



COMMODITY FETISHISM AND COMMODITY FEMINISM: A MARXIST FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF AMNA'S *A SPLINTERING*

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Abstract

Commodity fetishism and commodity feminism are among the major concerns of Marxist-feminist studies in the contemporary age of capitalism and consumer culture. These concepts reveal how capitalist and patriarchal systems shape women's identities, social relations, and economic conditions. The present research has been conducted on Dur-e-Aziz Amna's novel *A Splintering* under the paradigm of Marxist-feminism. It examines how the novel portrays the commodification of women, class consciousness, consumerism, and the influence of media in constructing female identity. The narrative presents the socio-economic struggles of women living within a society where material success, beauty standards, and social status determine personal worth. Through the character of Tara, the novel highlights the psychological, social, and economic challenges faced by women in a capitalist and patriarchal environment. Tara's desire for upward social mobility exposes the realities of class disparity, economic exploitation, objectification, and consumer culture. The novel further demonstrates how media representations of beauty and femininity encourage women to perceive themselves as commodities and measure their value through appearance and material achievements. The researcher has employed Karl Marx's theory of Commodity Fetishism and Goldman, Heath, and Smith's concept of Commodity Feminism as the theoretical framework of the study. Marx's concept explains how commodities acquire excessive social value and influence human relationships, while Commodity Feminism illustrates how female bodies and feminist ideals are transformed into marketable products through media and consumer culture. research reveals that capitalism and patriarchy work together to commodify women's bodies, labor, and identities. Female identity in *A Splintering* is continuously negotiated between class aspirations and economic realities, personal agency and social expectations, and resistance and oppression.

Keywords: *Capitalism, Commodity Feminism, Commodity Fetishism, Consumer Culture, Economic Exploitation, Female Identity, Marxist Feminism.*

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1. Introduction

Commodity Fetishism is emerging rapidly in the era of consumerism and supermarkets. People's way of associating the highest prestige with a commodity or object appeared in supermarkets, screens, advertisements, and magazines, falls under the domain of commodity fetishism. In this era of culture industry, people have become brand-conscious as well as class-conscious. They identify themselves with the branded things they own such as luxurious automobiles, mobile phones, footwear, and dresses. Commodity feminism is deeply rooted in the representation of women's images in ads, films, and magazines. Media is taken as a powerful tool to propagate the Euro-centric notions of female beauty as well as female body.

Marxist-feminism has become an important approach to study of how gender, class, and economic exploitation interact in literary works. While liberal feminism has principally concentrated its study on the legal and political equality of women, Marxist-feminism explores how capitalist system perpetuates women's oppression and produces women's work, bodies, and identities as commodities. There are many scholars who have adopted Marxist-feminist theory to various genres of literature from diverse cultures, and they have unveiled how women are exploited under patriarchy of a capitalist system.

1.1. Research Objectives

- To discuss the nexus of capitalism, patriarchy and feminine identity from a Marxist-feminist perspective
- To explore the construction of "womanhood" and "social mobility" in the media-saturated culture
- To highlight the ideas of consumer society and objectification of female body

1.2. Research Questions

1. How does Amna highlight the Marxist-feminist issues of commodification, fetishism, and consumerism in her novel *A Splintering*?
2. In what ways, media representations of women propagate the ideas of commodity feminism in the novel?
3. How does the consumer culture influence female's socio-economic conditions in the novel?

2. Literature Review

Baryar and Dhera (2026) in their article, *The Body as Capital: Class Consciousness and Commodified Flesh in Amna's, A Splintering*; analyze the novel from a Marxist/socialist feminist perspective. They claim that social mobility of a working-class

girl like Tara shows restriction of social mobility in a capitalist society. The researchers point out that female body is a source of capital, as women try to use it to improve their economic situation. The fragmented identity that Tara embodies represents dilemmas of women who are compelled to perform a number of social roles and to struggle for economic survival (Baryar & Dhera, 2026).

Similarly, Hamid (2026) in his essay, *Spectres of the Past: Trauma, Memory and Political Violence in Dur e Aziz Amna A Splintering*, uses Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma to analyze this novel. Hamid argues that narrative is a political violence that is not just a historical event, but a psychological state. This novel uses technique of fragmentation, silence and broken chronology to depict traumatic memory and aftereffects of violence. Memory and hallucinations are recurrent features that exemplify ongoing impact of violence in political realm on individual and collective consciousness. By focusing on painful histories that cannot be easily represented, Hamid's argues that *A Splintering* is an act of witnessing (Hamid, 2026). These novel throws light on the role of social and historical environments in shaping identity of an individual and thus it is a valuable literature for modern Pakistani Readers.

In their 2025 article entitled *Commodifying the Female Subject: A Marxist Feminist Analysis of Selected Fictions of Afro-American Women Writers*, Ramay, Hussain, and Zia Ullah examine how African American women are doubly marginalized on grounds of race, gender, and class. This article explains that capitalism and patriarchy have collaborated to put women's bodies and labor into the market, turning them into economic commodities. This study also shows moments of resistance when women resist structures of oppression and are on a quest for self-identification (Ramay et al., 2025).

Falaiye (2025) in "*Commodity Fetishism and Female Agency in The Oyster Princess by Ernst Lubitsch*" examines what is meant by the term "commodity fetishism" and how it affects female identity. This research is based on concept of commodity fetishism propounded by Marx, which investigates effects of wealth and material possessions on social relationships. The researchers suggest that women characters are frequently placed in a system where they are given economic value and are traded in exchange. This article demonstrates that gender representation is tied to capitalist ideology and how these influences notions of femininity and power (Falaiye, 2025).

Irshad et al. (2025) in their article titled as *Economic Exploitation and Resistance: A Marxist Reading of Toni Morrison's Beloved and Harriet Jacobs's Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, examine economic aspects of oppression of women. This study is focused on slavery as an extreme form of capitalist exploitation, with slaves' labor and bodies being turned into commodities. The researchers argue that women are doubly marginalized in slave narratives as they are economically exploited and have to deal with gender-based

violence. In such circumstances, female protagonists are able to develop strategies of resistance and survival (Irshad et al., 2025).

In another research article entitled *Deconstructing Material Commodification: A Feminist Critique of Objectification in Qaisra Shahraz's Holy Woman*, objectification of females in South Asian patrilineal culture is explored (Saeed et al., 2024). The researchers claim that women are treated as commodities whose values depend on social, economic and familial interests. This article illustrates how identity of women is being commodified and that oppression of women can be maintained not just by economic system, but also by cultural ideologies. These findings are especially significant to the present-day Pakistani literature where women characters are disempowered in multiple ways, both social and economic, and are forced to contend with these oppositional powers (Saeed et al., 2024).

Ali and Chandio (2024) in a study titled as *Economic Exploitation of Pakistani Women: Marxist Feminist Analysis of How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, explores relationship between capitalism and gender inequality in Pakistani context. Women characters are depicted doing domestic, emotional and low-paid work without receiving any compensation, but they are not given economic power. This article is a useful addition to the Marxist-feminist literature, because it shows that economic disparities remain relevant to women's lives in developing societies (Ali & Chandio, 2024).

Another important research contribution by Amara Faheem (2022), is a Study entitled *A Critical Analysis of Marxist Feminist Multi-Voiced Expressions in Pakistani Writings*. This study investigates representation of women's voices in Pakistani literature from a Marxist-feminist perspective. The researchers maintain that literary text is a place where several oppression and resistance experiences are expressed. This study reveals commonalities of class inequality, domestic labor, economic dependency and patriarchy. It also suggests that in modern era, Pakistani writers are constantly questioning traditional narratives, portraying women not as victims but as actors. This article is important as it expands scope of Marxist feminist criticism in Pakistani literary studies and highlights difference between social class experiences of women (Faheem, 2022).

In another study, *The Exploited Body: A Marxist-Feminist Reading of Gender, Labor, and Capital in Emecheta's Second Class Citizen, El Saadawi's Women at Point Zero, and Darko's Faceless* (2026), the researcher looks at how bodies of women become commodities subject to labor exploitation in capitalist or patriarchal systems. This study contends that oppression of women goes beyond economic oppression to include psychological and physical oppression. This research is especially significant as it connects economic exploitation to the commodification of the body, which is one of the key tenets of Marxist-feminist criticism (Akakpo, 2026).

2.1. Research Gap

All of these studies share common themes in Marxist feminist literary criticism, such as: class inequality, labor oppression, economic exploitation, commodification of female bodies, and resistance to patriarchal capitalism. Research and writing reveal that women are oppressed through social, cultural and economic processes that are interconnected. There is a great deal of research on Marxist-feminist issues related to African, American and Pakistani literature, very little work has been done on the representation of commodification, class consciousness and female identity in *A Splintering* by Dur e Aziz Amna. Thus, the present study aims to address the research gap by integrating the concepts of commodity fetishism and commodity feminism under the single paradigm of Marxist-feminism in Amna's novel *A Splintering*.

3. Theoretical Framework

The current research has been conducted under the Marxist-feminist theories of commodity fetishism postulated by Karl Marx in his book *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867). Another selected concept of commodity feminism has been proposed by Goldman, Heath, and Smith in their article *Commodity Feminism* (1991). Marxist-feminism is a theory which looks at how women's social, economic and psychological oppression is affected by capitalism and patriarchy. The theory is that the bodies, beauty, emotions and reproductive organs are capitalized in capitalist societies and women's domestic labor is not paid. In addition, the notion of "femininity" that is encouraged through consumerism is an impossible one for women that makes them value themselves based on their appearance, marriage and material success.

3.1. Karl Marx's Concept of Commodity Fetishism

Karl Marx has introduced the concept of commodity fetishism in the fourth section of his book *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (1867). He puts forward his theoretical concept of commodity fetishism in one of the chapters of his above book, entitled *The Fetishism of Commodification and the Secret Thereof*. He defines the commodity fetishism as "a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (Marx, 1867, p.47). A commodity is given the highest rank and convinced as an object having magical and supernatural powers in the eyes of people or customers. This way of judging the standards of things is called commodity fetishism. This mythologized and mysterious object plays a vital role in satisfying the human desires.

3.2. Goldman, Heath, and Smith's Concept of Commodity Feminism

In their article, entitled *Commodity Feminism* (1991), Goldman, Heath, and Smith put forward their insightful ideas about commodity feminism. In capitalist societies, women are facing the issues of commodification and objectification. They link this concept with the female images presented in ads and movies. They are of the view that: "Ads objectify female body" (Goldman, et al; p.335). In this way, this article also falls under the domain of commodity narratives and media studies as well. In the context of

the above-mentioned article, both commodity fetishism and commodity feminism are highly interlinked with one another under the paradigm of Marxist-Feminism. Both deal with the issues of subjugation, commodification, and marginalization of women: “Turning feminism into a commodity value fetishizes feminism” (p.336).

Marxist -feminism has become an important approach to study of how gender, class, and economic exploitation interact in literary works. While liberal feminism has principally concentrated its study on the legal and political equality of women, Marxist-feminism explores how capitalist system perpetuates women's oppression and produces women's work, bodies, and identities as commodities. There are many scholars who have adopted Marxist-feminist theory to various genres of literature from diverse cultures, and they have unveiled how women are exploited under patriarchy of a capitalist system.

Marxist-feminism is a fusion of the concepts of capitalism and class exploitation that are associated with Marxism, and the concerns of feminists about women's oppression. Marxist- feminists consider capitalism as a capitalist system which relies on women's domesticity, and they market their sex, beauty and emotions as commodities. From Karl Marx and Nancy Fraser, one can get an idea of how capitalist systems can produce inequality, replacing labor and consumption and social relations. The novel exquisitely employs the theory of Marxist-feminist and drawing a parallel between the two, women and the systems that are created on their basis, including the notions of femininity and success, which are based on classicism patriarchy and consumption (Fraser, 2022).

Marxist-feminism is employed to address the issues of oppressed women in capitalist and patriarchal society. Marxist-feminist critics highlight the issues of domestic violence, class struggle, woman as a commodity, standards of beauty, economic exploitation, and power dynamics. The female characters are analyzed from a Marxist-feminist perspective in terms of their actions, their struggle against consumerism, social inequality, and exploitation. From literature, this theory also points to the role of capitalism in the distortion of woman and womanhood (Goldman, 1991).

4. Textual Analysis

Dur-e-Aziz Amna is a modern award-winning Pakistani writer on the firmament of literature highlighting the issues of women’s commodification, economic exploitation, fetishism, and consumerism. Her novel entitled *A Splintering* (2025) realistically illustrates women's lives and their exploitation at the hands of patriarchy as well as capitalism. Amna speaks in a realistic tone about the complex female characters to demonstrate social mobility and education, beauty ideals and expectations of women's spheres, which affect their identities. Her novel *A Splintering* is marked by socio-economic as well as feminist issues that can be analyzed in light of a Marxist-feminist perspective. The story also helps to convey the nature of conflict that exists in Pakistani culture between traditional and modern (Ahmed, 2025).

4.1. Marxist Ideas of Commodity Fetishism

Marxist ideas of commodity fetishism are highlighted through the character of Tara, the protagonist of the novel. She appears as a true representative of commodity fetishism. She was highly influenced by the lifestyle of an aristocratic society in a metropolitan city like Islamabad. As a class-conscious woman, she wanted to adopt an elite class setup. Tara describes the idea of a *fetishized object* in the following words: “School children were dropped off in chauffeured cars much more luxurious than the second-hand Suzuki Mehran” (Amna, 2025, p.71).

4.2. Tara's Body: A Fetishized Object

Tara's physical appearance has been depicted as a fetishized object. She appears as a “commodity” by selling her body to the rich capitalists just for the sake of mercenary motives. In her pursuit of an elite class lifestyle, she undergoes the emotional pain after being slept with two rich men- Chaudhary Rafiq and Waleed. In this way, she becomes the victim of sexual abuse and fetishism to satisfy her economic needs. The novelist wants to convey the following message: “**One must be happy with what one has**” (Amna, 2025, p.104).

4.3. Negative Impacts of Media

In present scenario, the theoretical aspects of commodity fetishism have merged in media studies. Media representations of women's body and beauty intensify the ideas of a fetishized look that are highly associated with Laura Mulvey's concept of *Male Gaze*. In *A Splintering*, Tara was keen interested in T V. serials and fashion magazines. The choreographic images shown in the novel, exercise a negative impact on Tara's mind. As she starts to imagine herself as an actress. As she admits: “In these films, I was like both actor and director” (Amna, p.17).

4.4. Hamad: A Spokesman of Marxist Ideology

In *A Splintering*, Hamad appears as a true specimen of Marxist ideology by showing his interest in the books of Karl Marx and the “revolutionary poetry about the working class” (Amna, p.106). During the weekend, Hamad reads revolutionary poetry pertaining to the issues of working class. Marxist-feminism is a fusion of the concepts of capitalism and class exploitation that are associated with Marxism, and the concerns of feminists about women's oppression. Marxist- feminists consider capitalism as a capitalist system which relies on women's domesticity, and they market their sex, beauty and emotions as commodities. From Karl Marx and Nancy Fraser, one can get an idea of how capitalist systems can produce inequality, replacing labor, consumption and social relations. The novel exquisitely employs the theory of Marxist-feminist drawing a parallel between the two: women and the systems that are created on their basis, including the notions of femininity and success, which are based on classicism patriarchy and consumption (Fraser, 2022).

4.5. Female Subjugation and Surveillance

In *A Splintering*, women were subjugated and treated as commodities by the hands of capitalists as well as patriarchal society. Males were controlling the lives of women through suppression as well as surveillance. Latif, Tara's brother emerges as a true representative of Pakistani patriarchal society. As Tara admits in the novel: "At the hands of my brother, I had dealt with violence and surveillance" (Amna, p.31). Amna's *A Splintering* (2025) is one of the important literary genres in the context of Marxist-feminism which depicts the social class system, gender inequality, labor exploitation and capitalist ideology. Furthermore, the novel may draw attention to the oppression of women in patriarchal society in terms of the characters, settings, and social relationships. The novel turns into a place where class, gender, power, and consumer culture are portrayed in a realistic manner (Skeggs, 2021).

4.6. Marriage Stereotypes in *A Splintering*

In the novel, Mazinagar, a fictional land, portrays the stereotypical beliefs about women's marriages. These so-called stereotypes have been exemplified through the following lines: "Marriage outside the extended family was rare in Mazinagar" (Marx, 1867, p.21). Women in the lower middle-class groups are depending on the economy for their survival because they are unable to access education, stable source of income and opportunities in urban areas, which restrict their social mobility. An additional one is the idea of 'consumer culture' that media provides and propagates a set of criteria for beauty, fashion and lifestyle, thereby redefining the feminine. It puts a tremendous mental burden on people such as Tara to think of their value based on what they look like, what they accomplish in tangible ways, rather than developing themselves, gaining independence (Goldman, 1991).

5. Conclusion

The present study concludes that *A Splintering* by Dur-e-Aziz Amna is a good literary image that explains the interaction of two forces, capitalism and patriarchy that affect the identities, dreams and lives of female characters. The character of Tara reveals the impact of structural inequalities, such as class disparity, gender oppression and economic exploitation. in the patriarchy system. In the meantime, the novel shows how capitalism can continue to reinforce gender inequality by attaching a value to women based on their beautiful look and physical appearance. In conclusion, *A Splintering* is a much-needed analysis of the two intertwined systems of capitalism and patriarchy that govern women's lives. It demonstrates the dynamic nature of female identity that is continually constructed, shaped, and packaged within the context of home duties, notions of beauty, consumerism, and class aspirations.

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