CHAPTER V
Chapter V

Cutting Free: An Extraordinary Memoir of a Hapless Victim of Circumstances

Following the theoretical position adopted earlier and problematising women's writing of autobiography, the present chapter examines Salma Ahmed's autobiography, Cutting Free: An Extraordinary Memoir of a Pakistani Woman.

Published in 2002, Cutting Free is truly an inspiring story of Salma Ahmed—a woman from Pakistan who surmounted formidable odds to achieve extraordinary success in business and politics. The saga of her personal life, often difficult and sad, is intertwined with an equally enthralling account of a public career that brought her much acclaim and reward. This book is the absorbing tale of a woman who was a pampered child, an unhappy wife and a repentant mother. In this strikingly honest and candid account, Salma talks about her three marriages—to a naval officer, to a scion of a leading feudal family, and to a cricketer—her conflicts as a mother as she makes the agonising decision to give up two of her six children, and her efforts to build a career as a business entrepreneur and political figure in an emerging Pakistan. As she recounts the events of a life filled with dramatic highs and equally painful lows, she does not spare herself any more than she does other players in her story. This is a book that unabashedly reveals many of the hidden taboos of contemporary Pakistani society, bringing into question customs that are an integral part of sub-continental culture.

Salma Ahmed —Eny to family and friends—was born in Cambridge, UK on Friday, 10th September 1941. She started her business career as a young woman, and set up her first industry in 1967. The high point in her career was the remarkable success she achieved in ship breaking. It remains her proud achievement to have been the first woman ever to have done this. She is the winner of the prestigious Priyadarshini Award for being Pakistan's most successful woman as the entrepreneur in the fifty years since independence (1947-1997). Salma worked with selfless zeal for the rehabilitation of displaced Pakistanis from Bangladesh. She later entered politics and joined the All-Pakistan Muslim League in 1977. She was appointed as a member of the party's Central Working Committee and was MLA from 1985 to 1988. Begum Salma Ahmed's own grit and her determination to get the women out of their shells, especially in the sub-
continent, truly set her apart from many women of her generation. Based in Karachi, Salma Ahmed became the Founder-President of Pakistan Association of Women Entrepreneurs (PAWE) and was the first President of the International Federation of Women Entrepreneurs (IFWE). She is also the President of the Women’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry (WCCI) which happens to be the third country in the SAARC to have a Women’s Chamber of Commerce after Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Salma Ahmed wrote her autobiography *Cutting Free: An Extraordinary Memoir of a Pakistani Woman* in 2002 in loving memory of her beloved daughter Bina. Her autobiography entails a candid view of all the dramatic turns she had in her life. It is an emotional recapturing of the past, bringing to life people and places long buried in the mind. The book is Salma Ahmed’s cathartic work, a release from the bondage. She breaks her silence with a series of flashbacks, her pampered and charmed childhood, involving her parents, siblings and a host of other relatives.

In her autobiography, Salma gives an account of male abuse. All three of Salma’s husbands are cut from the same cloth as Duranni’s Gulam Mustafa Khar. Her first husband is exploitative of his wife’s privileged position in the society as the daughter of Syed Akhtar Husain, a Pakistani diplomat; the second husband is an arrogant nawab, and the third, a cricketer, is inherently temperamental and brutal. ‘Cutting Free’ from what? In a woman’s autobiography, it will not be too difficult to hazard a guess: from male injustices meted out to women by the Islamic patriarchy and their shame of living in the Islamic society. Like Tehmina Durani, Salma Ahmed talks openly about her childhood, adolescence, marriages and her subsequent position as an entrepreneur and a member of the Pakistani Muslim League. With it, she exposes the hypocrisy of Islamic customs, the cronyism of Pakistani politics and the accompanying gender bias. She exposes this as her suppressed silence breaks. She is unable to accept unquestioning injustice which is a part of her daily life. It is mostly seen in the woman who has a mind of her own and finds it difficult to lead a resigned life of silence. She becomes aware of an identity of her own, free from the stereotyped roles of daughter, sister, wife or mother; she breaks her silence and re-organizes her life differently.

*Cutting Free* is interspersed with striking anecdotes which reveal what can only be described as the miserable life of the contemporary Pakistani society. Salma Ahmed’s painful personal life, recounted in graphic details, must bring into question many of the customs that are an integral part of sub-continental culture. It was her
mother who ingrained in her the idea of financial independence. The advice her mother gave her to live with the economic autonomy is the symbol of the changing scenario of a modern woman. Her mother said, “We can’t change society and we can’t change women. Women have to change themselves” (9). That is why Salma Ahmed opened the Women’s Chamber. She says, “By opening a women’s chamber we don’t mean segregation. We need autonomy. This is being felt in Bangladesh and in India and in Pakistan” (Ibid).

As Tandon rightly points out:

Feminism has always meant independence of mind and spirit and body. Feminist effort to end patriarchal domination should be of primary concern precisely because it insists on the eradication of exploitation and oppression in the family context and in all other intimate relationships. (23)

This statement sounds true when we study Salma Ahmed’s autobiography. As the first woman entrepreneur of Pakistan, she has laid bare the story of a life that began in a privileged home before partition, continued thereafter in the elite Pakistani society. By the time Salma was just 22, she was into her third abusive marriage and had three children. After Suicide attempts and bitter tears, the indomitable spirit seems to raise her again. She is partying, hobnobbing with the family of the Shah of Iran, with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, with Zia-ul-Haq, with Indira Gandhi and with Rajiv Gandhi. She learns the rules of starting an industry from the scratch and rises to be recognized as the most successful woman industrialist of the country.

But all the while there is an underlying current in her life of pain and fear. It scalds the imagination to know that a woman who has successfully taken on the male bastion of entrepreneurship should attempt to arrange for a girl to satisfy her husband and bear him a son, knowing that otherwise he will take another wife. Later on, she blossomed into one of Pakistan’s earliest woman entrepreneurs and went on to receive Priyadarshini Award. She pioneered the ship-breaking industry in Pakistan, and thus, became the first woman in the world to do so. She went on to become a parliament member.

In Salma Ahmed’s story of tumult and triumph, one can find wisdom distilled through a life of uncommon struggle. Salma Ahmed’s gripping narration of her political career is fast-paced and often amusing. The book relates the events of the 1985 assembly which no other author has yet commented on. Her interaction with the late
President Zia-ul-Haq and Prime Minister Mohammad Khan Junejo, MQM leader Altaf Hussain, the charismatic Pir Sahib Pagaro, and several others, gave her a unique opportunity to witness first-hand the intrigue, power plays and unfolding drama of Pakistani politics. Her frequent visits to India brought her into contact with Indira Gandhi, her son Rajiv, and many other leading figures of the sub-continent. It is customary for those at the top to face their exile alone. Being a woman in power, Salma was often mocked and scorned by men and women alike. Despite this, she has had a very exciting time as an industrialist. She owns a ship-breaking industry and a cement unit, a livestock farm and has set up a plant for edible oil. "I have enjoyed my businesses thoroughly, even though when I stepped out for the first time 30 years ago, I didn't even have work clothes. I used to wear chiffon saris," she recalls (Preface).

Begum Salma Ahmed has a decent family background. Her father, Syed Akhtar Husain was a civil servant and worked as an ambassador to Italy, Russia, Iran, Algeria and Austria. After opting for Pakistan, Akhtar Husain transferred to the Foreign Service, and following a distinguished career spanning over two decades, retired as one of Pakistan's senior-most diplomats. Salma’s mother, Zakia Husain, belonged to an eminent landed family in the Uttar Pradesh (India). Most of her education has been abroad. In the Acknowledgements of the autobiography, Salma thanks her whole family:

My mother, for her unconditional love and unstinted support, my father, for being my greatest source of inspiration, and for retaining faith in me despite everything, my brother Akku, for always being there for me, my aunt Razia and uncle Shahzad, for not letting me stumble in some of my darkest hours, my beloved children-daughters Fawzia and Sheba, and sons Chou Chou, Bunty and Farru Baba - for not judging me harshly despite the fact that I gave them ample reason to do so. (ix)

She also acknowledges the contribution of friends and relatives:

Ahmed Altaf, a friend for a lifetime whose support lasted even in the most trying circumstances. Jamil Nishtar, for his extraordinary help and encouragement. He was my guardian angel, and a pillar of strength. Syed Saeed Jafri, my father's dear friend, without whose kindness I might never have launched my business career. Pir Iqbal Nizami of Dargah Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia, for being my duagoh. Pir Sahib Pagara, to whom I owe my political career. Yunus Sahib, for his long and loyal service, and Mahmud Mian, for his patient and
tireless effort in typing the script...Hasan Pervez, who edited this book with diligence and empathy, and made it more readable. (ix-x)

The book is Salma Ahmed's cathartic work, a release from bondage. She breaks her silence with a series of flashbacks from her pampered and charmed childhood, involving her parents, siblings and a host of other relatives. It is an emotional recapturing of the past, bringing to life people and places long buried in the mind. At a young age, Salma marries Fazil Janjua, a marriage which is a trap from the very outset, possibly because Fazil expects her to 'amuse' one of his friends, but also, one concludes, because his position in life does not offer the extravaganza Salma is used to. While married to him, Salma recounts her affair with Cheemi, for whom she eventually leaves her first husband and son and with whom she has an endless honeymoon in Europe, enjoying ballets, races, operas and theatres, following the pattern of the lives of women of leisure. But soon, she sees his dark side when he punishes her for dancing with another man. She recounts:

Cheemi dragged me by my hair to my room. He took out a pair of scissors as I looked on, faint with fear. Taking hold of my hair, he started cutting it. I thought that he would not only chop off my hair, but perhaps, also my nose, which is the traditional way of treating a woman who is supposed to have sinned. (28)

As Tandon rightly pointes out, "The oppression of women is not only a material reality, originating in economic conditions, but also a psychological phenomenon—how man and woman perceive one another" (23). Although the reasons for Salma's failed marriages is unclear and the violence of her husbands inexplicable, her story is simple and straightforward. It carries a message for Pakistani women to learn from the struggles of professionals like her and change society for the better by fighting for their rights. As other women play a role of a daughter, a wife, a sister etc., Salma too played such roles with different feelings. It was her loving daughter to whom Salma Ahmed dedicated her book with great affection. Salma writes in the opening lines of her Preface, "It didn't occur to me that one day I would write a book. The four-year process started in 1999, after my world came crashing down on me when I lost my eldest daughter, Bina. ...I became convinced that to recount my side of the tale was a duty I owed to myself and those whom I love" (xi). She adds, "My child didn't live long
enough to savour the joy of seeing her wish fulfilled, but this book and the tears that I have shed in writing it, is dedicated to her with all my love” (Ibid).

*Cutting Free* contains 36 chapters having in all 262 pages. In the first chapter titled ‘From India to Pakistan’, Salma Ahmed writes about the nostalgic feeling of her own experiences of her childhood days in India with her parents. She tells in all ten experiences of her childhood and how she was a beloved daughter of her father. Her father was the District Magistrate at Saharanpur, a member of the coveted Indian Civil Services (ICS). Her mother came from a feudal family in Moradabad, her ancestral village being Mankula in UP. Salma writes: "I have some brief memory flashes of the place I thought was home. Little did I know then that I would grow up in another country, so different from the familiar surroundings I knew and loved. Nostalgia haunts me even today” (2).

Salma was born Indira Salma Husain on Friday, 10 September at Granchester Hospital, Granchester Meadows, Cambridge. Salma was the first child who was born in those pre-partition days. To be born in England was considered a special privilege. After her birth, her parents brought her back to India. Salma writes about the earliest memory,

> My earliest memory is of my father's house in Ajmer. I have fallen in a lotus pond, and I am drowning; water is going into my eyes and nose. I have been pulled out of the pond. I can still breathe; I am breathing. There is a cut on my head and that is oozing blood....My father is shouting, berating the servants. He picks me up in his arms. We are in a jeep, and I am sitting in his lap. (Ibid)

When her father was the Deputy Commissioner in Bahraich (UP), the local Maharaja used to arrange the *shikars*. Salma always accompanied her father. Salma remembers her mother as a gentle and gracious woman, a devoted wife, and a loving lady at all times. Salma admits that she is lucky to have her as a mother. Salma describes her childhood days in Ajmer where her father was the Deputy Commissioner. She tells about her brother, Akkoo's birth when the sweetmeats were distributed. Then she recounts a symbolic incident in Mankula. An old oak that has stood for centuries in the courtyard starts shuddering in the strong wind and the next morning they learn that the giant tree has fallen ripping the earth from under it. She writes, "It was June 1947; India was partitioned soon after, in August 1947. Ominous portents!" (6)
The second chapter is entitled as ‘Early Years’ in which Salma Ahmed recounts her early years of her childhood days in Pakistan (Karachi). She says, "These are just shadowy hotchpotch memories—nothing emerges clearly" (8).

As there was the time of Partition, she writes, "Relatives started to flow in from India" (Ibid) and at one time, all her four uncles, her grandmother, her mother’s aunt and uncle managed to live with them in the tiny flat. Then she and her sister were admitted to St. Joseph's Convent School in Karachi. She was in the second standard. In the school she made friends for a lifetime. There were mainly daughters of bureaucrats, but what they shared most was living through those early years of Pakistan. Salma writes, 

Something that struck me even then was that our dresses were simpler than those of the other girls. We wore cottons whereas they wore silks, even to school. Then a uniform was enforced and we didn't feel the difference so acutely. We would take a bus from the road opposite our house and we all felt equal to each other. (8-9)

Salma states that her mother did not approve of her wandering around in the evenings on cycles. Sometimes she would play cricket, and sometimes just walk with the boys living in the neighbourhood. She also felt that they were gradually becoming aware of the pecking order of the bureaucratic hierarchy. Her father was senior joint secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They would get invited to parties given by children of senior politicians and government officials—the sons of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, daughters of the foreign secretary, children of Gulam Mohammad (later the Governor General), daughter of Choudhry Mohammad Ali (later the Prime Minister of Pakistan), and many others. Salma writes,

Such occasions were considered routine, and part of the normal social pattern. There was a complete absence of the so-called 'VIP culture' that prevails today - the distinction between the 'important' and the 'less important'. One was guided by self-respect, and felt equal to all. We have travelled a long way since then, and have become shallow, and have no real values. (9)

She says that she also had the opportunity of seeing the legendary Quaid-e-Azam, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, on 14th August 1948 when she went with her father to see the Independence Day parade held at the Polo Ground in Karachi. She writes,

The Quaid-e-Azam and his sister, Miss Fatima Jinnah, first drove around the ground in a buggy (a 'Victoria, as it was then called), and then alighted amidst thunderous applause. It was the first time I had seen either of them. After the march past, the governor-general and his sister entered a marquee, where tea had been laid out...
remember Mr. Jinnah patted me on the head. That was the only time I saw him. He was thin and had a perfect posture – a distinguished-looking gentleman with a karakuli cap (now popularly known as the Jinnah cap) and a sherwani. Miss Jinnah looked amazingly like her brother. She was tall and thin, had curly white hair cut fairly short, and was wearing a white dupatta. She was smiling-naturally; it was a great triumph to witness the first anniversary of the birth of a country. The whole place had an air of great joy and happiness. (9-10)

Salma recounts many of her childhood memories. She says that birthday celebrations have always been a ritual in her family. She writes:

Perhaps they were a colonial legacy, especially espoused by those who had served under the British and liked to follow their customs. Mummy usually made a great fuss about celebrating our birthdays... Even today, we celebrate our birthdays and the birthdays of those whom we have befriended. It makes one feel special, at least for a day. I think it is a very beautiful custom bringing with it laughter and joy. (10)

Salma says that in 1950, her parents decided to send her and Minal for further studies to the Convent of Jesus and Mary, a boarding school in Murree, a hill station about 25 km from Islamabad. Her father had been sent as Secretary-General to the first Pakistan delegation to the UN, with Sir Zafarullah Khan, the foreign minister, as its leader and Choudhary Mohammad Ali, the deputy leader. Her father returned and started to point many lapses of which they were not even aware. She writes,

... we were not to slouch while working or sitting, we had to use the correct knife and fork, we had to know how to talk to grown-ups in company and many other such behaviour patterns that he must have observed in American children but of which we were ignorant...No more cricket, no more sports, perhaps a game of Scrabble, but we knew that our father was not happy with our upbringing and manner. Hence, the immediate move to the convent to learn from the nuns how to become ladies. (12)

The second reason for being sent to the boarding to the Murree convent school was that Salma Ahmed's father was posted to London to attend a course at the Imperial Defense College for promotion to the rank of Federal Secretary (he was a senior Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time of Partition). Her experience at this school was good. She met several very interesting girls belonging to different backgrounds, mostly Pathans, sheltered and cloistered in their homes and entering a boarding school for the first time.
Surprisingly, childhood for Salma has often been projected as the happiest of
times in her writing. However, the childhood memories are often secondhand; parents
and grandparents narrate incidents from early life and therefore, what is offered as
recollections of childhood are generally no more that what the writers have heard about
themselves from others. These are then the ‘edited’ versions of childhood memories,
written by adults.

In 1952, her parents had returned to Karachi, her father became the Foreign
Secretary in Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin’s government, and so they left the
school at Murree. Minal went to Grammar School and Salma joined the St. Joseph’s
College. She writes, "I had barely attended college for eight months when preparatory
leave started, and I studied at home for a month. This was the most systematic regime
of study that I had ever followed, with self-discipline and total concentration" (14).

In the third chapter named ‘Italia Bella’, Salma Ahmed describes her
experiences in Italy as her father was posted to Italy. From Cairo they sailed to Naples
and saw the breathtaking beautiful sights of Sorrento and Capri, their first introduction
to Italia Bella. She writes, ‘...the Italian government had sent protocol officers to
receive the Pakistani envoy. My mother was presented bouquets of roses while the
ship’s band played national anthems of both the countries. A very impressive occasion
indeed!’ (16) They left Genoa for Rome, and drove through the beautiful countryside to
reach Via Veneto and the Grand Hotel, where they were to live for four months. The
legation was upgraded to an embassy, and her father became Pakistan’s first
ambassador to Italy.

In Rome, Salma forgot all about her studies and any future plan - life seemed to
stand still. Learning to live in diplomatic circles came easy to her. The dressing up and
never-ending parties were exciting, something she hadn’t known before. She fell in love
for the first time. He was a married man, ten years older. She started to believe that she
was beautiful, and life was a headlong rush in the ‘eternal’ city. When her parents
discovered her romance she was sent to London with her mother. Her friend was sent
back to the foreign office in disgrace, despite his pleas that he wanted to marry her. Her
mother said, “My daughter will never be a second wife to any man; she has the world at
her feet.” Salma writes, “Were those words, spoken with indignant pride, a challenge to
destiny?” (18)
The purpose of her mother’s trip to London was to look for a suitable husband for her daughter. Salma writes,

I could only idle away my time at Shakespearean theatres, museums, and art galleries, and by visiting other places to educate myself until I met the ‘right’ man. In the meantime, letters sent to me by my friend were destroyed, and his telephone calls intercepted; I thought he had forgotten me. It must have been very painful then but I can’t seem to remember the pain now; it was such a long time ago, and when fresh aches replace the old, the earlier pain tends to ease, finding its own place somewhere in the deep recesses of one’s mind. (Ibid)

Finally her mother found a suitable husband for her. Salma writes, “...and my mother returned triumphantly, fired with missionary zeal to marry me off. I am sure she wished the best for me, but she didn’t know at the time that I was being sent on an adventure from which I would not return unscarred.” (19)

The fourth chapter is entitled as ‘Trapped into Marriage’. Salma Ahmed tells about her marriage with ‘trapped’ gentleman Fazil Janjua. He arrived in Rome on a train. Salma writes,

Throughout our tour to Naples and back ... Although we didn’t have a marvelous time yet it is always nice to visit beautiful places. I had no inkling that something was amiss during the drive back to Rome but on arrival things happened so fast that I was left speechless. The perfidy that was perpetrated on me, with utter duplicity and complete lack of honesty was devastatingly ruthless and cruel. It was a great, great shock! (21)

Salma had no idea of Nayyar Mumani’s intrigue or secret plan. She writes:

I cannot understand what really happened and am at a loss to describe how fast things moved....As for myself, I could not have been more traumatized. I thought I was living through a dreadful nightmare. We were not allowed to speak to each other or talk to anyone else to explain the situation. I was locked in my room and by evening, Muslim members of the diplomatic corps were called in, the Saudi ambassador arranged for a qazi, and there, in our house. I suddenly became Mrs. Mohammad Fazil Janjua. There ended my childhood, my dreams, my hopes, and my education. (21)

Thus her nikah was performed. She writes about her parent’s condition, “My father looked a bit guilty as did my mother but it was a perfect and superbly executed drama” (22). The very next day of her wedding, her husband left for London saying goodbye to her. Mumani also left for London and was a house guest of her husband for the next two months. Salma writes, “Looking back at this traumatic event,
which changed the course of my entire life, I am appalled at my lack of spirit, gumption, and at my foolishness in giving in to my parents in such a manner!” (Ibid)

Salma was displeased about her marriage but her mother was pleased in a manner of speaking and talked of going back to Karachi for the wedding reception. She talked of clothes, jewellery, and other ceremonies. Salma writes,

The innocent girl who had gone to Rome was returning to Karachi a sophisticated young lady. Once back in Karachi, I was happier with my relatives who made such a fuss over me...I begged my aunt (Razia Apa’s mother) to stop the ceremony or to somehow have the reception postponed, but matters were too far gone and beyond anyone’s control. (22)

Arrangements were made of the wedding reception on 25th March 1956, when Salma was only sixteen years old. Her father did not come to the reception. She writes, “...I think my father stayed away because he was mired in guilt for having betrayed me” (Ibid).

After the wedding reception, husband and wife spent a night together at Beach Luxury Hotel. Salma thought it was a terrific night in her life. Salma writes:

The bridal suite awaited my husband and myself. Another drama, another nightmare – it was not me he was touching, it was not me he was undressing. It was so unreal, so painful, so shocking. Virginal blood gushed onto the sheets. It was a night of horror at the Beach Luxury Hotel. As is customary, my relatives came in the morning to take me home. I had been outraged, I felt unclean, sore, and ashamed. What had happened to Eny? What had happened to “I, the Ena, the great’? (22)

The next day was the valima lunch, and all sorts of people started pouring into the house from dawn. After lunch they left for Karachi. Salma writes, “The whole thing was so unreal. From that time on, I became two people – smiling sweetly in outside but suffering inside” (Ibid). These were her miserable feelings which she cannot share with anybody else. After a few days in Karachi, she left for London to live with her husband “...without knowing how to cook, and unable to do any household chores” (24). A month later she learnt that she was pregnant. Salma recalls:

It was a feeling of loathing, of being trapped and it brought me no joy. I started going for routine check-ups to my doctor....my pregnancy was uneventful, and I had an uncomplicated delivery... Being just sixteen, my doctor was very proud of me and brought many people in to see me. I learnt in a mechanical sort of way how to go about handling the baby. (Ibid)
In this way, Salma gave birth to a child at the age of just 16 when she did not know how to handle the baby child.

In chapter 5, ‘Decadent Living’, Salma tells about a strange experience after her marriage of her stay in Karachi with her small baby, where she had no house and a meagre salary of Rs. 100/-. She had no option but to find temporary residence at her grandmother’s house in Garden East. She lived for four months with her mother when her husband had to go to sea. She writes,

.... No money, and no life, I was terrified...I pleaded with my husband to let me join him in Sri Lanka where he would be stationed for one month but he said that it was against the rules...I had not run a home before and neither had I ever lived by myself; living independently was, therefore, a strange new experience for me. We had little or no furniture, only what my mother had given me as part of my dowry, but I moved to PECHS (Pakistan Employees Co-operative Housing Society). (25-26)

Rahim, her old faithful servant along with his wife Bibbi and their five children moved to PECHS with her. Then she met Noorjehan and her brother Yusuf, daughter and son of Ali Mohammad Javeri, a very well-known Bombay jeweler who had a shop on Victoria Road. She started to go to horse races with her newfound friends. She started a social life of sorts, often having dinner at their homes or going out to restaurants. She writes,

Yusuf was lots of fun, freshly back from studies in the United States (Palo Alto), Noorjehan was full of life, seeking adventure and excitement, things that had not been permitted to me, either in my parents’ home or at my husband’s. I started enjoying myself, leaving the baby in the care of servants...It was the beginning of a new life for me, one I could have never dreamt of. (26)

Salma says that she met two gentlemen, Cheemi and Shiny who invited them for dinner that night at Le Gourmet, the best nightclub in town. Naseem Husain nicknamed Cheemi had came to collect her at her house. Salma writes,

“And that is where the Naseem Husain saga began in my life, in my heart” (Ibid).

Naseem Husain/Cheemi was in his thirties, balding but attractive. When they reached the Le Gourmet, they were joined by Noorjehan and Shiny/Captain Shahanshah (a retired army captain) Sultan and his wife Shamim. There was a cabaret which she had seen at first time with a belly dancer gyrating on the floor. The band was too good. Cheemi and she got up to dance. She discovered that he was an excellent dancer. Salma writes,
“From then on we found our rhythm. Dance after dance, we were on the floor. Dance and music had been my childhood passion. As a child, I was often asked to sing. I had learnt classical music from Ustad Umrao Bundu Khan at 3 Bath Island Road and took Indian classical dancing lessons at my friend Naz Ikramullah’s house, where together we learnt the Kathakali. (27)

They were the last to leave the place and Cheemi drove home in his car as she slid in beside him as if it was the most natural thing to do. He asked her how old she was and she replied that she was seventeen. Then he started calling her ‘Baby’ teasingly as he had heard Rahim call her that. And then he offered her the next day lunch. She accepted his invitation and it was decided that he would pick her up by one o’clock. Salma writes,

For the first time since Italy, I felt good, I felt alive, and my interest in life seemed to revive. Of course, Rahim and company frowned in disapproval when they saw me come home so late but I was in no mood to take any notice...It did not make any sense to me, not having met a ‘farmer’ before, but I didn’t ask any questions. I was too caught up in a strange kind of excitement. It was much later that I learnt he was Nawabzada Naseem Husain Qureshi, a scion of one of the most prominent families of Multan. (27-28)

Cheemi then took her home and while dropping told her to be ready at 8 p.m. for a dinner at the Beach Luxury. Salma writes, “I was thrilled. I had forgotten my son, myself, who I was, what I should be doing, and whether it was right or wrong. I was caught in a spell and didn’t want to break it” (28).

The next day she was ready by 8 p.m. quite oblivious of the disapproving stares of the servants. Cheemi came and she was out going with him to the Beach Luxury. Salma writes, “After that evening, we were inseparable. We could not bear to be away from each other even for a moment, and the only time we would part was when he dropped me home to get some sleep” (29).

Then everyday they visited and could go and see his racehorses, to coffee house etc. She met his classmate Sardar Ahmed Nawaz Bugti and Nawab Khair Bux Marri. Khair Bux was very handsome but very silent and Ahmed Nawaz was a lot of fun, laughing and joking all the time and very fond of cabarets and he was also a racehorse owner like Cheemi. Salma writes, “It came as a very rude shock to me that my six-month reprieve was almost over, and that I had a husband somewhere (Ibid).
After two months Fazil came home and then they had shifted to another centrally located flat in an apartment. She introduced Cheemi to Fazil and soon they started going out as a threesome. Salma writes, “Fazil didn’t appear to mind having Cheemi around. Soon Cheemi and I went back to our morning routine and remained out the whole day until Fazil came home. In the evenings, Fazil would sit with us and appeared to enjoy himself, but there was very little or no relationship left between us” (30).

Fazil and Salma were slowly heading towards some sort of confrontation. On one occasion he said to her that a Commodore Rashid would be visiting them that evening in and she should be at home and look after him. Salma wondered what the Commodore might want to speak to her about. In the evening her husband came home with the Commodore and Fazil excused himself and left her alone with Commodore Rashid. He started by sermonizing, telling her that it was not right for me to jeopardize her husband’s promotion by being friends with the Indian air attache’s wife. Salma writes,

He then slowly moved closer and putting his arm round my shoulder said, ‘You are so pretty, why don’t you let me be your sugar-daddy? I will help Fazil get his promotion.’ He moved even closer, and pulled me towards him. I screamed, and pushing him away rushed to the door. The door was locked from the outside. I knew then what Fazil wanted. My screams raised an alarm, and Rahim broke open the door and rushed in. Shouting profanities at Fazil, he pulled me out… Rahim saved me. The Commodore, of course, left in a huff and Fazil was nowhere to be seen. (31)

The same night they were Ahmed’s guests at Le Gourmet, and the usual crowd was present. Fazil came along with Cheemi and Salma. He was heavily drunk. “Suddenly Fazil started to slap me. This was the first time he had ever hit me” (32).

After two weeks Salma’s father came. He got the two of them to talk. Fazil thought they should give it another try but she refused saying, “Daddy, I love Cheemi, and I want to marry him. Besides, I cannot sleep with a man I do not love, or respect, I don’t want anything from him – no mehar (alimony), no child support. I will return his jewellery, and even leave my furniture behind. I will only take the baby; I want nothing, only a divorce” (33). In December, 1958, Fazil and Salma were divorced.

In chapter 6, ‘To Moscow via London’, Salma tells her journey and a stay in Moscow. Salma did odd jobs like evaluating quotations, replying to letters, receiving
guests, making coffee, etc. She received a very paltry income. She placed her son Chou Chou in a day nursery. She would drop him there, but he was always the last child to be picked up and she often found the poor fellow sleeping, waiting for her. She writes, “When I look back at that period, I feel very guilty for being so un-motherly” (35). Her mother was against Chou Chou’s stay with them in Moscow. Finally both went to an adoption centre. While filling the forms the lady asked for the relatives of the boy and her mother said the boy had no relatives but she was only a friend. Salma writes:

It suddenly struck me that the child also had a father, and if I could not do the best by him, I had no right to place him for adoption. At that point I felt that I was all alone, that I had no one to fall back on, and that this was the price I had to pay. I was not a good mother. (35)

Salma was repentant on adopting her child. Then her mother spoke to Fazil and he agreed for taking care of his son and getting him back, but bitter and critical of Salma. Soon thereafter, the child was sent back to his father by air in the company of a family travelling to Pakistan. Salma writes, “I sat at the DSSD office, conscious of the departure time, yet trying to block out my emotions. I could not cry for I was too nervous. But that, too passed, as all things pass – and after that day, I didn’t see my boy again for three years” (Ibid). Then her father came to Moscow to meet Cheemi and asked him about his intentions. Cheemi assured her father that he wanted her to be his wife and his intentions were strictly honourable.

Her father seemed satisfied after having met Cheemi. There was an informal nikah ceremony, after which they rented a flat in Beaufort Gardens, Knightsbridge. All day they would be out. Salma writes, “We had an easy life. Movies, operas, theatre, ballet, restaurants, and the dog races at Wembley and White City” (37).

In chapter 7, ‘Apaji – My Mother-in-Law’, Salma tells about Apaji, Cheemi’s mother and her stay with her mother-in-law. Salama in the opening lines of this chapter, writes about her,

Apaji was a great institution, 5 feet 8 inches tall, very fair, robust, and dressed in bright colours with matching jewellery. I have rarely come across a lady as formidable as Begum Ashiq Husain – my mother-in-law. Widowed at a young age, daughter of Sir Liaquat Hayat, Prime Minister of Patiala State, wife of late Nawab Ashiq Husain Qureshi of Multan. (42)
Apaji welcomed Salma into the house as the younger daughter-in-law. The first thing they had to do was to go through another nikah ceremony as she wanted this done in presence of her. After completing it she took Salma over completely. Salma writes about Apaji,

She had prepared over one hundred outfits for me, some shalwar-kameez suits and some saries. I was given about twelve sets of jewellery. Every day I was decked up like a Christmas tree and told, ‘You will wear this Salma.’ and I had to obey. Even my accessories were chosen for me. My room was beautifully decorated, but I did not have the courage to change a single thing. I was terrified of Apaji. (42)

Salma was required to go to Apaji’s room first thing in the morning to say ‘salaam’ to her, and sit with her for a while before returning to her own room. She had two maidservants – Sharmi Bebe and her daughter Fakhri. Bebe was Cheemi’s doodhma, his foster mother. Salma writes about her, “She loved me, protected me, and looked after me as if I were her child. She told me the ins and outs of the house, of the servants, of the masters and their forbears, the do’s and don’ts, and guided me through life in Lahore” (43).

Salma tells that her life soon settled into a familiar routine – lazy, but with plenty of apparent activity. She remarks:

We would go to Shezan on the Mall for coffee, go to see the horses, attend the races on Sundays, play golf at the Lahore Gymkhana, visit the Punjab Club, and play bridge all the time. We would go to the cabaret at the Falettis Hotel. The Taqu Butts became our good friends, and I grew very fond of Aziz Taqi Butt. She was Pakistan’s tennis champion and her husband was an excellent bridge player, and the head of a multinational firm. We always had friends many years older than me because they were Cheemi’s friends. He knew just about everyone. Ahmed Nawaz Bugti would also come down to Lahore for the racing season. So we had a friend from Karachi and, of course, all the jockeys were our friends. Strange company, strange life, but a lot of activity. (43)

Salma says that they were anxious to get the land affairs sorted out when she was into eight month of pregnancy and had a very critical delivery. She writes, “I can remember the agony to this day. I screamed in pain, and Apaji rushed to get hold of Dr Sami – but he had conveniently left Lahore ...said, ‘The girl will die if we don’t take her to a hospital right away’” (44). Then Salma was taken to the Lady Wellingdon Hospital by Apaji and Dr. Bheek prepared her for a caesarean section. In such agony there was no one who cared around her. Salma writes, “I suddenly felt nauseous...and

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vomited. And, as if by miracle...I was delivered of a beautiful little baby girl....name her Sabina Brown...shortened to Bina" (44). She adds,

I wanted my husband to be by my side ...When he saw the baby, he instantly fell madly in love with her. I do not believe he had ever loved any person in the world more than this little bundle of 7 lbs, a love that never diminished and withstood every hurdle that life presented. It was of secondary importance that Bina had saved the family lands... (44-45)

When Bina and she went home she had a nursery made for her next to her room but Apaji had other plans. Salma writes, “But I didn’t have to do anything for this baby... There was no way I could assert myself in taking care of her. This was not my house, it was not my baby, and I was too foolish and too young to disturb the peace” (45).

While Cheemi and Salma lived with Apaji, Sadiq lived in the White House, their ancestral home in Multan, the Seraiki speaking area of southern Punjab. They came from a well-known feudal family – the Qureshis of Multan. They were also pirs or spiritual leaders, who jointly owned four very large shrines or mazars in Multan, the best-known among them being the mazars of Hazrat Bahauddin Zakaria and Shah Rukn-e-Alam. The shrines were under the control of Cheemi’s ancestors. Later after a family dispute, these were taken over by the father of the late Makhdoom Sajjad Husain Qureshi.

‘Auld Lang Syne’, the next chapter in the autobiography, tells about the family of Cheemi and the misbehavior of Cheemi with Salma. When Cheemi planned a trip to Karachi, Salma insisted him to take her along with him, but he refused her plea. Then his trips to Karachi became frequent. After 18 months persuasion finally he agreed. In Karachi they stayed with a friend, Yusuf Bhabba, in PECHS. Salma writes:

It felt strange... Cheemi was a difficult man to live with. He was very unpredictable and erratic. I did not want my family to see this side of him especially since I already had one broken marriage, but I had no alternative. It was also odd that while at times Cheemi was very extravagant at others he was equally stingy. (50-51)

Once Aziz Sarfraz asked Salma for a dance, but she declined and said that she always had the first dance with her husband. Then Aziz pointed out and said that her husband was already on the floor with Sue Joseph. Sue Joseph later became her friend. She was a beautiful Pathan lady, with whom Cheemi had had a raging affair just before he met Salma. Now Salma realised the bitter truth—
Actually, Cheemi was the ultimate playboy - plenty of money, rugged good looks, no work, total freedom, no liabilities, a good dancer, racehorse owner, and had been single – what more could a woman want? He usually went for married women and swept them off their feet, but when it came to marriage, he would get cold feet. The only single woman he was ever interested in was Nighat Shoaib – Chicky, as she was known. She was destined to marry him much later in life and had the distinction of being his wife for the longest period. But, they had no children.” (51)

Salma was worried about getting late as they had to meet her father, but Cheemi was unconcerned. He had warned her in the car, ‘I will do anything I want tonight, and you are not to stop me.’ Just before midnight, Salma went to the floor with Noor Hayat Noon but before midnight struck Cheemi came and claimed the next dance. After five minutes, Cheemi said, ‘We’re leaving.’ But, they did not leave for the Beach Luxury where her father was waiting, but went straight back to the flat. She writes, “I was petrified. Cheemi locked me in my room, and said, ‘You will get no food for twenty-four hours for misbehaving in public” (52). Salma kept crying, but could not do anything. The next day Cheemi left for Lahore in a huff, without talking to her. Salma remarks, “I felt extremely insecure, not knowing what lay ahead. What had I done that was so terribly wrong?” (Ibid)

The third day Apaji called Salma to Lahore. She said that she had no money and no ticket. Ahmed Nawaz arranged for them to leave in two days. Salma for the first time broke down in front of Ahmed and told him the whole story. He said, “Cheemi has always been like this, unpredictable and erratic. He also has fits of temper, but he has a good heart and you should learn to understand his nature and adapt yourself to his moods” (Ibid). Salma felt good after talking to Ahmed Nawaz. She thought that there was someone who could understand and be kind and sympathetic. Salma writes, “It forged a bond between us and from then on whenever I had trouble with Cheemi I would run to Ahmed with my tale of woe. Many a time I used his shoulder to cry on. This was the beginning of a friendship between us” (53).

Salma tells that Ahmed Nawaz was a man of intellect, who was sensitive, philosophical, and polite. He was a contrast to her husband. Cheemi could never imagine that there would ever be a cause for him to be jealous of Ahmed, and so he was the safest man in his eyes. Thus Salma found a friend to whom she could relate. Ahmed would talk of Cheemi’s childhood and his ancestry, of his father, who was a minister and was assassinated when Cheemi was only 17, also of Sir Sikandar Hayat, Apaji’s
uncle and Chief Minister of the Punjab: of Sir Liaquat Hayat, Apaji’s father; of Sir Rab Nawaz Tiwana, and many other personalities and events. She learnt much about Punjab’s feudal history and its political ramifications from Ahmed.

At the same time she noticed that her relationship with Cheemi was deteriorating. Once, Salma had been at Cheemi’s cousin’s house. Tasneem poisoned the ears of Apaji and told her that Salma was heading for the Falettis. As Salma reached there, she saw Cheemi’s car suddenly come up from behind, driving past her in the driveway of the Falettis, and in a voice like thunder said, ‘Drive home.’ Salma writes:

Cheemi dragged me by my hair to my room ... The door was slammed shut in Ahmed’s face, and Cheemi and I were alone. He did not say a word. He took out a pair of scissors as I looked on faint with fear. Taking hold of my hair, he started cutting it. I thought that he would not only chop off my hair, but perhaps also my nose, which is the traditional way of treating a woman who is supposed to have ‘sinned’. After cutting my hair, he bundled me into his car, drove to the Gymkhana Club, drove around the premises, and returned. (55)

Salma tried to commit suicide by taking tablets of Benzedrine. She informs:

I knew that the bottle had ‘Poison’ written on it. I got up looked for the bottle, and swallowed nearly two hundred tablets. I had no desire to live. Without thinking I kept on swallowing the pills, I think I must have gone to sleep or perhaps I fainted, because next I heard Apaji screaming: ‘Cheemi, take her to Ganga Ram Hospital. We can’t let her die in the house. Hurry, hurry!’” (56)

Cheemi put a blanket over her. Apaji went with them to the hospital. Salma writes, “My stomach was pumped; it was very uncomfortable, but they finally managed to clean it out. Luckily for me I was taken to the hospital in time. The doctors worked all night and some time before dawn broke...” (Ibid).

Next week her mother with Nayyar Mumani arrived and was shocked to see her lying in bed, pale and corpse-like, having lost some 20 pounds. Salma wept and wept and asked her mother to take her home. She hated Lahore. She could not bear to stay there any longer. Her father had been posted to Iran. Her mother begged Cheemi and Apaji to let her take her along, but they were adamant. Then they left for Karachi when Salma was fit to travel. Cheemi took a house in Sharfabad on rent with a few basic bits of furniture. They moved in – Bina, Bebe, Cheemi, a cook and Salma herself. Salma records, “I was like a dead person with no zest for life” (57).
On morning trips into town with Cheemi she started to notice a little boy, standing with a servant close to the Naval Barracks, looking at her and apparently waiting for her car. She recognized him, her son, Chou Chou. She was scared to ask Cheemi to stop the car but the boy was there almost every day. On one afternoon, she passed that way alone and decided to go into the boy’s house. There she found Bundoo, her old servant and Bibbi’s brother. He confirmed her that he was Chou Chou, three and a half years old. He told that Chou Chou did not get enough to eat and was always hungry. Salma gave him some money and said that she would give more if he would look after him well. Salma writes, “Seeing the child made my heart ache, and whenever I would see goodies lying around the house for Bina my thoughts would turn to the little boy who had nothing” (Ibid).

In chapter 9 entitled ‘Tehran’, Salma describes her experiences at Tehran. Salma says that Tehran was beautiful and had the most fabulous and opulent lifestyle. They visited the most beautiful palaces. She made a good amount of observation about Tehran and its people. Her concern over it throws light upon the realities regarding Tehran. Salma writes, “The language, the entertainment—it was all so different from anything I had ever seen, even in Rome and Moscow. The aura of monarchy was so conspicuously evident everywhere” (59). Salma was attending parties and hosting a few of her own. Every time her father had a dinner and she would invite her friends the following day and serve the leftovers. Salma writes, “It was a very carefree and joyous time, free from the bondage of marriage, of motherhood and reality” (60).

Then she left Tehran for Karachi where Cheemi came to receive her and they flew back to Lahore. Aziz was dying with cancer and Salma spent many evenings with her in the hospital narrating tales of Iran, transporting to a different world. During that period Salma became pregnant again but she insisted on having an abortion because Bina was only two years old. Salma writes, “Aziz died. And the best part of Lahore was finished for me. I longed to get back to Karachi. Our marriage was dying although Cheemi made a terrific effort. I had given up—the magic was gone” (Ibid).

Then they left for Karachi, but there were constant arguments, mostly over little things. Cheemi insisted that I go home with him. She did not want to go because she had to fly to Tehran the next day, but her uncle said that that was not proper for her to refuse. Salma writes, “And so I went with him and had to go through the motions of the most meaningless and mechanical sex I had ever experienced” (61). For a while there
was a sort of cold war in the house, but then everything was normalized and there was harmony. Salma writes, "... I had finally decided to ask Cheemi for a divorce" (63). She told all to her mother.

In Chapter 10, 'Stirrings of Motherhood', Salma, a mother, tells about the miseries in her life. When she reached London, Saeed Ahmed asked for her address and she told she would be staying at Malbrook Road in Putney with Shaharyar and her sister. Then the next night Shaharyar had given a dinner for the Pakistani cricket team where Saeed sang a few songs of Mohammad Rafi. He sang the song 'Chaudvin ka chand ho ya aftab ho, job hi ho tum khuda di kasam lajawab ho' pointedly looking at Salma. Salma mentions, "I was quite amused! Our reception at Shaharyar’s house had been quite frosty as both he and my sister did not approve of me then. They knew that I was seeking a divorce, but was unable to go through with it because of the pregnancy" (67).

Salma says that that was a very bad time for her. The family’s obvious displeasure distressed her. But her mother was very good towards her. In her own words, "Mummy...gave me the emotional strength to bear up in those difficult circumstances. She was so wonderfully loving, understanding, tolerant and caring – I have no words to describe how she looked after me then" (68).

On Friday, 5 October 1962, agonizing labour pains started and a baby boy of 8.75 pounds- heavy, with a big head and so beautiful was born. She named him Bunty. Salma writes, "For the first time I felt like a mother. That latent motherhood, lying buried inside me, suddenly emerged as a real and powerful emotion. I marveled at the creature that I had delivered" (70).

Cheemi came the next morning walking in like a wrestler with a threatening posture, he said, 'Why didn't you inform me you were back? I first heard from someone at a party last night that you were back and that you had delivered a son.' Extending his arms towards the baby, he said, 'Come to Pappy, son.' Salma writes,

I was quite surprised at this reaction, but knew fully well what it meant for a feudal to have a male heir. He came again in the evening with clothes for the child, this time in the company of Sadia. She went into raptures over the child. 'Oh, what a lovely baby! He looks just like his father' – pretending as if nothing had happened between Cheemi and myself. (Ibid)
The next day she took the baby and left for her uncle’s house, finding no access to the baby and herself. Cheemi immediately moved at suit in the session’s court for child’s custody. Hafeez Pirzada and Hafeez Memon, prominent lawyers and former friends, represented Cheemi and she engaged an ordinary lawyer, Aia Qureshi. Salma writes,

They got an immediate hearing and, in my condition, I had to climb forty steps to reach the chambers. It was not yet a week since the delivery. The charge was ‘mental torture being caused to the father, by depriving him of the child and of giving the child water instead of breastfeeding him.’ I was appalled. (71)

During the proceedings Bunty started to cry and Salma went behind a curtain to nurse him thereby disproving the whole case. When the matter of maintenance came up Cheemi said he could afford to give only Rs. 500 per month as he had a very meagre income.

At the same time, Saeed started pursuing Salma and invited her to watch the cricket matches. Saeed was from a totally different social background from Salma. This became an embarrassment for Minal and Miyan. Salma writes:

For me, it was quite novel to be close to a man from a different class, a man who had risen from nowhere to become a cricket star...However, he managed to keep his place in the team, batting at number three. Some of his cricket was really quite outstanding and he had no dearth of fans. (68-69)

Cheemi did not want to give her even Rs. 500 a month. He suggested her to sleep with him if she wanted the money. The result was that she did not take any maintenance and paid Bunty’s expenses with whatever little she had left. Her father gave her an allowance. Old Bua looked after Bunty. Cheemi came with a lawyer and said that he prepared papers for their divorce which he wanted her to sign and told her that he intended to remarry her later. She instantly realized he was doing that to satisfy his own notions of feudal ghairat. Salma writes, “No matter how unhappy a marriage is, it’s never easy to go through a divorce. Assailed with self-doubts, and with trepidation in my heart, I signed the papers” (72).

After reckoning the iddat period of four months and ten days, Saeed and Salma set the wedding date for 27 March 1963. On 23 March, President Ayub awarded Saeed the Pride of Performance medal, as he held the record for the fastest 1000 runs in Test Cricket. Salma writes, “My father and mother, as indeed the entire family, were totally
opposed to what they termed a ‘mismatch’, and boycotted the wedding” (72). She adds, “We got married without any support from our families but with a fair amount of publicity because Saeed was a cricketing star and the press was favourable towards him. Other cricket players were also present. Finally married, we went to live in my tiny apartment” (73).

Salma tells how she faced the difficulties in her life. Her life was such a miserable life that one cannot experience. She bewails:

Three marriages and three children by the age of twenty-one – quite a trauma and certainly not what I had bargained for! Life plays strange tricks on one. I have not been able to live down, or indeed justify, these marriages, and have always had to be on the defensive. That in turn has made me aggressive. I don’t wish to be apologetic or to offer explanations, but then people don’t allow anyone to be left in peace. Most fail to realize that odd and bizarre incidents and experiences distort what otherwise might have been normal lives. But, when the challenges of a hard life are faced with strength and determination, they bring out the best in a human being, and so has the case been with me. (73)

Salma writes about Saeed,

I knew Saeed had a bad temper, and was erratic and temperamental, but after marriage I discovered that he was also violent, abusive and moody....I realized in the first month of my marriage that I had made a dreadful mistake, I married Saeed on the rebound, and perhaps the glamour of being married to a popular hero dazzled me. I had known that we came from very different backgrounds, but I had not realized then what a difference this would make. One doesnot make the same mistake three times. One cannot afford to because life is too short. I conceived in the first month of my marriage. I had given no thought to taking precautions, and in hindsight realize I should have waited a while before conceiving. (73-74)

Once her son Bunty started crying when Saeed was about to leave the house to play the cricket match. Saeed became too much erratic. Salma writes,

‘Why the hell doesn’t he stop crying?’ he shouted. And then Saeed gave a vicious slap – the first time I had experienced physical violence from him. He left in that frame of mind. Tears welled up in my eyes, and I thought to myself that it was all over. The marriage I had looked forward to as being different was indeed different, and this was the greatest shock of all. (74)

Salma sent Abdul to bring 5 packets of Soneril sleeping tablets. She told Bua that she had not slept last night, and did not want to answer phone calls, and did not allow anyone to come in. She swallowed 100 tablets and went to sleep. She remained unconscious for a week. Billum saved her life. Salma writes,
I had taken the pills at about 10.30 a.m. She rushed me to the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital but they refused to take me in on the plea that it was a case of attempted suicide. Billium threatened them as her uncle, General Shahid Hamid, was a minister and got them to admit me. My stomach had to be pumped round the clock, drips had to be administered, and I emerged from the coma after seven days. (74-75)

When she came to her consciousness, she asked for Saeed. He arrived with his father who shouted and said that he had taken his son away. Saeed sometimes broke away from his father during the day and came back to the hospital. Salma writes, “I forgave him, and soon thereafter I was allowed to go home. I woe Billum my life, she saved it, for whatever it was worth at that stage, I had even forgotten that I was pregnant. I came back to the flat and life started once again” (75).

When heard about the incident, her mother flew in immediately and stayed with her. She could barely tolerate Saeed, and in turn he was rude and bad-tempered. They kept Bunty out of his way, but to no effect. After a month all kinds of thoughts came in her mind. Salma writes, “I realized yet again that it was not possible for me to live with the mistake I had made in marrying Saeed. I thought I had failed once, but I must try again to put an end to everything” (Ibid).

Salma and Saeed decided to make a new beginning in their life in England. As her pregnancy advanced, their relationship appeared to stabilize even though they had arguments and occasional violence. After the birth of Fawzia, on 24 February 1963, they left for London after a month. She took Bunty with her and also Bua so that she could help her with the children. They had decided to open a restaurant in London, but Saeed got fed up of having nothing to do and decided to go back to Pakistan to play some cricket. Salma writes, “I had a very difficult time on my own, with two children. I went to the employment exchange looking for a job but remained unsuccessful after knocking at several doors” (77).

Salma Ahmed wanted freedom from such patriarchal husband. She insisted on independence of mind and body rather than the capacity for substantive independence. In the words of Barbara Berg:

It is the freedom to decide her own destiny, freedom from sex-determined role; freedom from society’s oppressive restriction; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of woman’s right to individual conscience and judgment. It postulates that women’s essential worth
seems result to from her common humanity and does not depend on the other relationships of her life. (13)

Chapter 11, ‘Test Cricket Down Under’ provides the experiences of Salma’s tour to Australia. The opening paragraph of this chapter tells about their decision after the end of the cricket season:

In October, when the cricket season ended in England, Saeed started getting restless and wanted to leave for Pakistan to make himself available for the Australia and New Zealand series...Saeed tried out for the series and was made vice-captain. He left for Australia, and despite my pleas to be allowed to accompany him, I was left behind in Karachi to look after Fawzia. (78)

Salma made consistent attempts to obtain government permission to join Saeed in Australia and flew to Australia.

In the following chapter—‘The Entrepreneur’—Salma tells about how she indulged in entrepreneurship in business. Saeed’s friend Yusuf told that his National Tyre and Rubber Company was going to establish for production of aprons and cots which were the rubber accessories used in textile machinery and Japan was transferring technology for their manufacture in Pakistan. Uncle Saeed asked to submit a formal application. In the evening she and Yusuf drew up plans. She writes, “I was so excited. A pioneering entrepreneur was born that day – Pakistan’s first woman industrialist” (82).

Salma appointed Saeed, the managing director, Yusuf, the technical director and she as the administrative director and named the company ‘Imperial Rubber Industries Limited’. Then she went to a consultant, a friend of her lawyers. To quote Salma,

Armed with my documents, I went to meet Mr. Usman, the regional manager of IDBP. He gave me a letter containing forty-five queries that I had to answer before the application could be processed. It was my first interview with this gentleman. With a sardonic smile and a sneer he handed me the letter and said, ‘Come back to me in six months time.’(83)

She worked like the possessed one. Finally she had answers to all forty-five queries. And after three days she telephoned Mr. Usman to ask for an appointment and he agreed to see her the next day. She talked about her project and she would need finance and a good bank to back her as she had very little money. She showed the government sanction, and he was very pleased. Salma writes, “From then on he was

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interested in each little detail of my project and every small success of mine meant great
deal to him” (84).

In Chapter 13, ‘In Algiers’, Salma tells about her experience in Algiers. In July,
1965, Salma left for Algiers with Fawzia to spend time with her father. Salma writes, “I
had a joyful reunion with my son (Bunty)” (86). For a few days more Salma stayed in
Algiers, she was going swimming in the Mediterranean Sea, which at that time of the
year was very calm and looked like a huge blue sheet of water. Saeed never visited her
at her father’s ambassadorial residences. Salma writes, “… and when I invited him to
Algiers, he refused. This was perhaps due to his inferiority complex” (90).

On 6 September 1965, war broke out between India and Pakistan. That was the
17 day war. Salma writes:

A shocked nation witnessed the seventeen-day war. There was great
fervor and zeal and we would listen to Madam Noorjehan’s inspiring and
patriotic songs. There was great excitement in London when we heard
that Bhutto would be stopping over for a few hours en route to New
York. He was going to represent Pakistan at the United Nations, and was
to announce Pakistan’s acceptance or otherwise of the proposed cease­
fire. (90)

Meanwhile Salma hired for a rubber technologist, Maqbool Ahmed. In
November 1967, they got the first order – for 20,000 spinning cots from Valika Textile
Mills Saifuddin Valika, who was a great patron of cricket. When Saeed met him at a
party and mentioned that they set up a factory for the production of aprons and cots,
Saifuddin Valika decided to give him a chance. The Valikas, the Dyres, and many other
textile mills started making inquiries and they quickly built up sales in the textile
markets of Multan, Faisalabad, Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Peshawar. 1968 was a bumper
year and they had orders for up to three months in advance. Salma states:

We were pioneers in this industry and sold our products only under the
name of Emperial which soon became a well-known brand in the market.
We were making good money. This was very gratifying. The rewards
were plentiful and our lifestyle was beginning to change. I started to
make jewellery for myself and getting beautiful clothes stitched, instead
of only having to make do. (93)

Salma tells about the miseries she experienced in her life as a wife in chapter 14,
‘An Unhappy Wife’.

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One afternoon, she was sitting with Saeed in the drawing room and drying her hair when Bua came in with Bunty. As usual, Saeed looked at him with a sneer. Salma writes:

‘What has the child done to you?’ I had barely uttered these words, when blows started raining on me, my hair was pulled, and I was dragged along the floor and literally kicked out of the house. My parting words were, ‘Please let me take my shoes and my bag’ – but no, the door was banged shut in my face. (94)

Bua ran out with Bunty, but Salma was in a state of shock and had no idea what to do next. First, she knocked at the door but there was no response. Salma describes her acute state in the following words:

In a daze, I began walking down the road - barefoot, with no dupatta, no bag, and no money. I just could not go to my mother’s house and let her see me in that condition. My whole face was bruised and swollen. Hot tears rolled down my cheeks. I had achieved so much since I last attempted to commit suicide but my relations with Saeed had broken down; ... Now, I just wanted to go away and be by myself. (94-95)

Jamil helped her and then they went to his room at the hotel and after ordering soup for her he took some cotton wool and Dettol and treated her cuts. Salma memorizes:

By now ugly blue bruises had sprung up on my arms, legs, and neck – I felt so tired and worn out... I told Jamil of the kind of life I had lived with Saeed from the beginning of our marriage, of the misery and torture, the feeling of utter helplessness, the lack of understanding, the different backgrounds, and the sense of failure in spite of my achievements. I knew then that the marriage was over. There was too much bitterness and too much pain. My self-esteem was at an all time low. (95-96)

Jamil then went to New York. When he came to take her away, Salma realised his place in her life:

The relationship that I had with Jamil was unique; I cannot imagine a similar relationship with anyone else. He was at the same time a father, a brother, and a friend, but above all a very decent human being. There are very few people like him in the world. Our friendship continued through the years and as long as he was alive I never felt alone. He accepted me as I was, with all my strengths and weaknesses, with all my troubles and problems, and he put himself out to see me happy. (97)

Unfortunately, Jamil died young, at the age of 52 only. Salma describes him as a man full of life and vibrancy, of hope and plans. Around the same time, Yusuf hinted that Saeed was having an affair with a married English woman in Bolton. He said that it was
well known in Lahore that Saeed was so licentious, that he would not even leave a bhangan alone. Salma writes, “I knew that Saeed had a glad eye, but I certainly did not think he was so promiscuous. I heard out Yusuf, but thought to myself, ‘He is jealous of Saeed and is trying to put me off’” (99).

For the first time in many years Cheemi wanted to see his son when Bunty got back to Karachi. So Salma arranged to meet him one night at her grandmother’s house in Garden East in Karachi. He brought a lawyer friend with him and a legal document was handed to read. It included the twenty-five squares (500 acres) of land in her name would be transferred to Bunty and she would never claim to this land and she would have no visiting rights and she would not get in touch with Bunty. She read the document and asked for only one thing, Salma writes, “Cheemi, Bunty has brought up by Bua. He has not been away from her for even a day. Please do not separate them now” (99).

Cheemi agreed. He was actually very relieved that there were no further demands. Salma writes, “I cannot quite recall the feeling I had at the time, but I was a trapped human being, a hapless victim of circumstances” (99).

Then she threw herself into work. She was at the factory every day. Saeed was busy with his cricket matches back home and Fawzia was with him.

Chapter 15, ‘Dabbling in Politics’, deals with Salma’s experiments in politics. In the opening paragraph of this chapter, Salma writes,

…the country was in a state of turmoil. From 1964 onwards, President Ayub’s popularity had started to decline. Following in the footsteps of Uncle Aftab who went to jail for agitating against imposition of martial law and the abrogation of the constitution. I decided to support the opposition candidate, Miss Fatima Jinnah when elections were called in 1965. (104)

Salma says that Saeed and she first got interested in politics in 1964 as they listened Uncle Aftab on every evening about politicians from East Pakistan. The most prominent amongst the politicians was Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Uncle Aftab stood up as a candidate for the Combined Opposition Parties (COP) from Liaquatabad, with the ‘lantern’ as his party’s election symbol. While serving with the ICS, he had spent much time in Bengal and had developed many contacts there. Miss Fatima Jinnah’s Council Muslim League and the National Awami Party (NAP-Bhashani group) from East
Pakistan came to the fore, but were unable to stem the tide of Ayub Khan's Convention Muslim League.

Salma joined Saeed in Rawalpindi; they stayed at the Inter-Continental Hotel. Salma writes,

Even today I can vividly recollect what transpired there — a horrible experience yet again. It started when the phone rang while Saeed was in the bathroom having a shower. It was a female fan, so I told her, 'He is having a shower, please call back in half an hour.' After ten minutes the phone rang again. This time I knocked on the bathroom door, and said, 'There is a girl on the phone, who will not give her name and number and insists on talking to you.' He came out of the bathroom in a huff, picked up the telephone, and talked sweetly to the girl. And then, without warning, he flew at me, pushed me and holding me by my hair started kicking me out of the room. I tried to save myself from the blows, and pleaded, 'Saeed, please, I am pregnant, please don't push me, please don't.' Shafaqat Rana and Parvez Sajjad, both cricket players, were in the corridor and witnessed this dreadful drama. I was lying on the ground with the door of the room half open. Somehow, I forced my way back into the room. (106-107)

Salma asked him why he had beaten her but he yelled back and told her in an abusive words that he would speak to anyone he wanted and she could take that or leave that. Salma writes,

Hot tears rolled down my cheeks as I lay down to sleep. He went out, but because the first Test was on, he had an early night. We did not speak to each other. I thought that nothing I could do would ever change this erratic man — not another baby, not anything. (107)

The Lahore Test ended, and the team travelled to Dhaka for the second Test, Salma went back to Karachi.

On 25 March 1969, General Yahya Khan and the Army General proclaimed martial law and President Ayub was overthrown. Saeed was back to England. Salma had written to the manufacturers of Rothman cigarettes that Saeed was available to play matches sponsored by them and they were happy to accept him. He became a member of the Rothman world cricket team, boasting great names like Garfield Sobers, Rohan Kanhai, Ted Dexter, and several other top players. They were paid well, got publicity, and it was a lot of fun going to these matches.

On 12 October 1969, Sheba was born. Saeed had not slept at all as he unfortunately met I.A.Khan, Manager of the Pakistan cricket team and Chairman BCCP. Salma writes, “Hot words were exchanged between the two. What actually
transpired, I never got to know, but the net result was that Saeed was debarred from playing cricket for life. Cricket was not only his first love, it was also his life” (108-109).

In the meantime, the cricket season had commenced and Saeed began playing in various domestic matches hoping to be selected for the Pakistan team. His performance was good and he was selected – the ban was lifted and likewise his spirits. Salma continued her work at the factory. Political agitation had apparently been brought under control but she remembers Jamil Nishtar warning her in 1968, that there was turmoil in East Pakistan and soon they would see the break-up of the country. Salma writes,

I was quite horrified but I thought he was exaggerating. During the period of political unrest, even my otherwise docile factory labour started playing up. I remember they greeted me one day with black flags and the slogans ‘Murdabad! Murdabad!’ I went inside the factory building and asked, ‘If I die, who will pay your wages?’ that calmed them down and they sheepishly resumed work. (109-110)

She sums up her experiences as an entrepreneur in the following words:

During my career as an entrepreneur, I have had to use my wits to survive in a man’s world. It has not been easy. In the beginning, when people thought it was a joke, or I was non-serious and just wanted to amuse myself, they played along. Very few people took me seriously. Unfortunately, the same has been true for politics. Until a woman reaches a certain level of excellence or clearly demonstrates merit, she fails to make any headway, making it extremely hard to establish herself in business or politics. All kinds of wiles have to be employed - sometimes one has to be overly aggressive, and at others one falls back to being the weaker or ‘fairer’ sex. But nothing succeeds like success. In my experience, a single woman has far more trouble in establishing her credentials, and runs many more risks than a married woman because the attitude of men differs accordingly. They either come on very strong, or can be protective, but there are very few who are genuinely helpful. It is difficult to achieve a balance, and one can so easily fall. The name of the game is to play one’s hand according to the circumstances. I attribute many of my failures to the spiteful vengeance of men whose advances were thwarted. These are the obstacles that stand in the way of a woman’s success. Even if a woman is prepared to make compromises, she is never really a free agent. In reality, she has to pay a high price to retain her self-esteem, dignity and pride, and despite all odds, to be able to hold her head high in society. (110)

Chapter 16, ‘Yahya Takes Over’, deals with the political upheaval in Pakistan and India. It also records ups and downs in Salma’s personal life. She was pregnant
again, and Saeed had left for London for the cricket season in March 1970. Salma recollects:

That year stands out as one of the blackest in my life. In the third month of my pregnancy I developed a small mole on my thigh, which changed colour from pink to black, and became bloodshot... The doctor suspect melanoma of the skin or ‘black cancer’ but it was haemangiomia and not melanoma. It slowly sank in that this was an extremely serious matter and that I was hanging between life and death. Saeed could not quite comprehend what had happened and would wear fancy clothes to charm the nurses. He did not even cancel his Rothman’s cricket match on the day of the operation; and only my father was present, waiting for the anaethetist to put me to sleep. His was the first loving face I saw when I came to. Tears were rolling down his cheeks. I was in great pain. They had not stitched the gaping hole, but had grafted skin from the inner part of my leg to cover the incision. When I felt the gash with my hand, it was covered with blood. I screamed, and was given an injection to put me to sleep. Saeed did not come to see me till late evening, and when he did I wanted to tear off his fancy bell-bottoms. He was selfish and foolish that he could not realize what was happening to me... the longest twelve days of my life began, with a death sentence hanging over me. At one stage, the South African doctor told me, ‘Madam, you are lucky we did not amputate your leg.’ Each word was more dreadful than the other.... All through the night I prayed as hard as I could for God to have mercy on me and to let the test results be negative. ‘Oh God, I swear I will go to the Holy Ka’aba and perform pilgrimage as thanksgiving.’ As far as I am concerned, a miracle did take place. The next day the sun was shining when the doctor came and told me, ‘It was haemangioma and not melanoma – sometimes the two get mixed up.’ I just could not believe my good fortune! (115-116)

Chapter 17, ‘Mecca’, deals with Salma Ahmed’s experience on a visit to Mecca. Salma remarks, “It was the first time I was going to the Holy Prophet’s last resting place, and it was an awesome experience. We prayed but were told not to touch any grave... I prayed to God that I be blessed with a boy this time” (117).

Unfortunately, that was a very critical delivery as baby died within twenty minutes of her birth. Salma writes,

I did not have the heart to see her. We had intended to call the child Wafa if it was girl, but we did not – the dead baby was named Umra... A coffin was arranged and baby Umra was taken to the PECHS graveyard, buried there with the inscription, ‘Umra binte Saeed Ahmed, born and died on 20th September 1970’. (119)

The doctor allowed Salma to leave despite her serious condition, but when she returned home without the baby, Fawzia ‘Api’ asked about the baby and the baby’s box coming back. Salma writes, “I decided to never again pray for a boy or a girl because I felt I had
wished death for my child at Medina by praying for a boy while a lovely girl was waiting to be born. The verses ‘Aur who aagayay achanak, bari umar ho tumari (And you came suddenly, may you live long)’ came wafting from the radio, and both Saeed and I started crying.” (120)

Chapter 18, ‘Debarred from Cricket’, deals with the untimely end of Saeed’s cricket career. Salma writes:

I started to feel restless. I had been stagnant for too long. There was a thirst that had not been quenched. I had children, I had made money. I had made my way to the top again but there was no excitement in my life. (126)

In 1973, Bhutto dismissed the Mengal government. Attaullah Mengal was jailed and Ahmed Nawaz was confined to his rented premises in Mohammad Ali Society, which was declared a sub-jail for that purpose. She wrote long letters to him and left them with his servant Hareen, whom she had known for many years. Hareen would pass these letters on to him and would return his replies to her. Salma writes,

I told him of my frustrations, my successes, my ideas, and my plans. I also talked about my children and my unhappy domestic life. If Ahmed Nawaz still has those letters, which I doubt, they will tell the story of a woman caught in trying to conform, trying to reform, trying to change her very being, and failing at it all. These were confessions of unhappiness, sorrow, and defeat. Those letters contained the story of ten years of discontent, struggle and endeavour, tears, sorrow and unfulfilled desires, and yet, ironically, told of a life that was crowned by phenomenal success in business. (127-128)

Chapter 19, ‘Turbulent Years’ describes the most evil experiences in Salma’s life. In the year 1972, the language riot took place when Mumtaz Bhutto, chief minister of Sindh, introduced a bill in the Sindh Assembly to declare Sindhi a compulsory language along with Urdu. For the first time, the Urdu-speaking populace of Karachi united in protest. Salma writes,

The traumatic break-up of Pakistan in 1971 had left people apprehensive and insecure. I recall that period as one in which the term ‘Pakistani’ was not relevant, and one was identified with one’s province – Punjabi, Pathan, Sindhi, and Balochi. The so-called mohajirs or Urdu-speaking migrants from India who were concentrated in Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkur, were left without an identity. Migrants from East Punjab, however, did not feel this way as they had easily assimilated with their West Punjabi brethren because of their common language and culture. The Urdu-speaking people, especially those from Uttar Pradesh or the Oudh belt, have always considered themselves more educated and
culturally superior. Hence the tussle. The original inhabitants of Sindh resented this cultural divide, and started to make various demands, including one that asked the mohajirs to call themselves ‘New Sindhis’. The Urdu-speaking people reacted violently, and began demanding a separate province, variously referred to as ‘Urdu Suba’ or ‘Karachi Suba’. This culminated in the formation of the All Pakistan Mohajir Students Organisation (APMSO), and later the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) led by its charismatic leader, Altaf Husain. (130-131)

In 1974, Pakistanis were displaced from Bangladesh. Mostly Biharis, were flocking to Pakistan and had to be resettled. But the Sindhis were not prepared to accept more immigrants from Urdu-speaking areas into the province. Only a small number of Biharis were allowed to settle in Sindh. Salma’s friends with some well-known elders of the community formed a Mohajir Unity Board in the office of retired Justice M. B. Ahmed. Salma spent from her own resources and also she got a good backup support from her friend Mariam Ali Khan.

As per the Simla Accord signed by Bhutto in 1972, it was agreed that 150,000 from amongst the Biharis stranded in Bangladesh were to be repatriated to Pakistan, and 93,000 prisoners of war were to be released. In Dhaka, Red Cross camps were established in Mohammadpur and Mirpur districts to house those Biharis who were left behind, all clutching their green Pakistan passports, looking bewildered and wondering why they had not been repatriated along with their 150,000 brethren.

Before New Year’s Eve of 1974, they were invited to attend dinner at Sadia and Hafeez Pirzada in honour of Prime Minister and Begum Bhutto. Salma writes, “I kissed Nusrat on both cheeks as was the custom but Bhutto was very proper, and did not encourage any familiarity, places at the high table had already been set. I went and spoke to Bhutto for a few minutes” (133).

Saeed had been having regular psychiatric treatment, first with Dr Ishrat in Karachi, and then in London with a Harley Street specialist. He had diagnosed his condition as ‘acute paranoia’. They moved into the new house in September 1974, but Saeed was there for just two months. Salma writes, “To try and save our marriage we decided on a temporary separation” (136).

Salma received an invitation from Amnesty International to go to Delhi, which she immediately accepted. After staying in Karachi for a week, she left for Delhi. She states:
We stayed at the Gandhi Ashram, and I fell in love with the city. During that visit, I went to pay homage to the Sufi saint, Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia, who until then had only been a name for me. I also met Pir Safdar Nizami. My visit to Hazrat Nizamuddin's roza was the beginning of a life-long attachment to the saint, and in a way, this has become an integral part of my life. The qawwali of Hazrat Amir Khusro, a devout disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin, is famous throughout the world; it opened up a whole new life for me – a life of spiritualism. I was so fed up with my existence and its harsh realities that the world of Sufism touched me and gave me solace. I don't think I have ever missed a single urs of Hazrat Nizamuddin from that day on. (138-139)

In Chapter 20 entitled ‘Political Shenanigans’, Salma tells about her decision and attempts to study for a Bachelor's degree. In the next chapter, Salma tells about the experience of elections in the year 1977.

In 1977, Salma went to Sardar Sherbaz Mazari, leader of the National Democratic Party (NDP), and offered to work with him. Nine political parties came together and formed an opposition alliance called the PNA (Pakistan National Alliance), popularly known as Nau Sitaray (nine stars). Salma's life revolved totally around the elections. She was working in Sherbaz's constituency, especially in the Urdu-speaking areas of Golimar, Bara Board, and Pak Colony, but she went to Sher Shah, Pathan Colony and other places. Her companion was Ahmed Altaf. She would be on stage, not only for his public meetings but also for those held by the PNA. They would address the crowd as it waited for the leaders to arrive. Salma writes:

\[\text{It was a strange and exhilarating feeling, seeing a sea of people and addressing them... I loved the open opposition to the Pakistan People's Party. All our frustrations and pent-up feelings of the past years poured out, including the deep resentment we felt at how Saeed had been treated, at the indifference of our friends who had become demi-gods and who hadn't helped when we needed it most, who crushed our personalities and our egos - torturing us and not caring about how we felt. (147)}\]

The nine parties chalked out a joint strategy and they held joint public meetings in order to have a united opposition. Salma's group attended all the meetings, in every area of Karachi, and she began to be recognized. All the time the deadly Federal Security Force (FSF) was in full action, dispersing crowds with teargas, shooting at them, wounding them, and picking them up for interrogation. Several people joined the fray and were putting up violent resistance. Salma writes, “Karachi seemed to rise as one to overthrow Bhutto” (147).
In Chapter 22, ‘Lady Ship-breaker’, Salma tells us about the experience of her bright career as a lady ship-breaker. In the opening paragraph, Salma writes about the commencement of her bright success:

Suddenly and unexpectedly, a golden period began for me. It seemed that General Zia-ul Haq was a ‘murderer’ of democracy when the promised election did not take place in ninety days. But, in all fairness to him, almost every leader from the PNA went and asked him to let martial law continue. For me, General Zia-ul-Haq was a benevolent savior, for he rescued me just in time so that I could ‘live’ again. I have never been as close to a president or head of state as I was to General Zia-ul-Haq. He lifted me out of mediocrity and pushed me to the top rung of success. (154)

As per her father’s wish, her luck was so well that she formally joined the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) on 13 November 1977. Salma gradually overcame her initial timidity and reserve, and Pir Sahib soon became a political comrade. The Party workers organized a very large meeting in Liaquatabad during which party workers ‘crowned’ Salma with a gold taj or crown. It gave them great happiness to do so, and obviously was very gratifying for her as well. Salma writes,

So, I led a very full life, working during the day and conducting political activities at night, which didn’t leave me with much time for the children. I was also anxious lest Saeed institute a suit to seek custody of the children. So I sent them to London to live in the Kew Gardens house and attend boarding school there. I had received a proposal of marriage from a highly eligible but married person, who wanted me to sell my business and move to London to be his second wife. He also wanted me to go slow in politics. I decided to seek a divorce or khula from Saeed through the court....Unfortunately, and unbelievably, he filed under the wrong section of the Family Law Ordinance, and we lost the case – and the proposal of marriage lapsed! (156)

After two years considerable amount of efforts later Salma finally obtained a khula from Saeed.

Mustafa introduced Salma to General Zia on 12 October 1978. She writes,

I met the general, who was smiling and quite relaxed. I had a photograph taken with him, and ‘General Sahib’, as I always called him, asked, ‘Why were you not at Gadani this morning?’ That same morning, Zia had visited Gadani but I had not been invited to attend...Going on television that night, at an appropriate point, General Zia said, ‘I have met so many talented women in Karachi today. I even met a lady ship-breaker.’ And that was only the beginning. He became both father and patron, and as time went by, I met him very often...General Zia has been
criticized no end, but I think he always did what he thought was right for the country. He put a battered Pakistan back to the world map. (159)

Salma was enjoying her life. She says that her life was so filled with magic. She spent the summer holidays with her children, including Bunty, who had left his father’s house and come to her. He was then sixteen years old and had just finished his O levels in grammar school. Salma’s birthday was celebrated when her father was standing with a chocolate cake outside the house in Kew Gardens, ready to join the family. They were very happy dancing along with the children till night and that was a memorable birthday of that year.

In Chapter 23, ‘Silent Tears’, Salma tells about the silent tears on the trauma of her father’s death. Salma says that she arrived at Karachi airport where hordes of people were came to receive her and take her to Clifton. Her father was lying on his bed, as if asleep. She kissed his cold cheek. Salma writes with anguish:

I touched his dear feet, and kissed them. Someone told me that this was not allowed in Islam but I pushed them away. I saw things through a haze; there was so much pain – pain that I could not stand. Oh, they are taking him away. Oh Daddy! Oh, why did I leave you? Why did I go away? Oh Daddy, you have left your bandages. Daddy, you never told me you were suffering on account of varicose veins and quietly tying bandages around your legs. I would have taken you to a doctor. Oh Daddy, your Hafiz and Saadi are still lying by your bedside. I will take them away. (164)

In Chapter 24, ‘Meeting Indira Gandhi’, Salma tells about her experience of meeting with Indira Gandhi. The great moment of Salma’s life was when six of the Pakistani delegates met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi at her Safdarjung residence. Though she was suffering from a cold, she came out and greeted them. Salma writes,

We were carrying photographs taken at the inaugural session at Vigyan Bhavan, to have them autographed by Mrs Gandhi. When it was my turn to get her autograph, she said in English, ‘You are the clever one, wearing light coloured clothes so my signature will show clearly.’ And it does. It is one of my prized trophies. Since I got an opportunity to speak to her I said, ‘I have the honour, Madame, to be named by my father after you. My granduncle, Sir Shafaat Ahmed Khan, was the education minister in Pandit Nehru’s first cabinet.’ She said, ‘I can place you now, you belong to my part of the world.’ (168)

Salma also tells about the sudden crash in ship-breaking. At the meeting of the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry, General Zia-ul-Haq announced that the steel mill was soon to be inaugurated, and finally they realized that the ship-breaking business

(203)
was doomed. Salma spoke at that meeting, the only woman to attend the mammoth gathering.

In the winter of 1981, Salma once again went to India to attend the second International Conference of Women Entrepreneurs held at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi. There again she met Indira Gandhi. She attended an urs at the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia, and once again felt a sense of calm and joy. By then she felt that he had become her patron saint.

After compensation for the losses incurred in ship-breaking, she applied for and received permission to set up a mini cement plant in Muzaffarabad, Azad Kashmir, and for a cooking oil unit in Kotri. She applied for capital finance from Bankers' Equity Ltd. to launch Kashmir Cement and received positive indications from them.

Chapter 25, 'In the Spotlight' describes how Salma was caught in a blaze of spotlights when all TV cameras turned to her. Salma writes:

The year 1983 arrived without fanfare. In fact, it was the year I was to suffer serious business setbacks. Also, Pakistan was suffering as a result of the Afghan war. The war brought in its wake several million refugees from across the border who settled in Karachi and other cities of Pakistan. It also brought the dreaded Kalashnikov culture and gave rise to the drug mafia. These two in combination started to eat into the body politic of the country and we were introduced to violence in its ugliest form. (178-179)

Some major changes happened in her financial situation in 1983. She sold her house in Kew Gardens, Surrey, and she also sold Emperial Rubber Industries – her ‘first baby’ – eighteen years after first setting it up. She lost a factory manager and a trusted lieutenant to whom she had trained herself. With the factory, she had also sold enough equity to invest in Kashmir Cement and Sarmast Cooking Oils.

Before going to Delhi in winter, she took a holiday with the three children. From Islamabad, they first went to Abbottabad and stayed at the Governor’s house for a few days. Then they went to Nathiagali, and finally to Murree for the last leg of their holiday and one day they went to her old school, the Convent of Jesus and Mary, which brought back many memories.

In Chapter 26, 'In Parliament', Salma tells her experiences of her entry into the Pakistan Parliament. She had earlier a meeting with General Zia in the state guest house in Karachi. General Zia turned to her and asked, 'Are you aware that I have increased

(204)
the reserved seats for women in the National Assembly to 10 per cent?' He then asked her a direct question, ‘Will Pir Pagaro support you for one of the reserved seats?’ Salma says that the next day Pir Sahib asked her to file her nomination papers. She wanted her proposer from the Pir ghara, and Ali Gauhar was her proposer and General Bashir Khan seconded it. She then proceeded to Islamabad to file her nomination papers and then she visited Afaq Shahid, Maulana Nadvi to seek their votes. Pir Sahib had specifically told her not to visit anyone as he had asked MK to canvass votes for her. The Urdu-speaking PML, MNAs were asked to cast their votes in her favour. Salma recollects, “The voting started moving rapidly. Aunty Afroze was the first to win with twelve votes. I was next with nine votes… Thus, two Sindhi and two Urdu-speaking ladies were elected” (185). It was a moment of great joy for Salma. She exclaims:

‘Eny, you have won.’ I said to myself, and silently spoke to my late father: ‘Daddy, today I have fulfilled your wishes – “I the Ena the great”.’ It was a moment of deep humility for me. I felt that people who would have been happiest for me were not present – my father, my Uncle Aftab, and my grandmother, Amma. They didn’t live to see the day when their Eny achieved all they had wished for her. (186-187)

When journalists questioned her, she said, “I had a dream twelve years ago of becoming an MNA, and God has fulfilled that dream. All praise to Allah” (187).

Thus began her career as a member of the National Assembly of Pakistan.

In Chapter 27, ‘Twice Bitten’, Salma tells her experiences of her bitten again and again in business. Salma decided to set up an updated version of Emperial Rubber Industries in Nooriabad, although the odds were against her such as new terrain, new people, unskilled labour and two hours from Karachi. She named her new factory Bhital Rubber Industries Limited.

She tried a lot to set up the new industry at Nooriabad. She had to face a number of problems about the machinery and the employees. The sales agent came into the Nooriabad factory, saw the entire lay-out, got hold of the local man who was doing the installation, asked him to copy the design and drawing of the Korean plant and duplicated the same in Hattar. All the difficulties on her way are the pitfalls in the life of women. Salma writes,

They say once bitten twice shy, but in my case it has been ‘twice bitten – and bitten again and again… These are the pitfalls that confront women entrepreneurs. Pakistani men want to fool women and this becomes easier when women entrepreneurs are surrounded by a disloyal work
force. A woman is a very lonely figure especially when she does not have the service of loyal people. When my father was alive the staff was not out of hand. It was then that I felt that perhaps having a man around would make a lot of difference. (196)

Chapter 28 is aptly titled 'Strange Bedfellows'. In it, Salma tells her experiences about different and strange people she had met in her life. The succeeding chapter 29— 'On the International Stage'—tells her experiences on the international stage.

Salma was once called by the Prime Minister and gave her the invitation to attend a special session of the UN commission on the status of women in New York on 12 January 1987. Salma says that their prime successes were the invitations they received to both the US and USSR functions. Anis and Shahid were doing the drafting and other committee work, while she was in the main UN hall taking care of the speeches, the resolutions, and the interventions and so on.

Salma went to Vienna in April, to attend a session of WASME hosted by UNIDO. They stayed with Khurshid Haider, Pakistan's lady-ambassador to Austria. Asif Khusro and Salma had been best friends through all her years in politics particularly after she was elected MNA. She was a member of PAWE. Later on, Salma was nominated to go to the US with the male MNAs. They were selected for a very important mission, and required to lobby for the restoration of US aid to Pakistan, which had been suspended as a result of charges that a Pakistani, Salim Parwez, attempted to smuggle special steel for use in Pakistan's uranium enrichment programme.

In Chapter 30, 'Dismissal of the Assembly', Salma tells her experiences of the Assembly sessions. In the opening paragraph, she writes:

Back to Islamabad and the assembly session, General Zia-ul-Haq invited prominent people from all walks of life to do some brainstorming and throw up ideas on how to strengthen the fabric of the country and promote integration and national solidarity. The Prime Minister had forbidden his cabinet ministers to attend this three-day conference, and other little tell-tale signs of trouble between the presidency and the Prime Minister's house were beginning to show. Cracks had first started to appear with the appointment of General Mirza Aslam Beg as chief of army staff. He was the Prime Minister's choice whereas the President preferred General Akhtar Abdur Rahman. (219)

Salma attended the three-day conference. She proposed that the country be divided into nine administrative units instead of the existing four. Kamal Farooqui, an
advocate, suggested thirteen administrative units. However, Salma mustered all her courage, speaking as she was in Islamabad, the headquarters of the army, and unequivocally said what needed to be said.

Salma relates an unforgettable incident happened in 1988:

New Year’s Eve of 1988 had not prepared us for the unforgettable trauma we were to experience. There was no inkling of an Ojhri Camp disaster, the Geneva Accord, the dismissal of the assemblies, the sacking of Mohammad Khan Junejo, the advent of Benazir Bhutto and her Pakistan People’s Party, and the air crash in Bahawalpur that resulted in the tragic death of General Zia, my friend Arnie Raphael, and so many army stalwarts. (220)

In April 1988, Salma left Islamabad for Karachi on Thursday. On Friday, the Prime Minister summoned an urgent meeting of MNAs and MPAs at the governor’s house in Karachi to tell them that a huge blast had taken place in an army ammunition dump close to Islamabad. This was hotly debated in the assembly – the Prime Minister and his Minister of State, Zain Noorani, were lobbying in favour of signing the Accord, whereas General Zia had his reservations.

The Prime Minister set up a committee comprising four federal ministers including Rana Naeem and Saseem Ahmed Aheer, to inquire into the Ojhri camp disaster. Salma says that they dispersed as the Prime Minister started preparations for a South Asian tour. He left on 18 June. Salma remained in Islamabad for sometime having informal sessions with Nimmo and Naseem Aheer trying to ascertain how things were going in the Ojhri Camp inquiry.

She says that visiting the interior of Sindh was an eye-opener.

On 22 May 1988, Salma left for London via Islamabad. Naseem Aheer told her that either the Prime Minister would be asked to step down, or the National Assembly would be dissolved. The same evening Nimmo told her that he was going to ring the Prime Minister in the Philippines and warned him. But Salma cautioned her not to play with fire.

In Chapter 31, ‘First President of IFWE’, Salma tells her experiences of becoming the first President of IFWE. In the opening paragraph Salma tells about her failure and frustration in politics. She had kept rapport with the MQM, but she was slipping away from the political arena. She made a trip to Delhi and met Rajiv Gandhi on his election trail. Romesh Bhandari told her that he was accompanying Rajiv Gandhi

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for a Congress Party meeting which coincided with the *urs* of Hazrat Nizamuddin. She said to Romesh that he could not simply address an election rally, he must get him to visit the shrine of the great saint. Salma reports:

After the election rally, breaking all norms of security and protocol, Romesh brought Rajiv inside the shrine. I had asked Pir Iqbal Nizami, ... to accord Rajiv a very warm welcome and I had the best *qawwals* prepare the famous Amir Khusro rendition of *merray banay ki bath na puchu, mera bana haryala hai*. This *qawwali* was recited by the Sufis in praise of Hazrat Nizamuddin, and also Prophet Mohammad, but its more temporal and literal meaning translates somewhat like this: ‘Do not ask me about my beloved, he is beyond compare...They were so terrorized that they did exactly as I had asked them to do. And what a wonderful *qawwali* it was. I can never forget the scene – Rajiv Gandhi flanked by Romesh Bhandari inside the shrine, and as is the custom, both being turbaned by Pir Iqbal Nizami. When Rajiv Gandhi stepped out, with his flashing smile and brilliant eyes, wearing a turquoise blue turban, he said ‘hello’ to Sheba, and shook hands with Yunus... When three months later I heard of his assassination I mourned the death of this young man. For three days I watched Simi Garewal’s documentary, *Rajiv’s India*, given to me personally by her in London. I watched the funeral on television. Our hearts reaching out to Sonia and the two children, Priyanka, so like her grandmother, and Rahul, his only son. We have an innate ability to transcend differences in religion and ideology to share grief with others, and one mourns from the heart for those who suffer a cruel fate. We mourned too for Lady Diana in 1997. (232)

In 1997, once again the PML was back in power when Mian Nawaz Sharif won the election. Salma flew to Islamabad to be the only woman representative at the businessmen’s conference, which Mian Sahib was chairing.

The same year, the WASME awarded her a medal for outstanding contribution to women entrepreneurship. Salma also became the first President of IFWE.

“It was a big boost for Pakistan and a great honour for me to be heading this body,” she exclaims (234).

Chapter 32, ‘Interregnum’, Salma tells her experiences of interregnum in the politics and narrates two incidents that gave her immense joy. The first one was of her son’s Farru’s, wedding on 7 December 1996 at Taj-ul-Masjid, the largest mosque in Asia, at Bhopal. All the relatives came including her friends Pir Sahib, Iqbal Nizami. Romesh Bhandari (Governor of UP) flew in his private plane. She gave a dinner in his honour at the Jehan Numa Palace.
Salma says that on Christmas day, she left for Delhi with Nimmo Rana and Anjum. Nawabzada Saleem Khan, her cousin, joined them at Delhi airport. They flew by helicopter to Dehra Dun. Governor Romesh Bhandari arrived, and she introduced Nimmo to him and Anjum had already met Romesh in Bhopal. Then Salma and Romesh sat in his car and the pilot vehicle in front led the twelve-car motorcade to the Governor’s house in Nainital.

After returning from Washington, Salma started organizing a PAWE delegation to take part in an international trade fair that was to be held in New Delhi from 13 to 27 November, 1997. She took a delegation to thirty women to the trade fair in Delhi. Pakistan and India were celebrating their Golden Jubilee that year. Salma writes, “The highlight of the event was that I won the coveted Indira Gandhi Priyadarshini Award for being Pakistan’s most successful woman entrepreneur in the fifty years since independence. This was a great honour.” (240)

In 1997, Salma’s son Bunty got married in London to Michelle. Her daughter Fawzia got married to Aseem, an Indian from Delhi. On 23 April 1998 (Shakespeare’s birthday) Zizi gave birth to a son, Ziad at St. Mary’s Hospital in Paddington. It was ‘another occasion for joy in the family that year’, says Salma (241).

In Chapter 33, ‘Mother Mourns’, Salma tells about her mournings on her beloved daughter Bina’s death. In the opening paragraph, Salma tells about how the year passed and the news of Bina’s illness came to her. She had left Karachi on 6 April 1999 for Washington DC, as member of a delegation led by Tehmina Daultana, Minister for Women’s Development. The object of the visit was to try and acquire franchises for Pakistani women entrepreneurs. It took them thirty hours to reach Washington as the PIA flight was delayed at every stop – at Islamabad, at Dubai, and at Shannon. They reached the hotel, but five minutes after her head hit the pillow the telephone rang and her friend, Mirret told her she had a call from her husband in Karachi that one of her daughters is very sick. The telephone was persistent in its ringing. Faiz, Minal’s son, called from London and told that Bina was very sick and was on a ventilator in Cambridge. She had suffered severe brain damage. Salma writes,

I was not prepared for anything new or great in the new year, but it turned out be very different. Twenty years after my father’s death in 1979 – this was to be a year of unexpected grief and sorrow...It still didn’t make sense to me. The combined effect of intense fatigue and my sleeping tablets had blanked out my mind, and it seems nothing
registered, for when I woke up a few hours later. I had no recollection of receiving any telephone calls. I changed, and went to the Washington Center to listen to a lecture on franchises. (242-243)

One of the members of delegation told Salma that someone from the embassy was looking for her and had been sent by Ambassador Riaz Khokhar. Immediately she left the lecture and the man told to ring up the Ambassador and Riaz told her that her daughter was dying and she was on a machine and she had to fly to London to allow them to take her off the ventilator. Salma became restless. She writes,

I started popping Lexotanil tablets – one, then two, then four. ‘Oh Lord, please don’t let me think.’ I wanted to block out my mind. People were surrounded me…. Everyone looked at me. There were no words said. All of us had young daughters. They wished me the best of luck. Bina is no more. They took her off the machine that morning and she lived only twenty minutes after that. (243-244)

Salma kept remembering her words, “Mummy, you have to write a book one day, write about yourself and write about us. If you don’t, I will” (246). She exclaims, “I am writing it, but with tears dropping on the very paper on which I write. Is this what you wanted?” (Ibid)

In Chapter 34, ‘New Players: Unchanged Politics’, Salma tells about the politics in Pakistan - how it was changed with the advent of General Pervez Musharraf. Salma says that she prepared to defend herself against charges that might be brought against her. She writes:

I had an answer to every charge, no matter how petty, as I had suffered a series of losses in business because of Mohammad Khan Junejo. I went to Dubai for New Year’s, and remained in a state of depression for the first three days. On the fourth day, which was 1 January 2000 – the start of a new millennium – a change came over me…a new person was suddenly born – a person who wanted to face the future with hope, had a desire to do something truly constructive, and was determined not to go under. (247-248)

After Sehba’s marriage to Salaam on 9 November 2001, Salma’s responsibilities to the family came to an end. She then planned to go to Delhi for a long and well-deserved holiday.

As per the political workers pleading and Pir Sahib’s insistence, Salma left no option but to agree to file her nomination for an MNA seat reserved for ladies. She relates:
When I went to file my nomination papers, a procession of political workers accompanied me, chanting slogans with great gusto and enthusiasm. It was heartwarming to see such loyalty, such love. For me, this is what public service is all about – when you earn the respect and affection of the people you represent. Security at the office of the Election Commission in Saddar, Karachi was very tight because Benazir Bhutto was also filing her nomination that same day. I went through the preliminary scrutiny, and having successfully qualified, decided to go to London for a short break. (252)

On her return, Salma found that a nondescript PML worker’s name had superseded her own in the party nomination for the ladies’ seat. She writes,

I quickly realized that this was no oversight but the result of manipulation by vested interests. The same nonentity that I had seen taking charge of the working committee meeting at Lahore was handling the party’s political affairs. It was clear to me that there were no criteria for obtaining the party’s nomination. Experience, excellence, dedication, loyalty, dignity, and honour were irrelevant in the context of holding political office. What mattered most were money and a willingness to abandon all values! Sadly, the same is true for society in general – where the nouveau riche but morally and intellectually bankrupt people are acclaimed as the rising stars of the nation. (252-253)

With the so many efforts and encouragement from Pir Sahib and Choudhry Shujaat, Salma filed her nomination. Salma writes, “... because once I decide to take up a challenge, I rarely give up” (255). Salma flew back to Karachi and filed her papers. She then left for Islamabad, to lobby for the Senate seat and to try and gauge her chances. The situation didn’t appear to be very encouraging as Choudhry Shujaat was away to Germany for treatment, and the others they met were not really forthcoming. She stayed for five days in Sindh House Islamabad and returned to Karachi on 5 February 2003. On the night of 6 February, she received a phone call from the party high command requesting her to withdraw her nomination. She did the same and “quickly put this episode behind me, and got involved in my business and family” (256).


The concluding chapter titled ‘Unfinished Agenda’ reveals Salma Ahmed’s thoughts about herself and about women in the new millennium. She lays bare her heart thus:
I have endured years of strife and struggle, joys and sorrows, successes and failures, of ambitions fulfilled, some not quite—perhaps a job well done, but yet retaining a strong conviction in my potential for tomorrow...Having been a single woman most of my life and having fought my battles alone, that too in an Islamic society, I know only too well how prejudice, narrow-mindedness, and vindictiveness prevent women from achieving their full potential. Fortunately, I find that attitudes are now changing. Society is not only more tolerant, but there is also an increased willingness to treat women as equals. I hope my story will inspire women to courageously fight the battle of life in spite of the limits imposed by society, circumstances, fate and destiny. I hope they will learn to believe in themselves, be always true to their inner beings, and never hesitate to shoot for the stars. (261)

Salma discloses her vision for Pakistani women in the following words:

I hope to see them changing perceptions, altering the fabric of society, and fighting for their rights; I hope to see them achieve excellence and perfection...I have tried to objectively assess my life and myself. I brought up four children as a single parent, and gave them the best—perhaps that has been my most gratifying reward. I have learnt never to look back, but to always move forward. Thus, this tale might be over, but the story of my life continues—and continues with renewed vigour and enthusiasm. I have dreams to fulfil and my journey is far from over. No mortal can foretell what the future will bring, but when I finally go, I hope to go while still searching for my next challenge. (262)

Salma Ahmed has fought a lot throughout her life to cut herself free from miseries and injustices meted out by the Islamic patriarchy. As M. Rajeshwar observes in his book *Indian Women Novelists and Psychoanalysis*, “Conflicts of a qualitatively different nature have always characterized the life of every freedom-conscious woman...” (9). This statement sounds true with Salma Ahmed’s life story.

*Cutting free: An Extraordinary Memoir of a Pakistani Woman* can be read as a unique autobiography as it records the development of a woman, her process of “triumphant self-discovery”. The events in the autobiography are a true representation, which lead towards the construction of gender identity. The writer not only discovers a unique individuality and selfhood but also a mission in life. Like Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, her marriage had locked her into a social system. However, she revolted against injustice and succeeded in asserting herself.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak demands “a special position” for “the subaltern who was trying to survive and establish its identity in its difference” (in Ashcroft: 8). Salma Ahmed lived as the “other”, as a woman and was constantly exploited. As a rebel, she went through painful struggles in her life but they indirectly contributed to
the empowerment and growth of her individuality. In the process of her ‘individual
growth’, she fell into the same trap of male domination, be it in the form of affairs or
marriage or even while climbing the career ladder. Most of the time, she is found to be
falling back into the same pattern, for society itself is structured in such a way that there
is no space for a woman to develop independently beyond her identities of being a
daughter, a wife or a mother. There is a huge chasm between the perception of
acquiring autonomy through breaking away from set norms and actually realizing it in
patriarchal terms.

Autonomy of selfhood of a woman in the society is problematic. First of all
women are not yet free from the values of patriarchy. They have internalized patriarchal
values and cannot think of a life outside the boundary drawn by patriarchy. Education
and economic empowerment although considered to be emancipatory for a woman,
have yet to materialize as women are too few in working places and they have to
negotiate all their relations under patriarchal norms. Therefore, the man-woman
relationship needs to be redefined on the principle that neither is inferior nor superior,
both are equal partners in making home. The basis of such an articulation depends on
our clear understanding of relational autonomy. Autonomy is not an essentialised
condition. It has to be recognized by others. Hence, autonomy of the self in social
sphere is to recognize and be recognized by the other with mutual respect and trust. As
we keep on living in a society that still perpetuates patriarchy or its biases against
women, true freedom for women is a far cry.

Individual autonomy in its extreme sense implies that it is free from all bonds,
relations and even of self-reflection. Salma Ahmed, in Cutting Free: An Extraordinary
Memoir of a Pakistani Woman, moves one step forward in this direction.