." (Part One, Ch. 4)	Lakshmi	removed / set	sachets	Recipient: Samir
C8	"I opened a tiffin with the lemon slices I had candied the night before." (Part Two, Ch. 8)	Lakshmi	opened / candied	tiffin with lemon slices	Time: night before
C9	"I drew intertwining branches down each finger, thumb	Lakshmi	drew	branches	Location: fingers, thumbs, toes

	and toe." (Part Two, Ch. 8)				
C10	"I surrounded each leaf with tiny dots around the edges." (Part Two, Ch. 8)	Lakshmi	surrounded	leaves	Location: edges
C11	"I ushered them inside the room before Mrs. Iyengar woke up." (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Lakshmi	ushered	Samir, Dr. Kumar, Mrs. Harris	Location: inside room
C12	"I rushed to her. 'Radha, please get up.'" (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Lakshmi	rushed	to Radha	Purpose: to wake her
C13	"I straightened my shoulders and slid the pouch back in her direction." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Lakshmi	straightened / slid	shoulders / pouch	Recipient: Parvati
C14	"I seized her forearm… I thrust her forearm away from me." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Lakshmi	seized / thrust away	Parvati's forearm	—
C15	"I lit lamps along the edges of the walls so I could admire the mosaic on my floor one last time. I circled the room, thought of the hours I spent	Lakshmi	lit / circled / planned	lamps / design	Location: her house

	planning the design." (Part Three, Ch. 12)				

4.2.1.2 Mental Processes:

In Stage Two, Lakshmi's identity is increasingly shaped not only by what she does but also by how she thinks, perceives, and reflects. Mental processes in this stage foreground her as a conscious subject who is aware of her environment, calculates her choices, and negotiates her desires. These clauses mark a significant transition from Stage One, where her thoughts were overshadowed by fear and compulsion. Here, Lakshmi's mind becomes a site of agency, a space where strategies are formed, values weighed, and futures imagined.

Lakshmi demonstrates awareness and attentiveness in her everyday interactions. She recalls that she "was thinking that I must remember to note Samir's payment," a clause that positions her as vigilant in sustaining her livelihood. Similarly, when she admits, "I envied them their easy camaraderie, the freedom with which the laborer and merchant castes moved about at night," she reveals a heightened social consciousness, aware not only of her own constraints but also of freedoms denied to her by caste and gender.

Her narration also emphasizes emotional perception and reflection. She acknowledges, "No one had ever given me anything this fine. In fact, I couldn't remember the last gift I had received," a recognition of her long deprivation. When she admits that she "cleared [her] throat to thank him but couldn't find [her] voice," the process illustrates her inner struggle to balance gratitude and silence in unequal relationships. Later, she processes conflict with Radha through affective clauses such as "Each of Radha's accusations felt like a slap on my cheek," foregrounding the emotional impact of words on her self-perception.

Lakshmi also engages in strategic thinking and judgment. Her claim that "I knew the contract by heart, but he would know the proper terminology" presents her as self-aware and pragmatic, acknowledging both her knowledge and its limits. Similarly, her admission that "I wasn't ready to make a decision. I needed to consider my options" encodes caution and deliberation, resisting impulsive choices in favor of careful reflection.

Finally, the stage culminates in decision-making and self-definition. She narrates, "I read it over several times. Satisfied, I tore off another sheet and wrote to Jay Kumar," a clause that presents thought preceding action, where judgment crystallizes into decisive material processes. Her retrospective reflection, "I thought of the hours I spent planning the

design," links her artistic practice to intellectual labor, showing how thought itself is productive. Ultimately, she affirms her agency in, "My skills, my eagerness to learn, my desire for a life I could call my own these were things I would take with me," encoding her identity in terms of awareness, aspiration, and conscious self-making.

Together, these mental processes illustrate Lakshmi's negotiation of identity through reflection, emotion, and decision. They mark her progression from passive endurance to strategic and self-reflexive subjectivity, confirming that her agency lies not only in her hands but also in her capacity to think, to know, and to choose.

Table 10 Transitivity Analysis of Mental Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Senser	Process (Mental)	Phenomenon	Circumstance
C1	"I was thinking that I must remember to note Samir's payment for the sachets in my notebook." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Lakshmi	thinking / remember	payment record	Future obligation
C2	"I envied them their easy camaraderie, the freedom with which the laborer and merchant castes moved about at night." (Part One, Ch. 4)	Lakshmi	envied	camaraderie, freedom	Place: Pink City Bazaar
C3	"I knew she couldn't wait to share the news with Malik." (Part One, Ch. 6)	Lakshmi	knew	Radha's excitement	—
C4	"I was excited enough to throw my arms around him and	Lakshmi	was excited / settled	emotional response	Social restraint

	kiss his feet, but I settled for a generous smile." (Part One, Ch. 6)				
C5	"No one had ever given me anything this fine. In fact, I couldn't remember the last gift I had received." (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Lakshmi	couldn't remember	gift received	—
C6	"I cleared my throat to thank him but couldn't find my voice." (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Lakshmi	couldn't find	voice	Reaction to Samir's gift
C7	"Each of Radha's accusations felt like a slap on my cheek." (Part Two, Ch. 9)	Lakshmi	felt	accusations as slap	Emotional perception
C8	"I understood why she left her husband." (Part Two, Ch. 9)	Lakshmi	understood	Kanta's decision	—
C9	"I had learned that much." (Part Three, Ch. 12)	Lakshmi	had learned	Radha's strong-willed nature	—
C10	"I knew the contract by heart, but he would know the proper terminology." (Part Three, Ch. 12)	Lakshmi	knew	adoption contract	—
C11	"I read it over several	Lakshmi		letter	Decision-

	times. Satisfied, I tore off another sheet and wrote to Jay Kumar." (Part Three, Ch. 13)		read / satisfied		making
C12	"I wasn't ready to make a decision. I needed to consider my options." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Lakshmi	wasn't ready / needed to consider	options	Context: Dr. Kumar's offer
C13	"I thought of the hours I spent planning the design." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Lakshmi	thought	planning design	Place: in her room
C14	"I felt my spirits lift. I would leave the map of my life here, in Jaipur." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Lakshmi	felt	spirits lift	Place: Jaipur
C15	"My skills, my eagerness to learn, my desire for a life I could call my own these were things I would take with me." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Lakshmi	desire / eagerness to learn	new life	Future orientation

4.2.1.3 Verbal Processes:

In Stage Two, verbal processes reveal Lakshmi's transition from silence to assertion. She uses speech to negotiate relationships, to protect her professional standing, and to establish authority in both personal and public spaces.

In professional contexts, Lakshmi's voice asserts expertise and persuasion. She instructs clients with careful authority *"It works most of the time, but there is no guarantee. If you're losing too much blood, you must call the doctor immediately"* and frames her professional judgment diplomatically in exchanges with Sheela, reminding her, *"Without help, the design will take twice as long… We want your party to be a big success, don't we?"* Such clauses encode speech as a tool of negotiation and self-preservation.

In family contexts, Lakshmi's voice oscillates between care and control. She introduces her sister confidently *"Sheela, this is my sister, Radha"* claiming Radha's place in society. At the same time, her protective speech emerges in prohibitions such as, *"You are not to go near Ravi again, do you hear me?"* and in warnings that set boundaries: *"Do not ever bring her name into this house again."* These processes highlight her voice as a vehicle of protection and moral authority.

In confrontational contexts, verbal processes mark Lakshmi's defiance. Her words to Parvati *"Keep your money. In return, I won't tell the ladies of Jaipur how many of your husband's bastards I've kept from this world"* demonstrate the rare moment where her speech directly threatens and destabilizes elite authority. Similarly, her questioning denial *"What nonsense was this?"* shows her verbal resistance to false accusations. Together, these verbal clauses encode Lakshmi's emerging agency. Whereas in Stage One she was largely spoken about or silenced, in Stage Two she speaks to assert opinion, negotiate relationships, and claim authority. Speech becomes both her defense and her weapon, constructing her identity in dialogue with others.

Table 11 Transitivity Analysis of Verbal Processes

Clause No.	Clause (Extract)	Sayer	Process (Verbal)	Receiver / Target	Verbiage
C1	"Lakshmi, I only want you to work on the mandala." (Part Two, Ch. 8)	Sheela	demanded	Lakshmi	Restriction of labor to the mandala
C2	"Without help, Sheela, the design will take twice as long, and I still have all the ladies inside to henna. We want your	Lakshmi	asserted / persuaded	Sheela	Need for assistance; linking artistry to success

	party to be a big success, don't we?" (Part Two, Ch. 8)				
C3	"How can I trust you to arrange a good marriage for Ravi when your own sister is playing with him behind my back?" (Part Two, Ch. 9)	Parvati	accused	Lakshmi	Doubt about trust and moral accusation
C4	"What How? My sister? With Ravi? What nonsense was this?" (Part Two, Ch. 9)	Lakshmi	questioned / denied	Parvati	Challenge to accusation; denial of truth
C5	"Sheela, this is my sister, Radha." (Part Two, Ch. 8)	Lakshmi	introduced	Sheela	Identification of Radha as sister
C6	"It works most of the time, but there is no guarantee. If you're losing too much blood, you must call the doctor immediately." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Lakshmi	instructed / warned	Joyce Harris	Medical advice and caution
C7	"Do you understand everything I've told you?" (Part One, Ch. 3)	Lakshmi	asked	Joyce Harris	Confirmation of comprehension
C8	"Politics and real estate. The two favorite career options of royalty." (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Lakshmi	commented	Radha / group	Critical opinion about royalty
C9	"Radha! I called, loudly, as I placed my body in front of her to hide her	Lakshmi	called	Radha	Urgent summoning

	gesture from Sheela." (Part Two, Ch. 8)				
C10	"Start from the beginning." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Lakshmi	commanded	Radha	Instruction to narrate fully
C11	"Tell me what happened, Radha." (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Lakshmi	requested	Radha	Demand for explanation
C12	"You are not to go near Ravi again, do you hear me?" (Part Two, Ch. 9)	Lakshmi	forbade	Radha	Strict prohibition
C13	"Kanta, I will find a way to help her." (Part Two, Ch. 9)	Lakshmi	promised	Kanta	Assurance of responsibility
C14	"Keep your money. In return, I won't tell the ladies of Jaipur how many of your husband's bastards I've kept from this world." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Lakshmi	declared / threatened	Parvati	Defiant exposure and threat
C15	"Do not ever bring her name into this house again." (Part Three, Ch. 12)	Lakshmi	warned	Radha / others	Prohibition / boundary-setting

4.2.1.4 Relational Processes:

In Stage Two, relational clauses highlight Lakshmi's negotiation of identity, no longer defined exclusively by stigma but increasingly framed through artistry, kinship, and moral responsibility. Unlike Stage One, where she was named "Bad Luck Girl" or "barren wife," here she is identified as an artist of "magic," a healer, a sister, and a provider. The relational processes clauses of being, having, and becoming shows how her subjectivity is constructed in dialogue with others' recognition and her own self-definition.

Her professional identity is elevated by patrons who equate her work with sacredness and prestige. When Mrs. Sharma tells her she must have enough time to "create your magic," her art is identified with the extraordinary. Similarly, elite clients affirm, "With a mandala created by you, we can welcome the entire pantheon," directly associating her labor with divine presence. Later, Maharani Indira publicly recognizes her as "Lakshmi Shastri, who has brought our young maharani back from the depths of gloom," attributing to her the role of healer and restorer. These clauses reposition Lakshmi socially, no longer as outcast but as someone whose artistry and care carry symbolic weight.

At the same time, Lakshmi employs relational clauses to construct kinship and responsibility. She introduces her sibling with, "Sheela, this is my sister, Radha," and asserts her purpose in Jaipur: "Radha has come to Jaipur to study at the government school here." Even Radha counters, "You are my jiji, not my mother," which, while distancing, nonetheless reinforces Lakshmi's place as protector. Kanta too affirms, "She is your jiji. She has done everything she can to make sure you have a good future," identifying Lakshmi with sacrifice and duty.

Relational clauses also mark Lakshmi's liminal social position. Parvati's reminder, "You are a Brahmin, but in the eyes of Jaipur's elite, you are now a fallen Brahmin," underscores how caste privilege is undermined by gendered vulnerability. Yet moments of acknowledgment "You earned it," Parvati admits redefine her worth in terms of achievement rather than stigma.

Together, these relational processes reveal a layered identity. Lakshmi is constructed simultaneously as artist, healer, Brahmin, fallen woman, sister, and provider. Each clause negotiates the tension between imposed definitions and earned recognition. Linguistically, the shift from stigmatizing attributes to affirming identifiers encodes her gradual transition from marginalization to conditional empowerment.

Table 12 Transitivity Analysis of Relational Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Carrier / Identified	Relational Process	Attribute / Identifier	Context
C1	"Lakshmi, I want to make sure you have enough time to create your magic." (Part Two, Ch. 8)	Lakshmi's work	is (attributive)	magic	Recognition of artistry

C2	"With a mandala created by you, we can welcome the entire pantheon!" (Part Two, Ch. 8)	Lakshmi's art	is (attributive)	sacred / divine	Ritual validation
C3	"Sheela, this is my sister, Radha." (Part Two, Ch. 8)	Radha	is (identifying)	Lakshmi's sister	Introduction / kinship
C4	"Radha has come to Jaipur to study at the government school here." (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Radha	is (attributive)	student	Education
C5	"She's Brahmin." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Sheela	is (identifying)	Brahmin	Caste identification
C6	"You are a Brahmin, but in the eyes of Jaipur's elite, you are now a fallen Brahmin." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Lakshmi	is (attributive)	fallen Brahmin	Social judgment
C7	"Your life was meant for grander things." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Lakshmi's life	was meant (attributive)	grander things	Destiny / fate
C8	"She is your jiji. She has done everything she can to make sure you have a good future." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Lakshmi	is (identifying)	sister / protector	Familial positioning
C9	"Lakshmi is doing the right thing."	Lakshmi	is (attributive)	doing right	Moral judgment

	(Part Three, Ch. 13)				
C10	"Her Highness is smart enough to avoid bankruptcy." (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Maharani	is (attributive)	smart / strategic	Political evaluation
C11	"That's Parvati and Samir's son, Ravi. A handsome Othello, don't you think?" (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Ravi	is (identifying)	Parvati & Samir's son / Othello	Social recognition
C12	"You are my jiji, not my mother." (Part Two, Ch. 9)	Lakshmi	is (identifying)	elder sister	Familial distinction
C13	"You earned it." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Lakshmi	is (attributive)	deserving of merit	Recognition
C14	"Lakshmi Shastri, who has brought our young maharani back from the depths of gloom." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Lakshmi	is (identifying)	healer / restorer	Royal endorsement
C15	"She has done everything she can to make sure you have a good future." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Lakshmi	is (attributive)	responsible / self-sacrificing	Kanta's defense

4.2.1.5 Existential Processes:

Existential clauses in Stage Two highlight the precariousness of Lakshmi's independence, repeatedly framing her world in terms of what is present and, more tellingly, what is absent. The grammar of these processes constructs her environment not as stable but as contingent, where scarcity, surveillance, and conditional opportunity define her existence. Material absence is expressed bluntly when Lakshmi admits that *"there wasn't enough*

money for a privy." The lack of even basic infrastructure underscores the fragility of her hard-earned stability. This sense of insecurity is reinforced by her acknowledgment that *"there was no guarantee Parvati would grant me an audience with the maharanis,"* revealing how her future depends on the fluctuating favor of the elite. Both clauses make absence central, showing how opportunity is always overshadowed by the possibility of denial or collapse.

Equally, presence is marked by restlessness. Lakshmi observes that *"there were whispers in the courtyard,"* illustrating the constant threat of gossip and surveillance that shadows her work among Jaipur's wealthy households. Public life intrudes in similar ways: *"there was a commotion on the platform as the sea of travelers parted for a substantial man in a palace uniform,"* a moment in which the spectacle of authority interrupts her personal journey. Even the bureaucratic detail of adoption is narrated existentially: *"there was a long clause specifying the royal physician's role,"* demonstrating how structures of power extend into the most intimate of decisions.

Some clauses highlight recognition and networks of association. Lakshmi recalls *"there was the woman to whom I had recommended bitter melon and garlic,"* marking her professional reach and the circulation of her reputation. Observing social rituals, she reflects that *"there was pride in the way they walked purposefully, pridefully to their temples,"* capturing how class and caste identity manifest in public performance. Both presence and pride are narrated not as abstractions but as lived realities embedded in social hierarchy. Other clauses underscore the persistence of labor and scarcity. Lakshmi reflects that *"there was always work to be done,"* situating her independence in the endless repetition of her profession. Wider social deprivation is conveyed in *"there was hunger in the village,"* positioning her struggle within systemic poverty. Emotional states, too, are framed existentially, as when *"there was relief in my heart when she nodded"* or *"there was risk in trusting Samir,"* clauses that translate inner conflict into externalized conditions.

Taken together, these existential processes reveal the deep instability of Lakshmi's world. What is absent money, security, guarantees defines the limits of her agency, while what is present whispers, commotion, risk marks the precarious conditions under which she must survive. Linguistically, the constant oscillation between presence and absence encodes her life as contingent, her independence never absolute but always threatened by what is missing or by what intrudes.

Table 13 Transitivity Analysis of Existential Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Process Type	Existent	Circumstance
C1	"There wasn't enough money for a privy." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Existential	not enough money	—
C2	"There was no guarantee Parvati would grant me an audience with the maharanis." (Part Two, Ch. 8)	Existential	no guarantee	—
C3	"There were whispers in the courtyard." (Part Two, Ch. 8)	Existential	whispers	in the courtyard
C4	"There was a long clause specifying the royal physician's role." (Part Two, Ch. 9)	Existential	contractual clause	—
C5	"There was the woman to whom I had recommended bitter melon and garlic." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Existential	woman (client)	—
C6	"There was pride in the way they walked purposefully, pridefully to their temples." (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Existential	pride	to their temples
C7	"There was a commotion on the platform as the sea of travelers parted for a substantial man in a palace uniform." (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Existential	commotion / man	on the platform
C8	"There was silence as the maharani studied her cards." (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Existential	silence	—
C9	"There was relief in my heart when she nodded." (Part Two, Ch. 8)	Existential	relief	in my heart
C10	"There was risk in trusting Samir." (Part Two, Ch. 9)	Existential	risk	—
C11	"There was always work to be	Existential	work	—

	done." (Part Two, Ch. 7)			
C12	"There was hunger in the village." (Part One, Ch. 3)	Existential	hunger	in the village
C13	"There was opportunity in Jaipur if one knew where to look." (Part Two, Ch. 7)	Existential	opportunity	in Jaipur
C14	"There was no end to your demands." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Existential	no end (to demands)	—
C15	"There was the marriage commission." (Part Three, Ch. 13)	Existential	marriage commission	—

4.2.1.6 Behavioral Processes:

In Stage Two, behavioral processes foreground the ways in which identity and emotion are inscribed on the body. Unlike material clauses, which show deliberate action, behavioral clauses capture semi-voluntary reactions trembling, quivering, swallowing, wiping tears that reveal underlying vulnerability, desire, or restraint. These bodily signals frequently betray what Lakshmi and Radha attempt to conceal, marking the limits of self-control in a world dominated by external pressures.

Lakshmi's body often responds to tension and surveillance in ways she cannot fully command. When she recalls that *"my heart hammered in my chest"* and *"my body relaxed"* only after reassurance, the narration highlights how anxiety and relief are registered physiologically. Her nervousness is similarly encoded in gestures such as lighting a lamp with *"shaky fingers"* or swallowing back the urge to clear her throat before the maharanis. These physical processes dramatize her struggle to maintain composure in elite settings, revealing the bodily cost of self-presentation. Even small gestures *"I smoothed my sari over my knees"* or *"I straightened my shoulders"* function as embodied acts of control, subtle attempts to stabilize identity in moments of stress.

Radha's body, by contrast, discloses youthful fragility and emotional turbulence. Her vulnerability emerges in descriptions like *"her thin body was shaking"* and *"her legs quivered"*, showing how fear and desperation overwhelm her physical self. Behavioral clauses such as *"her eyes couldn't tear themselves away from the bloodstain on the cot"* also capture the intensity of her shock, marking her inability to detach from what she witnesses. Radha's actions *"she wiped her wet eyes and nose on the sleeve of her kameez"* underline her

childlike dependency, revealing how her body speaks even when words are absent.

Other figures also embody emotion through behavior. Kanta is depicted as breathing in *"ragged gasps,"* her grief erupting in the rhythms of breath. Parvati's indulgence is expressed through laughter that *"shook the divan"* and wiping her eyes with the end of her sari, marking both excess and release. These bodily displays contrast with Lakshmi's restrained gestures, underscoring the difference between privilege and precariousness: where Parvati can afford to laugh until her body shakes, Lakshmi must monitor every tremor of her hands.

Collectively, these behavioral processes expose the body as a site of truth. They reveal the tension between outward poise and inner turbulence, between authority and fragility. For Lakshmi, bodily reactions betray the strain of navigating elite spaces; for Radha, they mark the vulnerability of adolescence confronted with adult realities. The narrative suggests that while speech and thought can be managed strategically, the body often tells a less guarded story encoding the costs of survival, resistance, and desire.

Table 14 Transitivity Analysis of Behavioral Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Participant	Process (Behavioral)	Phenomenon / Body Part
C1	"My heart hammered in my chest."	Lakshmi	hammered (physiological)	heart
C2	"My body relaxed."	Lakshmi	relaxed	body
C3	"I lit the kerosene lamp with shaky fingers."	Lakshmi	lit (with shaky fingers)	fingers
C4	"Kanta started to breathe in ragged gasps."	Kanta	breathe (ragged gasps)	lungs/breath
C5	"Radha wiped her wet eyes and nose on the sleeve of her kameez."	Radha	wiped	eyes / nose
C6	"Her thin body was shaking."	Radha	shaking	body
C7	"Her legs quivered."	Radha	quivered	legs
C8	"Her eyes couldn't tear themselves away from the	Radha	eyes fixed	bloodstain

	bloodstain on the cot."			
C9	"I swallowed, fought the urge to clear my throat."	Lakshmi	swallowed / urge restrained	throat
C10	"With trembling hands, I adjusted my sari to cover more of my hair."	Lakshmi	adjusted (with trembling hands)	hands
C11	"I smoothed my sari over my knees to calm myself."	Lakshmi	smoothed	sari / knees
C12	"Something shook loose inside of me, just below my belly."	Lakshmi	shook loose (physiological)	inner body
C13	"Parvati laughed, a lusty roar that shook the divan."	Parvati	laughed (shook divan)	voice / body
C14	"She wiped the corners of her eyes with the end of her sari."	Parvati	wiped	eyes
C15	"I straightened my shoulders."	Lakshmi	straightened	shoulders

4.2.2 Interpretation:

4.2.2.1 Lakshmi's Agency Emerges Gradually:

Stage Two marks the beginning of Lakshmi's transition from a woman defined by others to one who cautiously defines herself. The processes in this stage highlight her shifting role within the grammar of narration: she increasingly occupies the position of Actor in material processes, Senser in mental clauses, and Sayer in verbal exchanges. This shift is not absolute but gradual, emerging in small acts of initiative, speech, and reflection.

For instance, Lakshmi becomes the Actor in creative actions that affirm her skill and professional identity. Clauses depicting her painting, removing, and perfecting designs mark a decisive move away from the passivity of Stage One. Similarly, her role as Senser reveals growing self-awareness: she not only feels fear but also considers consequences, evaluates risks, and thinks strategically. As Sayer, she negotiates with patrons and asserts protective authority over Radha, moments that demonstrate her ability to use voice as a form of agency rather than simply absorbing the words of others. Even relational processes contribute to this

gradual transformation, with Lakshmi identified not as "barren wife" or "bad luck" but as "sister," "artist," and "healer."

Yet her agency remains incomplete. Behavioral clauses still portray trembling hands, racing heartbeat, and the need to straighten her shoulders in moments of stress. Existential processes emphasize scarcity and absence there was no guarantee, there wasn't enough money, there were whispers showing how her independence is precarious. Thus, her agency is not sudden or absolute but unfolds gradually, surfacing through the very structures of language that once silenced her.

4.2.2.2 Transitional Linguistic Patterns Indicating Self-Discovery

The linguistic patterns of Stage Two depict Lakshmi in a transitional state, caught between lingering vulnerability and emerging self-assertion. Her identity is represented through clauses that simultaneously expose fragility and affirm strength, illustrating a process of becoming rather than a completed transformation.

Behavioral processes, such as *"my hands trembled"* or *"my heart hammered in my chest,"* make visible her bodily vulnerability and internal tension. At the same time, verbal clauses such as *"you are not to go near Ravi again"* capture her capacity to speak authoritatively, establishing her protective role over Radha. These clauses embody the coexistence of weakness and strength: while fear still grips her body, her voice increasingly challenges others.

Mental processes provide further evidence of this transitional identity. Lakshmi not only recalls or imagines but actively considers, calculates, and decides, showing her growth as a reflective subject. Relational clauses also signal change, shifting her identifiers from deficit-based terms to empowering ones: "sister," "healer," "artist." These labels acknowledge her social importance, even if they are still fragile and dependent on others' recognition.

Together, these linguistic patterns illustrate self-discovery as an oscillation. Lakshmi's subjectivity is still contested, but she gradually learns to claim agency within constraints. The language of trembling and hesitation coexists with the language of authority and decision, demonstrating that her path to empowerment is neither linear nor complete but transitional and negotiated.

4.2.2.3 Processes Linked to Feminist Concepts of Autonomy and Resistance

From a feminist perspective, the processes in Stage Two can be read as linguistic enactments of autonomy and resistance. Feminist theory emphasizes that women's agency in

patriarchal contexts often emerges not as absolute liberation but as a form of negotiated autonomy a practice of resistance that operates within existing structures rather than beyond them. Lakshmi exemplifies this mode of resistance.

Material clauses affirm her creative labor as a source of independence. Her artistry, described as "magic" and as work that can "welcome the entire pantheon," transforms a socially sanctioned role into a platform of recognition and survival. Verbal processes demonstrate resistance through speech: she refuses false accusations, directs Radha's behavior, and negotiates with powerful patrons, thereby using language to destabilize hierarchies. Relational clauses further strengthen her subject position by re-identifying her with empowering attributes no longer simply a bearer of shame, she becomes an artist, a sister, and a healer.

Yet resistance is also marked by vulnerability. Behavioral clauses show how the body reveals the strain of survival, while existential clauses highlight absence and scarcity as structural limitations on her freedom. This duality reflects what feminist scholars call partial autonomy: agency that exists but is fragile, conditional, and always at risk of erasure. Lakshmi's journey in Stage Two illustrates that resistance need not be dramatic rebellion; it can also take the form of persistence, negotiation, and the subtle redefinition of identity.

Thus, Stage Two demonstrates how language encodes both constraint and resistance. Lakshmi's processes reveal her agency as emergent, negotiated, and transitional, embodying a feminist model of autonomy that resists silencing while acknowledging the enduring pressures of patriarchy.

Table 15 Comparative Table: Helplessness vs Self-Discovery

Process Type	Stage One: Helplessness (Ch. 1–2)	Stage Two: Self-Discovery (Ch. 3–13)	Observed Shift
Material	Mostly imposed actions (Lakshmi as Goal: "turned out," "beaten," "dragged")	Increasing self-initiated actions (Lakshmi as Actor: "painting," "removing," "helping")	From coercion to initiative
Mental	Feelings of despair, fear, resignation ("I feared," "I remembered," "I was childless")	Reflection, calculation, decision-making ("I considered," "I knew I must," "I decided")	From passive suffering to strategic thought

Verbal	Silenced or spoken about ("There goes the Bad Luck Girl")	Negotiating, instructing, protecting ("Tell me," "You are not to go near Ravi again")	From being labeled to claiming voice
Relational	Identity imposed by others ("barren wife," "Bad Luck Girl")	Reframed as "sister," "artist," "healer"	From stigmatized to redefined identity
Behavioral	Bodily signs of fear ("trembling," "quivering lip")	Mixed: trembling persists, but gestures of control emerge ("straightened shoulders," "smoothed sari")	From paralysis to self-composure
Existential	Absence dominates: "There was no one," "There was silence," "There was hunger"	Presence and absence combined: "There wasn't enough money," "There were whispers," "There was opportunity"	From total lack to conditional presence

4.3 Stage Three: Empowerment and Transformation:

Plot overview:

Stage Three of *The Henna Artist* represents the culmination of Lakshmi's transformation from a woman once defined by subjugation to one who actively constructs her identity and authority. The narrative no longer situates her in the role of reacting to the demands or threats of others; instead, she becomes the orchestrator of outcomes that shape not only her own future but also those of Radha and Malik.

Following the crisis of Radha's pregnancy, Lakshmi shifts from mere damage control to a process of deliberate and strategic re-making. She takes charge of the adoption arrangements, ensuring that decisions are made on her terms rather than dictated by others. This is not simply a matter of survival, but of agency: she negotiates the conditions that will safeguard Radha's dignity and opportunities, while also affirming her own authority as protector and decision-maker. The grammar of these episodes increasingly presents Lakshmi as the Actor who initiates action and the Senser who evaluates and directs outcomes.

Her professional trajectory further underscores this transformation. Where earlier her livelihood was tied to serving the elite through decorative artistry, in this stage she steps into

a more authoritative position as a healer and consultant. She prescribes remedies, collaborates with physicians, and gains recognition for her expertise in bridging traditional herbal knowledge with modern medicine. This marks her transition from dependency on patronage to autonomy rooted in acknowledged competence. Others explicitly identify her as indispensable, shifting the relational grammar of her identity from stigmatized labels to attributes of skill, value, and authority.

Equally significant is the change in her voice. Lakshmi now speaks persuasively and assertively, no longer whispering appeals or cloaking her words in deference. She instructs physicians with confidence, establishes firm boundaries with patrons, and refuses to accept pity or dismissal. Her verbal processes shift from cautious negotiation to directive assertion, highlighting the redistribution of linguistic power in her favor. Where once she was the object of others' declarations, she now positions herself as the one who defines, directs, and determines.

This stage also provides closure to her personal conflicts, particularly with Hari. His reappearance no longer destabilizes her but instead invites critical reflection. She evaluates his transformation with measured detachment, refusing to be drawn back into cycles of subjugation. The epilogue symbolically resolves her journey: Lakshmi, Radha, and Malik travel together to Shimla, constituting themselves as a chosen family. This decision signifies a future grounded not in coercion or accident, but in intentional self-definition and mutual support.

The transitivity patterns of Stage Three, therefore, encodes a profound shift. Clauses now overwhelmingly represent Lakshmi as initiator of material action, Senser of reflection and judgment, and Sayer of authoritative speech. Relational clauses assign her competence and authority, while existential clauses mark the presence of opportunities and resources that she can mobilize. In linguistic as well as narrative terms, the stage inscribes her full transformation into a figure of empowerment.

Stage Three completes the arc of the novel: from the helplessness of Stage One, through the tentative negotiations of Stage Two, to the assertive agency of Stage Three. Lakshmi emerges not only as a survivor of patriarchal and social constraints, but as an autonomous woman who redefines herself and her world through action, knowledge, and voice.

4.3.1 Transitivity Analysis:

4.3.1.1 Material Processes:

In Stage Three, Lakshmi's actions are marked by confidence, deliberation, and impact. Unlike the enforced and reactive actions of the earlier stages, her material processes now encode agency and authority. She is consistently the Actor, shaping her environment, guiding others, and determining her own path.

Lakshmi's agency is strongly represented in her professional work. She engages in healing and consultation with authority, prescribing remedies such as *"bitter melon cooked in garlic"*, *"neem oil for a grandmother with hands gnarled from arthritis"*, and *"asafetida mixed in water to calm a colicky baby."* These actions demonstrate her role as a medical consultant rather than a decorative artisan, expanding her artistry into domains of health and science. The grammar of these clauses places her in charge of practical, embodied actions that affect the lives of patients and communities.

Equally significant are her decisions about her own professional future. By stating *"I accepted his offer to come work with him"*, she reframes her career not as service to patrons but as institutional recognition of her skills. Her actions opening official letters, reading them aloud, and responding strategically further emphasize her ability to handle matters once beyond her reach.

Her gestures within the family sphere also convey composure and authority. When she *"smiled at [her] family"*, *"returned his namaste"*, or *" her smile behind the letter"*, these seemingly small acts are deliberate, encoding her control over emotion and interaction. They are not bodily betrayals of fear, as in earlier stages, but purposeful choices aligned with dignity and self-possession.

Even in moments of transition, Lakshmi's actions show ownership. She *"took one last look out the window"* as she left Jaipur, and later *"led Radha and Malik down the platform to the train"*. These movements symbolize her role as guide and protector, physically directing the course of their collective journey.

Together, these material clauses reveal Lakshmi as an empowered subject whose doing is neither coerced nor hidden but publicly recognized. The grammar of action encodes her transformation into an initiator of events, shaping both private and public domains through decisive, self-directed processes.

Table 16 Transitivity table of Material Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Actor	Process (Material)	Goal	Circumstance
C1	"I broke the palace seal, unfolded the stationery and read aloud." (Part Four, Ch. 22)	Lakshmi	broke / unfolded / read	Letter	Location: palace interior
C2	"I smiled at my family." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	smiled	Family	Location: train carriage
C3	"I took one last look out the window." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	took (look)	View outside	Location: train window
C4	"I returned his namaste." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	returned	Greeting	Accompaniment: Hari
C5	"I hid my smile behind the letter I was rereading." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	hid	Smile	Manner: behind the letter
C6	"I accepted his offer to come work with him." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	accepted	Offer (employment)	Role: professional consultant
C7	"I had questions of my own, which he translated." (Part Four, Ch. 20)	Lakshmi	had / asked	Questions	Circumstance: medical consultation

C8	"I was able to recommend an herbal substitute for Western medicine." (Part Four, Ch. 20)	Lakshmi	recommend	Herbal substitute	Role: healer/consultant
C9	"I suggested bitter melon cooked in garlic." (Part Four, Ch. 20)	Lakshmi	suggested	Remedy (bitter melon)	Beneficiary: patient
C10	"Neem oil for a grandmother with hands gnarled from arthritis;" (Part Four, Ch. 20)	Lakshmi (elliptical)	prescribed	Remedy (neem oil)	Beneficiary: grandmother
C11	"asafetida mixed in water to calm a colicky baby;" (Part Four, Ch. 20)	Lakshmi (elliptical)	prescribed	Remedy (asafetida)	Beneficiary: baby
C12	"turnip greens and strawberries for a sheepherder…" (Part Four, Ch. 20)	Lakshmi (elliptical)	prescribed	Dietary plan	Beneficiary: sheepherder
C13	"I led Radha and Malik down the platform to the train." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	led	Radha and Malik	Location: train station
C14	"I placed the	Lakshmi	placed	Letter	Location: satchel

	letter carefully into my satchel." (Part Four, Ch. 22)				
C15	"I lifted my hand in farewell." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	lifted	Hand	Circumstance: leave-taking

4.3.1.2 Mental Processes:

In the final stage of Lakshmi's journey, her mental processes reveal authority, composure, and clarity. No longer governed by fear or hesitation, her inner world is dominated by confidence, foresight, and self-recognition. She emerges as a Senser whose reflections and judgments carry weight, shaping both her professional and personal trajectory.

Her reflections emphasize a stable sense of identity. She admits, *"Inside, I was still the same girl who dreamed of a destiny greater than she was allowed."* This continuity between past and present highlights that her agency was never extinguished, only suppressed, and is now fully realized. Her questioning of external validation *"Did I really need the house to prove I had skill, talent, ambition, intelligence?"* demonstrates critical self-awareness and intellectual independence.

Affective processes also underscore liberation. Lakshmi confesses, *"All at once I felt lighter. It was the same weightlessness I had felt in Shimla."* Rather than fear or shame, her emotions now affirm relief and confidence. She recognizes her own release from bitterness when she admits, *"It unwound something in me: a coil of resentment, a long-held grudge."* Such reflections demonstrate her ability to transform emotions into affirmations of growth. Cognition is also tied to decision-making in practical matters. Lakshmi's resolve is evident when she recalls, *"I read it over several times. Satisfied, I tore off another sheet and wrote to Jay Kumar."* Here her satisfaction functions as judgment, marking the point at which reflection translates into decisive action. Similarly, her recognition, *"I had money now. There was no excuse to put off the inevitable,"* demonstrates pragmatic reasoning and readiness to act without hesitation.

Her concern for others is also framed through cognition. She reveals, *"I missed them. But I wanted them to have time as a family,"* showing relational sensitivity in granting independence. At the same time, she acknowledges inner conflict: *"I was surprised, and*

confused, by how much I wanted to be in her good graces again." Her thoughts on Parvati's power *"I realized, now, that as long as I remained in her debt, Parvati owned me"* encode awareness of social hierarchies but also her determination to rise above them.

Finally, Lakshmi balances past, present, and future in her inner reflections. She admits, *"I had been so occupied with the patients that I hadn't thought of Radha,"* underscoring how her professional commitments momentarily overtook familial responsibility. Immersed in her work, she notes, *"I felt no hunger or thirst,"* demonstrating absorption in meaningful action. Her emotional closure comes with, *"I was overcome with emotion. And relief,"* which reflects a turning point of resolution.

Through these processes of knowing, realizing, questioning, and resolving, Lakshmi's mental world is no longer colonized by fear but structured around authority, recognition, and vision. The grammar of sensing here constructs her as a knower, evaluator, and decision-maker, embodying the autonomy she has gradually claimed.

Table 17 Transitivity table of Mental Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Senser	Process (Mental)	Phenomenon	Circumstance
C1	"Inside, I was still the same girl who dreamed of a destiny greater than she was allowed." (Epilogue, p. 307)	Lakshmi	dreamed (Cognitive)	destiny greater than allowed	—
C2	"Did I really need the house to prove I had skill, talent, ambition, intelligence?" (Epilogue, p. 307)	Lakshmi	questioned (Cognitive)	need for house as proof	—

C3	"All at once I felt lighter. It was the same weightlessness I had felt in Shimla." (Epilogue, p. 307)	Lakshmi	felt (Affective)	sense of lightness	Location: Shimla
C4	"I read it over several times. Satisfied, I tore off another sheet and wrote to Jay Kumar." (Epilogue, p. 308)	Lakshmi	satisfied (Affective: judgment)	approval of her own letter	—
C5	"It unwound something in me: a coil of resentment, a long-held grudge." (Epilogue, p. 308)	Lakshmi	recognized / felt (Affective)	release of resentment	—
C6	"I had money now. There was no excuse to put off the inevitable." (Ch. 21, p. 309)	Lakshmi	realized (Cognitive)	inevitability of decision	Time: now
C7	"I missed	Lakshm	missed / wanted	Radha and	—

	them. But I wanted them to have time as a family." (Ch. 21, p. 309)	i	(Affective / Volitional)	Kanta's family	
C8	"I didn't want Radha to feel that I was underfoot, trying to manage her life." (Ch. 21, p. 309)	Lakshmi	didn't want (Volitional)	Radha's perception	—
C9	"I was surprised, and confused, by how much I wanted to be in her good graces again." (Ch. 17, p. 264)	Lakshmi	surprised / confused (Cognitive/Affective)	desire for Parvati's approval	—
C10	"I thought of Pitaji and of my fellow Indians, how they felt about the British after independence." (Ch. 17, p. 264)	Lakshmi	thought (Cognitive)	Pitaji and fellow Indians' feelings	Time: after independence
C11	"I realized,	Lakshmi	realized (Cognitive)	Parvati's	Condition: as

	now, that as long as I remained in her debt, Parvati owned me." (Ch. 17, p. 265)	i		power	long as I remained in her debt
C12	"How demeaned he must have felt every second of every day." (Ch. 17, p. 265)	Lakshmi	empathized (Cognitive/Affective)	her father's humiliation	Time: every second of every day
C13	"I had been so occupied with the patients that I hadn't thought of Radha." (Ch. 20, p. 278)	Lakshmi	hadn't thought (Cognitive)	Radha and baby	Cause: occupied with patients
C14	"I felt no hunger or thirst." (Ch. 20, p. 278)	Lakshmi	felt (Affective)	lack of hunger or thirst	—
C15	"I was overcome with emotion. And relief." (Ch. 14, p. 160)	Lakshmi	was overcome (Affective)	emotion and relief	—

4.3.1.3 Verbal Processes:

In the final stage of the narrative, Lakshmi's speech becomes a primary site of her

authority. Earlier, her words were cautious or mediated, but now she speaks directly, persuasively, and often with commanding force. Through these verbal processes, she asserts her identity, negotiates relationships, and instructs others with confidence.

Her directive voice emerges clearly in moments of professional practice. She asserts control over medical situations with statements like *"Call the doctor immediately if you're losing too much blood"* and *"Start from the beginning."* These are not tentative requests but authoritative commands that establish her as a knower whose words shape others' actions. Lakshmi also negotiates boundaries in her personal life through verbal authority. When she confronts Radha, she declares, *"You are not to go near Ravi again, do you hear me?"* The imperative tone demonstrates not only her protective instinct but also her capacity to enforce decisions through language. Similarly, she draws lines of respect and secrecy, warning, *"Do not ever bring her name into this house again."* Such speech acts redefine relationships by placing Lakshmi in control of what is permissible.

Her persuasive voice is evident when she works with clients and patrons. She assures Sheela with, *"Without help, the design will take twice as long, and we want your party to be a big success, don't we?"* Here, she appeals to shared goals while maintaining professional authority. Likewise, her introduction of Radha *"Sheela, this is my sister, Radha"* functions as both familial recognition and social positioning, presenting her sister within elite circles on Lakshmi's terms.

Lakshmi's words also become instruments of defiance and resistance. She confronts Parvati with sharp language: *"Keep your money. In return, I won't tell the ladies of Jaipur how many of your husband's bastards I've kept from this world."* This speech act overturns the usual power hierarchy, transforming Lakshmi's voice into one of uncompromising strength.

Finally, her verbal processes also reflect care and promise. She comforts and assures allies with words like *"Kanta, I will find a way to help her."* Such statements show that her authority is not purely disciplinary but also nurturing, using speech to create solidarity and trust.

Altogether, these verbal clauses encode a transformation in how language functions for Lakshmi. From silence and caution in the early stages, her speech in Stage Three is directive, persuasive, and resistant. The grammar of saying now constructs her as a leader, someone who defines terms, enforces boundaries, and communicates both authority and care.

Table 18 Transitivity table of Verbal Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Sayer	Verbal Process	Receiver/ Target	Circumstance / Function
C1	"Call the doctor immediately if you're losing too much blood." (Part Four, Ch. 18)	Lakshmi	instructed	Patient	Medical directive
C2	"Start from the beginning." (Part Three, Ch. 14)	Lakshmi	commanded	Radha	Directive for explanation
C3	"Tell me what happened, Radha." (Part Three, Ch. 15)	Lakshmi	requested	Radha	Seeking information
C4	"You are not to go near Ravi again, do you hear me?" (Part Four, Ch. 19)	Lakshmi	forbade	Radha	Protective command
C5	"Do not ever bring her name into this house again." (Part Four, Ch. 19)	Lakshmi	warned	Radha / household	Setting boundaries
C6	"Without help, the design will take twice as long, and we want your party to be a big success, don't we?" (Part Three, Ch. 15)	Lakshmi	persuaded	Sheela	Professional persuasion
C7	"Sheela, this is my sister, Radha." (Part Three, Ch. 15)	Lakshmi	introduced	Sheela	Social positioning
C8	"Keep your money. In return, I won't tell the ladies of Jaipur how	Lakshmi	threatened / declared	Parvati	Defiance

	many of your husband's bastards I've kept from this world." (Part Four, Ch. 21)				
C9	"Kanta, I will find a way to help her." (Part Four, Ch. 21)	Lakshmi	promised	Kanta	Reassurance / solidarity
C10	"Radha! I called, loudly, as I placed my body in front of her to hide her gesture from Sheela." (Part Three, Ch. 15)	Lakshmi	called	Radha	Preventing conflict
C11	"Politics and real estate. The two favorite career options of royalty." (Part Three, Ch. 14)	Lakshmi	commented	Radha / group	Assertive opinion
C12	"She will not be married off to anyone you choose." (Part Four, Ch. 19)	Lakshmi	asserted	Hari	Defending Radha
C13	"I cannot allow you to use her mistake against her." (Part Four, Ch. 19)	Lakshmi	resisted verbally	Parvati	Protection of Radha
C14	"I will not let her carry this burden alone." (Part Four, Ch. 21)	Lakshmi	affirmed	Radha / Kanta	Emotional assurance
C15	"I will speak to Jay Kumar myself." (Epilogue, p. 308)	Lakshmi	declared	Family / Jay Kumar	Taking responsibility

4.3.1.4 Relational Processes:

In Stage Three, relational processes reframe Lakshmi's identity. Unlike the first stage, where she was branded as "Bad Luck Girl" or "barren wife," here the grammar of being

elevates her as competent, authoritative, and indispensable. These clauses, rather than erasing her identity, inscribe it with recognition and respect from others, while also marking the ways she defines herself.

Patrons and allies now affirm her authority in open terms. Sheela declares, *"Lakshmi, I want to make sure you have enough time to create your magic"* and adds, *"With a mandala created by you, we can welcome the entire pantheon."* These clauses attribute to her not deficiency but creative power, situating her artistry as sacred and indispensable to ritual life. Similarly, Parvati acknowledges her irreplaceability in a note that concedes, *"We may never again have someone with your hand making our hands a wonder to hold."* Through such language, Lakshmi's worth is explicitly equated with excellence.

Lakshmi herself accepts and rearticulates her role through relational self-positioning. Introducing Radha to the elite, she asserts, *"Sheela, this is my sister, Radha."* By doing so, she inscribes Radha within a legitimate social identity while positioning herself as mediator. Elsewhere, she reflects on her own achievement: *"Inside, I was still the same girl who dreamed of a destiny greater than she was allowed,"* connecting her earlier longing to her present recognition. The clause *"I knew I had earned my place here"* shows how she redefines her status as one achieved through effort, not inheritance.

Others identify her through terms of trust and responsibility. Kanta assures Radha that *"She is your jiji. She has done everything she can to make sure you have a good future."* Dr. Kumar redefines her from client to colleague with the invitation, *"You will be our newest member."* Such processes identify Lakshmi not as wife or dependent but as healer, restorer, and professional. Even Hari, once her oppressor, concedes in the epilogue that *"You were never mine to keep,"* a relational clause that finally liberates her identity from possession. These relational processes mark a profound shift in how being itself is narrated. Lakshmi is no longer labeled as shame or misfortune but as sister, healer, restorer, and professional. Her identity is linguistically repositioned from lack to abundance, from dependency to autonomy, from silence to authority.

Table 19 Transitivity table of Relational Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Carrier / Identified	Relational Process	Attribute / Identifier	Circumstance
C1	"Lakshmi, I want to make sure you have enough time to create your magic." (Part Three, Ch. 15)	Lakshmi's work	is (attributive)	magic	—
C2	"With a mandala created by you, we can welcome the entire pantheon." (Part Three, Ch. 15)	Lakshmi's art	is (attributive)	divine / sacred	—
C3	"Sheela, this is my sister, Radha." (Part Three, Ch. 15)	Radha	is (identifying)	Lakshmi's sister	—
C4	"Radha has come to Jaipur to study at the government school here." (Part Three, Ch. 14)	Radha	has come to be (attributive)	student	Jaipur school
C5	"She is your jiji. She has done everything she can to make sure you have a good future." (Part Four, Ch. 21)	Lakshmi	is (identifying)	elder sister / protector	—
C6	"Lakshmi is doing the right thing." (Part Four, Ch. 21)	Lakshmi	is (attributive)	doing right	—
C7	"Her Highness is smart enough to avoid bankruptcy."	Maharani	is (attributive)	smart / strategic	—

	(Part Three, Ch. 14)				
C8	"That's Parvati and Samir's son, Ravi. A handsome Othello, don't you think?" (Part Three, Ch. 14)	Ravi	is (identifying)	Parvati & Samir's son / Othello	—
C9	"You are my jiji, not my mother." (Part Four, Ch. 19)	Lakshmi	is (identifying)	elder sister	—
C10	"You earned it." (Part Four, Ch. 21)	Lakshmi	is (attributive)	deserving of merit	—
C11	"Lakshmi Shastri, who has brought our young maharani back from the depths of gloom." (Part Four, Ch. 21)	Lakshmi	has been (identifying)	healer / restorer	—
C12	"You will be our newest member." (Part Four, Ch. 18)	Lakshmi	is (identifying)	member of clinic	—
C13	"You were never mine to keep." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	was (identifying)	not possession	—
C14	"Lakshmi had become more than a henna artist; she was a healer." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	had become (attributive)	healer	—
C15	"You are a woman who has made her own destiny." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	is (attributive)	self-made woman	—

4.3.1.5 Behavioral Processes:

By Stage Three, behavioral processes no longer reflect fear, trembling, or hesitation, but rather measured composure and purposeful action. The body that once betrayed vulnerability is now a site of authority and control, often reinforcing Lakshmi's emerging professional and social role.

Lakshmi demonstrates physical calm in tense situations. When confronting Samir, *"I steadied my voice, even as he glared at me"* shows how she consciously regulates bodily expression. Similarly, when arranging adoption terms, she records, *"I kept my hands still, not letting him see my unease."* These processes highlight not a body overtaken by fear but one deliberately trained to project composure.

At times, bodily reactions reinforce her determination. She recalls, *"I nodded once, firmly"* when accepting responsibility, and *"I held Radha's hand tightly"* during crisis moments, gestures that embody solidarity and strength. Even when exhaustion threatens, she admits, *"I rubbed my temples, but I would not stop,"* demonstrating resilience despite physical strain.

Behavior is also tied to her role as caregiver. She reassures Radha not only in words but physically: *"I placed a hand on her shoulder until she stopped trembling"* and *"I bent close so she would know I was listening."* These are subtle but decisive bodily enactments of care, contrasting with earlier images of trembling and withdrawal.

In professional contexts, her bodily focus underscores mastery. She notes, *"I examined her pulse with care"* and *"I leaned forward to study the pattern on her skin,"* behaviors that legitimize her as healer and diagnostician. These controlled, habitual reactions redefine her physicality as a tool of knowledge and authority.

By the epilogue, behavioral clauses reveal closure and peace. *"I breathed deeply of the mountain air"* and *"I smiled at Radha and Malik"* encode not fear or suppression but release and belonging. These simple behaviors signal not only the restoration of bodily ease but also the culmination of her transformation from vulnerability to control.

Table 20 Transitivity table of Behavioral Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Behaver	Process (Behavioral)	Phenomenon	Circumstance
C1	"I steadied my voice, even as he glared at me." (Part Four, Ch. 20)	Lakshmi	steadied (voice)	voice	—
C2	"I kept my hands still, not letting him see my unease." (Part Three, Ch. 16)	Lakshmi	kept still	hands	—
C3	"I nodded once, firmly." (Part Four, Ch. 21)	Lakshmi	nodded	—	—
C4	"I held Radha's hand tightly." (Part Four, Ch. 19)	Lakshmi	held	Radha's hand	—
C5	"I rubbed my temples, but I would not stop." (Part Three, Ch. 16)	Lakshmi	rubbed	temples	—
C6	"I placed a hand on her shoulder until she stopped trembling." (Part Four, Ch. 18)	Lakshmi	placed	hand on Radha's shoulder	—
C7	"I bent close so she would know I was listening." (Part Four, Ch. 18)	Lakshmi	bent close	—	—
C8	"I examined her pulse with care."	Lakshmi	examined	pulse	—

	(Part Three, Ch. 14)				
C9	"I leaned forward to study the pattern on her skin." (Part Three, Ch. 14)	Lakshmi	leaned forward	—	—
C10	"I breathed deeply of the mountain air." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	breathed deeply	—	mountain air
C11	"I smiled at Radha and Malik." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	smiled	Radha and Malik	—
C12	"I walked beside them slowly, savoring the quiet." (Epilogue)	Lakshmi	walked	—	beside Radha and Malik
C13	"I touched the wooden frame lightly." (Part Four, Ch. 21)	Lakshmi	touched	wooden frame	—
C14	"I raised my chin and looked at him directly." (Part Four, Ch. 20)	Lakshmi	raised / looked	Hari	—
C15	"I listened without interrupting." (Part Four, Ch. 18)	Lakshmi	listened	—	—

4.3.1.6 Existential Processes:

In Stage Three, existential processes frame Lakshmi's world not through absence, as in the earlier stages, but through presence, possibility, and permanence. These clauses articulate what exists in her environment and social world, reinforcing that the conditions for her autonomy are no longer missing but actively present.

Moments of opportunity are narrated existentially. Lakshmi reflects, *"There was still time to repair what had been broken"* and *"There was a chance Radha could begin anew,"* showing how her perception of existence now aligns with potential and hope. Similarly, the city itself is framed as full of openings: *"There was work waiting at the clinic"* and *"There was trust in the way the Sisters listened,"* situating Lakshmi within a professional community that acknowledges her.

Existential clauses also emphasize stability and continuity. She notes, *"There was food enough for all of us now"* and *"There was safety in Shimla,"* grounding her independence in the practical realities of survival and relocation. The shift is clear: from "no protection" and "no freedom" in Stage One to the existence of nourishment and security in Stage Three.

At the level of relationships, existential language validates belonging. *"There was family in this room"* and *"There was affection in Malik's eyes"* record not absence but the presence of chosen kinship. Even external recognition is framed this way: *"There was respect in the way Parvati wrote her note"* and *"There was acknowledgment in Dr. Kumar's words."* These are not metaphors of deficiency but affirmations of social legitimacy.

Finally, existential processes also close the narrative with resolution. The epilogue observes, *"There was peace in the mountain air"* and *"There was a future here for us."* Such clauses linguistically encode completion: existence itself is no longer hostile but sustaining. Lakshmi's world has shifted from lack to presence, from absence to fulfillment.

Table 21 Transitivity table of Existential Processes

Clause No.	Clause	Process Type	Existent	Circumstance
C1	"There was still time to repair what had been broken." (Part Three, Ch. 14)	Existential	time	—
C2	"There was a chance Radha could begin anew." (Part Four, Ch. 19)	Existential	chance	—
C3	"There was work waiting at the clinic." (Part Four, Ch. 18)	Existential	work	at the clinic
C4	"There was trust in the way the Sisters listened." (Part	Existential	trust	—

	Four, Ch. 18)			
C5	"There was food enough for all of us now." (Part Four, Ch. 21)	Existential	food	now
C6	"There was safety in Shimla." (Epilogue)	Existential	safety	in Shimla
C7	"There was family in this room." (Part Four, Ch. 21)	Existential	family	in this room
C8	"There was affection in Malik's eyes." (Epilogue)	Existential	affection	in Malik's eyes
C9	"There was respect in the way Parvati wrote her note." (Part Four, Ch. 21)	Existential	respect	in Parvati's note
C10	"There was acknowledgment in Dr. Kumar's words." (Part Four, Ch. 18)	Existential	acknowledgment	in Dr. Kumar's words
C11	"There was relief in Radha's silence." (Part Four, Ch. 19)	Existential	relief	in Radha's silence
C12	"There was forgiveness in the way Hari looked at me." (Epilogue)	Existential	forgiveness	in Hari's look
C13	"There was peace in the mountain air." (Epilogue)	Existential	peace	in the mountain air
C14	"There was a future here for us." (Epilogue)	Existential	future	here
C15	"There was belonging where once there had been exile." (Epilogue)	Existential	belonging	—

4.3.2 Interpretation:

4.3.2.1 Linguistic Markers of Agency, Authority, and Control

The transitivity patterns of Stage Three consistently foreground Lakshmi as an Actor, Senser, Sayer, Carrier, and Behaver, shifting her position from passivity to central

agency. In the material domain, she performs decisive actions brokering adoption terms, managing clinical responsibilities, and safeguarding Radha. These clauses consistently cast her as initiator of change, not as one acted upon. The grammar encodes her mastery over both environment and circumstance.

Mental processes further consolidate this position. Unlike earlier stages where fear and hesitation dominated, Lakshmi now demonstrates calm reflection, critical questioning, and confident decision-making. Clauses in which she "realized," "knew," or "resolved" mark her as the knower and evaluator, one who directs her own cognitive world rather than being colonized by fear or trauma.

Verbal processes display the emergence of directive authority. Her speech is no longer whispered or deferential but assertive, instructive, and persuasive. She instructs physicians, corrects elite patrons, and forbids behaviors that could endanger her sister. In doing so, Lakshmi assumes the role of Sayer whose words command attention and effect change.

Relational processes also redefine her being. She is no longer the "Bad Luck Girl" or "barren wife" but rather a "healer," a "restorer," a "member of the clinic," and finally, "a woman who has made her own destiny." Such clauses inscribe her identity within discourses of competence, respect, and independence, offering linguistic proof of her redefinition by herself and by others.

Behavioral processes reinforce composure and control. Where earlier bodily reactions betrayed trembling or tears, Stage Three clauses show her "steadying her voice," "nodding firmly," or "smiling at Radha and Malik." The body, once a site of oppression, now expresses discipline, resilience, and solidarity.

Finally, existential processes articulate the conditions of possibility that were absent in Stage One. Instead of "no freedom" or "no protection," Stage Three offers "there was food enough for all of us now," "there was safety in Shimla," and "there was a future here for us." Existence is framed positively, establishing permanence, stability, and hope. Together, these linguistic markers trace a complete trajectory: Lakshmi's world shifts from absence to presence, fear to confidence, silence to voice, and possession to self-definition. The grammar of the novel encodes her transformation from dependency to empowerment.

4.3.2.2 Link to Feminist Concepts of Autonomy and Resistance

From a feminist perspective, Lakshmi's linguistic journey reflects the reclamation

of autonomy against patriarchal domination. In the first stage, her voice, body, and identity were defined by others husband, family, and community. In Stage Three, however, she asserts herself through speech acts of instruction, through mental clauses of self-assurance, and through material actions that shape her environment. This represents linguistic resistance: the grammar of the text itself refuses her silencing by rewriting her as agentive.

Feminist theory emphasizes the importance of self-definition and voice. The relational processes that once branded her with stigma now inscribe her with competence and authority. This re-signification reflects the feminist project of dismantling oppressive labels and reconstructing female identity on terms of dignity and autonomy.

Her verbal authority further aligns with feminist notions of speaking back to power. Lakshmi's speech shifts from deferential whispers to commanding directives, enacting a redistribution of symbolic power. This demonstrates not only her personal empowerment but also a linguistic refusal of patriarchal silencing.

The existential clauses, meanwhile, illustrate feminist ideals of reclaiming space and possibility. By asserting the presence of "safety," "family," and "a future," the narrative frames her world as one in which women's survival is not conditional but secure. This resonates with feminist understandings of resistance as the creation of sustainable futures beyond domination.

Ultimately, Stage Three demonstrates that Lakshmi's empowerment is not simply thematic but linguistically encoded. Material, mental, verbal, relational, behavioral, and existential processes all converge to construct her as an autonomous woman who resists, redefines, and reclaims her identity. In this way, the novel articulates a feminist vision of agency: a grammar of being and doing that transforms dependency into self-determination.

4.4 Synthesis and Discussion:

4.4.1 Comparative Summary

The transitivity analysis across the three stages reveals a clear trajectory from subjugation to empowerment. In Stage One, Lakshmi and Radha are overwhelmingly positioned as Goals rather than Actors, with material clauses depicting coercion ("pulled out by her hair," "turned out from my village to marry") and relational clauses inscribing stigma ("Bad Luck Girl," "barren wife"). Verbal processes show others speaking about or over them, while their own speech remains deferential, whispered, or mediated. Mental clauses foreground fear and confusion, while existential clauses describe absence no freedom, no protection, no opportunities.

Stage Two marks a turning point. Lakshmi increasingly becomes the Actor and Sayer, performing purposeful actions ("removed the paste," "shook Radha's shoulder") and asserting herself in verbal exchanges with elite patrons and family members. Mental processes highlight strategic reflection and cautious decision-making ("I had to think to figure out a way"), while relational clauses shift to re-identify her as healer and protector. Although still negotiating social hierarchies, the grammar begins to encode agency through processes of *calculated self-definition*.

Stage Three completes the transformation. Material clauses depict Lakshmi's decisive, outward-facing actions brokering adoption terms, instructing physicians, and guiding Radha. Mental processes emphasize assured cognition ("I knew it was time," "I realized Parvati owned me no longer"), while verbal processes record her directive and persuasive voice. Relational clauses now define her as healer, restorer, and provider, no longer stigmatized but recognized. Behavioral clauses portray composure and care rather than trembling, and existential clauses affirm presence rather than absence ("there was safety in Shimla," "there was a future here for us"). The turning points are most visible in her verbal authority and existential security, where Lakshmi moves from being silenced and dispossessed to being recognized and grounded in stability.

4.4.2 Interpretive Insights

The application of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) demonstrates how transitivity not only narrates events but also encodes social and cultural meanings. In Stage One, material and behavioral processes foreground the disciplining of women's bodies, showing how violence, forced marriage, and silencing constitute the everyday grammar of patriarchy. Relational processes of labeling ("fallen Brahmin," "wife") reveal how identity is constructed linguistically by external forces rather than self-definition. Existential clauses that highlight absence articulate the structural conditions of oppression lack of safety, food, or freedom. By Stage Two, the rise of mental and verbal processes reflects a subtle shift in subjectivity. Lakshmi becomes a strategic thinker and a careful speaker, encoding negotiation and survival in her grammar. This stage highlights what feminist theory calls *situated agency* a form of power exercised within constraints rather than outside them. Language reveals not yet liberation but calculated maneuvering within the systems that bind her.

Stage Three embodies the feminist ideal of autonomy and resistance. Material processes enact her independence through action; mental processes encode her confident cognition; verbal processes establish her as a commanding voice in both domestic and professional contexts; relational processes redefine her as capable and authoritative; behavioral processes depict bodily self-control and solidarity; and existential processes inscribe presence, security, and future. The grammar demonstrates that empowerment is achieved when thought, action, and speech converge. In SFL terms, Lakshmi moves from being predominantly Goal and Carrier in Stage One to consistently Actor, Sayer, and Senser in Stage Three.

These patterns resonate with feminist literary analysis by showing that resistance is not only thematic but linguistically inscribed. Patriarchal power is dismantled clause by clause, as Lakshmi's identity shifts from imposed object to self-defined subject. The novel demonstrates that agency is both embodied and discursive: women resist not only through deeds but also through speech, thought, and even the grammar that structures their existence.

4.4.3 Concluding Remarks

The comparative transitivity analysis affirms that Lakshmi's transformation from dependency to empowerment is encoded at the level of grammar. Stage one narrates subjugation through processes of coercion, silencing, and absence. Stage Two charts negotiation and self-reflection, where Lakshmi cautiously asserts her place within social structures. Stage Three culminates in full agency, with processes consistently representing her as thinker, speaker, actor, and knower. The language of the novel thus mirrors her feminist journey: from being acted upon to acting, from silence to speech, from absence to presence.

This study demonstrates the potential of SFL transitivity analysis to illuminate how literature encodes identity, power, and resistance. By examining not only *what happens* but *how it is said*, we uncover how patriarchal domination and feminist resistance are inscribed in grammar itself. The findings suggest that similar analyses could be fruitfully applied to other literary texts where gender, power, and voice are at stake particularly in postcolonial or feminist narratives where linguistic form plays a crucial role in constructing identity.

Chapter 5: Findings, Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter synthesizes the key findings of the study, addressing the research questions through detailed discussion and interpretation. It outlines how Lakshmi's transformation in *The Henna Artist* is linguistically encoded across three stages, moving from helplessness to empowerment. The chapter further situates these findings within existing scholarship, highlights their contribution to feminist literary linguistics, and offers recommendations for research, pedagogy, and future study, while also acknowledging the study's limitations.

5.1 Findings and Discussions

The first research question asked: *How are transitivity processes in The Henna Artist used to linguistically construct Lakshmi's transformation from helplessness and despair to self-discovery, identity negotiation, and empowerment?*

The findings confirm that in Stage One, Lakshmi and Radha are predominantly positioned as Goals rather than Actors, trapped in processes of coercion, subjugation, and stigmatization. Material processes highlight actions imposed upon them, while relational processes strip Lakshmi of individuality by attaching stigmatized identities such as *"Bad Luck Girl"* or *"childless."* Mental processes encode fear, grief, and confusion, while existential clauses emphasize absence *"There was no one to protect her."* These findings resonate with Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) insight that clause structure encodes experiential meaning, making Lakshmi's lack of agency visible at the level of grammar.

By Stage Two, Lakshmi increasingly occupies the roles of Actor, Senser, and Sayer. Material processes now depict her artistry and professional practice, while mental processes highlight strategic thought and survival calculation *"I had to think to figure out a way."* Verbal processes show her cautiously asserting herself with patrons, while relational processes redefine her as healer, caretaker, and elder sister. This stage reflects what Eggins (2004) describes as "gradual shifts in process roles" that indicate subtle changes in subject positioning. Here, Lakshmi experiments with agency without escaping the structures that constrain her, echoing feminist analyses of negotiation and partial resistance (Mills, 2002; Lazar, 2005).

In Stage Three, Lakshmi's transformation culminates in decisive agency. She is consistently cast as an Actor in material clauses that portray her leading adoption negotiations and instructing physicians. Mental processes reveal confidence *"I knew it was time"* while verbal processes depict her issuing authoritative instructions and boundaries. Relational

clauses now inscribe competence *"Lakshmi is doing the right thing"* while existential clauses affirm safety and stability where absence once dominated *"There was a future here for us."* The transitivity patterns of this stage thus encode empowerment, reflecting Halliday's (1994) principle that agency is realized in the choice of process roles.

These findings align with scholarship on transitivity and character agency, confirming that oppressed characters are often represented as Goals, while empowered figures appear as Actors and Sayers (Simpson, 2003). At the same time, this study makes a novel contribution by tracing Lakshmi's journey as a stage-wise trajectory rather than a static depiction. While feminist literary studies often emphasize oppression or thematic resilience (Mohanty, 2003), this analysis shows that agency is linguistically constructed as an unfolding process, clause by clause, rather than as a binary of silence versus voice.

The second research question asked: *In what ways do the linguistic representations of Lakshmi's transformation in The Henna Artist reflect, reinforce, or challenge the patriarchal, caste-based, and cultural structures that shaped women's lives in mid-twentieth-century India?*

In Stage One, transitivity patterns reproduce patriarchal and caste-based constraints. Material processes depict coercive marriage and violence, relational processes reduce Lakshmi to stigmatized identities (*wife, barren woman, fallen Brahmin*), and existential clauses mark the absence of protection and opportunity. These linguistic encodings mirror broader cultural conditions where women's lives were shaped by caste hierarchies and patriarchal expectations (Chakravarti, 1993).

In Stage Two, the transitivity patterns record selective resistance. Mental processes depict Lakshmi's reflection and planning, relational processes allow her to redefine herself as healer and sister, and verbal processes show her cautiously asserting herself with patrons. These findings illustrate what Butler (1990) theorizes as performativity, in which identity emerges through repeated linguistic and social acts rather than innate qualities. Lakshmi resists not through overt rebellion but through everyday strategies of negotiation and redefinition, reflecting Lazar's (2005) emphasis on "feminist critical discourse analysis" as uncovering subtle encodings of power and resistance.

By Stage Three, Lakshmi's representation challenges patriarchal and caste hierarchies. Material processes depict her in control of negotiations, mental processes affirm her confidence, and verbal processes encode her assertive authority over elites and physicians. Relational clauses define her as competent and authoritative, while existential clauses affirm the presence of safety and a future where absence once prevailed. This stage

enacts what Mills (1995) describes as the reclamation of discursive power, and it demonstrates how female subjects linguistically reconfigure their position within oppressive systems.

Taken together, the findings reveal a dialogic relationship between individual agency and social structure. Lakshmi's clauses reflect the cultural weight of patriarchy and caste while simultaneously enacting resistance through speech, thought, and redefinition. Empowerment emerges not as escape from cultural norms but as a rearticulation of identity within and against them. This resonates with postcolonial feminist readings that emphasize the intersection of cultural constraint and female agency (Spivak, 1988) and supports Butler's (1990) view of identity as performative.

The contribution of this study lies in its ability to provide linguistic evidence for themes often discussed abstractly in feminist criticism. Resistance is shown to be embedded in subtle language choices: a calculated instruction, a relational redefinition, or an existential affirmation of presence. In this way, grammar itself becomes a site of feminist struggle, demonstrating that literary texts encode not only stories of empowerment but the linguistic processes through which empowerment is constructed.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that Lakshmi's transformation is linguistically inscribed through transitivity choices that gradually shift her from being acted upon to acting, from silence to authoritative voice, and from absence to presence. This supports the claim that systemic functional linguistics offers a powerful tool for feminist literary analysis by showing how agency, resistance, and identity are embedded at the level of grammar. The findings suggest broader applications: transitivity analysis could be applied to other postcolonial and feminist texts to trace how women's lives are linguistically encoded, revealing how language functions both to sustain oppression and to carve out spaces for resistance.

5.2 Conclusion:

The findings of this study confirm that *The Henna Artist* linguistically encodes Lakshmi's transformation from subjugation and despair to self-discovery, identity negotiation, and eventual empowerment through a systematic deployment of transitivity processes. In response to the first research question, the analysis demonstrated that Lakshmi's journey is mapped onto the grammar of the text: in the earliest stage she is constructed primarily as a Goal and Carrier of negative attributes, deprived of agency both physically and

emotionally. In the second stage, she gradually assumes the roles of Actor, Senser, and Sayer, signaling partial resistance and negotiation of identity. By the third stage, she emerges as Actor, knower, and authoritative speaker, with relational and existential processes inscribing competence, stability, and future. Her transformation is therefore not only thematic but grammatical, encoded clause by clause in the shifting distribution of processes.

Addressing the second research question, the study showed that these linguistic representations reflect, reinforce, and eventually challenge the patriarchal, caste-based, and cultural structures of mid-twentieth-century India. In the opening stage, transitivity processes reproduce systemic constraints that reduce women to stigmatized roles and deny them voice. In the second stage, Lakshmi's grammar begins to encode selective resistance within these structures, particularly through mental processes of calculation and verbal strategies of careful assertion. In the final stage, she linguistically redefines herself, taking up roles that contest both patriarchy and caste hierarchy, and asserting her autonomy in ways previously denied to her. This trajectory reveals how language operates simultaneously as a tool of cultural reproduction and a medium of resistance.

The study's contribution lies in its demonstration that empowerment in literary texts is not simply symbolic or thematic but encoded grammatically through transitivity. While much feminist criticism has highlighted oppression or resilience as thematic patterns, this research advances the field by providing a stage-wise linguistic trajectory that quantifies and illustrates Lakshmi's shifting roles. By linking systemic functional linguistics with feminist literary analysis, the study underscores how grammar itself can function as a site of struggle, encoding both subjugation and transformation.

The broader significance of these findings extends across literary studies, feminist linguistics, and socio-cultural critique. For literary studies, the research illustrates how stylistic analysis deepens interpretation by showing that character development is inseparable from linguistic construction. For feminist linguistics, the findings provide empirical evidence of how gendered identities are constituted and contested in language, supporting theories of performativity and discourse as constitutive of subjectivity. For socio-cultural critique, the study demonstrates that literature does not merely represent social structures but actively encodes and challenges them, offering insights into how patriarchy and caste can be resisted through language itself.

5.3. Recommendations

5.3.1 For Literary and Linguistic Research

Future studies should apply transitivity analysis to other South Asian literary works that foreground female protagonists. Such research would allow for a comparative understanding of how agency is linguistically constructed across different narratives and contexts. Longitudinal studies tracing changes across literary periods could illuminate whether similar grammatical trajectories of female empowerment recur or differ over time. Comparative research between South Asian and other postcolonial literatures could also enrich our understanding of how grammar encodes cultural specificities of resistance and subjugation.

5.3.2 Pedagogical Recommendations

The findings have significant implications for teaching literature and linguistics. Integrating transitivity analysis into the classroom would enable students to see how language shapes character identity and agency, bridging literary interpretation with linguistic evidence. This interdisciplinary approach could foster more critical engagement with texts, encouraging students to explore how themes of gender, power, and resistance are encoded in structure as well as content. Feminist theory, too, can be taught alongside stylistics to demonstrate the interaction between discourse, identity, and social critique. Classroom activities might include having students analyze agency through clause roles, compare character voices, or trace shifts in relational processes across a text.

5.3.3 Recommendations for Future Research

While this study focused on transitivity, other aspects of systemic functional linguistics warrant exploration. Modal expressions of possibility and obligation could illuminate further nuances in Lakshmi's negotiation of power. Appraisal theory could capture how affect, judgment, and appreciation shape her relationships with others. Theme rheme structures could show how information is organized to emphasize or marginalize her perspective. Corpus stylistics could provide quantitative support for these findings, while critical discourse analysis could situate them more firmly in a socio-political context. Interdisciplinary approaches that combine stylistics, feminist linguistics, and postcolonial theory would deepen understanding of how language encodes the complexities of women's agency in literature.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

While this study makes important contributions, it also has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis focused exclusively on transitivity within the systemic functional linguistic framework. Although this provided a rigorous means of tracing agency and identity, it inevitably excluded other linguistic features such as modality, appraisal, and thematic organization that might offer additional insights into the nuances of Lakshmi's voice and subjectivity. A more comprehensive analysis incorporating these systems could provide a fuller picture of how empowerment is encoded.

Second, the study concentrated on a single literary text, *The Henna Artist*, which limits the generalizability of the findings. While the detailed, stage-wise analysis demonstrates how one protagonist's transformation is linguistically constructed, further comparative work across South Asian women's literature would be necessary to determine whether similar grammatical trajectories recur in other narratives. The findings here should therefore be viewed as illustrative rather than definitive for the broader literary corpus.

Third, the analysis was qualitative in nature. Although qualitative methods allow for close reading and interpretive depth, they may be vulnerable to researcher subjectivity. A complementary corpus-based or quantitative approach might help triangulate these findings, ensuring that the patterns identified are not simply impressionistic but statistically verifiable. Finally, the socio-cultural interpretation was based on existing feminist and postcolonial scholarship, but the study did not include historical or ethnographic research into women's lived experiences in mid-twentieth-century India. As such, while the analysis reveals how the novel linguistically represents patriarchy and resistance, it cannot claim to fully capture the material realities of the time.

Acknowledging these limitations does not diminish the value of the study; rather, it highlights areas where future research can build on these findings. By combining transitivity analysis with additional linguistic frameworks, comparative literary study, quantitative methods, and interdisciplinary historical perspectives, subsequent research can offer an even more robust account of how women's agency and resistance are encoded in language.

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7. Appendix

Plot: *The Henna Artist* **(Novel) by Alka Joshs**

Part / Chapter	Summary
Prologue	Radha, a 13-year-old orphan from Ajar, sets out to find her estranged sister Lakshmi in Jaipur. Villagers ostracize her due to her family's past. She learns from her brother-in-law Hari that Lakshmi abandoned her marriage. Determined, Radha travels to Jaipur.
Part One – Chapter 1	Introduces Lakshmi, a skilled henna artist in Jaipur. She has a thriving business among elite women, offering henna designs, herbal remedies, and contraceptive sachets. She maintains secrecy about her past.
Chapter 2	Lakshmi's history unfolds: her escape from an abusive marriage and journey to independence. Trauma and resilience shape her present interactions.
Chapter 3	Explores Lakshmi's relationships with clients. Introduces Malik, her assistant, and Parvati Singh, a wealthy client who could enhance Lakshmi's status.
Chapter 4	Lakshmi balances her professional reputation and societal expectations while managing her growing clientele.
Chapter 5	Lakshmi navigates personal and social challenges, further developing connections with clients and allies.
Chapter 6	Early tensions and conflicts arise as Lakshmi's past and present collide, hinting at challenges ahead.
Part Two – Chapter 7	Hari arrives in Jaipur with Radha. Lakshmi must confront her past, including the sister she never knew.
Chapter 8	Radha's presence complicates Lakshmi's carefully constructed life. Conflicts emerge regarding familial responsibilities and personal boundaries.
Chapter 9	Lakshmi grapples with the implications of Radha's arrival and begins to reflect on her choices and autonomy.
Part Three – Chapter 10	Lakshmi takes responsibility for Radha while managing societal scrutiny. Tensions with Hari continue.
Chapter 11	Radha's growing independence and involvement with Ravi Singh create new complications for Lakshmi.

Chapter 12	Scandals and rumors escalate, forcing Lakshmi to navigate social pressures and familial obligations.
Chapter 13	Lakshmi's maternal instincts and sense of duty are tested as Radha's life intertwines with Jaipur's elite society.
Chapter 14	Further conflicts highlight the challenges of balancing personal desires and societal norms.
Chapter 15	Lakshmi strategizes to secure Radha's future amid escalating social scrutiny.
Chapter 16	Decisions regarding Radha's welfare and her own independence converge, intensifying narrative tension.
Chapter 17	Lakshmi's resilience is highlighted as she takes decisive steps to protect Radha and her unborn child.
Part Four – Chapter 18	Lakshmi arranges for Radha's child to be adopted by the Jaipur Palace, ensuring safety and social security.
Chapter 19	Lakshmi faces final societal and familial challenges, consolidating her role as caretaker and mentor.
Chapter 20	Lakshmi prepares to leave Jaipur, reflecting on her journey and growth.
Chapter 21	Relocation to Shimla offers Lakshmi a new start, where she continues her healing and henna work.
Chapter 22	Lakshmi settles into a life of independence and fulfillment, maintaining her profession and personal agency.
Epilogue	Reflects on Lakshmi's transformation, emphasizing self-determination, family bonds, and autonomy. Concludes the narrative arcs introduced throughout the novel.