Chapter-4

‘SO FARAH IS A MALE WRITER’

4.1. Introduction

This title refers to how a young woman reacted when she first saw Farah in person in a seminar held in the United States in the early 90’s. As one of those many readers of Farah’s fiction, From a Crooked Rib in particular, this young woman seems to have been overpowered by the sudden impulse created by his fiction, and believed that only a female writer could effectively capture the inner voice of a woman’s experience that lies deep in the hearts of those subjugated women. But she is not the sole reader to react in this way to Farah’s fiction. When the manuscript of From a Crooked Rib reached the publisher in 1970, Farah tells us, the editor, Mr. James Currey, wrote back to him demanding him to reveal his real name because he suspected the existence of female author of the manuscript. In other words the publication of From a Crooked Rib left a lasting mark on Farah’s gender identity. Letters still reach him addressing him Mrs. Farah, and he is given a rare approbation of “a male feminist writer.” (Jaggi.)
What these anecdotes bring home is his fiction’s feminist advocacy, while it deals with major feminist issues, to the extent that with the publication of his first English novel he immediately rose to fame with which he has been known since then. In Karim Al Rawi’ words: “With Ebla he created one of the vivid female characters to come out of African literature.” And according to Wright; “From a Crooked Rib’s marked sympathy for the oppressed Somali womanhood is forcefully put.” (28)

Farah’s feminist advocacy is not a mere presentation of individualistic female characters in a suffocating patriarchal social systems. What he rather succeeds to do is his effective articulation of a variety of feminist issues. Thus he addresses and successfully brings to light the pains inflicted on and the injustice done to the Somali women as a result of deep-rooted patriarchal socio-political system.

The term feminism, unlike femaleness and femininity, is a political term. It does not concern itself with its subject, women, merely as a matter of biology as such, as it doesn’t confine its area of concern to those characteristics which define women culturally.

Feminism and feminist are, therefore, employed as “political labels indicating support for the aims of the women’s movement.” (Moi. 182) As a specific kind of political discourse feminism or the feminist is preoccupied with combating those deep-rooted oppressive structures of patriarchy and
sexism. The politics of the feminism movement has always been a response
to women’s actual position in society. Thus through this movement women
resist those traditional views about the ‘nature of women,’ their having
instinctive tendency towards domesticity and motherhood for example,
which were justified for the exclusion of women from many spheres of
social life. Views such as these generated certain “power relations of
dominance and subordination.” (Jordan and Weedon.178) However,
feminism, as a pluralist movement having various forms and agenda, is
basically united by its struggle against patriarchal forms of culture and
politics. Among the various established feminist projects, there are; liberal,
women-centered, Marxist, post-modern, and Black and Third World forms
of feminism. (Ibid., 183) While there exists no hard and fast distinction in
these categories it is their respective emphasis, their ‘cultural politics,’
which they lay on certain women related issues that help their classification.

Male writers who contribute to women’s struggle against their
subjugation by patriarchal institutions are feminists but while female
feminists, no matter what ‘feminist criticism’ or theory they subscribe to,
their place in the feminist discourse is subject to no doubt the loyalty of male
feminists is questioned. In response to J.A. Boone’s essay ‘Me(n) and
Feminism: Who(se) is the Sex that Writes’ Toril Moi observes: “there are of
course different political views within feminism, and there will always be
debatable ‘borderline’ cases. The question of who is ‘inside’ or ‘outside’
feminism will never be settled once and for all: such definitions remain a
matter of concrete political debate.” (182-3)
Acknowledging the existence of those 'borderline' issues it suffices to stick to the given and specific border definition of the term feminist as a person, not gender specific - could be man or woman, heterosexual or otherwise - who is willing to question the status quo sexual politics and its consequent modes of women's subjugation. Nuruddin Farah is one such artists who falls under this definition. His portrayal of women in his work is free from the male stereotype attitudes to women. It shows his commitments to alleviate the patriarchal injustice to women, and hence liberate them from all those oppressive modes of culture, socio-politics and economy. This is what Alden and Tremaine had to say of him in their recently published work, Nuruddin Farah:

Nuruddin Farah is deservedly recognized for the kind of attention he has paid to women's experiences. From his first published novel wholly centered on a young woman's bid for freedom, Farah has put women at the center of numerous works exploring wide range of characters from traditional matriarchs to seductresses of power to resisting feminists and their insurgent daughters. What makes these characters memorable is not so much their psychological as their ideological complexity when they reflect on their lives from various positions within patriarchal structures. (123)

For him each and every action in life is political and politics is nothing but "the world's male dominated ideas" in which women are excluded from contributing but little to the patriarchal "grand design." As a writer, the responsibility to make politics neutral "ideas" becomes his: "A writer, however, is in a sense every body: he is a woman, he is a man; ... he
is as many other selves as the ones whose tongues he employs to articulate his thoughts.” (Farah 1984)

Placing Ebla and Madina, the two heroines in *From a Crooked Rib* and *Sardines* respectively, at the two ends of the Somali woman’s literacy spectrum Farah’s fiction seems to contain great deal of insight into matters of feminist consciousness. This is done by making use of an intricate language of symbols along with its cosmopolitanism cast of characters and issues, which won him praise from many other writers like Achebe, Rushdie, Lessing, Carter, and Godimer.

### 4.2. *From a Crooked Rib*: What Picture of the Somali Woman?

In telling Ebla’s story of escapades and polyandrous marriages Farah’s *From a Crooked Rib* confronts the reader with an entirely gloomy picture of the Somali woman. The story emphasises the dilemma of those women belonging to Ebla’s lot: both revolt and submission result in men’s world. In other words, despite all her escapades she always remains to be in the original cruel patriarchal world, wherein “nature is against woman (84)” and "men are the law". For the non-Somali readers of Farah’s fiction this dismal picture represents the real face of the Somali woman’s role and status, as it artistically questions the institution of marriage and hence tends to give an idea of what she is, where and to whom she belongs in the Somali society.
To understand the crux of his feminist polemics it is very essential not to miss the significance of his radical view of women’s position as one of “enslavement” and as subjects of “social blackmail and financial investment,” a belief he says was formed early in his boyhood as a result of his exposure to world literature through his reading. In his 1998 Neustadt Lecture “Celebrating Differences” he says: "I grew more confident the more I read. The more I got to know about the injustices perpetrated by men against the women folk, the more conscious I grew of my powers.” (Farah. 1998)

In an earlier article "A Country in Exile" he wrote: “In theory for me the war against injustice in both personal and not-so-personal ways began a long time ago, in my teens when literally between one moment and another, as though it were an epiphany, it dawned on me that as a Somali and a male I was an oppressor and, as the cliché has it, was part of the problem, not the solution.” (Farah 1995)

To cease being a part of the problem and find the solution made him a writer, who was “everyone,” which gave him a secure place in feminist discourse, and identified the patriarchal dominance as his socio-political targeted evil. These issues marriage, the traditional evil of infibulation and male sexual violence, are the basic issues of Farah’s feminism, which keep recurring in almost all of his novels. In addition to his three women centered novels, From a Crooked Rib, Sardines and Gifts, where all these ways of
female subjugation are found on almost every page, the theme of these forms of patriarchal dominance is found in all the other novels. Subjugation through marriage, (Alden and Tremaine who also identified these three forms of subjugation term it “men’s prerogatives in marriages”) is the dominant form of suppressing women in Maps, Gifts and Sweet and Sour Milk. Circumcision, the wounds of tradition on women, is given prominence in Gifts, besides in From a Crooked Rib and Sardines. Rape, aggression to women, is central issue in his latest novel, Secrets, besides in From a Crooked Rib, Sardines, Maps and Gifts.

In the following sections of this chapter I intend to deal mainly with these issues i.e. male prerogatives in the institution of marriage, rape and the horrors of genital mutilation. However, since there exists a great deal of social criticism in Farah’s feminist fiction it is indeed worthwhile to present some aspects of the Somali woman’s social position in the following paragraphs and it is of certain that such material will help us compare her social position in real life with her picture in Farah’s fiction.
4.2.1. The Somali Woman and her Nomadic Communal Identity

Among the Somalis, as in other nomadic societies, it is hardly conceivable to have an individual identity, what matters is one’s clan as a unit of kinship identity. Even the present kinship based Somali communal identity which is not entirely nomadic, individuals, no matter what gender, are victimised or made to prosper not because of their doings but merely because of their clan identity. People are killed in the name of clans and, as observed by Kapteijns, those “individuals and groups who have spent their lives resisting it have found this identity forced upon them.” (212) However, while this aspect of the Somali communal identity has its inherent contradictions, some scholars insist that a Somali woman’s identity is temporary and ironically nomadic or ‘second rank’ one. An example of this is what Kapteijns observes as follows: “Considered a temporary member of her father’s household a women gains only an outsider status in the household of her husband.” (213) This understanding of hers is based on what she makes out of the Somali proverb ‘naagi waa ninkay u dhaxdo’; ‘A woman belongs to the man to whom she is married’. But to the culturally well-footed Somali what it indeed contains is that a women’s loyalty is with her husband rather than with her brother or father. It is an allusion to the fable where in a drought season a woman had to offer whatever meagre food was left with her to both her father and husband at the same time. She put ghee in the husband’s side of the dish. Her father noticed the injustice done to him by his daughter and then said the proverb. Thus, this doesn’t show
that the Somali woman loses her by-birth identity. On the contrary in those cases where she is married to a man outside her clan or community a woman comes to have wider social identity, in addition to her by-birth communal identity, as her newly formed household is identified and known in the community she is married to as ‘the household of the daughter of so-and-so clan,’ specially when her husband is a polygamous one. Exogamy, which is seen by many scholars as the sell out of a woman’s identity in exchange of bride wealth, and what Farah considers as financial blackmail, is regarded by the Somali as an important socio-economic and political factor. As in the most of the Arab countries marriage in Somalia, whether it is exogamy or marriage in the same community, involves the transfer of great deal of wealth from a groom’s family or community to the bride’s as bride-wealth. This is, for such societies, a proof of her value. To confront the male bias of undermining a woman’s value in the community, as she does not fight for the community, mothers educate their daughters from their childhood through lullabies, teaching them their real value. In the following song a mother tells her daughter in a song that had it not been the wealth acquired through her, the daughter’s family might have been left with few goats or sheep but not camel and horses or guns

Oh (my daughter) Gudo men have wronged us / For a dwelling where women are not present / Oh Gudo, no camels are milked (in that dwelling) nor are saddled horses mounted. (Adan)
In the pre-independence era, transfer of wealth as a bride wealth symbolised a number of things at once. It was seen as a gift rather than price in the first place. Secondly a man proved his gender explicit social position by offering his most valuable property as a gift to his in-laws.

Hence when a man of the Sayyid’s stature is obliged to put forth his most endeared and favourite pony, *Xiin-Finiin*, which was the finest Arabian horse among the Dervishes’s horses and most useful for his running resistance battles against the British Empire, as a bride wealth because his in-laws would insist on having it, consented to make such a virtually unmeetable demand it is clear that the Somali woman’s social value and status command respect. The Sayyid met this virtually impossible condition as he knew that his marriage to that girl would lead to or give him more respect among his enemies and, more important than that, promised alliance and security from certain frontiers. The last lines of his poem ‘*Xiin-Finiin*’ clearly underscores the obligation that one owes to one’s in-laws in the Somali culture:

The fine bay horse is among your herds this evening,/It is Xiin-Finiin the beast you lead by the rope,/All the other beasts shy away from him with reverence,/Since a Sultan, to whom I owe respect has insisted on having it,/Hold its bridle; I would not have honoured another man with it. (Andrzejewisk and Lewis 71)
Thirdly, it acted as a token of how he values their daughter - as valuable or more valuable than others - and with that the future love and prosperity of that new family was judged.

In the socio-political sphere a woman’s exogamy meant new relations, wider kinship and more peaceful sharing of the water resources and grassing areas. With the sanctification of such a marriage communal enmity and long-standing conflicts are happily put to an end. It was always difficult, for any one belonging to either of the communities, to have those enmities or conflicts resurfaced. The elders of both camps resisted any such thing with the mere reason that ‘they are married to so-and-so, our daughter’ or ‘we are married to so-and-so, their daughter.’

Thus, rather than losing her identity through her marriage instead a girl occupied a more invaluable place in the newly formed kinship of the two communities. Another factor of great importance is that she is also assigned to the post of good will ambassador. Exogamy, hence concretises and makes a nomadic woman’s communal identity much more invaluable and ensured. Marriage is not merely an individual contract as it also unites the families and kinship groups of the newly married couple. (Ibid., 22)

While the practice of demanding high bride wealth, followed by some greedy patriarchs, may be what makes many emphasise it as an
exchange price that makes a woman’s sexual and reproductive powers given to the man’s lineage it is the truth that such materialist motive is effectively discouraged by the other individuals of a girl’s family. Brothers, for example, do not only protest to their sister’s forced marriage to a man just because he was able to tempt the patriarch, but they violently stand his way and make it impossible for him to do so. Sisters to the girl whose mean, greedy father wants to give her hand even to an immoral husband just because of his wealth pressurise him, the father, too by threatening an elopement. And the role of a mother is instrumental as well. Amina H. Adan recorded the following lines in her beautiful essay ‘Woman and Words’, which underscore the mother’s say in her daughter’s marriage.

When you reach marriageable age    And if Allah keeps His approval
A wicked, mean and evil man        A wife beater and intimidator
To such a man (I promise)          Your hand won’t go.

This is a lullaby in which a mother is assuring her baby daughter that after she grows up to a marriageable age she will not be exchanged with wealth given by that ‘mean wife beater man’. Here the mother’s role is strongly felt. In Adan’s words:

The mother is certain such a man won’t be welcome. A mother has a say and a great one at that, and this is what the song is conveying. The bottomline here is that she herself, being a woman, knows how an intimidating husband could be a disastrous match. (Ibid)
4.2.2. Woman as the central figure in the Somali family

Although the Somali society is essentially a patriarchal one, the Somali woman’s role as a mother or wife in the family is much more crucial than that of the man as a father or husband. As in most of Bedouin societies, culture privileges man over woman. This is more so in the pre-Islamic Arab culture where a girl was always received as a burden. The extremely harsh life-style, water scarcity and journeys for the provision of water which often took days and nights, camel herding and watering, continuous movement over hundreds of miles for grassy lands, frequent clanish war-fare and so on, gave men a place of superiority and importance over women.

But, ironically, when one observes a woman’s position in a nomadic and even the present city life, one is struck by her vast unacknowledged invaluablity. As a woman she has the exclusive reproductive task of bearing and rearing children. This task involves for the Somali woman extra risk of childbirth, due to the barbaric violation done to her genitals in the name of circumcision. She also does the ever occupying family chores such as cooking, fetching water over long distances, collecting fire wood, performs the difficult task of milking the smaller animals such as goats, sheep and cows. She also has the responsibility to preserve food for the hard times to come in the absence of technological access. In a nomadic family, men hardly acquire any household utensils from outside. Except few items, like cups and plates, all the household utensils are literally made by the woman. With an outstanding craftsmanship a woman furnishes her household with
water and milk containers of different sizes, drinking utensils known as ‘haruub.’ This is also seconded by the more difficult work of weaving all the articles used to build and furnish the movable nomadic homestead. The woman is the sole architect of the family house.

Another invaluable role of the Somali woman is that of the teacher. She, with great ingenuity, educates her children with their cultural identity. Gender oriented education is imparted by her to her sons and daughters. Therefore, education of the young in the norms of their society is effectively carried out by women as mothers or wives. To the girls her lessons are indispensable. In the following song a mother teaches her daughter the manners, which are supposed or expected of her by the society:

Quiteness is a girl’s virtue / You are within reach of your potential suitors / Who’ve come laden with dowries for your hand / Possibly one of them will become your husband / A girl’s quiet voice is a great virtue.

In this song the mother makes clear the manners that she wants her daughter should groom herself for the role the family expects of her. Thus, as Adan observes, her being soft spoken and quiet will make her attract suitors who will in turn pay handsome bride wealth which contributes to the family’s wealth. The daughter’s social status as well as her communal identity are also charged on the basis of the wealth that her suitor is prepared to offer.
4.2.3. Ebla and the Institution of Marriage

In Farah’s fiction, *From a Crooked Rib* in particular, marriage is a patriarchal institution that empowers men over women. It seems that Farah held this very institution responsible for most of the injustices done to women. It tightens, the text seems to say, men’s hold on women. But the irony is that women like Ebla seek refuge in what they run away from. In the earliest pages of the novel Farah drives home the point symbolically: “she put one foot outside and one inside and kept standing there motionless.” (16) Though there exists a forced marriage at the background of Ebla’s escapades she does not rationalise the ups and downs of the institution. However, it is the gender relationships that she questions on numerous occasions. In her inquisitive consciousness marriage is rather an institution of security. She rationalises it as the crux of life for her: “I love life, and I love to be a wife. I don’t care whose.”(125)

Thus, it is soon made clear that Ebla revolts are not against the institution as such. It is Giumaleh’s marriage, which she rejects all in all, though she sometimes levels the blame against the whole society when she refers to that particular marriage. Despite his polemic of treating Somali marriage as a one “of social blackmail, and commercial exploitation against women” Farah still sees to that his female characters seek to define their existence in the very institution. It does not, however, suffice to explain this
away by simply saying that as a Third World woman she had to seek to be a wife and then a mother so as to be, because these are the sole social roles for her. This is what Derek Wright means when he writes on the subject of women and the Somali marriage system:

And yet, however unsatisfactory it may be, it remains the given condition through which everything in the woman’s existence – even her striving after individuality and independence - has to be expressed, and those who remain outside it, such as the widow Asha, suffer the various punitive stigmas of spinsterhood. (25)

Such an attitude should rather be seen as the unwillingness of the hegemonic literature to admit the workability of the subject peoples’ social institutions. In the Somali society marriage helps both men and women to define their social roles and economic independence. Young unmarried men do not have any socio-political role whatsoever. The elders rather treat their motives with suspicion and always resist their initiatives. This is so because it is believed, as the Somali proverb has it, ‘A young man over steps an issue as he jumps over a tree.’ And the fear is that his youthfulness may take the community adrift. Marriage, which also helps to accumulate property and accordingly leads to a man’s future economic influence, is associated with responsibility and maturity. Not only that, but it, as well, helps such youngsters survive starvation as result of the harsh and difficult life in hostile nomadic environment.
Girls also do not occupy any given social role, beyond a certain division of labour, before their marriage. But as they are married, they become socially active and economically independent as well as productive. Though these marriage dividends are for both the woman and the man, it is the former who, contrary to Farah's views, exercises more influence through her family. As we have seen above, a man, despite the dominant patriarchal traditional values, never enjoys the title of breadwinner in the nomadic Somali society. The wife is the real manager of the family’s livestock; unlike the husband she keeps the record of the family’s economic substance other than the camel herds.

When it comes to the gender based strength of the personalities of the couple although the man enjoys a position of eminence in the sphere of war and the exercise of political authority the Somali culture, however, acknowledges and adorns the woman with praise for her invaluable role in the family. It may be contrary to the general attitude of those who tend to analyse the Somalis from patriarchal angle when one insists on the fact that the Somali culture admits a woman’s strength of personality as the real force that holds a family and hence the society together. She has more to say in the family affairs, because of her marriage she comes to a new status both socially and economically. This seems to be realised by Farah as well; “The women, however, have to wait until fates give them a new status in life: the status of marriage.” (FCR. 13)
As for the view that marriage in the Somali society is the source of all forms of women’s subjugation, which many of the readers of *From a Crooked Rib* tend to form, one finds some limited relative validity in it. Though there are certain tendencies in the oral traditions which are often seen as against women – e.g. a woman is supposed not to put claim to any of those three virtues of courage, generosity and knowledge, - we often hear stories of those immortal Somali women who, because of their strong characters and vitality made not only their husbands but also the community elders in general submit to their views and decisions. The story of Huryo Ugaas is often told by both men and women with a great deal of admiration for her. Hers is an example of those women who, because of their strong will powers and sharp minds, made their men folk give in to their sound decisions.

Therefore, if Farah’s Ebla is a picture of the Somali woman’s unhappy lot in the institution of marriage in fiction for the non-Somali reader, those like Huryo’s life story amount to real life portraits of the Somali woman’s bold line resistance and the culture’s even-handedness to gender related issues. This fact requires the reader to put some more efforts in interpreting Ebla’s polyandrous marriages. In other words, this would amount to an intentionally misguided polemics on the part of the writer of Ebla’s story, to have us believe it as a representative picture of the Somali woman, where there is hardly any alternative left for her other than prostitution.
This being a picture of the Somalis and the status of women and the institution of marriage we may ask: what is Farah’s attitude to woman and marriage? It must be brought into light the fact that Farah, at the time of writing his first two novels, was under the influence of modern novelists as Joyce, Woolf and Lawrence. It is very likely, as a result of that influence, Farah did not only question but also rejected outrightly certain social institutions. Going as per the content of his first two English novels Farah’s attitude towards marriage seems to be a very pessimistic one. But this is so in all about man-woman relationships in those novels too. In *A Naked Needle* the various couple-relationships and marriages presented bring home the writer’s dissatisfaction and pessimism with them.

In the novel Nancy’s arrival to Mogadiscio for her expected marriage to Koschin is presented as the main cause of Koschin’s paranoia and hence the main theme of the novel, with the already failing marriages of Mohammed-Barbara and Barre-Mildred; -European women married to Somali men- in the background. Here the white woman or mistress is seen as the dream of the black men who are foolish enough to hope to win, in Wright’s words, an “honorary whiteness through their sexual conquests.”(35) But a probably more valid and important aspect of the significance of such racial marriages is that they underscore the author’s cynical attitude towards the institution. What these show more forcefully is the underlying sense of opportunism. Both are marriages of convenience, and so is what brought Nancy and Koschin close together in the first place.
And it is this element of convenience in marriages what explains Ebla’s desire to be married, though she often questions, with the help of her artless sceptical intelligence, the “whole gamut of marital and related issues ranging from the choice of partner, divorce to polyandry and infidelity, and circumcision.” (Ibid., 31). What is never clear, however, is whether marriage differs in connotation from prostitution in the author’s polemics. As the text goes on problematising the word ‘marriage’ it becomes apparent that for Farah it is not that sacred way of solemnising a man-woman’s life partnership and as the corner stone of bringing family life into existence, but as a means of legalising prostitution. This seems to be the strong point that From a Crooked Rib has set to make. When the landlady hints the existence of the man Tiffo who has already enquired about her and was very interested in her, Ebla, despite the fact that she got choked with oddness of his name, which is the only thing she knows of him, leave his features and personality aside, questions Asha;

‘Do you think he will marry me? I am eager for marriage anytime - that was what Adan and Hawa [Adam and Eve] started, but they were never married, were they?’

[And then;]

‘Tell Tiffo that I am willing to marry him secretly. May be he will also want that. And if Awill comes back and doesn’t want to
Contrary to the view that Ebla decided to marry Tiffo, after what is probably and arguably her single lawful marriage in Islamic law, because of her utter helplessness in the world of man, and because of her intention to avenge herself upon Awill, these words of hers underscore her willingness and potentiality to be recruited as a prostitute. What is to be noticed particularly is the typically Farahan style of raising religious issues in defence of his ostensibly victimised characters; “That was what Adan and Hawa started, but they were never married, were they?”

Farah here, like Rushdie, skilfully finds fault in what all the Muslims and Christians took for granted by making this obtuse question of: “were they?” The object of Farah’s criticism in this is the Islamic Sharia (Law) which sanctions ‘polygamy,’ what Derek Wright considers as a part of religious and tribalism’s “negative and reactionary collaboration with the subjugation of women.” (31) And in Alden and Tremaine’s book male prerogatives in marriage help “older men benefit from the practice of polygamy by taking young wives while other women experience both economic and psychological harm.” (132) Therefore, with her polyandrous tendency of “you have another wife and I have another husband. We are even,” (145) Ebla turns, in Alden and Tremaine’s words “polygamy on its head.” (132).
And it is somewhat puzzling how Ebla, whose sub-consciousness is preoccupied with the unlawfulness of her both motives and actions, justifies her polyandry:

My cousin gave my hand to a man whom I never met. The Sheikh has pronounced my engagement to him. My cousin told me about it. That was why I eloped with Awill and came to Mogadiscio, but what does Islam say about my marriage to Awill? Is it legal? (124)

The question is put to Asha whose ignorance at Islamic Shariah is already stated. The point is not her answer, which is already known to Ebla – “I think. I don’t know”– but Ebla’s implied one which is ‘no’. No, because that was the outcome of her, decision to sell herself: “But it is good to sell yourself’, she told herself. ‘Without a broker there is no bidder – and no auctioneer. All I need is the Sheikh’s fee if Awill wants to marry me.” (85)

In this dangerous waters of Farah’s style layers of meanings need to be turned one by one. What sounded justified and moral response to the manipulation of her so-called cousin at the time now turned out to be the exact opposite and come to bear the bitter fruit of prostitution.
After her sexual relationship with Tiffo is clad with the legality of marriage he comes into the empty, prostitute’s-like, room. Farah ingenuously uses the ‘waji-fur’ tradition, which is the gift given by the groom to the bride before their first consummation used by some townsfolk, and unknown to the nomads, as the prostitute’s fee for selling her flesh:

For a moment she was going to uncover her face, but she checked herself.

‘The waji-fur fee?’

‘How much?’ he asked.

‘A hundred Somali Shillings,’ Ebla repeated the amount Asha told her. …

‘Uncover your face; here is the money’, said Tiffo. (127)

The landlady, Asha has all the tendencies of a bawd about her. When she enquires Ebla of the fee, and is told that he played a trick on her, she loses her temper. The narrator tells us; “Asha was no longer interested. Her main interest lay in money; it circulated in her blood. And in no time she has become more furious than Ebla had ever seen her.” (131)
Later in the novel Ebla contemplates over the balance sheet of her brief history of escapades and polyandrous marriages. Here, Ebla who till then tended to accept only her sideline involvement of her real life events specularates a whole span of issues. In a self-discovery chapter of her life Ebla admits that her marriage to Tiffo was the only thing of which she was guilty. She, however, justifies it on the ground that she had to take revenge upon Awill, which is what, in her subconsciousness, when she enacts the scene of her imagined interrogation of man and woman, regards as the outcome of woman’s helplessness: “I do things, just do them without really getting myself involved. I put my faith in my man, but once I lose it, then it is hard to regain it. It is jealous and insecurity that causes most misunderstandings.” (166)

She confesses that she committed adultery by going to bed with Tiffo in the name of marriage. Contrary to the supposed defence of a woman’s doing “things” without getting involved, Ebla admits she did all that intentionally and deliberately. What is so off-setting is that she was well aware of the fact that she was losing the game in spite of that. And it soon dawns on her that she might have been a prostitute: “I wonder if I am a prostitute; I wonder how many people think that I am one.”(152)

This may have won her the reader’s sympathy as the context presents her as a victim of the circumstances. In Alden and Tremaine’s words; “Ebla is victimised by men who first take advantage of her vulnerability and then
With her hand she felt her body, naked under the sheet; she scratched her sex, then chuckled. ‘This is my treasure, my only treasure, my bank, my money, my existence.’ She let her hand lie upon it for a while, and wondered if she had not got tired of playing uninterested games with foolish men on beds. (160).

Thus, all this strengthens the view that Farah’s attitude towards marriage is one of opportunism and legalised prostitution. Owing to his ever fading and always uncertain sense of reality, one would indeed like to know whether in Farah’s polemics the mythical rib of Adam is crooked permanently in favour or against Eve and her daughters. This is in relation to his use of the titular epigraph of Ebla’s story as ‘A Somali traditional proverb.’ One may however, suspect here what may be an intentional mixing up of issues: religious and traditional ones in particular.

As far as its Islamic connotation is concerned Prophet Mohammed told the Muslims in his last sermon in Mecca that women are “created from a crooked rib and that whosoever trieth to streighten it breaks it.” (Al Nawiwi) The prophet asked the Muslims to be good and understanding to women and make the best out of their dealing with them saying: “those who are most complete in their Faith among the faithful are those who are best in character and that most gentle among you are those who are most gentle to
their women.” What this tells us is that to the well-informed Muslim the ‘crook’ in the rib means a call for the need to understand woman’s nature.

But while this religious metaphor is concerned with the behavioural character of women Wright, has of certain, missed the point when he considers it as a preordained physical deformity “destined” for the subjugation of women; “Woman, not the world in which she moves, is deemed innately bent and askew. She is flawed creature, born with a crooked back, destined to receive whatever burden is placed upon it, and impossible to ‘straighten’ or made perfect.”(24)

Thus, in its proper religious context the ‘Rib’ does not work against women. But for many people, it is seen as a woman’s inherent inclination to evil deeds. Her motives are thought as ill-founded ones. When there is some untoward action of a woman those who subscribe to this latter interpretation of the crooked rib do not tend to ask what could have made her do so. They would rather will it away with the mere assumed truth of: ‘because she is woman’, meaning that her such actions were but the natural consequences of her crooked moral nature.

Farah probably employed his titular epigraphic for Ebla’s story in relation to the latter purpose. Ebla’s covering the wide distance between her strong sense of chastity in the early part of the story and the cruel experience
of prostitution brings home this fatalistically inimical attitude toward women. This is more so when we realise how Farah, may have wittingly, tried to localise this religious spiritual truth – that is when he identifies the titular epigraph of “God created women from a crooked rib; and anyone who trieth to staighen it, breaketh it,” as a “Somali traditional proverb”. For the Somali layman, like in any other Muslim societies, this saying, detached from its Islamic connotation, certainly holds women in low esteem. But if he castigates this far he does indeed defend her by handling the ‘rib’ ironically too.

Indeed Farah is not a writer who is interested in religious moral issues of woman and man relationship in his fiction. Conversely he sees religion as one of those basic discourses with which the patriarchal domination of women thrives: “God is the one who fixed the status of human beings … He must have had a good reason for doing so”(155), “May be God prefers men to women,” says Ebla (13) Citing this the writers of Nuruddin Farah observe: “Experience teaches her how difficult it is for a woman to challenge the prevailing views or to enjoy, for herself, the greater autonomy of a man. At the end of the novel, her impulses to resist patriarchal ideology falters.”(129)

In the final pages of the novel, in order to underline a woman’s ‘indecision’ and probably her secondary place and dependence on man, Awill tells her that women “were created from the crooked rib of Adam.”
But the irony that underlines, in Farah’s handling of the mythical rib, emerges from Ebla’s “and if anyone tries to straighten it he will have to break it.” (179) In this Farah’s message seems to be that women may originally depend on men but there is always the possibility for them to revolt and that patriarchal dominance should make amends through compromise lest humanity be at loss due to their ‘break.’

The incident of the woman, in Ebla’s rationalisation, who took up to prostitution as a profession after her relatives stigmatised her with their punishment subtly brings home this view of the author: “What good had her relatives done? A person is tempted to do awful things once in a while, but violence doesn’t solve any problem; violence and harsh beating alone could never have made that woman repent for her sin.” (122)

This brings us to another possible, but hardly mentioned, interpretation of Ebla’s story: urbanisation. What did the Somali woman have to lose or gain in the experience of her long journey from nomadic social set up to the completely new and strange machine, the city life? After her younger brother comes to Mogadiscio and meets her, Ebla asks him why he wouldn’t stay and start a similar easy life as hers. His response may be considered straightforward reference to that theme in the story of From a Crooked Rib. He tells her:
‘Because they [the townsfolk] don’t have any self-respect in them. You know, this place is full of people like yourself, all the outcasts, all those who could not get on well with their people in the country.’

‘But it is good that they get on well together here.’

‘Birds fly with their own types of birds,’ the Somalis say. They are all of the same type here: misfits, filthy and mean.”

Ebla kept silent for a while. She thought it over, and decided to send him back to the country as soon as he was ready to leave.(138)

It is more than clear that the boy’s criticism is not directed against only women. What it underlines is the idea of the emergence of the city dwellers as those individuals who had to give up their nomadic social and economic system of life for one reason or another.

4.2.4. Urbanisation and the Somali Woman’s Shifted Role

In the pre-colonial era the status and the role of the Somali woman in the socio-economic set up were not only invaluable but also occupied central position of the nomadic family as well, though largely unacknowledged by the patriarchal system. In the division of labour, they had specific and distinct labour tasks. In the nomadic life women in all ages, unlike the male elders who often had considerable leisure were to ensure the healthy functioning of the family, and perform enormous productive labour.
The British rule, and, then the Italian one that soon followed did not only undermine the norms of exercising political power, but they also had great impact on the overall socio-economic life of the Somali pastoral society. They introduced trade with the outer posts of the empire, which gave influence and power to those Somalis who became engaged in it. This did not only result in the marginalisation of the pastoral wealth which gave shape to the elders’ political authority, but it also made, as Kapteijns observes, “the Somali pastoral society lose its hegemony to the non-productive sectors of the society.” (219) In other words the introduced commercial capital and its subsequent influential middle class made the functioning of the pastoralist eco-political system closely tied, influenced and often rendered helpless by it.

This had also its impact felt on the social relations of the pastoralists. In the introduced township life all those sources of pastoral wealth i.e. bride wealth, livestock herding, etc., did hardly have any significance.

Urban life gave individuals, more so men, self-definition and dependence. Unlike the imposed kinship identities that prevailed in the nomadic Somali society in towns, men could define themselves by their accumulated wealth which was stored in money form in bank accounts, often in abroad.
The resultant individualism that set apart the townsman from his pastoralist kinship and also had its impact on the institution of marriage and the exogamy relationships it used to result in. Here, in the towns, an individual belonging to the emerged middle class no longer depended on his family or kinship for the acquisition of bride wealth. The townsman could now marry and pay for the bride wealth in money. In some cases men could inter into marriage deal without even paying anything whatsoever as a bride wealth.

While this individualism ensured men independence and social power, women, contrary to the views held by many scholars, lost two of their most defining social factors; socio-political role and economic independence. As far as the former is concerned a woman was no longer a bearer of ‘social capital’ seen above. Whereas in the latter, a woman, who in her marriage status acquired her economic independence in the earlier Somali pastoralist system, now found her fate and that of her family entirely dependent, economically, on men, as “she was excluded from all avenues of income.” (Adan)

For the women in general this shift to urban life had its ups and downs. Most managed to benefit and make the best of it. A young nomadic woman would come to a town, escaping forced marriage, as Ebla, or would
elope with an already well-footed man in a town, or as is often, preferring manipulative, unsatisfactory marriages and poverty in a town to the hardships of life in the country. In a township marriage, unless she was married to a man of her community, a girl was, most likely, to be victimised. Hence a woman who came to a town against the will of her family could most likely marry the man of her choice, even if there were close relatives of hers. But it would soon show its real face, as it often was a marriage of necessity in nature. This would lead to a divorce followed by another marriage, which could as well end up in divorce.

The character of Ebla in Farah’s earlier fiction of transworld existence, where the characters keep recurring in a novel, after novel shows that point with definite clarity. After her problematic marriages in her story of *From a Crooked Rib* she reappears in the all female cast world of *Sardines*. Ebla, presented here as an experienced and understanding affectionate mother, is said to have profited from her chain of marriages and divorces. She is with a teenage daughter, through whom she is connected to Medina’s circle of female activists. Her daughter, Sagal, is fathered by A will, we are told in *Sardines*. The marriage that followed lasted for only two years. But she profited from that marriage contract. The man, described as a “soft-spoken” with a heart as warm as love, was a wonderful father to Sagal, and before his death he left to Sagal a five-roomed house. And to Ebla he left a shop, already mentioned in *A Naked Needle*. 
It is clear, therefore, that a woman's taking to township life made her, in most cases, the victim of traditionally unsafeguarded marriages. That is perhaps the reason why Farah makes his Ebla regret her escapades in her self-discovery speculations, when she says; “If I had not left the country and instead had married the old man my grandfather had given my hand to, may be I would not have run into all these troubles. But to whom can I speak? May be only to God … one by one I am losing my acquaintances, and even my relations.”(155-6)

Thus, the possible reading of the theme of outcasts and misfits in *From a Crooked Rib* is made apparent which gives more weight to the exploitation subjected to such unfortunate women. Farah’s response to the question whether the loss of women’s traditional rights has been compensated by gains in modern civil rights strengthens the point in question: “I think the gains are fewer than the losses,” he said.(Jaggi--) After stating how sad it was that more and more women were being turned to prostitutes and semi-prostitutes, he illustrated the point saying: “It is no accident, for example, that Ebla is first raped by her future husband, before they get married, in Mogadiscio, because traditional restraints on behaviour simply do not exist in urban areas.”(Ibid.)

What is beyond all doubt here is that a girl’s being away from the protection of her relatives, and her contracting marriages that do not consist
in them any of the traditional values made her an easy meat for male sexual appetite. It again signifies the workability and the positive face of the traditional marriage systems, mentioned earlier in this chapter. It could also be regarded as an evidence of the moral aspects of the bride wealth. The increase in divorce rate in urban marriages, which are clearly depicted in Farah’s fiction, are considered, in Somali sociological circles, mainly due to this factor.

4.3. Sardines: Pain and Politics

The story of Medina in, Sardines, the second instalment of the Dictatorship Trilogy, represents a major feminist shift of Farah’s fiction. As a part of the concerted resistance to the oppressive world of the General’s Somalia Sardines sets forth not only a parallel resistance to Ebla’s but an advanced theme of the Somali woman’s revolt to the well-documented injustice done to them. Here, unlike the problematisation of marriage in From a Crooked Rib, the major issue is the political involvement of women and their role in the resistance to authoritarian rules. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, in this narrative Farah makes a female figure take over the leadership as well as the activities of the clandestine movement. Thus, Farah pitches his nomadic feminist tent in an interesting new territory. The proper political implications of the Dictatorship Trilogy, of which Sardines forms a part, already dealt with in detail in the previous chapter, I would like to concentrate here on, what follows, the feminist perspectives found in the women’s involvement in the insurgency activities against the authoritarian
leadership of the General. These mainly exist in the spheres of their political roles and resistance to those torturous barbaric traditions.

4.3.1. Women and the Exercise of Political Authority

In the pre-Barre era women had only domestic roles to play. Politically they were not only marginalised but also excluded and the exercise of political authority rested on male hands. A given community would call all the mature males of sound minds to a meeting in the process of deciding on a particular issue. ‘Xeer’, the body of principles and procedures with which a community defined its relations with other kinship communities, and employed for solving conflicts was a convention dealt with only by men. Though young men, married or singles alike, could attend a meeting of the clan and were allowed to make their views heard only those elders who, as Kapteijns argues, acquired prestige and influence through their extended support to the other individuals of the community could get qualified for leadership. (215)

Treating the younger passionate bloods of the community with the suspicion of misleading the clan and its interest, these elders were supposed to possess the characteristic of making impartial judgements, as they had to show wisdom and make fairly tolerant judgements. Thus, it is evident that gender, age and economic factors were, as Kepteijns concludes, those major
factors, which informed the process by which political power was acquired and exercised. (Ibid.)

Women, in spite of their indispensable roles in the family units of both their native and marriage kinship, and also of their contributions to the material wealth of their by birth ones and those of marriage, had never exercised any acknowledged political powers or influence. Besides the Arawelo fable, which tells the story of once powerful queen who ruled her tribe in northern Somalia and subjugated men by empowering the feminist cause, and the legend king, Wiilwaal’s daughter, who influenced the matters of the state through her consuls to her father, the womenfolk in Somalia were traditionally perceived as wives, mothers or sisters. Power through spirituality, magic or religious sainthood, common to both men and women in the sub-Saharan Africa, never existed for the Somalis.

However, as a part of the post-independence transformations that took place in many Third World societies women came to occupy political positions in the Somali state of Barre’s regime. Within a few years after he came to power, General Barre soon announced his socialist policies that had made a headlong clash with the Islamicly informed cultural force of the Somali people. And the resistance to his so-called gender equality was met with tough and swift martial laws of execution. In those early years of his rule, his socialism inspired feminist agenda made women come out in great
numbers in support of the regime’s policies. Women’s associations were formed and through them soon women did climb the social and political ladders of the nation.

In the social sphere Barre’s regime declared its policies of gender equality. This is more so as he challenged the existing blood compensation laws of the Somali ‘Xeer’. His early literacy campaigns concentrated on women and consequently raised the percentage of Somali women’s presence in educational institutions both as teachers and students. This led to a steep rise in the employment of the small percentage of townswomen in the modern sector. All this made a part of the regime’s policies of women’s emancipation. It considered education to be the basic factor for enhancing the social status of women.

In the political sphere much of the regime’s state feminism made many women the recipients of numerous political and economic favours extended to them by the government. However, there are many critics of the government’s such policies, including Farah, who raised doubts of the sincerity of its declared feminist agenda. Among others, it was regarded as the regime’s tactics to keep male rivals at bay of power by giving to women some huge portfolios, ministerial ones included. Thus, women came to power, according to Kapteijns, mainly in three ways: firstly, of their being relatives of loyal male clients to the economic and political dictator. Secondly, as a leverage to keep out of power their politically influential male relatives. And finally as they compromised with their sexuality in obtaining
political positions. Thus, she concludes, that this of Barre’s state feminism policies had their cynical impacts as they ironically “devalued women’s social roles and deepened their dependence.”(230)

4.3.2. Women’s Role in the Struggle for Independence

Though as we have seen above the Somali women did not have any role to play in the exercise of political authority in the traditional Somali pastoral community they participated in the struggle for independence. They stood by their men folk and encouraged them. Sometimes they went deep into the battle and got killed, in others they were sent to jail as political prisoners. From early forties most of the Somali townswomen were politically involved. They did not only support the nationalist political parties but they also got enrolled in the active membership of such high profile parties as the Somali Youth League (SYL) and Somali National League (SNL).

As Zeinab M. Jama reveals in her essay, “Fighting to be Heard: Somali Women’s Poetry,” there was such a group of women known as the SYL or SNL women like Xalimo Godane, Halimo Shiil, Barni Warsame, Timiro Ukash and Fatima Abane, who actively participated in the struggle for independence. These women, like many others, employed all their mental, physical and oral powers to win independence for their country. While many Somalis know them as the women members of the reputed SYL and SNL, what ensured their historical presence more was mainly their effective and powerful poetry. They used their poetry to elate and intensify
the spirit of nationalism of their fellow countrymen and as a result made it a fear inspiring oral weapon against the British, Italian, French and Ethiopian imperialists. As they were hailed as famous poetesses throughout the country they recited their poems at political rallies, encouraged the political prisoners and also envisioned a better future through their *buraanbur* or even *geeraar* lyrics and fine voices.

What proves their courage and the sacrificial spirit in them is their prison poetry. Like the men folk the Somali townswomen experienced detention, prison sentences, physical and psychological tortures and many other types of humiliation. Among large people of Somalis who were rounded up at a political rally in Kismaayo in 1952 and sent to detention jails over a year, and later some of them sentenced to life imprisonment while others got prison sentences ranging from three to twenty four years, was the activist and poetess, Timiro Ukash. Timiro was pregnant when she was taken to detention and gave birth in prison serving five years of imprisonment in a high security jail in Kismayo.

In spite of all the physical and psychological tortures, and the humiliation the Somali women were subjected to because of their active nationalist participation, they even went to the extent to ridicule at the most effective and oppressive means of the colonialists. Employing the *geeraar*, one of the most serious male verses of poetry, Fatima Hersi Abbane, a great poetess and a member of the SNL who also underwent all the experiences of
detention, torture and humiliation, undermines the oppressive role of the colonial prisons in the following poem:

By God we are not afraid,/ For we are used to Jail, / There is a blanket for cover, / Another to use as a pillow, / Two sets of clothes to wear, / A bath for washing, /a big yard for walks / Plenty of warm tea, / And millet meal to fill one’s stomach.

Having at its background that fearsome patriarchal world of the regime, Medina’a story in Sardines sets forth a well-articulated intellectual complexity of the Somali women’s resistance. Dealt with in the sphere of family, a typical style of Farah’s fiction, Medina’s consciousness is mainly directed to feminist aspects of the regime’s ‘incestuous’ policies, which is a part of the intellectual resistance to the dictatorial regime. Her overwhelming preoccupation of that Woolfian motif of the boundaries of an individual woman’s freedom can be seen as Farah’s response to the dictator’s declared state feminism.

The fact that Medina came to the post of the editor of the only daily newspaper by virtue of her intellectual prowess is made apparent in the early pages of the novel.

She had a room of her own. She was young and beautiful. .... She had taken a degree in literature, then applied her talent to writing for the press; ... two and a half years later she was appointed acting editor of the only daily in the country. She came into a head-on confrontation with the authorities over the paper’s editorial
policy. She was sacked. A presidential degree forbade her to publish her writings inside the Somali Democratic Republic. So she directed her talent else where. She decided to translate twenty world classics from six languages into Somali. (3).

Her removal from that post seems to confirm her independence and also the absence of any state influence in her original nomination for that post in the beginning. But the regime's willingness and subsequent pressures to Samatar after her removal from the post of editor makes arguments to the contrary strong and valid as well.

One dawn, two men came for Samatar and took him away. Ubax rose with the sun and found her mother reading the daily newspaper which carried a large photograph of Samatar on the first page. She learnt that her father had been appointed Minister of Constructions. ...Life was never the same after that. (4)

Here the regime's tactics of keeping one out by accommodating another of the family should not only be seen as a means of discrediting the political resistance but also as a useful and effective ways of buying allegiances, and also undermining the future role of that done-with former member of the system as well. Contrary to Wright's view of seeing that the dictator's such policies render the activities of his opponents ineffective, it may be seen that in Medina's case the regime's policies have been counter productive to certain extent, and this is probably a point Farah wants to bring home. Instead of making her rejection and criticism of the regime mild after Samatar accepted the ministerial post Medina's views and attitudes towards the regime became more radical and hardened, as she turned to be bolder
and more scathing in her attacks. And Farah’s ever evasive style seems to be emphasizing this element of counter productivity in the regime’s pressures.

*Sardines* may, therefore, be read as the writer’s attempt at refuting the hypocritical projects of state feminism. What it does probably convey more forcefully is that there existed women who came to occupy important state posts by their own educational and intellectual qualifications. Rather than giving in to the overwhelming state pressures Medina celebrates in the face of what Xadiya calls defeat at the end of the narrative. Perhaps there is, in Farah’s polemics, enough reason to do so as one happens to survive and live one more day so as to continue resisting:

Medina asked herself if Samatar had held well, if everything had been futile, if there was any point beginning from the beginning all over again. It seemed an eternity before either of them said anything. She looked shaken but she refused to admit that she was: her voice did not betray her either.’(240)

In this light it may as well be argued that Farah presents, in the person of Medina, the Somali woman’s political consciousness, moral strength and fight against the patriarchal system of authoritarianism. She derives the source of her strength from her maxim: “he is humiliated who breaks.” Thus, despite the great odds against which she finds herself she refuses to admit the fact that she was indeed shaken. The regime has succeeded to silence her first, then coerced her husband to hold its ministerial post, and finally, in addition to the damages done to her, dumps him i.e. Samatar, broken at her place. Her loyalty to the group’s cause and defiant attitude are considered

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fair enough to show the positive feminism that Farah’s fiction sets forth. As the narrative comes to an end we leave Medina pondering over her future steps of action:

Medina thought if she, too had another traumatic trip ahead. She knew she definitely had a long, long way to go to fight for Nasser’s release, Samatar’s rehabilitation and convalescence. ... Medina would supplement her intellectual activities – her translations and original writings - with these social responsibilities. (249-50)

4.3.3. Lasting Scars of Tradition

Among the host of issues that affect the lives of the Somali woman, like motherhood problems, divorce, polygamy, rape, circumcision is an evil Farah’s feminist fiction presents wholly and sincerely. It may as well be stated that this is an issue of which we can easily form our ideas and reject it after reading Farah’s texts. In other words his humanist and feminist perspectives as regards this practice are, unlike other writers like Ngugi wa Tiong’o who also dealt with it in their fiction, devoid of his characteristic ambivalence.

As in Ngugi’s *the River in Between* circumcision occupies a central position in Farah’s *Sardines*. It is believed that Medina deserted her home as she did not want Idil’s threats to have Ubax circumcised materialise into deeds. To bring the barbaric effect of this cultural evil home Farah employs one such factual incident known to most adult Somalis and gives it flesh of his imagination. A Somali diplomat, Mr. Mohammed Abdi, had his children grown up in London. When he returned home in late 60s, his women
relatives circumcised his daughter, Asha, against his will. The girl, in her late teens then, wanted to see it done: “I was the only black girl in my class in England. Now I was the only uninfibulated girl in Somalia. ... I had always been an outsider in London and did not want to be alien in my own country.” (D’Haem) It is made apparent that it is her very mother, who arranged the operation to take place simply because she couldn’t bear any longer her daughter being treated as an outsider and verbally abused.

Though female circumcision is practised in many parts of the world and is particularly more prevalent in Africa, experts say that it is a tradition, which has its origin in ancient Pharaonic Egypt thousands of years ago. But it has always meant different things to different cultural groups. To the ancient Egyptians, for instance, it was an oppressive means of birth control employed against the dominated Jewish community. Presently to the Egyptians, Somalis, Sudanese and some Asian Arab countries it is a means of ensuring that a girl remains virgin till marriage and, to some extent, of purification, treating the female genitalia as unclean. To the Negroid African it symbolises, as does male circumcision, a girl’s initiation to womanhood. It bears no significance of maintaining the girl’s virginity for them as it is done only a few weeks before her marriage, even if she is in her late teens or early twenties or thirties. The Arabs who practice it see to that the operation is strictly done in the first eight years of her age. Regardless which culture, critics generally see this practice as "a method of controlling women sexuality.” (Jama and Nielsen)
Experts consider the term female circumcision as highly misleading one. They tend, therefore, to employ the term Female Genital Mutilation, (FGM). According to them the practice of FGM broadly falls into three types: (Ibid.)

A. “Sunnah” referring to the only acceptable form of female circumcision to Islam. It involves a very slight cut or even confining to a blood causing scratch of the prepuce or the tip of the clitoris.

B. “Excision.” It involves the cutting off the clitoris and the removal of the inner and outer parts of the vaginal lips.

C. “Sealing”, which involves the sewing up of the vulva, after an excision operation has been done, with the leaving of a small hole for the discharge of menstrual blood and urine.

All these types of FGM cause serious health hazards and leave a lasting effect on the lives of the women who undergo them. Among the other complications, which the FGM leads to, are those long term medical problems such as: pelvic inflammation, sterility, chronic urinary infections, cysts and abscesses. Its, however, most fatal ones are experienced during childbirth.

In the post independence era the voices of medical experts and other anti-circumcision social activists came to be heard. In some cases, like Somalia, governments held their anti-FGM banners high and employed state media to fight it. But while some activists felt the impact of their campaigns
on the Somali women in Europe it is the Islamist organisations who showed more success in their anti-FGM campaigns both at home and abroad. This is so because such organisations convince the people that beyond the Sunnah form of circumcision is mutilation and unacceptable to Islamic faith, and that Islam prefers that even the Sunnah be abandoned, since it is, unlike male circumcision, not obligatory.

Farah’s position of circumcision is unequivocal as his fiction wages clear war against its practice. This is obvious from his rendering of Asha’s real story. In its factual form, and as is narrated by the victim in person, it does not contain, whatsoever, political undercurrents, in its conventional sense. But in Farah’s fictional rendering it serves as a far-reaching and unforgettable picture of the regime’s gross violations of human rights, and the suppression of women. At the time of its narration in Farah’s novel it is the political implication that over shadows its feminist one. Farah makes Asha’s father a Somali intellectual, who stayed in America for about twenty years and received U.S. citizenship. In his first visit to his native country, after all those years, he is humiliated, his American passport confiscated and arrested. His 16 year old daughter forcefully circumcised. The significance of this anecdote lies in the fact that it affects its narrator, Medina, before it does so to its audience: “It broke me. The news broke me.” (92) She continues:

When Sagal who brought me the news had left, in came Idil. She saw me choked with tears. She enquired why. I told her. Her eyes brightened as though she had seen a meteor with the devil at its
heels. She said that was what she had planned: she said she might one day take Ubax by the hand as if taking her to the hairdresser and have her circumcised. I vowed I wouldn’t let her go anywhere near Ubax and that if she so much as exchanged a word with my daughter about this I would murder her. (93-4)

Then suggestion is made that Medina decided to take Ubax away from Idil’s reach, though she wouldn’t confirm it. As a part of the author’s strategy to cement the barbarity of circumcision in his reader’s mind its related motifs such as childbirth pain and female genitalia keep appearing in regular intervals. The following is one such examples: “Medina, in a flash, recalled the pain accompanying the pleasure of giving birth to Ubax. ... the pain and the scissors-cut; and the complications which had arisen because she was circumcised.”(13)

References and motifs, such as this, make the author’s attitude towards FGM clearly stated. In From a Crooked Rib, we remember, how horrified was Ebla when she saw a girl being circumcised. The small girl’s cries and the blood on the woman’s clothes made her remember the day when it was done to herself, and how she experienced the pain that is there specially for every woman:

‘Oh, my God. What a painful thing it was,’ she recalled. There were only two times that she wished she had not been born, and one of them was when she was circumcised. It was not only painful but also a barbarous act, she thought. ‘Are there people in the world who are not circumcised?, she wondered.(149)
Then to make the psychological and physical scars of the operation forcefully felt Farah goes into detail describing how it is carried out: “She recalled everything. They had sliced out her clitoris and stitched the lips together, thus blocking the passage, but also leaving a small inlet for urinating through.”(149) But the pain does not end there. Her life becomes subject to endless torture that endangers her very existence due to the serious health risk and complication that follow: Ebla remembers the torture she had undergone in her first intercourse;

She also recalled that other night of pain. The first time that she had ever had sexual contact. It was with Awill, and it was very painful, indescribably painful. She had bled and he rejoiced seeing her blood, as his manhood depended upon breaking her chastity. (150)

Writing with such a clinical description and sympathy won Farah that rare appropriation of ‘male feminist writer.’ Alden and Tremaine observe: “Farah repeatedly represents female circumcision as an excruciatingly painful practice that has serious repercussions throughout women's lives and as an ideological inscription upon women's bodies practised by women in the service of the male construction of women as a way of controlling female sexuality.”(131) Supposing that only women could do so his female readers write him letters addressing him as Mrs. Farah. “Women write to me as Mrs. Farah, you know,” he tells J. Kitchener.

But because of his such rendering of that out-dated traditional monster most Somalis who read From a Crooked Rib or Sardines, while they would
rather see the practice brought to an end, sneer at the mentioning of his name simply because of the subject matter; female circumcision, in their view, is not a male subject. Among Somalis women are often heard reacting to his fiction inimically: let him deal with those real subjects that matter to us if he is sincere in his fighting for us instead of talking about our 'underthings.' But the reality is that because of the evils of this custom all women's other 'real issues' get impaled and disappear. It is a torture, which every traditionally chained mother wants to see her daughter(s) undergo. Ironically, it is the men folk who happen to acknowledge its horrendous endless effects and call for its abandoning. But many is a mother who, despite her husband's clear warning against doing it to their daughter(s), conspires against her female offsprings. Her defensive response of her carrying it out is: do what you may I don't want to see my daughter pregnant with a fatherless child. In this way she puts both herself and her husband's in a very difficult situation. In most cases men take the drastic step of divorce.

Though many scholars tend to locate this practice in the sphere of patriarchal domination it is indeed very intriguing that this custom is one that women want to see its continuation. The father or the brother never interferes its doing or otherwise. Interestingly Farah, who employs the rendering of this operation in his fiction probably to present women as the victims of patriarchal barbarity, accuses men to be the culprits. His response to J. Kitchener, when she asked of his views on female circumcision does not leave any one in doubt: "Circumcision reduces the woman to property. A
man likes to know that the shirt he is wearing has not been worn by some one else. The same is with his woman. He is creating his own myth.”

While there is no denial of the existence of such male attitudes, the virgin syndrome, it is not the whole picture of the truth. As we have seen above the continuity of this barbarity, whose victims are both men - as husbands - and women, whether girls, mothers or wives, is ensured and demanded by women in the first place. Thus Farah, described as “notorious trickster” by Prof. Sugnet, is forever committed to make his cause i.e. feminist cause, acceptable to his non-Somali audience. To the enlightened segments of the Somali society Farah’s subject matter is a noble one, but what they cannot trust and criticise is his manipulation of the facts. For example in Sardines it is another woman, Idil, who terrorises Medina and her daughter “with her descending knives which retrace the scarred wound” (62). Thus, one doubts whether patriarchal domination and subjugation of women are what is at stake as there emerges an element of conflict between tradition and modernity; Idil's traditional world virsus Medina’s western education.

The pain and control of women’s sexuality by circumcision, “the ideological inscription upon women’s bodies,” takes its cruel political implication in the violent and extreme form of rape. Farah brings these two violent means of patriarchal control over women together successfully in the story of the political rape victim Amina, in Sardines, in such a way that the reader is made to witness and experience both the pain of circumcision and
rape at once: “but what pain, what pain, what pain! She had been virgin, she had been circumcised ...what pain, what pain!” (119)

The way Farah introduces Amina’s terrible experience of pain into the narrative reminds the reader that of Maya Angeloe and her personal strength of denying it the chance to haunt her life after the terrible thing of rape. Farah writes: “Her past was a large holdall into which anything she could not carry was thrown. Now out of the hole rose the ghosts of the three men who had raped her.”(118)

Amina is the daughter of one of the politically privileged circle of men surrounding the General. His brutal highhandedness towards one particular community made her a rape victim of three young men, former classmates of hers, to avenge her father’s cruelty to their community. As they prepare themselves and advance to their victim, “her lips trembled as she saw the men unbutton their trousers,” she appealed to them by their names saying: “Please, no, I am not he, nor am I my father.” The rapists see themselves doing nothing harm to her: “We are doing this not to you but your father...not you, your father. Tell him that.” (119 Emphasis in the original)

Besides its effective way of capturing the victimisation of women under the game of patriarchal politics this position of the rapists helps Farah point to the parochial tendency of those revolutionaries who see themselves resisting against tyranny. Referring to this aspect of Amina’s rape Alden and
Tremaine write: “The horror of the situation is thus magnified by the fact that she is merely an instrument in a quarrel between men and by the rapists’ grotesque notion that they are fighting against one form of domination by exercising another.” (135)

In his feminist polemics Farah denies men even the human heart in order to drive into his reader’s consciousness the helplessness of women in the Somali patriarchal world. When men are called to the scene of Amina's rape their concern is the man who fathered the victim and not the victim, and her vulnerability:

‘Whose daughter are you?’ The villagers asked. She told them her father’s name. The two men rolled their eyes in wander... The men decided they would have nothing to do with the daughter of that great conspirator. ‘Do you know how many innocent men of our clan your father has sent to prison, how many he has sentenced to death and how many his men have tortured?’ said one of them. (119)

For Farah, this is what he calls male’s politics where the game is played by him a man and others who surround him on one side, and others who are his rivals, but the victims are the subordinated and excluded others, masses, women and the nation. The political implication of Amina’s rape is far reaching for the General and “his incestuous circle,” as Madina calls it, though they can hardly foresee any other solution for it except making it an “isolated” incident, having no political implication:

“The case of your daughter,” said the General, “must be isolated; it must be treated as though it were devoid of any political significance; it must be dealt
with as having no political implications whatsoever.” (120) These are “strict orders” to Amina’s father. The issue for the General is to fend off the challenge to the nation’s patriarchal power politics. Open ticket to anywhere in the world to Amina is the isolating strategy of the patriarch, ironically to save his face, not the victim’s. But this bribe strategy fails in the face of Amina’s feminist resistance who is already well-versed with its ideology, as she has just read Susan Brownmiller’s *Against of our Will* along with Fanon, Richard Wright and Eldridge Cleaver. When her father tells her, “this rape is political” she challenges him by identifying herself as a woman not merely as Amina, his daughter by emphatically asking him: “*but which rape isn’t?*” (120. Emphasis in the original.)

Her point is that the solution to her problem should also be the solution to all those other rape victims of male violence; “I accept nothing short of your bringing all three rapists here for a public trial, I want everyone to know:...that every rape is political; that the powerful rape the weak.” (121-22) Thus, her case is women’s case. Women as victims do not have community loyalties in Farah’s view. When in the aftermath of Amina’s rape the men deny her any help it is the women who identify themselves with her condition saying: “The pain is ours, the fat and wealth and power is the men’s. I am certain your father will not understand - your mother will.” (sic. 119)

Later on in her life women like Ebla, her daughter, Sagal and Medina recognise Amina’s problem as theirs and find solution for it, which turns out
to be, as Alden and Tremaine call it: “a new kind of female-centered family” where they “encourage her decision to bear the child conceived in this rape.” (135) Besides Amina’s rape, Farah presents this extreme form of male violence to women in the characters of Misra in Maps and Damac in Secrets. In Alden and Tremaine’s words “Misra spends her entire life as a victim of male abuse, her defiled body becoming emblematic of multiple forms of violence directed against women.” (132) In her strategy to be accepted as Askar’s guardian she had to endure Qorax’s sexual advances. Later in the aftermath of the Ogaden conflict she is accused of betrayal and gang raped and murdered in Mogadiscio.

Damac in Secrets tries to resist male blackmailing and exhortation but, since she is disowned by her aunt and does not have male “relative’s protection” owing to her independent outlook, she is also, like Misra, gang raped. One is reminded in Damac’s story Duniya’s “by refusing to be seduced with lifts, a woman exposes herself to perils of being raped in dark alley.” (18) In this way Farah makes his reader witness the vulnerability of women in his patriarchal world wherein, as Alden and Tremaine observed, “efforts to resist this control, to refuse the ‘gift’ of male protection, leave women all the more vulnerable to punitive male violence.” (134). For Damac, unlike Amina, the incident is personal “humiliation of rape” and “overwhelming neurosis,” she even made “suicide attempts” to put both her past and present behind her. Yaqut tells Kalaman, the offspring of the gang rape:
Your mother used to be on the perilously jagged precipice of nervous breakdown. I am glad we have survived the suicide attempts we’ve been through a great deal together, your mother and I, sharing insomnia as long as a year of sleepless nights. (260)

In this way Farah has employed rape as one of those “most coercive and damaging forms” of female subjugation, helps Farah to depict a socio-political world of power relations in which a woman’s bid to seek an autonomous existence of self-definition, the subject of the next chapter, invites the male sexual violence. Nevertheless Farah probably considers it as a price worth paying since it helps characters form an alternative family as Damac and Yaqut’s, or Kalaman and Talaado’s imminent one, or that of Duniya and Bosaaso, or even a metaphoric one of “communities of women.”

4.3.4. Ambivalent Symbols

In his fiction Farah has made a reputation for his analysis of what he calls female oppression. His position is not merely that of a liberal humanist but he rather sees the fate of his country and people in that of woman. This is clearly stated in what he tells Jullie Kitchener, when he says; “only when women are free we can talk of a free country. Attitudes to women have to change.” This amounts to what many commentators on his works see as his being most sympathetic about women. But it becomes apparent that he, as Al Rawi observed, is as well sometimes “scathingly critical of his female characters.”
Farah uses women as symbols for Somalia. His readers try to understand what this symbol represents. In other words, how does he, as a male writer, see the nature of his subject? To some critics, his women are never given any essential trait whether class or gender. “It is reasonable to ask how it is possible for a writer to use ‘figure of a woman’ as a symbol without implying that women belong to a category that can be associated with the symbol, without denying women their individual identity.” (sic. Alden and Tremaine 146)

But while Alden and Tremaine try to explore the “category that can be associated with the symbol” other writers, Wright among them, tend to take the presence of the associated symbol for granted. Women, for Farah, are oppressed class of the society and it is this oppressedness that functions as his allegorical symbols for the nation as well as the masses. No doubt certain interpretations of his female characters do not fit into this: Misra and Duniya, for instance, are as central as the foundation of the earth and the cosmos respectively. But yet they are victims of male subjugation and in this way they may be employed as symbols.

Let’s concentrate here on one such symbolic reading of Farah’s women: the artless feminist voice of Ebla's history as an image of multiply colonised and compartmentalised nation of Somalia. Her polyandrist marriages tend to reflect the pathetic fate of the infant Somali state of sixties. Somalia’s colonial history shows how its people were subjected to European as well as African rules, and its territories divided. It has had as many as five
colonial rulers; three Europeans and two Africans. Thus, many readers tend to insist on the allegorical significance or the national theme of the novel. This is more so as both in poetry and folktales the Somalis often use a female figure or she camel (camel being the ship of the desert, is the main source of the Somali nomad's survival and independence) to represent their country. For them, a woman as a symbol of beauty, love, mother and dignity to be proud of and to be defended and died for, is the proper image of their country. In most of Hadraawi's (Hadraawi is the best living Somali poet) poems, a female figure i.e. a girl, daughter, woman, or a mother, is often employed to convey that meaning.

When Farah was put to the question whether, as a part of his frequent use of language images, symbols and metaphors, he ever conceived Ebla's story as an allegorical or playing the role as a symbol of the Somali nation, he implied that it might had been a possible authorial sub-consciousness. He, however, stated in else where that he “like all good Somali poets I used women as symbol for Somalia. Because, when the women are free, then and only then can we talk about a free Somalia.”(Kitchener) This may be considered as a valid justification of the allegorical content of Ebla's polyandrous marriages, but one finds a great deal of material in the novel that impales such an interpretation, as it convincingly shows what may be considered as the author's real interest to deal with a woman's lot rather than that of the nation in this particular novel.
Some readers, however, found this allegorical reading of the novel faulty, even if that was what Farah intended to achieve in writing it. Derek Wright, who dwelt in this possible theme of *From a Crooked Rib* is one such critic:

Ebla may be appropriate as an image of a colonised, subject people, but the prospective continuation of Somali women’s patriarchal repression under independence makes her an ill-suited or at best an ironic symbol of free nationhood.(30)

Wright’s such observation should be given a relative value. Even after almost forty years of its so-called independence, Somalia continues to be still confused as Ebla. If Ebla saw the only remaining but impossible escape was to run to the sea, i.e. Indian Ocean or the Red Sea, now the Somalis both men and women crossed the seas and even intend to reach Mars, as refugees running from themselves. In addition to those Somali territories under others’ rule that of Somalia proper began to shrink in the nineties. Thus, as we have seen in the earlier chapter, there existed no freedom for any one and women may still be used as images that represent the nation’s fate when intended to be so.

Farah’s feminism is indeed involved in a noble cause of demonstrating how women are subjugated in a patriarchal society, but it is very essential for us not to miss the fact that he does not idealise his women, as Alden and Tremaine observed: “These women are neither idealised not
demonised: they are clumsy, dogmatic, inconsistent, self-pitying, and hostile as well as friendly, nurturing, imaginative and ambitious.” (155)

This kind of understanding of his women can be characterised as an attitude of ambivalence to women. Some aspects of the characters of Medina and Sagal in Sardines may be presented here in the concluding paragraphs, so as to give an idea of the presence of such misgivings.

Though the novel presents Medina as a positive picture of the Somali woman’s indomitable personality and courageous resistance to the forces of oppression, and fighting for her rights as a part of her over all political consciousness, we find some lopsided portrait as we come to the analysis of those issues of character and its related motifs. The first of these concerns with Medina’s character. Her resistance tends to be verbal one. The group under her leadership lacks its central role in influencing the events of the novel, unlike the other two novels of the trilogy. As Wright pinpointedly notes the clandestine movement’s actions turn to be mere “gestural” ones. Though the after effects of anti-regime writings on walls are related, it is very intriguing that the group’s involvement can hardly be ascertained.

They wrote their first words of warning on the walls of Hodan. Then on the recently whitewashed walls of the main post office, opposite the Soviet Embassy. The third wall they used is the one opposite the American Embassy. And they signed ‘Dulman.’ (125)

After Sagal learns that following those dawn wall-graffittis fifty young men and a woman were taken to detention, she feels defeated when
she is told that the only woman was but one of her two sole contenders in the swimming competition. Her reaction of; “heroines, heroines,” underscores the fact that the impact is complete. The narrating voice adds: “Sagal seemed weak, like a moth, she seemed fragile as a myth. …Cadar and Hindiya at last heroines of a movement and Sagal a mere spectator?” (126)

In addition to the powerlessness of the underground movement in Medina’s leadership, Farah delineates his female activists, Medina and her sole protégé, Sagal, as fantasy ridden ones. This just mentioned incident clearly shows the motive of Sagal’s involvement: publicity and place in the history books not necessarily from a feminist angle of resistance. This truth is made clear in Ebla’s observation:

Some of us choose to carry the lantern and stand right under it, remaining under its staring eye, until we become one with the spotlight. Some of us believe that it makes one a hero or a heroine, and we love being watched, shadowed, suspected of one thing or another until we are as heavily guarded as a nation’s powerhouse. (127)

In this symbolic manner Ebla, presented as an understanding and tolerant mother, the foil of Idil, disapproves her daughter’s wishful activism. Before the present incident, she knew and was very concerned about Sagal’s motives in joining the clandestine movement against the General’s regime, knowing how she fantasised her going down “in history as contributing to a cause” and her determination to “tie the thread-end of my future to that of the country” (39) Farah made ingenuously apparent that for these activists it
is the life of being on the banners that matters to them. This is clear from what Sagal encounters with her mother’s realistic observation of; “I would say they succeeded if they wrote their message and got away,” as Sagal responds; “that was perhaps the whole idea; to get caught, to become the theme of people’s observation, to become heroines.” (39) Obviously this is not the positive feminist message which Farah wants to put across. As a result of Medina’s indoctrination of Sagal by simply recommending her the books to read, she is attracted to the movement by its fascinating aspects of risk taking in the process of opposing the General. To her, one feels, what matters is not the success of seeing him dethroned and replace his regime with one under which people live in human dignity provided by unhindered democratic liberties what matters.

Medina’s character and related motifs make her loyalty to the movement and leadership responsibilities secondary to her narrow private one. Unlike in the other two novels of the trilogy wherein the principal characters are preoccupied with issues of national aptitude, here Medina is concerned with the drawing of the boundaries of her spatial private life and allotting or assigning pieces of furniture to their particular positions. Referring to the mental structuring of her individualistic life the narrative begins;

She roamed about in the architecture of her thoughts. ... To create effect she marked where the walls met with a warning written in red: stop and give heed: He is not all of us! She walked about aimlessly, stumbled upon a vase full of water and broke it. She ceased moving. (2. Emphasis in the original)
She stumbles upon the vase of tradition and breaks it, by confronting the matriarch, but she is rendered ineffective. However, this preoccupation of a woman’s personal freedom and her determination not to part with it in the process of her confrontation of the patriarchal world of dictators and fathers may be seen as a positive feminist task. Thus it is understandable, in this context, for Medina to reject the notion of defeat, suggesting that what happened to all those around her, i.e. Nasser, Dulman, Samatar, and others, does not amount to her purpose of “fighting the woman” in her.

Possibly one of the most important actions in the novel, though its after-affects are dealt with, is the heroine’s leaving home and husband. Its significance symbolically presented as her changing of the position of a piece of furniture in one’s own room, means different things to different people.

This central action of hers which is reacted to and interpreted differently by others is left ambiguous ever by the author. The concerned agent, Medina, is probably making herself idiosyncratically well entertained. It is not, obviously, a question of helplessness at her part to correct or confirm the views of those she doesn’t doubt of their sincerity, like Sagal and Nasser. Not only this but she seems to enjoy even those damaging versions of outsiders, and not interested in refuting them.

Contrary to Wright’s view that this represents a picture of the “oral convention’s moral usurpation and invasion of private sanctities”, Medina’s
unwillingness to confirm which, if any, of the versions is to the point is intended to draw a cynical portrait of her self-conceited intellectual posture. If a revolutionary person like Medina is not prepared to clear the doubts in the minds of her close ones, concerning her actions in the personal level, how can we expect her to lead her group to a well-defined public situation?

After Sagal posits her view of Medina’s action and waits for her reaction, whether she confirms it or corrects it, the writer shows the reader a half-opened possible window in Medina’s mind: “Medina was impressed. Shouldn’t she review her impression about Sagal as a half-child, half-adult, and tell her that she was the only one who came anywhere near guessing why she left Samatar.” (57)

This makes us wonder loudly: Is all what Medina is involved a game of who guesses her motives best? This is another possible cruel irony, in addition to her assuming the character of the dictator, related to Medina. The attitude of let the inferior beings, women, children, masses be kept guessing associated with the patriarchs like Ghad Thabit, Medina’s maternal grandfather, and the General’s regime, is here made applicable to her. Fatima bint Thabit, her mother, is described as a ‘purdah strangled traditional woman, who believes that she is a prisoner of tradition whereas her daughter is a prisoner of principles and secret dreams. But the irony is that this traditional woman cannot only guess best, but also see and make Medina confront and realise the real fire they (Samatar and Medina) are playing with:
I have a strange feeling that the two of you are playing with us, teasing us. But has it ever occurred to you that you might have exaggerated this time? Has it ever crossed your mind or his that this might be a very expensive joke? He will probably lose his job as a minister. And who knows but you may lose him; or take him back into your embrace a different man, a man broken, prideless, needy, with a running nose: a potential suicide.

[To which Medina’s answer comes feebly as;]
‘I must admit it hasn’t occurred to me.’ (143)

And when Fatima’s above mentioned observation comes to pass Medina is no more absent or guest. The narrating voice makes her a fully involved agent whose action results in what sounds as a remarkable self-destructive success;

Medina a hostess? Why, when she altered the position of the chair the house fell in on her and the ground below her shook with seismic determination. No, she wasn’t a guest any more. She was a full and active participant in the history of her country. (250)

Sounding a similar note to Turfan’s questioning of “what has she finally achieved apart from the private fulfilment of a renuclearised family? ... Is Farah’s closing chorus of praise genuine or ironic?,” one may be convinced that this certainly does not amount to a positive picture of feminism. One does not arrive at such a conclusion being oblivious to the possible postmodernist bent of mind that underlies Farah’s writing. On the contrary, reading from this modernist angle itself, where “the vertigo of
relativity, the abyss of uncertainty, are its results”(Lyon) we feel the presence and pronouncement of such a discourse of irony much more forcefully.

Thus, rather than considering Medina’s intransigent idealism coloured by her priggish self-righteousness, as “doctrinal finality and authorial approval,” the reader is left with such a partially disappointing picture of feminism in Medina’s person. Hers is a hollow type of feminism. Instead of seeing her the master of her actions and fate, and letting a ray of hope gleam at the tunnel end of Somali womanhood’s or at least hers, in his jigsaw puzzle Farah leaves the narrative at the point where she stands in the middle of her private mental construction’s ruins as hinted earlier;

‘Medina’s timbered construction,’ Sagal would comment, ‘has been invaded by white ants and so the structure of her dream has weakened, the underframe has given the trunk and flooring have become faulty. If you look ... a life in ruins. But she herself stands firm, this is a miracle, firm and strong as her intentions.’ (57-8)

If this is to underscore the Somali woman’s strength and vitality in the face of magnanimous upheavals, such as the post-General ruins of the present Somalia, is there, one asks, any reason why she should attribute that destruction, i.e. the “seismic determination” to herself or actions? In other words, one thinks that, as Farah complicates “the use of women as symbols,” reading his women as being part of Somalia’s self-destruction may be a warranted conclusion.
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