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INVISIBLE SUFFERINGS TO VISIBLE POWER: EVERYDAY VIOLENCE AND NECROPOLITICS IN DANIYAL MUEENUDDIN'S *THIS IS WHERE THE SERPENT LIVES*

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Abstract

The present study examines the representation of feudal power and violence in Daniyal Mueenuddin's recent publication This is Where the Serpent lives (2026) through theoretical prisms of Veena Das about everyday violence and Achille Mbembe's necropower. The novel traces the interconnected lives of abandoned children, servants, landlords, and politicians across Rawalpindi, Lahore, and rural Punjab, and reveals how feudal hierarchies persists in modern Pakistan in dynamic micro and macro level structure of rule. The novel showcases that how feudal hierarchies, power structures and systematic violence persists in contemporary Pakistan. Additionally, no study has examined the novel from theoretical lens of Veena Das and Achille Mbembe and as the novel is recent addition to Pakistani contemporary fiction, this study contributes as one of the earliest literary contributions for the selected novel. The study addresses this gap by employing qualitative interpretative methodology grounded in close reading and textual analysis of This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026) Furthermore, the paper utilizes Das's concept of normalization and internalization of victimhood to evaluate violence at micro level alongside Mbembe's concept of sovereign power and death worlds at macro level. The study reveals that how marginalized entities experience conditions like vulnerability, social exclusion and normalized violence in the texture of everyday practices, economic dependency and unequal power relations. By integrating micro experiences of everyday violence and examination of macro structures of sovereign authority, the present study elaborates how violence at micro and macro level is not separate rather they reinforce each other altogether. The research offers comprehensive interpretation of how feudal power is dominated and sustained in Pakistani feudal society through power, violence and social exclusion

INTRODUCTION

There are very few Pakistani contemporary fiction writers who deal with the socio-political realities of Pakistan. In this category Daniyal Mueenuddin holds a significant position. His recent publication *This is Where the Serpent Lives* (2026) offers in depth exploration of Pakistan's feudal landscape because it portrays that how inherited authority, economic dependence of privileged ones and everyday violence shapes the lives of individuals at different levels. The relationship between power, violence and different social hierarchies are the most

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concerned and focused issues in postcolonial societies.

Contemporary Pakistani fiction has explored the major issues of class, gender, power and violence to expose the terrible effects of feudalism in the fabric of individual and collective lives of the marginalized entities. Among those contemporary voices, Daniyal Mueenuddin holds a distinctive position for his most realistic and unique portrayal of Pakistan's feudal society. Through the creation of psychologically complex characters and socially grounded narratives Mueenuddin presents feudal world as a space where domination is not maintained through violence but also through inherited hierarchies, everyday practices and deep structures of social and political inequality.

His novel *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* has been divided into four interconnected sections tracing the lives of dozens of characters across different social strata and novel is set between six decades. The novel moves from abandoned child Beyazid to servants, wealthy landowners and their families. The setting of the novel moves from bazaars of Rawalpindi to elite houses of Lahore to agricultural states of Pakistan creating a diverse portrait of Pakistani society. Through variety of characters like Beyazid who is an orphan serving his masters just to rise and become something, Saqib an ambitious servant whose dreams led him towards his tragedy, Hisham Atar a wealthy landlord who is a politician. The novel reveals that how power operates at different levels like patronage, domestic service and police stations.

The study employs Veena Das literary prism of violence as primary framework from her recognized work *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary (2007)* to explore violence at micro level. Das demonstrates that how violence becomes part of daily lives, routines and become indistinguishable from social life. Additionally, Das illustrates that victims of violence absorb their own domination so well that they fix guilt on them, act without knowing and carry their own corpse as a dead being. This is what she called complete internalization of violence. Furthermore, Achille Mbembe's concept of necropower is drawn his book *Necropolitics (2019)* guides the study to explore violence at macro level as a secondary framework. Mbembe illustrates that the ultimate expression of sovereignty is in power to dictate that who may live and whose life is not worth of any protection and he must die. Ultimately giving birth to death worlds. Through this, the study explores violence at both the levels micro and macro. By combining Das framework of normalization and internalization of violence with Mbembian sovereign power and death worlds this study offers a complete understanding of violence that how it operates in feudal world.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How does the violence becomes normalized and internalized in everyday lives of servants, peasants and common masses represented in novel?

How does the novel depict feudal estates as sovereign power and how these estates functions as death worlds where populations are reduced to living dead?

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To analyze the scenes, dialogues where violence is embedded in daily lives and to examine that how the victims absorb their own victimhood

To identify instances where state, police and feudal lords exercised sovereign power and to analyze feudal estates and state institutions as death worlds

1.3 RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

The present study holds significant position particularly in academic discourse. This novel *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* is recent addition in Pakistani contemporary fictions. The study contributes as one of the earliest works on the novel. Furthermore, this study is standing alone in Pakistani literary context due to selection of its unique theoretical frameworks. Till the date, No Pakistani literary

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piece has been examined from these frameworks.

Additionally, there has been no trace of exploration of violence specifically from Veena Das concept of normalization and internalization of violence and Mbembe's idea of sovereign power and death worlds in the novel. Furthermore, there has been no work that claim that violence resides in the novel at micro and macro level which is a major gap need to addressed.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

As this novel is recent addition by Daniyal Mueenuddin in Pakistani Literature, the text received very little attention. These studies focused on issues such as feudal modernity, governance, patriarchy and inequality in Pakistani societies. The novel yet lacks to be explored through two combined theoretical frameworks of Veena Das's everyday violence and Achille Mbembe's necropolitics. No study has not investigated feudal power, normalized violence, necropolitical authority, feudal state as death world or lived experiences of marginalized people. The present study addresses this gap by in depth interpretative reading of the text from the literary frameworks of necropolitics and everyday violence.

1.5 DELIMITATION

This study is confined to certain boundaries that define its scope and focus. This paper examines the novel *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* by Daniyal Mueenuddin specifically focusing on the violence within the text. The research does not aim to provide comprehensive analysis of the characters of the novel, its narrative techniques or stylistic elements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The article by Dhera and Baryar offers one of the earliest sustained scholarly analysis of Daniyal Mueenuddin's *This is Where the Serpent Lives* (2026). Authors demonstrate that how the rule operates through discipline, aspiration, patron client relation and unequal access to state resources. The article examines that roads, telephone, schools, police stations, ledgers are household loyalties are not neutral source of modernity but different technology of rule. It analyzes how the novel showcases postcolonial order in which elite power is modern, repeatedly secured through personal authority and sovereign force. However, the article does not discuss that how violence is normalized and how novel shows sovereign power exploiting victims and creating death worlds.

In this recent book talk conducted by Politics and Prose with the writer of *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)*, Daniyal Mueenddin provides a profound commentary on the socio-political environment of Pakistan. In his interview he articulates that "the book is all about power and status." (Mueenuddin 00:15:24) He is framing the text as an investigation into "impulses and situations and quantities that are known as dark forces." (Mueenuddin 00:34:20).

A review on the novel published on The Hardvard Crimson by Arushi A. Vyas examines the portrayal of Pakistani society across different periods as the novel is written between time span of six decades, the reviewer highlights that novel focus on different characters from different socio-economic backgrounds.

In Tariq's article about feudal system of Pakistan in Daniyal Mueenuddin short shories from his previous work *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* he used the literary lens of Marxism to analyze Mueenuddin feudal hierarchies in Pakistan. The paper specifically emphasized on class stratification, exploitation of marginalized ones and persistence of feudal ideology in rural Pakistan. Tariq's article states that Mueenuddin fictional feudal world depicts class structures through different categories of people like bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and proletariat. This categorization exposes the exploitative dynamics that is embedded in Pakistan agrarian society.

Javed and Aslam's work about "Feudalism in Pakistan: Myth or Reality/ Challenges to Feudalism" (2017) made valuable contribution in understanding the feudal system in Pakistan. Authors evaluated that the feudal system of Pakistan revolves around the patriarchal

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structures. The authors situate the feudal structures is in countries historical, political and socio-economic development. They analyzed that this system continues to shape governance, social relation and political authority despite modernization and democratic reforms.

Rodriguez applies Mbembe's theory of necropolitics on the novel *We Need New Names* by Nonviolent Bulawayo. She examined that how Zimbabwean state reduces its citizens to the status of "living Dead." She demonstrates that characters in paradise experience triple loss; loss of their home, right over their body and political agency. This is what that Mbembe identifies as the condition of living dead.

3. THEORATICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study employs the analytical prism of Veena Das and Achille Mbembe to investigate the representation of violence in the novel *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* by Pakistani contemporary writer Daniyal Mueenuddin. Veena Das through her book *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary (2007)* helps in understanding violence at micro level that how violence is normalized in everyday life and internalized among the common masses. Furthermore, Achille Mbembe's framework of necropower in his book *Necropolitics (2019)* aids to examine macro level power structures that enables violence through sovereign power which ends upon creating deadly worlds.

3.1 VEENA DAS AND VIOLENCE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Veena Das is a distinguished South Asian anthropologist and social theorist. Her work made significant contribution to the study of violence, suffering and subjectivity along with its aspects that are least discussed. The main concern of her work understands how violence affects ordinary individuals and how its consequences continue to shape social relationships. Drawing upon anthropology, philosophy and postcolonial studies, Das's work emerges due to her deep engagement with violence and suffering in South Asia. She developed a broader framework that helps to understand how violence extends beyond physical destruction. These concerns are most comprehensively discussed in her most influential work *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary (2007).*

3.1.1 NORMALIZATION OF VIOLENCE

The major concept of Veena Das that guide the study is how violence is no longer anything shocking or extraordinary rather it becomes normalized. It no longer feels like a visible rupture in the texture of social existence. She challenges the conventional assumptions about violence as something extraordinary event which for a specific period of time disrupts the normal social order and after that the situation is at peace. Rejecting this idea, she proposed that violence is "mutual absorption of the violent and the ordinary." (Das 7) it means that violence does not exist outside our everyday life rather it becomes intertwined with ordinary daily routines, social practices, relationships and interactions.

To explain this process of normalization, Das evaluates that violent acts and events become part of routines, memories and interactions of everyday life. Das observes that "event attaches with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary." (Das 1) so violence is folded into ordinary existence. For Das violence survives with this precision because it becomes embedded in everyday practices rather than visible as a permanent rupture which means that violence is not anything external to the society but it is enrooted within the ordinary structures, relationships and practices. The event does not arise in isolation. Rather, it comes into practices through exclusions, hierarchies and conflicts that are part of everyday existence. So, violence is underlying social condition despite a situation standing apart.

While extending her argument Veena Das said that violence reaches its profound form when the violence becomes indistinguishable from social life itself. Das demonstrates that violence becomes "so embedded into the fabric of the social that it becomes indistinguishable from

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the social." (Das 219) In this condition violent acts of violence no longer appears as an exceptional occurrence but as the ordinary feature or part of social existence.

3.1.2 INTERNALIZATION OF VIOLENCE

Veena Das extends her study of violence beyond the visible manifestations that examine how violence is gradually becomes embedded with the consciousness of subjects. Her concept of internalization of violence focuses on the transformation of the individuals in societies where violence has become part of ordinary existence. Violence is no longer understood as external act of domination rather it becomes incorporated into the victim's imagination, emotional life and social practices, through these process victims gradually inhabit the dominant structures that oppress them.

Das illustrates that this internalization does not directly comes into practice rather violence becomes so internalized through gradual social mechanisms that reshape the way in which people understand them and their place in the world. Victims do not only endure violence but they gradually absorb it until the difference between external domination and internal identity becomes blurred.

Das explores that one of the primary ways of internalization is fixing of guilt on the victim. Das illustrates this through the case of Shanti, a survivor of Anti Sikh violence in 1984. Her husband and three sons murdered during the riot. Rather than blaming the murderers she gradually comes to believe that she herself is responsible for what happened to her husband and son because she failed to protect them. Das asks "how did Shanti crystallize all the floating guilt around her and attach it upon her own self? How did the community around her collaborate in this fixing of guilt on her." (Das 186-187) These questions reveal that guilt is not produced only the victim but it is society that directly collaborate in building this guilt and reinforce it through communal interactions.

Das further develops her concept of internalization through upon Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus to explain that how victims act without knowing that what they are doing. She questioned that whether individuals living under the conditions of structural domination should be understood as "acting without knowing" where she said the conditions like habitus operates through concealment because "the conditions under which the habitus was produced are said to be concealed from its subjects almost as a condition for practices to be actualized." (Das 161) This concept shifts the focus from false consciousness. Victims are not only deceived rather the social conditions produce their actions and also conceal them from the conscious awareness of the victims.

3.2 ACHILLE MBEMBE AND NECROPOLITICS

The secondary framework of this study is designed from Achille Mbembe's theoretical lens of necropolitics from his book *Necropolitics (2019)* This critical lens offers significant concepts to understand the relationship between power, violence and sovereignty. Achille Mbembe, a Cameroonian philosopher, political theorist and postcolonial scholar is widely recognized for his contributions in postcolonial studies, African thoughts and critical theory. Through the theory of necropolitics Mbembe extends the contemporary debate about power. Mbembe's necropolitics critically extends Michel Foucault concept of biopolitics or biopower where Foucault said that power is exercised over populations through the management and regulation the life. Biopower is concerned with birthrates, hygiene and optimization of life at population level. Mbembe's acknowledged Foucault's idea but considered it insufficient in understanding structurally unequal societies.

3.2.1 SOVERIEGN POWER

The traditional concept of sovereignty interprets it as a supreme political authority exercised by the state over its territory, institutions and population. According to the classical theory, sovereignty is commonly associated with the idea of legitimate power that formulates laws, justice, maintain public order and protect integrity of the state. Mbembe reinterprets this conventional idea

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and demonstrates that sovereignty cannot be fully understood solely as legal authority.

Mbembe instead of defining sovereignty as authority to govern citizens by law, he said that most important characteristics of power is that to decide whose lives deserves protection and whose life is worthless and can be sacrificed. He states "The ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die. To kill or to let live thus constitutes sovereignty's limits, its principal attributes." (Mbembe 66) This concept transforms the traditional understanding of political authority where sovereignty is no longer defined by traditional concept rather it is clearly revealed as authority that expose specific populations to death while protecting others. This is how Mbembe reinterprets Foucault's concept of biopower.

The central point of Mbembian concept is relation between sovereignty and right to kill. Drawing upon political philosophy of Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben, Mbembe encapsulates that one can clearly see sovereignty in state of exception where there are no basic legal protections and violence is legally or politically permissible. He illustrates that certain political spaces are permanently designed through exceptional form of rules and laws. In such spaces violence is neither accidental or temporary instead it is suspension of law as it is a permanent condition to which he said that "the sovereign right to kill is not subject to any rule." (Mbembe 77) This absence of legal limitation reveals that sovereign power is not only to enforce the law but have the authority when law itself becomes inoperative. In such situations sovereign holds more power than the law.

3.2.2 DEATH WORLD'S

The second most essential concept of Achille Mbembe's framework of necropolitics is idea of death-worlds. While sovereignty determines who may live and who must die, death worlds explain the condition of those who are not immediately killed instead they are exposed to circumstances that gradually strip life of its politics, social and human significance. To inflict death certain conditions are produced in which life itself is reduced to a state of prolonged suffering. He defines death worlds "new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the living dead." (Mbembe 92) These points highlight central paradox of necropolitics. Individuals who live in such spaces remain biologically alive yet they are deprived of their basic rights, recognition, and dignity that make life meaningful.

According to Mbembe, death-world is not simply a geographical location where death occurs rather it is a designed mode of existence created by sovereign power. The inhabitants of death world continue to live, breath and survive but they do all these things under conditions that deny them political subjectivity and belonging. There are considered out from the legal protection and are exposed to vulnerability of violence and the absence of secure future. Ultimately life in death worlds is perpetual precarity. The populations occupy a position between life and death. They are neither fully alive nor completely dead. This concept of "living dead" captures necropolitical existence where life persists biologically but socially and politically dead

He said that it is a political regime that systematically destroys humanity of the enslaved while preserving their biological existence. According to him "The slave condition results from a triple loss: loss of a 'home,' loss of rights over one's body, and loss of political status. This triple loss is identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether." (Mbembe 74–75) This means that slavery operates through the comprehensive stripping away of personhood.

Then he discussed that how these populations face "triple loss" where they loss home, their land, family and identity. This displacement is not only geographical but existential. The second loss concerns bodily autonomy; under slavery the body of individual do not belong to him instead it becomes the property of sovereign master. The third loss is of political

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agency where he is excluded from the sphere of law and citizenship. The slaves live outside the community that bears rights. This political exclusion makes slave legally visible and morally disposable.

3.3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study adapts a qualitative, descriptive and interpretive design to examine power and violence in Daniyal Mueenduddin *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* The study seeks to interpret literary meaning so qualitative approach is most suitable. The study is based on close in-depth textual analysis and critical interpretation of the selected novel.

The analysis of the selected text proceeds through the significant textual events, characters, dialogues that reflect structures of violence at both the levels. A total of sixteen events has been analyzed from the selected novel *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* for detailed in depth textual analysis. These events are equally divided between both the literary theoretical frameworks.

3.2 RESEARCH METHOD

The study employs a close reading as its fundamental method of analyzing the selected text. This enables us to examine characters, narrative events, dialogues in detail. This study is guided by Das's theory of everyday violence and Mbembian concept of necropolitics. From Veena Das's framework the particular attention is given to normalization and Internalization of violence and from Achille Mbembe the core attention is given to sovereign power and death worlds. The purpose of using these theoretical prisms is to examine feudal authority at micro and macro level.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION

The primary source of this research is Daniyal Mueenuddin novel *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026).* Furthermore, this analysis is supported by variety of secondary sources which includes Veena Das framework of *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary (2007)* and Mbembian theoretical prism of necropolitics from his book *Necropolitics (2019).* As secondary sources this research also uses journal articles, interviews of writer, scholarly books, feedbacks on the novel, critical studies on Pakistani feudalism, violence studies as well and feudalism in Daniyal Mueenuddin's previous literary work.

ANALYSIS

This study employs a qualitative research design where close textual reading method is utilized to analyze recent Pakistani contemporary fiction *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* by Daniyal Mueenuddin. The novel showcases the lives and destinies of different characters who are connected to each other through the violence, class discrimination and their struggle for surviving in the powerful and oppressive systems of feudal hierarchy. To examine this, the paper employs two theoretical frameworks one as primary and other as secondary framework which serve as analytical prisms which illuminate and shed light that how violence is practiced at micro and macro level in Pakistani feudal hierarchies.

4.1 VEENA DAS (MICRO VIOLENCE)

The primary lens utilized in the study is of Veena Das from her one of the most influential work *Life and Words: Violence and Descent into Ordinary (2007)* The framework of this study is derived from Veena Das's concept of normalization of violence to examine how violence is embedded in ordinary texture of everyday life of common masses and enrooted within social relations and daily routines of different characters of novel *This is Where the Serpent Live (2026)* by Daniyal Mueenuddin. Furthermore, concept of how violence is internalized by victims will guide the analysis of lives of characters of novel, how they absorb and embody their own domination through silence, fear and obedience. With Veena Das's lens as primary analytical prism, this study proceeds in two sections first normalization of violence and second internalization of violence.

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4.1.1 NORMALIZATION OF VIOLENCE IN LIVES OF COMMON MASSES

As per the evaluation of Veena Das, violence operates through "a mutual absorption of the violent and ordinary" where she describes this process as "tentacles that reach out from the everyday and anchor the event to it." (Das 7) The illustration of this stance can be analyzed in the very beginning of the selected novel *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* where Mueenuddin represented Beyazid's abandonment story as

"Bayazid never knew how he came to be a little boy alone in the streets of
Rawalpindi. He had a memory more of forces than of people, a crowd, a
hand, a hand no more. Yet the bazaars in those early 1950s were not so
crowded as that, and Rawalpindi a town small enough that a lost little boy
should be found." (Mueenuddin 12)

The abandonment of a child is not shown as dramatic event. There is no screaming of a child, no bloodshed, no villain, no tears of Beyazid or his parents or a scene that how Beyazid got separated from his loved ones as if it was an ordinary event which Veena said "mutual absorption of violent and ordinary." Instead, he only remembered "*a hand and hand no more*" which means that someone held his hand but it was not clenched it simply left the child, this showcases that boy was not kidnapped but abandoned. Writer proceeds with that child does not remember violence as violence rather he had memory of forces, crowd and hand not people. Here ordinary things like hands, crowd are the sites where violence hides. And these ordinary things become tentacles and attach itself to violence. The violence (abandonment) and ordinary things (hand, crowd, small town) are so much absorbed in each other that Beyazid fails to separate them. There is no nobody saying this event as portrayal of normalization of violence even victim himself, highlighting that how violent and ordinary are absorbed in each other that the element of shock disappeared.

Das encapsulates that violence becomes enrooted in fabric of daily routines, becoming something expected not a visible rupture. The novel *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* clearly showcases this specifically when Saqib was remembering how his father got humiliated by the farm owner Hisham

"Hisham had thrown those books from the table as if worthless and so much worse kicked his father as he lay prostrate on the ground, just another landlord beating his peasants? The dull thud of Hisham kicking his father's ribs seemed a madness, the father more vegetable than man, who timelessly swept the lawns at Ranmal Mohra, and might do that forever without thanks." (Mueenuddin 280)

In this passage violence is so obvious and unmistakable. Hisham who is a landowner and feudal lord beats Saqib's father a lot. He kicked him while he was lying *prostrate on the ground*, the narrator here listened *A dull thud* of kicks but in the passage, there is no trace of violence marked as something extraordinary. Saqib's father does not cry or resisted, Saqib does not intervene to protect his father. The old man is described as vegetable not a living entity. Saqib the son of old man watching his father beaten and not retaliating highlights that's how much violence is enrooted in daily routines that no one is feeling what is happening. He is not calling for help or police as if he knew that nothing will work. He even does not say that what's happening to his father is brutality. He calls it *madness* not a moral decay. Narrator said that Saqib's father continues his work highlighting that violent event is not anything exceptional rather a permanent condition of which common masses are not shocked. The phrase *just another landlord beating his peasants*, this comparison becomes a tentacle that anchors that violence to ordinary. Peasants being beaten by feudal landlords is not presented as a crime rather a routine feudal practice which is ordinary and expected. The phrase *just another* shows that, this is something that happens all the time and demonstrates that violence is neither new nor exceptional.

Veena Das evaluates that violence does not remain visible on the surface of social life rather it becomes buried in routines, transactions that it becomes unrecognizable while it stays the

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driving force that makes relationships move. According to this, violence is the force that drives relationship between powerful and powerless, master and servant not power, law or justice. This can be seen in the novel where the grandnephew of the patriarch of gangster clan from Lahore Sheikh Sharif casually describes the police raid scene to Rustom a landowner.

"Last night the DSP's men made a raid on them. They are all scattered across the river, not a river now hiding in mud on their next forward. My idea is that I fall in some of their women to the station last night, then it is lying. Is it right? She actually said grinning don't worry. These ladies are like sisters to supply. He's not sisters like distant cousins. It wouldn't be the first time they were invited to dance party at the station." (Mueenuddin 68)

In this scene severe violence has been elaborated. A police raid occurred where people are scared and hid themselves in mud, women have been taken by police. Violence is so much enrooted in their lives that Sheikh Sharif narrated this as part of casual discussion as he was discussing the weather and to mask their cruelty, they are calling women *sisters* and *distant cousin*. Here the raid is also euphemized as *dance party* which was sexual violence and forced entertainment in reality. The phrase *wouldn't be first time* showcases that this was not something happening for the first time but a daily practice. Importantly this demonstrates that this buried violence moves the relationship between DSP and villager as said by Das, it is based on violence, raids, taking women, harassing them. Women are taken because police officer knows they are not answerable to anyone and there is no one to retaliate this brutal act and it is so deeply buried that no one even names in wrong. Another event from the novel highlights every day violence enrooted in daily routines of common masses and has been precisely illustrated when killing a person (Saqib) has been described in calm, matter of fact tone.

"Was it possible that they would kill him? That's how they did it. Stop the truck in some wasteland and pull out the bound prisoner. Let him run a little while and then shoot him down and report that he died escaping." (Mueenuddin 283)

The passage from Saqib's perceptive is narrated when he was in truck, bound and taken somewhere. He perceives that they are going *by the river* (Mueenuddin 283) and thinks about the possibility that they would kill him. This narration of Saqib is calm as there is no screaming, fear, outrage, begging for forgiveness, mourning over his own impending death. The expected feeling from Saqib were panic, desperation and fear but he was narrating this as it was a procedure stopping the truck, throwing the prisoner, let him run a little and then shoot him. This is what Das states that violence is buried in the everyday life that people don't even consider it something extraordinary or wrong. Instead in Saqib's perception he said that *that's how they did it* and this phrase is reducing the intensity of killing a person and this absence itself is evidence that how killing is normal, casual and routinely done. This is what Das named violence become part of everyday life through tentacles and reach ordinary and here the tentacles are these ordinary words and phrases used to describe extreme violence. And this highlights that how violence is buried so deeply that victim is not retaliating his own impending death.

4.1.2 INTERNALIZATION OF VICTIMHOOD AMONG SERVANTS AND PEASANTS

Internalization of violence is another major concept of this analytical prism. Internalization of violence according to Das's framework is a situation in which victims absorb their own domination so well that they become unable to recognize it as wrong. In novel *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* there are characters like servants on the farm, peasants like Saqib's father and many villagers who internalize their own victimhood. Mueenuddin's novel holds multiple events that demonstrates this concept. Fixing of guilt is evident in the text when Zain's sister Yasmin was kidnapped and assaulted. He didn't blame those who abused his sister rather

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he blamed himself for what had happened. He said:

"What's the piece of shit? I'm the piece of shit. Give me that gun. I'm no use." (Mueenuddin 41)

In this line Kamran the real culprit of her sister is missing. Neither he discussed the injustice nor his desire to take revenge instead he turned this violence towards himself. Most significant line that he said about himself *I am the piece of shit*. Zain does not say they call me a piece of shit rather he declares I am. The thing that should be external judgment becomes his internal truth. The floating guilt that should belong to Kamran and his men was attached to Zain itself. When he said *give me that gun* at this point, he completely internalized that guilt and this time it is leading towards his own destruction as well. He asked for weapon to kill himself not to react against the injustice. This shows that how he absorbed the violence that happened to her sister. He declaring that *I'm no use* extends this absorption of guilt and it also highlights that his own existence even doesn't matter to him anymore.

There is another character among common villagers a young boy Yazid an orphan servant who articulates his own subordination while talking to his rich friend's father he said that

"Whoever owns the whip owns the buffalo" (Mueenuddin 23)

Here he is indicating towards himself and used animalistic imagery to represent himself. When inquired from him that to whom he said buffalo he said "People like me" (Mueenuddin 23) this line portrayed extreme internalization of subordination. Yazid does not say that they called me buffalo rather he declares that I'm a buffalo. It means that he admitted himself a buffalo which is extreme level of verbal violence. The word like buffalo is used for bullying someone and here Yazid himself saying people like me are buffalo and even he said I "see a resemblance" (Mueenuddin 23) this is peak subordination. The floating guilt that should belong to those who hold feudal system, landowners who maintain control through violence they should be guilty but here Yazid attached guilt to him. Yazid completely internalized violence of feudal power that he no longer considers him human being. Additionally, here people like Karim Khan played huge role in Yazid's powerful judgment against himself. This is what Das says that victim absorb their own domination so well that they longer feel violence anything exceptional.

Furthermore, Das argues about this absorption of domination that victim does not choose to submit over people who are in power, instead becomes second kind of nature of that person, embodied habitus that he no longer considers that he had submitted himself completely. The conditions that produce that habitus are hidden from subject's own awareness. Mueenddin novel holds this concept an acting without knowing. This was very evident in Saqib's encounter with his master where he said,

"As salaam uleikum, sir," said Saqib, tilting his head down in salute.

Absurdly, he wanted to fall on his knees and make the peasant submission,

his forehead to Yazid's feet." (Mueenuddin 270)

This moment was crucial because it highlights that nobody forced Saqib to bow his head, this desire of submission came from his inner self. No beating, no threating is shown here but Saqib's desire to submit. This moment showcases Das's "acting without knowing" which means that subjects enact violence so much that they even don't recognize it. This demonstrates that victim do not choose submission rather it becomes part of their life. Saqib's desire to bow in front of his master is not due to obedience rather its submission to years of violence, abuse, humiliation that he no longer considers wrong. His body has absorbed that he belongs on his master's knees and his place is alongside with dust. To this situation Das says that "we cannot often assume that subjects are in possessions of the knowledge they are acting." (Das 160-161) same is the case with Saqib he does not know what he is doing. His desire of submission in front of his master Hisham is portrayal of internalized violence where he became the source of his humiliation and disgrace.

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While elaborating her argument Das said that most extreme form of internalization is living dead when victim becomes a living dead who is bound to carry his corpse wherever he goes. It means he is breathing, walking and even speaking but there no hope, future or recognition as human beings who have a right to live with dignity. For them death holds no fear because they are already carrying their corpse, in Mueenuddin's fiction this can be seen with great precision in Saqib's father words in front of Hisham.

"Yes, I'm eating your salt.....my father and his father belong to this household with all the rest. Kill me if you like. Take the boy and do with him whatever you wish." (Mueenuddin 277)

This line shows complete absence of self-preservation or self-defense. Saqib's father a peasant who was gardener at Atar household from years do not plead for mercy. Neither he demanded justice nor did he protect his very own son. He does not express sadness rather he offered his life, his son's life, whatever master wishes. This is not act of bravery rather speech of a man that no longer sees his life and his son's life worthy of protection. He internalized his inferiority and subordination that he considers his and his child's life as a belonging of their master which they are ready to end if their master wishes. The phrase *with all rest* holds deep meaning. It shows that Saqib's father himself considers him among objects, possessions and materialistic things. Saqib and his father are already carrying their corpse and the phrase *my father and his father belong to this household* further extends this argument while showing that Saqib is carrying his corpse before he was born. Due to this death holds no fear for father and son because they are already dead. And striking thing is that Saqib's father didn't even know that he is carrying his corpse and is dead already rather he thinks he is loyal and this will be an honor if he will die to please his master and this is what Das says that victims hold no fear of death.

4.2 NECROPOLITICS (MACRO VIOLENCE)

The study further proceeds with its second analytical prism of necropower derived from Achille Mbembe's book *Necropolitics (2019).* Mbembe's lens will guide the study to examine violence at macro level by analyzing institutions and power structures to determine who may live and must die and how it ends upon creating death worlds. This framework will guide the analysis of novel *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* that how violence became a systematics condition which is enrooted in political, feudal, and institutional structures. Characters like inspectors, police officials, landlords, political figures practice various forms of sovereign power over marginalized ones. So, the paper explores how violence is organized and legitimized at societal level where certain lives are protected and rests of all are left unprotected.

4.2.1 FEUDAL LORDS, POLICE OFFICERS AS SOVERIEGN POWER

Achille Mbembe evaluated that the ultimate expression of sovereignty is not the power to make laws and govern populations but it is the power to dictate who may live whose life is worth saving and who must die and can be discarded as something disposable. The sovereign power will decide whose life is worth protecting and who will exposed to danger, abandonment and death. Mueenuddin's feudal Pakistan shows this from the very beginning of the novel when Karim Khan a stall owner took Beyazid an abandoned orphan to police station for help

"Earlier he had been to the nearby police station but as he expected found the duty officer quite uninterested in street boy's trouble." (Mueenuddin 10)

This line reveals how sovereign power is practiced over an orphan. Here the police did not directly kill the boy they simply refused to help the poor orphan Beyazid. The child is considered worthless to be provided with aid or to find his parents or to find a safe place for him. He is exposed to hunger, violence and even death. Through negligence and discrimination police officer practiced his

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sovereign power. Officer killed him not with weapons or guns but by not listening his problem and reducing him into the category of *must die*. The phrase *as he expected* holds significance it means that Karim Khan before entering the police station knows that officer will not help and same happened the police officer simply turned away showing that state exercise its sovereign power and to let people die. This is what Mbembe called "cheapening the price of life." (Mbembe 38) The street boy's life has no price because it is worthless. This is necropolitics at its core killing through indifference.

This was evident when a power clan of Chandios was engaged in systematics harassment and theft from Rustom Abdalah's farm. They stole multiple things from the farm including telephone wires, cut down of valuable rosewood tree from garden, stole motorcycle and have beaten Bahadur Khan who was Rustom's loyal servant at farm. when Rustom went to DSP to file against Chandios expecting that state would protect him, his property and people. DSP ignored him and he revealed that Mr Aftab Chandio is in office. He said that I should introduce you to him properly:

"This is Mr Aftab Chandio, in fact. Infact his uncle is senior member of the Chandio clan. He was just speaking to me of this whole matter. Don't worry. We'll have it all sorted out. It seems someone else has been troubling you and you've been blaming the Chandios" (Mueenuddin 50-52).

Now here DSP does not pretend to be neutral here rather he decides who is worth protecting as Mbembe said *who may live*. He dismisses Rustom's complaint knowingly that Rustom is right and protects the Chandios. He also suggests that *someone else* have done this. The system here practiced their soveriegn power by giving unfair decision and by protecting a criminal which shows that state does not protect who are weak instead to those who are in power, has connections and wealth. The DSP did not demanded evidence and neither had he conducted a trail. He simply decided not to proceed Rustom's complain as he and his people's life does not matter in front of powerful Chandios clan. This is what Mbembe evaluates that the right to kill operates freely in those spaces where normal legal protection is not given to subjects. Sovereign power decides who will be protected and who will be exposed to harm and danger.

Mbembe begins his analysis of necropolitics by redefining sovereignty discussing it something different from judicial and contractual models. He discussed this in terms of brutality. He examined that sovereignty is not making laws or protecting rights of citizens but right over death. Sovereign is one who exposes certain lives to death without legal consequences. In the novel this can be explicitly seen when inspector Janjua tortures Saqib. He said to him,

"Oh no, said the inspector, right, just for that, and he began cranking the handle energetically and continuing and continuing and continuing and continuing till the room turned purple and then black in Saqib's sight ... his teeth ground so hard that he broke a tooth felt it snap, and then in all the burbling jerking foaming confusion he swallowed the little niblet" (Mueenuddin 295).

The inspector here does not need trial or evidence that proof's Saqib is guilty. He simply tortured him and Saqib's body is completely exposed to state violence because state becomes source of pain rather than protecting him. As Mbembe said state on the basis of racism decide who may live so as Saqib is a poor gardener's son who was mere a servant. His life has been cheapened; the inspector does not see him a human being. Saqib became a tool whose limits of endurance were examined and then he was discarded. Inspector was not answerable to anyone that what he has done whether its justified or not. Inspector throwed Saqib in the category of killable. This is what Mbembe names sovereign power, the capacity of sovereign to inflict maximum suffering without any accountability and without the victim ever being able in complain.

The novel records another major incident which capture that not only police officer practice sovereign power among marginalized ones but it can be any one that is in power like landowners and feudal lords in the novel *This is*

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Where the Serpent Lives (2026). This was evident when Mueenuddin represented Ranmal Mohra (agricultural estate of Atar family) Feudal head manager Chaudhry Abdul Sattar was beating the peasants as he was described as

"Who beat the peasants himself, the terror of the village, the one who called in wives of the villagers at night, the one who had told them how to vote and threw them off the lands if they failed to follow his instructions to the letter." (Mueenuddin 252)

Absolute violence is shown here. The feudal manager Sattar does not decide physical punishment rather he beats the peasants himself. He personally inflicts pain and humiliation to common villagers. In the passage he is described as *the terror of the village* which highlights that his name is enough to raise terror among subjects. He personally beats them, call villager's wives at night, dictates electoral behavior to them and expels one who fails to obey his commands. This means that he is such an authority who controls their physical security, economic survival and family lives, all depend on his approval. Such extreme control highlights that he is a sovereign figure whose power and order decides everything for villagers. Mbembe argues that sovereign power becomes most visible where violence becomes legal tool of rule. Sattar personally beating peasants demonstrates this idea. Violence is not accidental rather a mechanism to maintain control. Furthermore, Sattar controlling how villagers will vote reveals his control in democratic process as well. Even elections are conducted in his authority. Mbembe says that sovereign power seeks domination over bodies as well and the way Sattar calls villagers wives at night is what Mbembe called controlling bodies of victims as well. Sattar cheapened their lives and reduced them to "who must die" reducing their lives as worthless and left unprotected. This is sovereign power, a feudal manager practicing his authority over bodies, families, votes of villagers and he is not answerable to anyone. Mbembe demonstrates that sovereign power determines that which populations are to be protected and which are exposed to violence.

4.2.2 FEUDAL ESTATES, POLICE STATIONS AS DEATH WORLD'S

Furthermore, to put forward the notion of necropolitics Mbembe introduced the concept of death worlds. As per his evaluation these are spaces where populations are reduced to the status of living dead means biologically alive by socially, politically, economically and spiritually dead. He examined that Death Worlds are not temporary or isolated sites of violence, instead they are permanent sites of living where normal legal protections are suspended and people exist without rights, dignity or future. Mbembe identifies three conditions that characterize his idea of living dead to death worlds. Those are loss of home, loss of rights over body and loss of political status. In Mueenuddin's *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* the feudal estate functions as death world. The novel records:

"Sattar for a moment let his temper overcome him, the old Chaudrey Abdul Sattar, who beat the peasants himself, the terror of the village, the one who called in wives of the villagers at night, the one who had told them how to vote and threw them off the lands if they failed to follow his instructions to the letter." (Mueenuddin 252)

This passage showcases three conditions of living dead. Firstly, it shows villagers have no place they can call home. They have no shelter which is their basic right. Sattar throws peasants out on his own will whenever he wants. Peasants have no secure habitation. Sattar ability *to throw them of the lands* highlights that their homes are conditional that can be snatched from them anytime. The second condition of death world is loss is bodily autonomy. Mueenuddin narrated that Sattar beats the peasants himself and called in wives of villagers at night. It reveals social order in which subordinate bodies are permanently exposed to violence. Their bodies are controlled and sexual violence is practiced on them. There is no protection or law for peasants which can protect them. Their bodies are completely exposed to their masters and due to which their bodies remain subjected to the desires of feudal lords. The third feature is loss of political agency Sattar tells villagers how to vote and punishes

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those to fails to fulfill his command. Their votes do not belong to them. Elections are not democratic. This situation leads towards democratic power an illusion for marginalized people. This situation portrays what Mbembe called death world where people are biologically alive, breathing but they are dead to world as they have no home, no right over their body and voice that can be heard. This reduced the status of villagers as living dead who are surviving on the mercy of sovereign. This situation was more evident when Zain's sister Yasmin was kidnapped from her own house but there was no law, protection that can react against her abduction.

"Three days ago, some of his men came and they took her. Right from in front of our gate. They took her away and Kamran took her up to Murree and then yesterday they let her go in front of our gate again. Last night she tried to cut her wrists, but she couldn't." (Mueenuddin 41)

The violence here is absolute. Mbembe said that home is not a place of protection in death worlds. Its mere a place where helpless people survive. Kamran who is member of Punjab Provincial Assembly does not need any warrant or any reason to kidnap Yasmin right in front of her own house. Neither her house is not sanctuary for her nor a place where she can feel safe. The powerful can come at any time take anything they want, whomever they want because there is nobody to hold them accountable due to which Kamran's power penetrate everywhere he wants. Secondly Mbembe said that in deadly spaces victim have no right over their body. Bodily autonomy is snatched from them, and they cannot retaliate. Same happened with Yasmin when she was abducted narrator do not mention anything which shows her retaliation over her abduction as if she knew that is useless. Narrator said that she was kidnapped, held for three days and then she was released. What happened to her body is not described but it is evident that her body is no more her own. It belongs to Kamran. He will decide what happens to her. He will decide when she will be released and till when she will be kept. Third loss of political agency is also visible here as Mbembe said that in deadly world people has no political existence or voice. They cannot raise voice or complain to system. No police intervened and even her family do not take such help. Neither investigation is launched nor is justice served. This is what Mbembe's said dead worlds.

According to Mbembe spaces where people are biologically alive, they are breathing and walking but there social, political status is invisible. Such spaces according to Mbembe are death worlds. In Daniyal Mueenuddin's *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* illustrates this necropolitical reality is exposed during a driver's casual interaction with young boys' brutalization,

"They grabbed the boy and laid him out and thrashed him till he cried like a dog... I hear they broke his legs... No one who was there would talk." (Mueenuddin 73)

The most profound horror of the event is not only the violence but conditions that are leading towards that violence. The boy was grabbed from the place wherever he was. It feels like reaching him was very easy task. There is no mention of any difficulty, any struggle. The perpetrators do not need to plan anything carefully. This situation highlights boy has no secure home, a place or home where he is safe. Even if he has home still its gate and walls failed to protect him which means that he has no place of habitation. Secondly boy is laid, thrashed and beaten until he cried like a dog. He did not retaliate. He is even reduced to an animalistic existence. Such dehumanization is not something unusual in necropolitical world. The attackers are doing whatever they want to do which shows that boy cannot decide anything for himself. His body is no more his. It belongs to those who have power over him which means that in death world's people have no bodily autonomy. Most importantly driver Mustafa who witnessed this entire scene said *No one who was there would talk.* This shows complete absence of justice to be served. Though there was witness but no one come forward. In the story even boy is not shown filing a complaint in his defense as if all of them have learnt that speaking is useless. They

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know that police will help those who are in power. The Chandio's are powerful and definitely DSP will protect them. This is Mbembe's death world, though the boy is alive but from other spaces he is invisible. Therefore, the study reveals that violence becomes `another most profound event that encapsulates this concept, when sudden raid was conducted by DSP men

"Last night the DSP Sahib's men made a raid on them. They are all scattered across the river now, hiding in mud up to their necks. For good measure, DSP Sahib has hauled in some of their women to the station last night. She actually said, grinning, don't worry. These ladies are like sisters to the sepoys. Not sisters, like distant cousins. It wouldn't be the first time they were invited to a dance party at the station." (Mueenuddin 68)

This produces an immediate situation of emergency for villagers as people scatter *around the river* and hide themselves *in mud*. This powerful imagery holds great significance as it is highlighting intensity of terror and violence. It shows that villagers and their families have no secure habitation and how they are struggling to survive. Police can enter anytime, drag them and take their women. The act of hiding in muds is against the human dignity but they are forced because there is no law or any system which can protect them. This is what Mbembe said that dead worlds are spaces where people are not protected by law or citizenship rather than exposed arbitrary exercises of forces. The raid also showcases those women who are *hauled in ...to the station.* This means that authorities control the bodies of people without their consent. The women are not shown as individuals who have rights instead, they are treated as objects and commodities exactly as Mbembe said in such spaces people lose their control over their bodies. Their consent does not matter. The powerful groups of state take decisions for them. Neither they can speak nor resist which reduce them to deadly entities. The police station that should be a place where justice is supposed to be served becomes a dead world where women are taken as source of entertainment without their permission. This situation shows that villagers are biologically alive and physically dead.

3.3 MICRO AND MACRO VIOLENCE

The present study of micro and macro violence in Mueenuddin novel *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* reveals that both the levels of violence are not separate phenomenon rather they altogether reinforce each other. The macro structures of violence reinforce the normalization and internalization of violence at micro level. When the state can raid easily, take women for entertainment, torture them kill the victims without accountability, victims learn to accept it normal routine. Same like that at micro processes of normalization and internalization of violence allows macro structures to persist. When the victims have normalized violence, they no longer resist, complain or demand justice. Like the way Yazid said to Saqib that there is no one hard rule what the master says is everything. Saqib's father considering his and his son's destruction as obedience of their master. This shows that feudal system survives because the terror of macro structures produces micro level acceptance of violence and micro acceptance allows macro terror to proceed without and accountability

5.2 CONCLUSION

The present study has conducted detailed and systematic study of violence and feudal authority in Daniyal Mueenuddin recent publication *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* through the combination of two contemporary framework.

The study demonstrates that selected fiction *This is Where the Serpent Lives (2026)* presents feudalism not only socio-economic institution based on land ownership but a terrible system that governs the social relations, human worth and regulates the conditions under which victims live. Through Das's framework the study encapsulates violence at micro level that how violence is normalized through its absorption in daily lives, routines, casual conversations and social interactions. Additionally, violence folds itself into ordinary

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life so completely that it no longer feels violence to the victims and they absorb their victimhood. Characters discusses kidnapping of Yasmin, murders as it is a routine business transaction, police raids are euphemized as *dance parties*, Saqib's father keep on working despite being beaten and kicked. This normalization of violence is maintained through the complete normalization of violence in fabric daily lives that it became undistinguishable from social life as Das claimed. Furthermore, the novels reveal the mechanism how violence is internalized in feudal Pakistan. Characters fix the floating guilt upon them as Saqib called himself piece if shit and wish to die. The victims no longer know what is right or wrong they act without knowing towards the conditions of their subordination and destruction which shows how they completely absorbed the violence as Saqib showed his own desire to submit himself to his master and to fall on his knees. This was also evident when Saqib's father was ready to sacrifice his son and to let him die just because he sees it as obeying his master. They numb their own voices and carry their own corpse.

Additionally, by using Mbembian necropolitics the study examines violence at macro level. The novels showcase feudal state, police station, and state institutions as necropolitical spaces where sovereign power operates the subjects with inequality and decides who may live and who's live is not worth of any protection or safety. The DSP behaving as a sovereign power and raids at villagers take women to police station for their entertainment. Inspector Janjua tortures Saqib even when it was not proved that either he was guilty or not because inspector is sovereign power who can decide whose life is worthy and whose life is disposable. Sattar, a feudal manager of farm acts as feudal authority who exercise absolute control over peasants, beats the peasants, calls their wives late at night, and even controlling their votes. The inspector can kill as many people as he wants and conceal the murder in the disguise of legal procedure. All these events reveal that state and feudal authorities exercise sovereign power with inequality, reducing the marginalized populations as something disposable.

Furthermore, according to Mbembe's concept state and feudal authorities functions as death worlds where servants, peasant's villager no home, bodily autonomy and political agency. In the novel servants, villagers and peasants have no home, they live on their master's property they can be dismissed and made homeless at any time. Sattar manager at Atar's farm can through peasants out at any time. They have no secure habitation. Kamran a powerful man of Provincial Assembly can take Yasmin right in front of her house because in real sense she has no home.DSP can raid at any time and take women of villagers. Secondly, they have no right over their bodies, they can be beaten, their wives can be called at night, their children can be taken. And thirdly in death worlds as Mbembe elaborated people do not have any political agency. They cannot vote with their free will, cannot complain, demand justice. This is what Mbembe called death worlds.

5.3 FUTURE RECCOMENDATIONS

The core function of present study is on power and violence. No attention has been given to gendered discrimination and violence. By applying feminist literary lens of Judith Butler, Chandra Talpade, Gayatri Spivak future researchers can examine that how gender intersects with class and feudal power in the novel. Future researchers could examine that how characters in the novel resisted and challenged the feudal order. Through the concept of hidden scripts by James Scott, future research could examine hoe the characters resisted and challenged feudal system through silence, gossips and secret conversations. They can also study that how resistance is present in necropolitical structures and whether the novel provides escape from death worlds. For such research, researchers could use the later work of Achille Mbembe on post colony in *On the Postcolony (2001)* which examines that how power and resistance work in postcolonial world. Furthermore, future research can be drawn on trauma theory of Cathy Caruth to examine psychological dimensions of the novel.

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Molecular violence can also be analyzed that how it operates through routine practices and everyday interactions. Such research could be engaged with Lauren Berlants concept of "slow death" and Rob Nixon framework of "slow violence."

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