Chapter 3
Feudal Lords of Pakistan:
Tehmina Durrani’s Blasphemy

Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able?
Then he is not omnipotent.
Is he able, but not willing?
Then he is not malevolent.
Is he both able and willing?
Then whence cometh evil?
Is he neither able nor willing?
Then why call him God?

- Epicurus (341 – 270 BC)
Many causes and curses behind Partition in 1947 created an Islamic state based on “Islamic Universalism” rather than supporting “Indian Nationalism” (Jalal xvi) wherein the woman could be seen as a muted, zipped, locked and yet widely looted property to be dragged into an abyss of violence, humiliation, loss and psychotic trauma along with a dislocated individuality. The status of the woman among the hullabaloo of nationalism, religious identity and existential crisis in rapidly changing and growing yet dreadful situations remained complex to comprehend. The inquiry into women issues in a religion based nation state Pakistan is appallingly distressing though the Promised Land had dreamt of a certain harmonious future. What did the Muslims, in general, achieve after partition? Was it a promised, secured, separate, idealized Islamic state wherein their religion was the backbone to govern the affairs of the country? But what did Muslim woman receive out of partition? Did they receive mere misogyny, patriarchal and feudal chauvinism in the name of religion? As per the natural phenomenon, where there is any sort of suppression or oppression, there is a revolt every time even if it carried by a handful of protestors. If misogyny exists in the name of religion, it seems obvious to seek for the Islamic feminism as a discourse to fight back with secure referencing based on the Quran, Hadith, and other Islamic treatises. Contemporary fictional literature is used here as a tool to attest the hypothesis that Islamic feminism exists to counter misogyny in Pakistan.

Many threads together formed a knot to construct a demand of separation to create an Islamic state called ‘Pakistan’ (Paak Land) but this separation “could include only the contiguous Muslim populations of East and West Pakistan, separated by about 1,000 miles, and did not include millions of Muslims in what became India” (Adamec 246). But what were the implications on Muslims which gave fervor to demand a separation? Which were those strong threads forming a knot to insist on a pure land? Why did a specific animosity grow to split the nation into two? And among all this chaos, where was the woman positioned? Was Muslim women's consent for the dislocation and relocation considered anywhere? Were they in need of a different nation? Had this newly separated land secured their self-esteem and dignity? These questions are complex to answer with tremendously complicated historical nuances.
It is stated in a Dictionary of Islam that “Muslims in India feared that, even in a democratic state, their cultural and religious interests would be endangered by the Hindu majority” (Adamec 246). The events from 1857 onwards had shattering effects on Muslim minds which were treating them “as a vanquished enemy” (Wasti “Dr. Muhammad Iqbal”). During the British regime in India, the differences between Hindus and Muslims were getting more pronounced. Their customs, cultures, belief system, eating habits, rituals and behavior in public were contradictory to each other in nature. Emerging and rapidly growing hostility between them not only created hatred for each other but also paved the way to religious organizations spreading fundamentalism. It is frequently mentioned in historical documentations that the British played a significant role in the formation of All India Muslim League in 1906 which as a catalyst brightened the flame of demand very high among Muslims. As many as historians; as many the historical nuances are on separation history. “Two-Nations theory” (“Do-quami Nazariyah” in Urdu) (Majid 185) was propagated in many Muslim public gatherings wherein Muslim leaders, poets, writers and activists strongly opposed secularism with the demand of the private world. They started to envision that Islam as a Universal belief system cannot be harmoniously sustained with other religions and cultures. “Our heart is not of India, Turkey and Syria/ Our common birthplace is nothing but Islam.”- this poetic expression originally is written in Urdu by Allama Iqbal and much other such poetry and literature with promoters of “Islam's universalism” over “Indian nationalism” were encrypted on Muslim minds and ignited the common Muslim man's longings for a separate land (Wasti “Dr. Muhammad Iqbal”). The other Indian writers had had different ways of looking at the partition; some claimed Muslims to be responsible, some claimed the Hindus while a big bunch claimed that British rulers, by far, were the responsible and pivotal culprits for the same. The uneven population of Muslims and Hindus in both the divided lands wherein millions of Muslims were left in India showed a short-sightedness and chaotic implementation of partition decision. On the other hand, many other issues also played effective roles. Whatever remained the reason behind one of the deadly migrations in the world history, it has left a permanent scar on the face of humanity blinded by different religious belief systems.
Retrospection: Women in Pakistan

Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed (1987) in the book *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?* illustrate women’s role in different stages mainly pre-independence era (1896-1947), the Pakistan Movement (1940-47), Early Years (1947-58), Ayub Khan’s Period (1958-69), Bhutto Era (1970-77) and General Zia’s Coming to Power (1977-88). They describe the years 1896 to 1947 as “a Period of Awakening” (35) while “The Pakistan Movement” inspired Muslim women who “responded to the Muslim League with fervour and enthusiasm, especially the younger ones, who had hardly ever stepped out of their homes and now showed their organizational potential and capacity to work” (7).

Many Muslim political leaders contributed in brainstorming the Muslim mass including Sir Saiyed Ahmed Khan who “is credited with being one of the initiators of India’s Islamic renaissance and a promoter of the idea of creating a Muslim state” (Adamec 23), Muhammed Ali Jinnah (with titles Quaid-e-Azam, ‘Great Leader’; Baba-e-Quam, ‘Father of the Nation’), Allama Iqbal (poet, political leader), Liaquat Ali Khan (the first Prime Minister of Pakistan) etc. Jinnah’s most quoted and remembered speech in Aligarh in 1944 is remarkably significant when he said:

> It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable conditions in which our women have to live. You should take your women along with you as comrades in every sphere of life. (qtd. in Mumtaz & Shaheed 77)

And thus, not only male members but also few Muslim women contributed massively during the formation of Pakistan. Fatima Jinnah was “like a bright ray of light and hope” for her brother Quid-e-Azam, Muhammed Ali Jinnah. She was an inspiration to Muslim women during partition, worked for refugees in hard times and worked for the welfare of Pakistan thus received the title of ‘Madar-i-Millat’, Mother of the Nation. The official website *story of Pakistan* illustrates these men and women of letter. Women who served in movements and revolutions are significantly described by Mary Hegland in her essay “The Power Paradox in Muslim Women’s Majales: North-West Pakistani Mourning Rituals as Sites of Contestation over Religious Politics, Ethnicity, and Gender”: 

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During revolutions, rebellions, and movements, women are often called on to serve contradictory roles. They are asked to perform work—political, communicative, networking, recruiting, military, manual—that generally goes beyond the society’s usual gender restrictions. At the same time, women serve as symbols of movement identity, unity, commitment, and righteous entitlement. To fit into this idealized symbolic image, individual women must fulfill often “traditional” or even exaggerated “feminine” behavioral and attitudinal requirements, such as loyalty, obedience, selflessness, sacrifice, and proper deportment. (Saliba 95)

Hence the women who were directly or indirectly engaged in different movements and revolutionary rebellions had to play dual roles. However, as a need of the hour, women with a political background plunged into issues of women’s welfare. Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, an economist and first lady of Pakistan, after the reorganization of Muslim League, devoted her life to creating a political awareness among Muslim women, teaching, and welfare of Pakistani women. All Pakistan Women Association (APWA) was formed as a voluntary and non-political organization for the social, educational and cultural uplift of the women in 1949 under her President-ship. Begum Shaista Ikramullah (1915-2000) became the first female representative of the first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in 1947. The first Muslim woman from Pakistan to obtain Ph.D. from the University of London in 1940 was extremely talented and effective spokesperson of Muslim women in Pakistan. She is remembered for a groundbreaking contribution in Pakistan policy making:

Together with Begum Shah Nawaz, she made untiring efforts to get the "Islamic Personal Law of Shariah" approved. Her male counterparts in the legislature had certain reservations towards this law, which recognized women's right to inherit property in accordance with the Islamic Law. The law also guaranteed all citizens; male and female alike, equal pay for equal work, equality of status and equal opportunities. After protests by women both inside and outside the legislature, the bill was finally approved in 1948 and became effective in 1951 when Pakistan adopted its first constitution. (storyofpakistan)
During Ayub Khan’s period (1958-69), when in 1965 Fatima Jinnah showed up as the presidential candidate by the Combined Opposition Parties (COP), Ayub Khan “condemned her candidature as un-Islamic on the grounds of her being a woman” who “had various maulvis give fatwas to condemn Fatima Jinnah for contesting election”. (Mumtaz & Shaheed 11). But on the other hand, these women leaders were mainly used by political parties to manipulate the political scenes as it can be seen that “COP manifesto had no special measures or provisions for women” (Mumtaz & Shaheed 60). Besides political scenes, “the only significant organizations to come into existence were the Behdud Association, the Soroptomist Club, and the extension of Anjuman Jamhooriyat Pasand Khawateen (Democratic Women’s Association) to Karachi” (61). Due to strong anti-Ayub agitation, there was a rise of the Bhutto era (1969-77) which is famous for its “politicization of women” (62) ignited a sense of political awareness among Muslim women. One of the founder members of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), Begum Nasim Jehan played a significant role in women’s lives. Mumtaz & Shaheed furthermore writes that:

She told the women, oppressed and overburdened by the drudgery of domestic chores, of the condition of women in socialist societies; talked to them of crèches and washing machines, the possibility of having these facilities and ultimately the opportunity of flowering as human beings in their own right. These ideas seemed far-fetched but caught the imagination of women, especially of the depressed classes, and gave them a glimpse of a new world. It is said that at the time of the elections women broke the age-old tradition of obeying their men and voted for the PPP. In the post-election period, women had participated in the electioneering became part of the PPP’s drive to form mohalla committees. … This exposure was as important for the upper and middle class young women as for those of the working class, because this kind of interaction was taking place for the first time in many years. (62)

Many political and social activities welcomed women and as a result of such awareness, “the Bhutto period in Pakistan’s history was one of the great strides for women’s formal organizations” (65). Existing organizations flourished and new ones popped up to address women’s issues and concerns. The execution of controversial
laws in Pakistan was the Hudood ordinance in 1979 under General Zia-ul-Haq’s ‘Shariasation’ or ‘Islamisation’ process. The laws on criminal cases against adultery (zina), rapes, alcohol and fornication were added with the punishments of whipping, amputation, stoning to death based on the Quran and Sunnah. Zia-ul-Haq’s era is a hallmark of women’s subjugation Islamically and thus legally. Religion deciding the rules of ‘crime and punishment’ was made a yardstick with strict execution which was sheer patriarchal and irrational decree. “The Offence of Zina Ordinance” (VII of 1979) referring to fornication, adultery and zina bil jabbar (rape), specifically remained with greater loopholes for men to be saved from punishments. The rape victim – a woman – has to present four Muslim men as witnesses to prove the crime against the rapist or rapists in the case of gang-rape which is next to impossible as such crimes are not supposed to be done openly in others’ presence. It is true that “Zia’s accession to power and his starting of the Islamization process marks the culmination of the growth of the political usage of Islam… Pakistan seems to be in the grip of the unenlightened and the closed-minded” (Mumtaz & Shaheed 17). Due to such a severe approach, nobody has been ever found guilty of rape in Pakistan and none was stoned to death. Zaheer in Denied by Allah quotes a report by the National Commission on Status of Women in Pakistan saying that an estimated 80 percent of women, in jail in 2003, were there because “they had failed to prove rape charges and were consequently convicted of adultery” (52). In most of the cases, Ta’zir judgments were pronounced wherein Ta’zir means “Discretionary punishments for offenses that are not specified in the Quran or traditions.” Furthermore, the dictionary of Islam says:

Ta’zir permits the judge considerable discretion in a wide range of punishments, including admonition, reprimand, threat, boycott, public disclosure, fines, imprisonment, and flogging. It is usually imposed for less serious offenses and differs from the Hadd offenses, for which punishment is prescribed in the Quran or traditions. (Adamec 340)

Hence, rapes, gang-rapes, physical abuse and sex without consent (in the case of married couples) fall in the category of ‘less serious offenses’ which has been counter-questioned by many learned scholars, progressives, feminists and human rights activists. If such heinous crimes against women are not punished strictly then the question on law and governance lingers. Rape as a crime is quoted in the Quran
but the punishment for this sin is not clearly mentioned, and after many negotiations and nationwide discussions, new 2006 act deleted the rape clause from Hudood ordinance and instead section 375 for rape and 376 for its punishment were added. (Criminal Laws Amendment: Act 2006) It was observed that the feminist movement could manage to negotiate a fairly successful relationship with governments in the democratic period between the two military dictatorships of Generals Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) and Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008). It should be mentioned here that:

The women’s movement gained maximum influence in policy making in general and women’s issues in particular during the two terms under Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto’s liberal leadership (1988-1990; 1993-1996). During this time, NGOs found more negotiating space and a less threatening state and shifted their efforts towards sensitizing, negotiating, influencing and ‘infiltrating’ government policy. Bhutto’s pro-women agenda galvanized the women’s movement to engage with her government in a more meaningful manner… The World Social Summit for Development and International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 and the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women 1995 took place during her time, and we saw very close cooperation and collaborative work between women’s groups, NGOs and the government in Pakistan. (Zia 36)

The world witnessed a vigorous opposition by Nawaz Sharif on the election of Benazir Bhutto as 11th Prime Minister of Pakistan when he exclaimed “Never – horrors! – has a Muslim state been governed by a woman!” There was an uproar claiming that “throughout 15 centuries of Islam, from year 1 of the Hejira (AD 622) to today, the conduct of public affairs in Muslim countries has been a uniquely male privilege and monopoly.” (Mernissi 1) The government ruled by a female in Islamic nation created havoc and controversy in Pakistan. Besides all the opposition, she served two non-consecutive terms in 1988-90 and then 1993-96 with all her abilities. Fatima Mernissi mentions in her book Forgotten queens of Islam (1993) that there is no caliphate (religious authority) given to women in Islamic tradition while the Quran cites many Queens in the pre-Islamic era. Arguably, the world could be a more peaceful and greener place if women had ruled the nations. Besides all women in Pakistan's politics, women liberation policies, feminist movements, and government
as well as international support, women from all classes suffer from a variety of injustice.

**Feminism as a Discourse**

While evaluating the scenario of feminist approaches in Pakistan, as Margot Badran (2005) says there are dominantly two threads of feminist discourse namely “secular feminism” and “Islamic feminism”. It is important to acknowledge that the “secular feminism” may be marked out from the late nineteenth century while the emergence of “Islamic feminism” can be traced to the late twentieth century (6). She further specifies that:

Secular feminism draws on and is constituted by multiple discourses including secular nationalist, Islamic modernist, humanitarian/human rights, and democratic. Islamic feminism is expressed in a single or paramount religiously grounded discourse taking the Qur’an as its central text. (6)

What Islam offers to women in a legally religious way is re-examined and re-defined by modern Islamic feminists like Rif"at Hassan, Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, Fatima Mernissi etc. They believe that the holy text needs to be reinterpreted with feminist perspectives. In fact, Rif"at Hassan (1943- ) who is cited as the first woman accepted herself being tagged as an ‘Islamic Feminist’ belongs to Pakistan. Unlike other Islamic countries, Pakistan has generated many feminists as it can be seen as an amalgamation of secularism (from India) and religion (Islamic Jurisprudence) both as governing ideology.

The significant gang-rape case of Mukhtar Mai demonstrated the sheer failure of government’s laws and execution in interior villages during 2002. The village committee punished a Mukhtar Mai to be gang-raped to secure the honour of the opposing party. “It is unfathomable that such an atrocious human rights violation could be rendered as a form of punishment in a civilized country. In order to understand how something like that could happen in the twenty-first century, one only need look at the state of Pakistani law and order, or the lack thereof.” (Castetter 543) Contrarily, with the support of national and international media coverage, she started to change that village and got involved in many women welfare activities. Malala,
“the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner” girl, is a name on everybody’s lips with her courage to fight against the Taliban in Pakistan. Her dedicated efforts for girls' education could attract support from the entire world. (Tribune “Malala Yousafzai”) But all are not Malalas and Mukhtar Mais. Fakhra Yunus (Acid attack victim) with all national and international support could not withstand the humiliation and committed suicide in Rome in 2012. The former governor of Pakistan's largest province, Punjab - Gulam Mustufa Khar's son Bilal Khar by a first wife, took Fakhra from the red-light area and married her. But after physical and mental torture, he ruined her life by throwing acid on her face. Tehmina Durrani as a step mother in law helped her to move to Rome. In her suicide note, Fakhra wrote the reason being “the silence of law on the atrocities and insensitivity of Pakistani rulers” (Telegraph “Fakhra Yunus”). Not only this case, but the hundreds of acid victims demonstrate another face of recent Pakistan. The Oscar-winning movie (Best Documentary – Directed by Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy) from Pakistan- ‘Saving Face' in 2012, a documentary on Pakistani acid victims made the entire world aghast in shock and agony to see the height of crippled patriarchal mindsets. The female face is always equated with beauty parameters and thus ruining the face satisfies the criminal's male ego. The female body in all these cases of violence does not justify itself as a human body but validates many other connotations like that of community's pride, possession, an object of sexual desire, license to inflict violence etc. Violence on female bodies is seen as a very common agenda of Islamists, feudal and patriarchal males in Pakistan to emphasize the male supremacy over the ‘second sex’. Gina Hens-Piazza talks about the female body as an object to inflict violence with Biblical (religious) perspectives in the article “Terrorization, Sexualization, Maternalization: Women’s Bodies on Trial” which precisely justifies the phenomenon of violence on female bodies and failure of law and justice in Muslim contexts. Hens-Piazza says:

The rapes, forced childbearings, wife beatings, medical butcherings, forced prostitutions, sex-motivated murders, and sadistic psychological abuses that go unpunished are so frequent as to define them as the very condition of women’s lives. The gravity of these circumstances is only surpassed by the failure of legal systems to render justice in these circumstances. Writers on feminist jurisprudence note that not only is the occurrence of these crimes defining the condition of women’s
existence persistent but so also is the difficult time women have had getting the law and/or the courts to come to their aid. It seems almost impossible for women to communicate their situation. (Kirk-Duggan 163)

Extremists breathe in an open space of power and patriarchy while government’s role as a savior fails miserably while it actually supposed to be an aid to fight. “The laws, the courts, and nature or legal discourse itself often promote and even encode within their statures the terrorization of the female body…Hence, one meaning legal system assigns to the female body, then, is a body in terror.” (Kiek-Duggan 172) The movie Stoning of Soraya in 2008 based on a real incident of ‘stoning by death’ in an Iranian village is shocking in detailed depiction of Soraya’s execution for false accusation of adultery. (Sahebjam “The Stoning of Soraya”) When the judgment seats are occupied with the patriarchs of the societies and religious leaders, women would never see justice. The Mullahs/Maulvis with all their power pacts do violate the female bodies. Some of the disgusting examples (from Europe) are very well quoted by Zaheer in Denied by Allah (2015) wherein she cites the opportunistic conducts of such so-called Islamic leaders who authoritatively manage Halalas by themselves, get money and enjoy female body with pleasure and power in the name of religious justice. (27-28) Hence, the religion based judgments have been seen as highly paradoxical and contradictory. On the one hand, the Islamic laws pronounce protection to women from any kind of physical abuse while on the other hand when they approach the Muslim clergies for justice they are demoralized and driven to more humiliation and embarrassments. The ruling party’s liberal or strict laws and actions played a distinct role in forming a voice of women. The most recent news of the approval of Sindh Commission on the Status of Women Act 2015 by Governor of Sindh Dr. Ishratul Ibad is sowing tremendous hope wherein "the rights are in accordance with international declarations, conventions, treaties, covenants and agreements relating to women” (Kamayani “Good News”). The far light of hope and justice is soothingly anticipated by the entire country. Different failures of government laws are in hype since long. Retrospectively, the scenario of laws for women in Pakistan seems to fluctuate due to a variety of factors i.e., ruling party, political intervention, opposition from NGOs, ignition through media and interactions with various international bodies working for human rights etc.
Voicing through Literature

In the midst of all personal and political subjugation, women in Pakistan have been engaging themselves in writing fiction and non-fiction extensively with their dissent voices to project the saga of suffering through unheard, untold stories in different genres. Viewing Pakistani literature in English makes the readers realize that it is rich in themes, characterization, realism, imagination and verbal grandeur. Considerably, Pakistani literature tends to have many similarities with that of Indian literature in English as colonial suppression was a part of the experience for both the countries before 1947.

Pakistani fiction is the continuation and extension of the fiction produced under the colonial rulers in India. As such it has inherited all the pros and cons of the fiction in India before the end of the colonial rule in Indo-Pak. Feminism has been a part of this larger body of literature. All this makes Pakistani fiction a part of the postcolonial fiction. Pakistani writers have portrayed the lives of Pakistani women under the imposing role of religious, social and economic parameters. (Ahmed 92)

The category of Postcolonial fiction focuses on “reclaiming spaces and places, asserting cultural integrity and revising history’ with the characteristics of “resistant descriptions”, “appropriation of their colonizers language” and “reworking colonial art-forms” (Harrison “What is Post-colonial”). While Pakistani literature deals with a post-colonialism in context to Islam as a ruling phenomenon, here the nationalism is driven by a set of religious belief systems. Islamic nationalism hence maneuvers the psychological/mental make-up of those who had started residing here. But women as Gayatri Spivak says are ‘subalterns’ and the silent majority became a subject in post-colonial Pakistani literature.

The Postcolonial men re-colonized the bodies and minds of their women as a reaction and in an effort to preserve their cultural values. Women, as in the past, were supposed to carry the burden of cultural values as an offshoot of post-colonialism. But the same has brought also modern day realities to the forefront along with a new
Female bodies in Pakistan are still colonized under their religiously imposed stereotyping which is reflected in literature in a fierce and distinct way. Postcolonial fiction in Pakistan does not forget to highlight feminism as a hovering theme along with poverty, injustice, inequality, political unrest etc. affecting human emotions and lives. As Aldous Huxley in *Literature and Science* (1963) states that “human life is lived simultaneously on many levels and has many meanings” and “Literature is a device for reporting the multifarious facts and expressing their various significances” (qtd. in Arora 141), literature in Pakistan unfolds many layers to signify the complexity of life. Fiction writing by women in Pakistan has represented the agony, violence, helplessness and haplessness of female characters but at the same time, it shows their unbeatable spirit, their wrenching battles, their un-shattered desires for freedom and undying efforts for equality; in a nutshell ‘multifarious facts’ of their lives. The feminist poets like Naheed Kishwar (1940), Parween Shakir (1952-1994) and Fahmida Riaz (1946) are remarkable with their feminist poems. Naheed Kishwar furiously writes in her poem “Me Kaun Huun” in Urdu which has been translated here:

Punish me for I wrote the significance of the dream in my own blood  
Punish me for I compiled a book ridden with obsessions  
Punish me for I freed womanhood from the insanity of deluded nights  
Punish me for you might lose face if I further live  
Punish me for I am the seeker of a new life in every breath

During recent years, from an unsuccessful attack on Malala Yousafzai, eleven-year-old school-going girl (in 2012) to successful assassination of Sabeen Mahmud, a 40-year-old famous human rights activist (2015), violence against progressive Muslim women fighting for secularism, liberation and education has become news. And thus, a stronger than ever wave of passion is thriving amongst Pakistanis to gain a better place for voice raisers and activists. Pakistani women seek ‘a new life in every breath’ with every possible fight against bigotry. Through different art forms like literature, paintings, music, cinema, and theater, they express their longings for freedom and equality. Literature in Urdu is dominant in its popularity while literature in English
has gained the same charisma which is evident with the publications of Bapsi Sidhwa (1938), Mohsin Hamid (1971), Zulfikar Ghose (1935), Talat Abbasi (1942-1969), Qaisra Shahraz (1958) and Hanif Kureishi (1954). All these fiction writers have focused on Muslim women's suffering, the feminist approach in society, religious extremism, political interventions, partition nostalgia etc. Mumtaz Shahnwaz (1912-1948), whose novel *The Heart Divided* (1990) was published by her family posthumously, can be called a milestone for Pakistani feminist writing in English. (Zia 93) Many of the contemporary writers have migrated abroad, penning down Diaspora literature and successfully gaining international acclaim and rewards. The case with different books from Pakistan is generalized like this:

Some books are written to shed the veil of goodness which a brazenly hypocritical society covers itself in to deceive its innocent occupants. Some books are written to shed light on that darkness no human dares to transgress onto even at the peak of noon. Some books are written to shake us out of that ignorant slumber which shows dreams of lasting goodness and faith in the world. (Kulshreshtha “Blasphemy”)

The novel *Blasphemy* by Tehmina Durrani falls into this third category of books which shakes us ‘out of that ignorant slumber’. This novel is a devastating indictment of Pakistani women’s roles in their communities.

**Tehmina Durrani: Unveiling the Hypocrisy**

Married second time to a Casanova kind of man and politician Mustufa Khar, a former Governor of Sindh, Punjab in Pakistan, Tehmina Durrani has witnessed extreme subjugation in her personal and political life. Her marriage proved to be a milestone in transforming her naïve self into a strong individualist woman with a voice. Her sensational debut, her autobiography *My Feudal Lord* in 1991 shook the entire Pakistan with a true depiction of feudal mentality. Her extremely lucid and literary language with bold expressions made her a controversial writer. Needless to say, “All across the world, especially in the Indian sub-continent, the act of writing is for a woman essentially an act of breaking her silence because her repressive patriarchal/racial society has taught her to be culturally silent. The feminine is essentially the marginalized consciousness that operates on the periphery of patriarchal discourse” (Omar “Breaking the Silence”). ‘Breaking the silence’ always
demands great mental toil while accusations and tremendous criticism arrive on top of that. Durrani's bold attempt faced the same difficulties but at the same time, it could create a welter of sensations, respect, and appreciation of her courage. Her autobiography won the Italian Marrissa Bellasario Prize and was later translated into several languages. The three parts of the autobiography aptly entitled as ‘Lion of Punjab', ‘Law of Jungle' and ‘Lioness'. This devastating indictment of women's role in Muslim society depicts Durrani's husband with his psychopath possessive nature, his wife beatings, his forceful penetrations with a perspective that a woman like land is power, prestige, and property. Durrani in My Feudal Lord shows the elitist Muslim women in their hypocrisy realistically when she writes:

The women in our circle did not seem to look beyond their raised noses. They chattered endlessly about disobedient servants, clothes, jewelry and interior decorations... Many a day in the lives of these women was completely devoted to the topic of what to wear that evening. (65)

This is about a class of women who do not need to see beyond their comfort zones while millions of women from lower classes and villages suffer from malnutrition, right for education, poverty, husband beatings, forceful abortions of a female fetus and sexual, mental harassments. Contrarily, the higher class women too are pure objects for subjugation by their male counterparts. They are objectified caged birds in golden cages with distinct restrictions and humiliations to face. Even if they recognize it like that of Tehmina Durrani, then it might seem to them unprofitable to leave a comfort zone and a life of luxury. But the question arises as to why these women don’t find subjugation under an elite man’s gaze and why they don’t find it humiliating to be objects of sexuality, private property and become legal prostitutes for their males. In the wake of capitalism, the luxuries they enjoy, the elitist environment they live in and the superficial glamor they acquire seem to be the incentives to continue in the same rut while losing self-esteem and self-worth. Islam preaches simplicity and natural living with the minimum of resources available around one's premises, but their scenario of living paradoxically stands to destroy it. For some, it has become Modernized Islam and for others, it is Westernized Islam.
Durrani also lived a life of a sophisticated, hypocritical and pompous (house-) wife of a Governor. She had all the luxuries in her love-less marriage. She confesses in her autobiography *My Feudal Lord*:

There was not a day that Mustafa did not hit me… I just tried my best not to provoke him… I was afraid that my slightest response to his advances would reinforce his image of me as a common slut. This was a feudal hang-up: his class believed that a woman was an instrument of a man's carnal pleasure. If the woman ever indicated that she felt pleasure, she was a potential adulteress, not to be trusted. Mustafa did not even realize that he had crushed my sensuality. I was on automatic pilot… responding as much as was important for him but never feeling anything myself. If he was satisfied there was a chance that he would be in better humor. It was at these times that I realized that prostitution must be a most difficult profession. (106-107)

Women have been subjected to many kinds of ill treatments in Pakistan. Zaheer in *Denied by Allah* sheds light on Pakistan's current situation in these words which is a topsy-turvy image of what Pakistan is based on: "Every year, numerous women in Pakistan are subjected to domestic violence, marriage with the Quran, child marriage to settle blood feuds, acid throwing, and honor killing." (145) The feudal lord Mustafa Khar represents this misogynist mentality of Pakistani men. He has been shown as a dictator of the family and the clan who pursues Durrani’s sister and, later on, marries her. The autobiography stands to expose a certain class of men – the feudal, bourgeois and rich class. This suggests that not only rural, illiterate and poor women but also urban, literate and rich women suffer from a certain type of subjugation. The novel *Blasphemy* presents the highest class of Muslims lives in a village. Lives of upper class as well as the lowest class women are illustrated.

*Blasphemy* (1998) dares to talk about one of the most taboo subjects in Islamic countries i.e. Mullah – Pir community. As Durrani remains upright with the literary presentation of reality, it is important to understand that the novel is inspired by a true story of a girl in a South Pakistani village. The story circles around the life of Heer in synchronous as well as the asynchronous plot of the novel. Thirteen chapters followed by an epilogue talk about her suffering with gory, horrible and unimaginable details in
lucid literary language. The titles are highly suggestive and apt. The story, in a nutshell, begins with ‘release’ as the title of the first chapter as well as an appropriate justification of the word as it describes the death of Pir Sain, the so-called Messiah and next to Allah for the villagers. For all villagers, his death is the biggest loss to them. However, the reality is devastatingly opposite to its core. ‘Release’ is metaphorically used to suggest that as he was the oppressor of the poor as well as his wife – all are released from his inhumane terror. In the Haveli, unspeakable horrors are perpetrated in the name of Allah. Durrani talks about different stages of her life; her naïve self at the age of fourteen, her pauper parents and siblings, her marriage to Pir Sain, his brutal and weird sexuality, his oppressive nature, painful physical beatings, humiliations, their children and their lives, her courage to reveal the truth behind the shrine, female servants, etc. Each chapter aptly has a significant title. ‘Stepping Out’, the second chapter, deals with Heer’s young age, her love for a boy Ranjha who was her friend’s brother and how she was forced to get married to Pir Sain as she was very beautiful and liked by the so-called messenger of Allah (Pir Sain). Her poor fatherless family, especially her pauper mother is proud to have such an ultimate proposal of marriage for her daughter. She ‘steps out’ from an innocent, imaginative and romantic world of youth into a literal hell of Pir Sain’s Haveli. Third chapter ‘Stepping In’ horribly describes Heer’s stepping into the Haveli as a queen but actually less than a maidservant with weird experiences. ‘Jahanum’, meaning hell, is the fourth chapter with all gory details of Pir Sain’s explicit sexuality and misdeeds. ‘Unbound’ - the fifth chapter where Heer gives birth to her first child – a baby girl and as expected Pir Sain doesn’t look at “the bundle” (Blasphemy 78). She compares herself with her own younger sisters before whom Heer looks like “a tormented maid at eighteen” with “no youth, no love, no hope” (78). Toti, a maidservant, appears and vanishes mysteriously and this reveals many horrible sins of Pir Sain, while in the sixth chapter ‘Circling the Square’, Heer comes to know the reality of Toti who was actually a spirit and a victim of injustice. This chapter is an account of Heer’s retrospection:

Swinging around in circles, my hands clasping Guppi’s, I thought of how the custodians of law, above the law themselves, had made each one of us spin. Heirs were attached to old men’s corpses like bloodsucking leeches and another bead was strung into the tasbi that
bled from the bloody business. My routine never changed. By the time I turned thirty, I was the mother of five children. (103)

‘The Lure of Innocence’ depicts Pir Sain’s lustful attitude towards his own daughter Guppi and how Heer involves herself in crimes to save her own daughter from incest. Yathimri, an orphan, a small girl, as well as smaller girls of maid servants were raped and slaughtered every night. Chapter Eight ‘Chhote Sain’ illustrates Heer’s younger son and his plight at the hands of his own father, Pir Sain. Heer writes: “To me, my husband was my son’s murderer. He was also my daughter’s molester. A parasite nibbling on the Holy Book, he was Lucifer, holding me by the throat and driving me to sin every night.” (143) But at the same time, the image of her husband amongst the villagers is that of “the man closest to Allah, the one who could reach Him and save us” (143). Chapter Nine, ‘Killer Waves’, talks about horribly unimaginable waves of ill deeds of Pir Sain. A foreigner lady, professionally a journalist, Gori visits the Shrine and Haveli with a promise to Pir that she would write about men of Pir family only, not about the women. Heer feels disgusted on seeing the fact that this English woman is a fool who cannot see the “terror in our eyes” (152) and praises the divinity of Pir Sain. Her addiction to nicotine and boozing caused by extreme physical and mental suffering remains an only option to her for calming herself down and ignore the pain. Tenth chapter ‘Heroes’ is more haunting than previous chapters wherein Heer is offered to unknown, dirty and filthy strangers for sexual acts to make video films by Pir Sain. His fetish to watch her pleasing murky people motivates him to make films and introduce Heer as a whore from the city to different Jamindars, officials, and men from the city. The following chapter ‘In the Name of Allah' unfolds the story behind Pir Sain's death while the twelfth chapter entitled as ‘Stripping’ informs the readers about the consequences after Pir's death; Rajaji – the younger son's dastarbandi ceremony – offering him the place of his father; Cheel’s story and Heer’s new plans to free herself and the village from this religious slavery. She prepares Tara – another courageous servant to achieve the unimaginable. She persuaded her by saying:

We are bonded together in suffering, you and I … we are captives of a false and evil system. A poisonous octopus grips us. Its tentacles usurped the strength of Islam to exploit us in every possible way. Its grip tightens but never lets us die… they allow us to breathe just
enough for them to feed upon us until our flesh is gone. We survived, you and I. That is why I trust you. (195-196)

Heer’s plans to destroy the falsehood behind the Shrine lead her towards more self-destruction and anguish; confirming Tara’s words that “they will brand [them] us kafir and burn [them] us at stake. Their propaganda is deep rooted. [Their] Our protest is weak.” (196) Chapter Thirteen – the last chapter indeed is a heartbreaking yet courageous memoir of Heer wherein she describes her life after death surrealistically. How her plans fall apart and smash the entire idea of abolishing slavery for women in the name of Allah; how she faces her son Rajaji labeling her a whore and culprit in the Pir’s family; how she suffers from her dreaming which eventually proves that dreaming is a sin for women in her “square” world (221). Epilogue is narrated by someone else; most probably by Heer's friend – Ranjha's sister or someone close to Ranjha wherein Heer's tomb was offered flowers, agar batis and small green paper flags of the country; family worshiping before her grave “for exposing the decadence of Shrine-worship”. But the fact that “it was the birth of another Shrine” and shakes the readers from the core (229). The abrupt open-ended ness of Blasphemy is remarkably striking. What E. M. Forster wishes in Aspects of the Novel (1927) fits Durrani as a novelist when he writes: “Expansion. That is the idea the novelist must cling to. Not completion. Not rounding off, but opening out” (115). Like a musical symphony, this novel flows synchronously and asynchronously as well; shocking readers with lyrical details.

**Heer: Epitome of Suffering**

The day Heer marries Pir Sain, she becomes a sex object for her husband. Her body here serves as an object for Pir’s pleasure and bizarre fantasies. Heer is terrified at the very first encounter with Pir Sain in bed:

His hand crept under my veil and fumbled on my lap. Lines and patterns disappeared when his hand covered mine, for ever. Stripped naked, I felt a mountain of flesh descend on me…. Did I sleep that night or was it some kind of death? ... I staggered into the bathroom. Standing under the shower, I stared as blood mixed with water, turned pink and collected under my feet… When the ordeal of lunch was
over, he said, ‘Come inside,’... In the grip of a nightmare again, I could no longer distinguish which part of my body was which. (37-42)

The thought of love and romance seems futile and wrong to Heer who being a teenager cannot ever experience soothing love-making or romance. Like female teenagers in African-American novels Color Purple and The Bluest Eye, brutal physical intercourse destroys their emotional connection with the opposite gender and creates disgust towards physical relationships. Here in Blasphemy, the core reason of suffering is not race and gender but that of religion and gender. Heer was amazed and excited with the perception of love and romance with Ranjha, her friend’s brother before Pir Sain’s proposal. Her expectations from Pir Sain as a loving husband were destroyed and scattered on the very first night of her marriage. Heer questions men’s entitlement over women’s body. To understand the sense of authoritativeness among Muslim men on their women, it is imperative to understand the religiously legal ways which sanction them a sense of entitlement which may or may not be absolute truth in its real sense. Two specific verses from the Quran are referred and highlighted by Asma Barlas in her book “Believing Women” in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Quran (2002) seem persuasive and yet controversial with their interpretations and contexts. Surah 2, verse 223 and Surah 3, verse 14 cite women as ‘sexual property’ as interpreted by many. Both the Surahs are widely used against women, but Barlas goes on defending its contextual meanings to rationalize the politically corrupt meanings. Surah 2:223 cites female body as ‘tilth’ and suggests males penetrate women whenever they wish; without their consent. The widespread translation of verse 2:223 is cited below:

Your wives are a place of sowing of seed for you, so come to your place of cultivation however you wish and put forth [righteousness] for yourselves. And fear Allah and know that you will meet Him. And give good tidings to the believers. (2:223) (Sahih International)

She suggests referring to verse 2:222 to understand the context. She cites:

They question thee (O Muhammed) concerning menstruation. Say: It is an illness [adan], so let women alone at such times and go not in unto them till they are cleansed. And when they have purified themselves, then go in unto them as Allah hath enjoined upon you. Truly Allah
loveth those who turn unto [Allah], and loveth those who have a care for cleanness. Your women are a tilth [harth] for you (to cultivate) so go to your tilth as you will, and send (good deeds) before you for your souls, and fear Allah, and know that ye will (one day) meet [Allah]. (2:222-23) (Sahih International)

As the Quran shows the righteous ways to deal with almost all worldly affairs, it stops men from the intercourse during menstruation as it is hurting and unhygienic for women. Hence after that period, men are permitted to have sexual intercourse with their women. While Surah 3:14 says:

Beautified for people is the love of that which they desire – of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, and cattle and tilled land. That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return. (3:14) (Sahih International)

This verse 3:14 is vindicated by Barlas in 2002 by saying that “although women are included among men’s ‘lusts’ on earth, this is a list of what men covet, not what God wants them to covet.” (161) According to her, this Ayah (verse) is primarily dealing with afterlife wherein it is suggestive that men’s covetousness and lust towards women “can cost men the afterlife” (161). The re-interpretations of Islamic Feminists seem to tend towards defending God’s words. Though Asma Barlas denies tagging herself as an Islamic feminist, she propagates Quranic teachings with a specific agenda against women subjugation in the name of Allah. As a ‘believing woman’, Barlas justifies these verses as counterfeits to their original contexts and meanings. (2002)

Pir Sain tries to rape his own daughter while, in order to save her, Heer offers a small girl – Yathimri – daughter of a maid servant to satisfy his animalistic sexuality. The pain of 9-year-old girl was reduced by intoxicating her. Later on, over time, she becomes a mistress of Pir Sain and overrules Heer, behaves like a queen of the Haveli. Heer’s son was brutally beaten to death by Pir Sain as he was accused of raping Yathimri. Extreme physical beating is the key feature of the novel which resembles Durrani’s autobiographical details in My Feudal Lord. Heer writes that “everyday activities were a potent source for violence even when every caution was taken to avoid the slightest mistake” (51). A constant fear of receiving physical
punishments distorts Heer’s psyche with the justification that her husband is next to Allah (the guard, the protector) and as a wife to him, he has rights to punish her. The Quran seems supporting wife-beating in a specific way in Surah 4:34 wherein it says:

The men are supporters/maintainers of the women with what God preferred/bestowed on some of them over others and with that they spent their money, so the righteous women are dutiful/obedient; guardians/protectors to the unseen with what God guarded/protected. And as for those women you fear their uprising/disloyalty, then you shall advise them, and (then) abandon them in the bed, and (then) idriboo them. If they obeyed you, then seek not against them a way; Truly, God is High, Great. (4:34) (Sahih International)

Idriboo stands for ‘beating’, but religious scholars justify that Idriboo suggests ‘authorize’ or ‘justify’ while in Hadith, the Prophet suggested that women have all the rights to retaliate. It is cited as a misconception by many Islamic scholars. What Amina Wadiud (1999) highlights is another dimension to its interpretation when she takes into account many scholars justifying that the context here is ideal and not absolute. She further affirms that people take it as a verdict that God prefers men over women. But clarifies that men are qawwamuna ‘ala (better in relation with) women has many implications and cannot be taken up as an absolute truth. She says:

Ideally, everything she [a woman] needs to fulfill her primary responsibility comfortably should be supplied in society, by the male: this means physical protection as well as material sustenance. Otherwise, ‘it would be a serious oppression against the woman.’ This ideal scenario establishes an equitable and mutually dependent relationship. (73)

But in the wake of globalization, no Muslim scholar, arguably, address questions like: “What happens in societies experiencing population overloads, such as China and India? What happens in capitalistic societies like America, where a single income is no longer sufficient to maintain a reasonably comfortable life-style? What happens when a woman is barren?” (Wadud, “Quran and Woman” 73) She argues that such age-old convicted ideology is irrelevant in globally competitive human lives. The uses and misuses of Quranic verses bring about a sexist, misogynist and empowering
domination over the ‘second sex’ (Simon De Beauvoir fame). The novel is full of incidents wherein Pir Sain beats Heer on the slightest of her mistakes, even during her pregnancies.

**Physical Violence and Muslim Female Body**

Ali and Gavino, in Journal of Pakistan Medical Association, in a report on “Violence against Women in Pakistan: A Framework for Analysis” write:

Many religions expect members to adhere to traditional values. For instance, divorce is discouraged in Islam… such attitude makes it very difficult for a woman to end even a violent relationship. Women tend to believe that they were committing a sin by dissolving even an abusive marriage…. By examining the literature on the dynamics of violence against women, it appears that factors like the ideology of patriarchy, culture and society, religion, media and individual characteristics come together to explain violence against women. (199)

‘Individual characteristics’ of Pir Sain is the reason of his brutality. *Dai* explains his upbringing as a child in an environment where he was punished by extremely brutal ways. “The child [Pir Sain] was locked in a dark and airless room with seventeen stray dogs for three days and three nights” (60), exclaims *Dai*. Psychologically, the roots of his brutality are based on his childhood experiences. Muslim ‘culture and society’ is a direct byproduct of Islam, its preaching cited in Quran and in other treatises. The novel presents violence against women as a severe stance by the religious belief system. Heer is a victim of extreme physical beatings by Pir in the name of Allah and the Quran. The first beating she receives is just after a week of their marriage “in full view of every one and ended inside” (43). The reason is trivial and illogical for readers; her “flourmill aunt’s daughter came to visit with her six-year-old son' and she meets them without ‘observing purdah from a male whom she could marry” (43). The concept of ‘*Mahram*’ and ‘*(Non-) Ghayr-Mahram*’ is applied here which suggests that except father, brother, and son (‘Mahrams’), a Muslim woman is restricted to meet Non-Mahrams without covering her head and face. ‘Mahram’ is ‘an unmarriageable kin with whom sexual intercourse would be considered incestuous, a punishable taboo’. (Abdul-Rahman 22) Here, a male cousin of six years belongs to the category of Non-Mahram (with whom marriage is
possible) and thus Heer is beaten brutally for her being ignorant and an adulteress. On examining the Quran, Surah 24, verse 31 commands:

> And tell the believing women to reduce [some] of their vision and guard their private parts and not expose their adornment except that which [necessarily] appears thereof and to wrap [a portion of] their headcovers over their chests and not expose their adornment except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, that their right hands possess, or those male attendants having no physical desire or children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women. And let them not stamp their feet to make known what they conceal of their adornment. And turn to Allah in repentance, all of you. O, believers. That you might succeed. (Sahih International)

The translation of the verse includes ‘sister’s sons’ as *Mahram* but not cousin sister’s sons and thus Heer was punished severely. Pir Sain adheres to so-called divine words but ignores the genuine aspect which says “children who are not yet aware of the private aspects of women” are not ‘Ghayr Mahram’. The height of fanaticism is seen in his gestures. This incident shows that fanatic believers rigidly adhere to the inscribed words and shallow meanings. Later on, Heer describes:

> Anything trivial, like spilling milk, a stain on her clothes, something missing when he needed it, over-cooked vegetables, undercooked meat were offenses... Tight bundles of *chharris*, the thin wet branches of the *khajji*, or date tree, were brought in. (51)

On different occasions, Heer is almost beaten to death by Pir Sain and has no voice to resist as she was a wife. Pir has to keep his image intact and thus he says: “No sound from you is to reach beyond the walls of this room.” (71)

Heer notices that little girls are brought to Haveli to work but disappear suddenly and while re-appearing, they look terrorized and aghast but never utter a single word. On inquiring of *Dai* about the same, she describes the horrible stories of oppressed maid-servants. Kaali’s story is heart-wrenching when she says that she was
forced by a man to get married who wanted her for his old father's pleasure. Her husband watches her being penetrated by different men at the same time and gains pleasure. Kaali was impregnated by her father in law and eventually commits suicide. But later on, in the novel Toti’s spirit informed Heer that “a part of the virility serum injected into your husband’s horses to ensure a productive mating season was injected into the boys that were let loose upon Kaali. The wild beasts scavenged Kaali’s pregnant body. She could no longer rise from her bed, the only time she did was when she hanged herself.” (96) But this fact comes to Heer’s knowledge long after Kaali’s suicide. Heer has to pay for her affection towards Kaali as Pir Sain was a friend to Kaali’s father in law hence Pir could not spare her for being good to Kaali. He beats and penetrates her until she miscarry the child in her womb.

He pushed me to the floor, his foot crushed my face… He sat on a chair, pulled me down between his legs and gripped my temples with his knees… He shouted for a razor. Time froze to the sound of scraping. The razor ran across my scalp, then back and forth across my brow. Flung across the room, I saw him coil towards me like torrid lava. Flat on my back. My stomach protruded. Inside it, my baby kicked. Over it, the father descended…My child pushed against his thrusts. Neither of them tired. He was still inside and the baby was coming out…I did not hear him cry or die. (71)

The chapter ‘Unbound’ describes the filthiness of Pir Sain’s brothers but Pir Sain beats her to death just because she got to know their filthiness through Daai. A younger brother to Pir, who tries to make a connection with Heer, sends a letter through a maidservant, Terhi. Heer writes:

Terhi was blessed with old age and her punishment was lighter than mine. Ordered to lie flat on my stomach, I obeyed instantly. Two maids held my outstretched arms above my head and another two grasped my ankles. A lightning swing made the khajji whip hiss and swish. It was always regulated by his energy, never by how much I could endure. Fabric slashed, the flesh beneath tore, and I swallowed the pain through my pursed lips. (81-82)
Similarly, there are horrid incidents when Pir Sain immensely tortures his wife. In love with a small maid servant Yathimri, Pir selects special gifts. In an amalgamation of anger and jealousy, Heer does not present those gifts to Yathimri and the result is very predictive. On knowing this, Pir Sain punishes Heer.

Lifting the Charpai, he commanded, ‘Put your hands under it.’ Heavy wooden bars descended on them. I winced. My eyes rolled up. My lips pursed. I swallowed explosion after explosion of pain… Every moment was insufferable…. I saw him sit on the charpai. (119-120)

For several hours, Pir Sain was fast asleep leaving Heer in such dreadful, painful situation. On the day of Eid, she couldn’t put henna on bandaged palms. So on so forth, the novel is a representation of extreme male chauvinism and brutality towards women’s body.

**Hypocrite Pir Community**

Not only the wives and maid servants but also the downtrodden and rebellious men are beaten to death by Pir Sain and his ancestors which justify that anyone opposing authority whether he is Pir Sain’s own son or Toti’s – maid servant’s fiancé. Hence, it is important to comprehend how Pir Community exploits their followers in the name of Allah in this novel. After listening to the brutal stories of old Pir by Dai, Heer feels that she was not alone in suffering from intense physical beatings; many “faceless and nameless” people were trapped like her. (61) This authoritativeness over others is a remarkable self-assertion. It is significant what Heer says: “it had reduced Islam to fit into the palms of pygmies. They played with it like putty. Middlemen and salesmen had converted Muslims into grave worshippers. They led us back to the time of jahalia, back to the conditions our Prophet had freed us from, back to the very reasons that had called for Islam.” (103) One of the reasons why the so-called learned Mullahs do not encourage common people to read and understand the exegesis of Quranic Verses in translation is well described by Heer in the novel when her little daughter sought to know why should she read Quran in Arabic only:

If our Holy Book was understood, it would cause an uprising. Its content was dangerous. It exposed those who exploited it. The translation could make a revolution. But it was not good for Guppi to be involved in these matters and I said nothing. (105)
Guppi, the eldest daughter of Heer, is a curious bird and asks her grandmother, Amma Sain, several questions out of curiosity. She is permitted to read only Arabic version of the Quran wherein she argues reasonably with childlike honesty “But I don’t understand Arabic. How can I commit myself to Allah without knowing what to keep? Allah knows that I don’t understand what I read.” (104) Amma Sain exclaims with a very coarse voice that “only the original words are divine. Only they will give [you] sawaab.” (104) Muslims, thus, are conditioned to believe that reading Quran means gaining sawaab (punya, rewards) to get the Jannat (Heaven) after death. The more you read the more you gain sawaab and the more you gain chances for getting the after-death benefits. The reality is buried under the heap of temptation for Jannat while at the same time this compulsion paves direct ways to Maulvi, Pir and Saiyed clans to interpret the verses as they wish. This issue is not trivial because most of the complaining women during Jansunvai were unaware about the Quranic details in India (and most likely in South Asia) as Noor Zaheer exclaims in Denied by Allah:

The purpose of every woman knowing the Quran and reading it once before marriage is that she should know not only the process of worship but also the law. However, the Muslim Personal Law falls amongst the things that are never told or discussed. Every single meeting of Muslim women that I have attended has always ended with women saying, ‘But we did not know this…’ The Quran is never taught in simple Urdu or Hindi. It is read from one end to the other in Arabic, without any effort being made by the teacher to explain the meaning of the Ayats – the result being that the maulvis are given a free hand to interpret it. (Author’s Note)

Thus, the real sense of Ayats is unapproachable for Muslim women. Though, Muslim males are also unaware of the real sense as they learn reading the Quran same way. But why would they re-approach when they are receiving utmost entitlement to power and possessiveness over women in the name of Allah. Irrespective of gender, the Quran should be read to understand the implied meanings and not to adhere to sheer words without context and relevance. The oppressors in this novel are the Pirs who make readers face to face with the atrocities and falsehood in Islam. Without understanding Quran, everything else especially Pir’s words has become authentic
and true to life. The novel compels the readers to consider these words by Wadud true in *Quran and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective:*

Shari’ah (Islamic Law), Grammar, Literature, and Politics are some of the most important disciplines whose developments were based on the Quran. Each of these disciplines generated a great deal of literature. As this literature developed, it began to play a role so central in Islamic scholarship that it overshadowed the text upon which it was originally based. Consequently, Islamic studies began to focus more heavily on the understanding of this literature and less on the understanding of the Quran itself. The result was a disconnection from the original text and its intent. (xx)

What makes ‘a disconnection’ is quite clearly mentioned but who makes it should be understood as well. Like Amma Sain in the novel, the upper-class scholars claim to be “the direct descendants of the Prophet” (61) and self-declared authorized agencies to interpret the text and proclaim the final verdicts creating different disciplines. Pir Sain seems like a savior for the villagers – next to Allah – though he is actually a culprit in disguise. He always drapes a green *chaddar* embroidered with the ninety-nine names of Allah on his shoulders like he is possessed with the superior spiritual powers. Including him, every male member of the family remains sexually hyper and brutal to their own females and others too. The weird stories of the siblings of Pir Sain surprise Heer as it does to the readers. The next brother in age to Pir Sain is a “debauch who spent his days and nights surrounded by young village girls and bottles of whiskey” (81), the third brother is again a real sinner of Islam who has a sexual relationship with his own daughter. Her name is Meesni, a case of forceful incest turned into submission. Shameless, serious, pale looking Meesni is avoided by every member of the family except her father, the penetrator. The details of the fourth brother are heinous too.

The fourth brother had married three middle-aged maidservants after his marriage to Amma Sain’s young niece. He was also known to have a long-standing relationship with his wife’s mother, who being Amma Sain’s widowed sister, was lodged in his haveli. (81)
The fifth, the youngest brother is not forgiven by Pir Sain for his cheating on damaging his cotton crops by using low-quality pesticide. This slight cheating was punished by breaking off all connections with him while the scandalous crimes of other brothers were never punished or even mentioned before anyone. Adding more to this, Dai explains the tradition of the ‘pir’s uthni’ to Heer in which

\[ Pir’s \text{ she-camel would be left to wander around the village freely until it chose a house before which it sat down. This signaled that the unwed daughter of the house was to be dressed as a bride and offered to the pir. Deflowered, the girl would be sent back home to live untouched by another man for as long as she lived. What was halal for the pir became haraam for everyone else. (147) \]

That particular girl would become Pir’s she-camel for the rest of her life. The perverts of this Pir family were called the direct descendants of the Prophet and thus were never questioned. Is this community/sect of Pirs the final authority to pass the verdicts on each and every issue? Do they acquire that sanctity to rule the downtrodden? Do they have all the rights to ransack lives of poor women of their so-called kingdom? The authority to translate the holy words is never limited to scholars and so-called Maulvis, Mullah Community with knowledge of language and scriptures. The first revelation of Quranic Ayah on Prophet orders Him to “read” the holy words and believe accordingly. In the case, each believer is advised to read the Quran and have right to interpret it with contextual relevance. In practice, translation and exegesis always are done by these so-called scholars who infuse the patriarchal perspective. This Pir community in the novel rules like dictators in the village.

**Maidservants as Mere Slaves**

Another important element of focus in the novel is the predominance of the presence of maidservants. At the time of Heer's wedding, her Ma boasted of a luxurious life with all maidservants around her after her marriage. Sheer slavery is practised in the Haveli which is anti-Islamic practice according to religious leaders. Young, old, widowed homeless and spinsters – all age maidservants are seen; many of them are a confidante to Pir. The Haveli becomes a shelter to many such servants – a hidden brothel. There are specific types of oppression on the maidservants by the Pir family. Pervert Pir Sain is fond of different very young sex partners and finds his own
daughter Guppi attractive. To save her daughter from incest like that of Meesni, Heer represents Yathimri – an orphan small girl before his lust at midnight when Heer herself is in menstrual period. She feels guilty of her act but again thinks “child rape was a lesser evil than incest. Or was it?” (112) Yathimri is badly molested and raped by Pir Sain's sexual hunger. Durrani writes:

A wounded baby deer with frightened eyes lay on the floor. Her mouth was stuffed with his handkerchief, her torso was naked, and her child-like breasts bore teeth marks…Yathimri clutched the blood-stained sheet around her body… His evil was tattooed all over her little form. Her legs shook like of the aged. Between them, blood trickled and dried. (112-113)

Using maidservants as sex-objects is a self-proclaimed privilege in higher castes Muslims like that of Pir Sain's family in the novel. Not only sexual oppressions but also for all sorts of household works and inhumane and sinful tasks were forcefully imposed on these females of all ages. This scenario in the novel seems to reflect the horrible times of slavery which was prevailing in a pre-Islamic era wherein female slaves were treated like that of sex objects. Tremendous internet sites mainly Anti-Islamic entities claim that Islam promotes slavery by stating that Prophet himself used to have sex with the female slaves. Some Quranic references, Hadith, and anecdotes seem to attest the same. Historically, slavery has been a very complex and contextual phenomenon. Pre-Islamic era, the Jehaliat Age - the age of ignorance – is marked by all ill-conducts like that of consuming alcohol, oppression on women, slave marketing etc. But with the rise of Islam as a faith, the demolition of ill-practices and inhumane behavior started to be nullified according to many scholars. While with reference to Egypt, Badran (1995) tries to justify the act of accepting that slave woman as a wife once she bears an illegitimate child by the master,

Islam permitted men to take slaves as concubines. It was common practice during much of the nineteenth century among the Turco-Circassian ruling class and the rising Egyptian Muslim elites to obtain such women from the Caucasus. When a concubine gave birth, the child was the legitimate offspring of the father, who usually married the mother. In this way, women of humble origins might improve their
status. The decline of concubinage was another corollary of the disappearance of slavery in Egypt. (6)

But what was the status of those who were simply used and thrown or re-sold? What does this signify? Does this signify that Islam promotes equality? How did they decide a woman's (a slave's) 'humble origin' and theirs as an elite class? Who gave them a right to do so? Direct references from the Quran and Hadith speak a volume. Quran 23:1-6 says –

The believers must (eventually) win through – those who humble themselves in their prayers; who avoid vain talk; who are active in deeds of charity; who abstain from sex, except with those joined to them in the marriage bond, or (the captives) whom their right hands possess – for (in their case) they are free from blame. (Sahih International)

Likewise, few other verses like that of 4:24, 70:22-30 and 33:50 also shed light on the same issue of sex with captive girls/slaves as the legal act. In verse 33:50, Allah gives the sexual rights to the Prophet in the words: “O Prophet! Surely we have made lawful to you your wives whom you have given their dowries, and those whom your right hand possesses out of those whom Allah has given to you as prisons of war.” Allah commands to abstain from sex except with their wives and with "those whom their right hands possess." Different Hadiths mention numerous incidents wherein the Prophet allows Muslim men to have sexual relationships with the captive women with a clause to avoid illegitimate child birth. It is mentioned in Sahih Muslim 3371, Sahih Muslim 3384, Sunan Abu Daud 2150 and Sahih al-Bukhari 4138 to name few. This documentation shows that Muslims were taking full advantage of the Prophet's teachings about female captives and slave girls. With or without the consent of these women whose husbands and families were made slaves and brutalized, Muslim men used them as sex toys. Pir Sain treats his female servants as objects to satiate his sexual hunger using sedatives to heighten his virility. The orphan girl Yathimri is offered to Pir Sain for satiating his sexual hunger and it becomes a daily affair. This adolescent starts to getting adjusted to physical assaults by Pir, the highest authority of the haveli and of the entire village. Heer feels a strange kind of jealousy at the same time. Yathimri slowly becomes a dear and near to Pir Sain. Little incidents like the
way she behaves with other older maidservants, the way she becomes coy in the presence of Pir, the way she uses lipstick and bright orange clothes and the way she behaves adamantly with Heer are the signs to show Yathimri's triumph over Pir which could not be done by Heer as a wife. One incident reciprocates the extreme addiction of Yathimri to Pir wherein Heer doesn't give her an expensive set of clothes which was selected and gifted to Yathimri and on the acknowledgment of the same, Pir bangs on Heer mercilessly. To save her own daughter Heer had offered Yathimri and then she becomes an amalgam of anger and jealousy for her. On the day of Eid, Pir Sain summoned Heer and Yathimri together and ordered Yathimri to serve whisky to both of the ladies. And Heer thinks: “Now I understood why the girl always reeled out of the room. Another contradiction sprung at me… Pir Sain's wife was drinking alcohol while he was drinking fresh goat's milk” (122). The threesome orgy starts and Heer, with a drunken body, couldn't sense anything and expresses that “the night was fed to the flesh or the flesh to the night” (123). She begs for the forgiveness before Allah for such unthinkable sins.

Lust and its Horrible Dimensions

Pir Sain has not only the fetish of having sex with small girls but also of watching his own wife penetrated by others. The chapter titled as “Heroes” in the novel is full of obscene descriptions of how the God like Pir calls on different people comprising Jamindars, officers and high-profile bureaucrats from city and presents Heer as “a whore from the city because no one had ever laid eyes on the venerable wife of the pir” (164). Pir Sain, after a visit to the Capital, came back with strange objects – the films – and instructed her to go with him that night. The tunnel – a black corridor leading from the shrine to the guest house becomes a never-ending journey into sexual oppressions by strangers; unknown, dirty, filthy, sweaty, fat, bumpy and intolerably odorous people with calluses and dead skins descended over Heer. She remembers each man with a number in order to recall the sequence of atrocious experiences. Meanwhile, she discovers that one of the strangers was Ranjha – her first ever crush, her dream man. This experience drags her towards the pits of humiliation in her own eyes. Another incident, in addition, kills her revitalized sense of love and sensuality. One of the “heroes” who is described as “pink and white like an angel” (176) touches her very sensuously and she enjoys his touch with all her passion. Pir Sain can sense her pleasure through her response. The same boy is called for Heer the
whole week and then brutally killed. Pir Sain with all his satanic aversion for this boy gets him killed. His psychopath actions are extremely villainous. Heer says:

There was movement on the other side of the wall. I heard shuffling feet and men’s voices. The khajji whip hissed. A man howled. I was on my back and my husband was on top of me. The victim’s torment fuelled Pir Sain’s desire. He slurred in my ear, ‘Do you like it?’ And pressed his ear to my breast to hear the answer. Shrieks far more painful than the khajji could ever induce resounded in the air. Pir Sain’s voice punctuated them, ‘Tell me you like it. What do you think is happening? Who do you think is screaming?’ (176)

That ‘pink and white' boy screams until he dies with the false accusation of raping a girl. Pir’s bizarre sexual fetishes and possessiveness result into murders of innocent people like this. Pir’s brutal character sheds light on different dimensions of lust mingled with anger, jealousy, patriarchal domination and violence. Lust has to be hidden from the public so to protect the religious image. Pir Sain stands for sheer religious hypocrisy in its true sense. There are two incidents when Heer is forced to abort the child after the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is the holy month when every five senses are supposed to be controlled by even a common man. But Pir is almost a man of God. If people come to know about his indulgence with sexual activities during Ramadan through the news of Heer's pregnancy, his reputation can be shattered. Amma Sain, Heer's mother-in-law, declares: “Men don't like to deprive themselves of pleasure when they have had to abstain for thirty afternoons in Ramadan.” (83) At the time of second abortion after few years soon after Ramadan, Amma Sain foretells the future: “Yathimri will possess him wholly.” (123) To abort the five months pregnancy, Heer takes twenty tablets of quinine, and begins to bleed profusely and meanwhile, Amma Sain's prediction comes true as Yathimri replaces her in every possible way. Heer has diagnosed a hole in her womb, a crater from excessive doses of quinine. She has borne six children, three sons and three daughters. At the age of thirty-three Heer becomes a grandmother too. Pir Sain’s lust infused with power has infected Heer along with all in Haveli. The novel carries out a documentation of Heer’s suffering with that of other women of the village at the hands of male patriarchs. All basic tenets of Islam are brutally exploited and shattered here but almost all in the name of Allah. Pir’s individual characteristics as a sexual
psychopath turn him into a titular leader of the village, profligate and brutally lustful person. His lust and power combine his atrocious self. Religion becomes a mere tool to accomplish his fetishes through power inflict.

**Mother-Son Relationship**

Male-female binary has been the most complex phenomenon in Islam. Even if it comes to mother-son relationship, the same male patriarchal attitude lurks around to demolish the psyche from the beginning. Heer is not allowed to play with her male kids nor can she spend time with female kids as per the tight schedule. The children mostly played with maids and cousins as the mother Heer remains busy serving guests or Pir Sain. She tells us about Amma Sain’s pathetic situation wherein “she [Amma Sain] became so unfamiliar with her progeny that once when she caught her adolescent son cuddling a maid, she created a ruckus about a strange male in the women’s quarters” (102). Anticipating the future like Amma Sain, Heer “kissed them hard and loud whenever [she] snatch a moment away from [her] never-ending duties.” She blurts out: “I longed to watch them grow, hear their first words, help them with their first steps, but it never happened.” (102) Mothers here are generally not allowed to bring up their children; especially male children. Guppi became her mate and strength with whom she could share her emotions but never Chhote Sain or Rajaji.

The elder son Chhote Sain is beaten excessively by Pir Sain - the father - for a false accusation of raping Yathimri. After the torturous beating, he becomes totally quiet and spends entire days in isolation under a tree. He resembles with learned Babaji; a man with miracles in family history. The only time when he smiles and plays is when Heer's daughter his sister gives birth to a child. A day comes with the news of his death with the reason of snake biting. Pir Sain remains unexpressive and solemn on his son's death. Rajaji, the younger son is a photocopy of Pir Sain who falls in love with a girl called Maharani. This girl is called to be given by his extensive prayers to an infertile couple. But the truth behind the so-called miracle of Pir Sain is horrible. He himself had given some intoxication to the mother of Maharani and had penetrated her. The infertile woman had conceived and thus, biologically Rajaji was this girl's brother with the same bloodline. Knowing the fact, Pir Sain restricts him for marrying while the son as unyielding as him tries all the possibilities to marry his own
sister by another woman. After murdering her husband, Rajaji ties a knot of marriage with her. Heer describes:

Maharani became pregnant and my son, who had activated this rot, now asked himself a delayed question. Was he to become a father or an uncle? When the heinous sin turned in his brain like a worm, he screamed and shouted his wife away, and drank himself out of the horrendous reality. When that did not help, he tried to escape into the arms of every young maidservant he laid his eyes on. Or else, he locked himself up and abused his mother and his wife at the top of his voice… (211)

Ultimately, Rajaji turns out to be another Pir Sain. He inherits cruelty, lust and the patriarchal attitude from his father. Heer suffers emotionally because of two extremely opposite sons.

**Style and Technique in Blasphemy**

Literarily, the novel is full of metaphors, similes and clichés. The story of the novel is conveyed through flashbacks which comprise several years of Heer's life. Stories are told and retold in bits and pieces by the protagonist with her point of view. Very often, verbosity and exaggeration can be seen as a tool to make readers more empathetic with characters and their circumstances; their helplessness and suffering. The supernatural elements, suspense and thriller are used to grip the readers’ nerves. Heer experiences the spirit of Toti in mysterious and thrilling ways. The spirit of Toti visits the Haveli but is seen by Heer only. She describes her first appearance:

A fly froze with its wings spread out. An old woman I had never seen before touched her hands to her forehead, touched my feet with them, and settled on the floor. … She was strange. I could not tell whether she was sixteen or over a hundred years old. Her hair was silver, her face unwrinkled, and her eyes bright. Standing, her body bent double, sitting, she was almost invisible. Her faded clothes had patches that made her look like everyone else and yet, there was a difference. It was an absence of fear. (84-85)
Toti like an accomplished storyteller reveals her own story of injustice, secret behind the shrine, Babaji a true Pir and his devoted life to Islam, Pir Sain's sins and other maidservants' mysterious disappearance etc. On knowing that Toti died before fifty years, Heer is startled to the core while Dai furiously starts protecting Heer with taaviz, (amulets) dum water (after reciting verses from the Quran, air is blown on the water from that mouth) and sacred breath on her by saying that “every winter she returns to seduce those of weak faith” (98). Dai explains Toti’s story with a very different angle; the angle of oppressors. She was called Budrung means ugly as she had some allergic skin disease all over her face and body. None was ready to marry her and hence she became a burden to her father. A young, strong Baluch man from mountains came to the village and his presence mysteriously cured Budrung’s disease. They were about to get married, but Pir Third suspected him for being a thief and wanted to have access to their area and thus marrying this ugly girl; he was beaten to death by whips of khajji and “crushed chilli into his rectum... thrashed about with hundreds of red insects that infest the cotton crop running amok on his wounds and stinging like wasps” (99). Toti tried to save him but she was also beaten to death by Pir’s men. She was called a blasphemer because she fell in love with a stranger because she tried to save her man from the grip of Pir's men because she raised her voice against authority. Her unfulfilled desires for love lead her towards death. But for the Pir family; it’s sheer blasphemy. Heer is on the right path when she says: “I wondered how a great religion could be destroyed at the hands of a hapless girl craving love. I also wondered why the people did not see the Holy Book burning in the hands of their pir and shuddered at my own association with the Shrine” (101).

What is Blasphemy?

The title of the novel Blasphemy is ironically used to show the fallacy in Islam which is practised versus Islam which ought to be followed. Sacrilege is actually committed by these so-called protectors of Islam in the disguise of Pir-Mullah avatar. To love and to be loved - is never a blasphemy never anti-Islamic. Surprisingly, how can Muslims forget that “at the beginning of the Hejira”, their beloved “Prophet could be a lover and a leader hostile to all hierarchies, when women had their place as unquestioned partners in a revolution”? (Mernissi 10-11) How does loving someone
become blasphemy in Islam? What is blasphemy and who are blasphemers here? Is killing any innocent blasphemy? Is disrespecting and beating women blasphemy? Is raping and crushing helpless teenager blasphemy? Is doing injustice to innocent people blasphemy? Is having a lust for power is blasphemy? Pir Sain under the chaddar embroidered with ninety-nine names of Allah executes all the blasphemous deeds. Profanity is practiced by the religious leaders in the name of serving God. But they are never punished for their hidden sins. Wadud puts the issue of being called a blasphemer in a suggestive way:

Sometimes such charges (being called a blasphemer) push people out of the pro-faith perspective and oblige them to take up secular western articulations of human rights or social justice…. The implication is that for any who wish to be accepted as truly Muslim, their struggles cannot go beyond established patriarchy or male authorities, otherwise, they face the potential consequence of being labeled outsider to Islam. ("Inside the Gender" 4)

Progressive and intellectual believers often become soft targets of fanatics who label them as blasphemers. Tehmina Durrani, too, has been tagged as one for her writing My Feudal Lord and then the novel Blasphemy. South Asian countries showcase this attitude towards Muslim women fighting against subjugation. They are often called outsiders who are unknown and ignorant of their religion; supporting western culture and female rights. In the novel, the characters are villagers and obsessed with superstitions. The character of Sakhi baba is that of a blasphemer who rejected the Shrine and its authority over their lives. When Sakhi baba’s house is on fire, Dai clarifies that:

Every person living in the vicinity of the Shrine is bound to observe a demeanour of respect for it. Whenever somebody has broken that rule, sooner or later he has faced a terrible catastrophe. If the common folks are not punished for blaspheming, the power of the Shrine will diminish. (149-150)

Heer tries to reason out by saying that “but blasphemy is about defiling the faith, the Prophet, his companions and Allah, not other people” (150). The reasoned argument
is outright rejected as they equate themselves with the supreme power, i.e., Allah. The most difficult task is to change such authoritative systems but how to change seems much more difficult task here in this scenario.

**Reformist Agendas vs. Rebellious Actions**

To change or alter such patriarchal systems, progressive liberals who want to fight back but at the same time want to be accepted by the patriarchal systems take the path of reforms with many precursors and do not rebel against the persisting system of belief. But do reforms cater to the need of urgency? Do the reformative agendas serve the purpose effectively and timely? The answers negate the possibility of sudden and effective changes in the context of the novel. Thus, the rebels instead of reforms are thought to be required with forceful executions here. In the novel, the protagonist comes to a realization that surrendering to Pir Sain's heinous demands and helping in his crimes is blasphemy. She prays to Allah after every sin she commits. But finally, she attains courage with the help of few confidantes mainly maidservants to go beyond the periphery of this vicious circle.

Pir Sain is always lust ridden and violent against poor and powerless people especially women. “The room reeked of a stale mixture of semen, alcohol and musk” all the time. (138) Heer contemplates that for demolishing his kingdom of crimes, reformative agendas cannot work and “rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God”, said William Penn (1644-1718). The final solution remains the murder of Pir Sain. Heer and maidservants like Cheel, Tara, Kaali, Yathimri and Toti, after extreme pain and suffering, all rebels in a distinct way. Though Yathimri and Cheel are seen as confidante to Pir Sain; they too are mere byproducts of his brutality in disguise. Heer realizes this fact after Pir Sain’s murder. Like Toti’s spirit, Heer experiences someone tall in a white robe in the shrine. The novel exhibits another strong supernatural element after Toti’s subplot. When Heer stops dreaming of freedom and life outside Haveli, Rajaji - her younger son gives a ray of hope for freedom by a clue of Pir’s death. The women under his power had to rebel at a certain juncture of their suffering. The robed figure disappeared after instructing Heer what to do and how to react to the situation of Pir’s murder.
On the decided night, Heer remains restless and anxious; anticipating the dangers behind the murder and the consequences. With her shivering body, she avoids witnessing the action as instructed by the robed figure. The first chapter of the novel puts readers in a suspenseful thrilling situation with the details of post-death scenes of Pir Sain. It becomes necessary to know “what happened before this happened” (19) while in chapter 11 “In the Name of Allah”, it describes what happened after this happened. Yathimri reveals a fact that Pir Sain was murdered by Cheel. The most devoted, silent and obedient maid servant Cheel had murdered Pir Sain who later on murdered Yathimri too. Many murders and extreme violence make the novel unbearably disturbing. But by murdering Pir Sain, Heer’s undying desire for freedom is not rewarded with peace nor is rewarded by demolishing his false image. In fact, the prestige Pir Sain acquired remains untouched and rather it becomes more prestigious. Heer thinks that the truth behind the shrine and the falsity of Pir should be exposed at any cost as his death is not paying justice to the cause. What Quran suggests in Surah al-Nisa is appropriately what Heer executes later in the novel: “O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor…” (Sahih International 4:135) For Heer “burying the evil and preserving [my] reputation meant preserving the evil. No exposure meant maintaining the status quo. That meant no change”. (208-209) At the cost of her own image and dignity, Heer decides to see those men who exploited her body “as Piyari, a whore from the city” (198) – introduced by Pir. There is one last hope for Heer in the form of Tara- a courageous maidservant whom she says: “The Shrine is a symbol of all exploitation. If men can use Allah against the weak, all other means are lesser and easier to exploit. If we make a war against this Shrine, every truth will be served”. (196) Tara is also a physically abused victim of Pir Sain’s lust. Anyways, Hero number one and then many were approached personally through the back door during midnights with video films. Heer reveals the truth by saying that “I am not Piyari. I am Heer, Pir Sain’s wife. Rajaji’s mother. When last we met, you did not lose faith in your pir. Lose it now.” (196)
‘Shattering the Myth’

Heer’s attempts to shatter the myth behind Shrine shatter her image completely amongst all the villagers and Rajaji. Pir Sain is nowhere to be seen in those video films while Heer as Piyari is everywhere involved in pornographic activities with strangers. Disgrace falls on Heer only and not upon the Shrine. Rajaji’s wrath resembles that of Pir Sain’s now shouting with the same wrath:

My father did not parade you naked in the street and introduce you as my mother. Whatever his ailment, he kept it away from us. He did not throw his filth at his descendants. He behaved selfishly only with you. You have been selfish with all of us. I will protect my heirs from your shadow. … Your accomplice, the whore, (Tara) is dead… Before dying, she disclosed all. I know how to make a woman talk. (210)

Heartbroken and tormented Heer understands that the satanic chain grows from generation to generation. Evil grows out of evil here. A woman’s crime is punishable while a man’s is not even mentionable before all. In a rage, Rajaji and his uncles, decide Heer be locked up in a room and declared her as mad. Ali and Gavino (2008) aptly put the scenario amongst rural areas which are shown in the novel keenly:

Unfortunately, Pakistani and Indian [Muslim] societies still run on tribal and feudal system and the majority of the population lives under rural and feudal control. … Some tribal societies consider women as the source of all evils and men are not mentioned in any evil doing…. In such societies, women's personality is determined by the man's wishes. If she is non-compliant and rebellious, she is punished through beatings, isolation, virtual imprisonment and sometimes murdered. (202)

Heer becomes an isolated individual locked in a room. In constant search of freedom, love and respect, Heer, with final hope, approaches Dai for sending letters to Ranjha for the meeting. Day by day, Heer’s depression grows into strange nauseated madness wherein she writes letters to Ranjha and then replies back to herself as Ranjha. Heer soothes her craving self psychologically perhaps with a heap of letters by herself as Ranjha. But her craving for real love is never fulfilled. After tremendous
unsuccessful efforts to convey her messages to Ranjha, Heer writes back to her as Ranjha:

My dearest Heer,

I cannot meet you at the cost of your life. It is such a selfish desire that it mars the purity of my love. Your life is under threat. You challenge the Shrine. You break their epitaphs and chop the hands that rise before the graves of mad men. The matter is not a simple domestic one. You did not understand the consequences of taking on the devil in his private domain and as a member of his hell….

Nothing can change our circumstances.

Except, if you become someone else…

If you become someone else…

Someone else… (222)

Heer, after all, becomes ‘someone else' in her search for freedom, love and self-respect. Shocking and aghast, readers are face to face with another triumphant literary excellence of Durrani when Heer explains her experiences after her physical death. Scientifically, the NDEs (Near Death Experiences) recorded by leading scientists and researchers attest what Heer experiences during her last few moments. “The system emits certain psychoactive chemicals upon death, and that these bring about the NDE symptoms”. (Barron “Brain functions”) Heer writes:

A needle pricked me. … I was swelling or stretching or solid or condensed. … Guppi covered her face with her hands and cried. More sobbing came from another direction. I wanted to turn to the sound, but could not. … My head was dizzy, my vision swayed,… Nanni pulled off my clothes. I slipped. They screamed. I was lying on a choki. It was my last bath. They rubbed soap, poured water, and chanted prayers. Cotton wool filled my mouth. A bandage braced my face. A sheet went over my head. … I looked up into the sky, at Baba smiling down at me, his face appearing and disappearing like a mist. At last, he had come. (222-227)
The novel, painstakingly, maps Heer’s psychological and physical perseverance keenly. Heer emerges as a tolerant, brave and cathartic main character of the novel. Not only her patriarch husband and Pir family, her own son and women around do not support her cause and rebellious actions. Although the epilogue stunningly set the entire novel as a rebellious conquest; Heer as a manifestation of suffering cannot survive to see the light of the revolution.

Conclusion

Arguably, there are two possible ends to this open-ended novel on the basis of epilogue one year later. A woman “concealed under a white shuttlecock burqa” (229) does not reveal her identity in the epilogue. First inference suggests that the narrator who stands before a tomb-stone that read ‘HEER’ is real Heer herself as at the time of death scene, Heer’s mother requests Rajaji to declare her as dead on their mosque’s loudspeakers but asks him to take Heer with them at their place to revitalize her from shock, humiliation and virtual madness. After coming home, she might have become ‘someone else’ to reunite with Ranjha and establish herself as a believing woman. During the gap of a year, Heer along with Ranjha might have spread the truth of Pir Sain as in epilogue, the woman worships: “O Allah, bless this soul [of Heer] for exposing the decadence of Shrine-worship. Bless her for bringing us closer to you” (229) Second possible inference says that Heer dies and is buried in her own village where Ranjha stays with his sister, a friend to Heer. Dai met him with Heer’s letter once which signifies that he might have revealed her real self before the villagers later on. Epilogue might have the direct voice of Ranjha’s sister or wife in shuttlecock burqa.

The events in the novel have many gloomy and heartbreaking plots and subplots interwoven with each other. Tehmina Durrani presents a real story in a fictional way. The female Muslim characters from different classes are aware of their subjugation in the name of Allah, but they do not oppose the authority. The prime reason for suffering without voice is that of physical violence infliction by men on women. Financial dependence on male members, lack of education and religious knowledge lead women towards a bleak future. Niaz, in context to South Asian countries (2003), says:
The family structure, in which the man is the undisputed ruler of the household, and activities within the family are seen as private, allows violence to occur at home. As well as traditional forms of violence such as wife-battering and sexual assault, women in the purposes of prostitution, and “honour killings”. Laws permit discrimination against women and discourage reporting of violent acts. (173)

The novel exhibits the fact that there is no law persisting in Pakistan’s villages except the laws created by religious leaders for their personal gains. The novel firmly supports Zaheer’s suggestion in *Denied by Allah* that “religious beliefs need to be segregated from law” (Author’s Note). When economic independence and religious knowledge mingle together, only then the real emancipation of women can be dreamt of. Islamic feminism as a discourse is constantly seen in Heer’s approach wherein she clearly refers to Quranic knowledge and defy man-worshiping / Pir worshiping as an idol. “The murder of my husband was a *jehad*. I had broken an idol. He was an impostor” (192), asserts Heer. Here, *Jehad* (Jihad) does not stand for “holy war” as it’s a “misconception of the west”; it suggests "struggle" or "effort" in the Arabic language. (Skinner 2) When Prophet Mohammed was in quest of creating “a just egalitarian society, where poor and vulnerable people were treated with respect”, (Armstrong 37) the word Jehad was mentioned in the Quran for the first time. Heer is neither at war with non-Muslims nor with Pir Sain. She is at war with a patriarchal system which nibbles the real Islam. Canadian-Pakistani broadcaster, activist and secular liberal Tarek Fatah points out: "The poison is not coming from the Quran, but from the man-made shariah laws of the 8th and 9th centuries.” (Fateh “The Question”) The question lies in the patriarchal interpretations and imposition of Shariah in the strictest ways. Whether it was Zia’s regime or Ayub’s or Bhutto’s, women in Pakistan have sought to achieve freedom from the shackles of patriarchy with variety of means. Religion as a base to fight with extremists requires knowledge and critical thinking to understand the conspiracy of men over religion. All the decades after independence in Pakistan have witnessed strong Islamic feminists and their undying battle against fundamentalists. It is believed that by early 1980s a debate on Islam and women’s rights had already begun and Rayhana Firdaus, a female Islamic scholar dared to publish her two-part article in English newspaper *Dawn* that “in the eyes of God and
in the eyes of the Quran the personality and status of women in Muslim Society are exactly the same as those of man” (Mumtaz & Shaheed 72).

To achieve equality, one has to raise voice and to raise voice, sacrifice is needed. Heer sacrifices her self-esteem and respect in order to reveal the truth behind the falsity of the Shrine. In her quest to establish a paak (pious) land, she questions the patriarchy; she revisits the past; she capitulates herself for future. This real story of a Pakistani village girl suggests that there is a dire need of examining religious authorities to give voice to unheard Muslim women suffering in the name of Allah. It is true to assert that

If after independence, upper class urban women appeared to be making great strides forward, the majority of Pakistani women remained tied to ‘traditional’ culture in the rural areas. Cut off from the dynamic forces operating in the urban centers, and built around a feudal or tribal structure, rural culture remained firmly rooted in traditional customs and modes. (Mumtaz and Shaheed 157)

Rural girl Heer’s life becomes extremely pathetic but as her gender equates helplessness, she takes up the arms of rebellion. Her gender imprisoned her into fragile physical and mental state. Thus it is significant to reexamine the gender question in the context of Islam and its stringent approaches towards women. Power politically corrupt religion has to be learned, unlearned and relearned to establish facts and reality.


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