

FEMALE SUBJUGATION THROUGH RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY IN POSTCOLONIAL PAKISTAN: AN ANALYSIS OF DURRANI'S (1991) BLASPHEMY

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ABSTRACT

*Patriarchy is a global phenomenon that has resulted in the unequal distribution of power and privilege between men and women. It has been established as a system that reinforces male dominance and subjugates women. Patriarchy is a system that reinforces the marginalization of women in all aspects of life, from the political and social to the cultural, economic, and ideological. It is evident in the lack of access to education, employment opportunities, and other resources. Additionally, women are often subjected to violence and harassment, and are denied basic rights within their own families and communities. In the post-colonial period, Islam, being the most adopted religion of the majority in Pakistan, has been manipulated to perpetuate this discrimination. Durrani (1999) dares to talk about one of the most taboo topics of 'The Mullah-Pir Community' which subjugates females by using a false image of Islam. The study uses the qualitative methods and theoretical foundations of Naik's (2009) discourse on Islamic feminism and Spivak's (1998) work 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' to analyze the postcolonial discourse on women subjugation. In light of these theories, this study explores the unspeakable horrors perpetrated in the name of Islam to subjugate women in the novel *Blasphemy*. Duranni presents an in-depth analysis of the misrepresentation of Islam by predatory religious leaders. The study reveals that pseudo-clerics like Pir Sain have misconstrued Islam and its constitution to exploit his wife Heer. The study unmasks the duplicity of a man who is deemed as a religious caretaker. He discourages reading the Holy Quran with translation so that he can manipulate religion as an instrument to persuade other people for a blind submission. Through his prejudiced analyses of the Holy Quran he tries to stop women from attaining education, and subjugates them to an inhumane extent.*

Keywords: Blasphemy, Discrimination, Subaltern, Women subjugation, Feminism.

INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan, gender inequality is a pervasive reality and is rooted in a patriarchal society. Men are considered the superior gender and enjoy higher status and respect, while women are viewed as less important and have fewer rights (Haqqani, 2010). The distinction between the two genders is clear; men are viewed as individuals with agency, while women are often seen simply as bodies (Shamsie, 2007). This results in women facing oppressive circumstances, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, forced marriages, acid attacks, and honor killings (Durrani, 1991). Women in Pakistan must fight to gain respect and recognition, while men are born with it.

In recent years, Pakistani women writers have made a mark on the literary landscape of the country, using literature to challenge and undo the gender-based oppression and subjugation of women in Pakistani society. Through the use of powerful words, these female authors are bringing to light the stories of suffering that have been previously unseen and unheard. Pakistani literature in English is renowned for its exceptional verbal intricacy, characterization, themes, realism and creativity, often focused on the topics of feminism and patriarchy. Authors like Abbasi (2001), Durrani (1998), Ghose (1967), Hussain (2000), Sheraz (2007), and Sidhwa (2008) have become renowned for the inclusion of female issues in their works. These works are highly significant in helping to raise awareness and spark conversations around the difficulties and struggles that women

face in Pakistani society. As such, these authors are raising their voices in dissent and providing a platform for women to express themselves and their experiences.

Postcolonial fiction often deals with reclaiming lost spaces and histories and is characterized by its resistance to colonial influence, its appropriation of the colonial language, and its use of colonial art forms (Harrison, 2003). Pakistani literature, however, is confronted with the additional challenge of post-colonialism in the context of Islam being a major force. This has resulted in nationalism being a function of a variety of beliefs and understandings. Islamic nationalism, then, has an effect on the spiritual and psychological state of those living in Pakistan. Unfortunately, Spivak (1988) argues that in many cases, the Islamic faith is misused to oppress women and other marginalized members of society.

In Pakistan, literature often reflects the religious stereotyping of female bodies, in addition to many other topics such as poverty and political unrest (Bano, 2003). Postcolonial fiction in particular often highlights feminism, emphasizing the importance and effects of gender inequality in the country. This literature offers insight into the human experience and emotions, in relation to the numerous issues that Pakistan faces.

Durrani (1999) explores a controversial topic in an Islamic context: the Mullah-Pir community. The novel is based on a true story of a girl from a rural area of Pakistan, and its thirteen chapters, followed by an epilogue, depict the struggles of women with vivid, powerful language. Durrani paints a realistic picture of the harsh realities of life within this community.

In the novel *Blasphemy*, Heer is a fifteen year old girl who is married to Pir Sain, a self-proclaimed intermediary of God. However, under the false pretense of Islamic principles, Pir Sain commits unspeakable crimes such as incest, rape, adultery, fornication, drinking and murder. Heer is subjected to the injustice of being dehumanized and victimized by her husband, and is robbed of her honor and self-respect. Through the characterization of Pir Sain, the novel explores the idea of (mis)usage of Islam and how it can be distorted and falsified to satisfy a person's own greed. Pir Sain serves as a symbol of bigotry, duplicity, and fraud, and can be seen as a perverted, barbarous patriarch who abuses Islam for his own gain (Durrani, 2019).

This research delves into the concept of Islamic Feminism, as discussed by Naik (2009) and Spivak's (1998) work 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. These theories provide the framework to explore the injustices inflicted upon women in the novel *Blasphemy*, in the name of Allah. The study is qualitative in nature, following Interpretivist principles. This approach is used to investigate how Islam has been manipulated and used to oppress women in Pakistani society. This is done through an in-depth analysis of the misrepresentation of Islam by oppressive religious leaders to subjugate and dehumanize women. A close textual analysis method is utilized to assess religious hypocrisy as a tool of subjugation.

In her 1998 work "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Gayatri Spivak examines the concept of subalternity and the power dynamics that are associated with it. She argues that subaltern groups, such as women, are not only excluded from the dominant discourse but are also excluded from the ability to speak for themselves. Spivak argues that subalterns lack the power to speak for themselves, as they are heavily influenced by the dominant discourse that shapes their identities and experiences. She argues that power and privilege are not just at the level of the individual, but rather that it is systems of power and privilege that marginalize and oppress subalterns. Therefore, Spivak's work highlights the fact that women are often positioned as the subaltern and are denied the right to speak for themselves, let alone have their voices heard in the larger discourse of society.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The Islamic holy book, the Quran, is a clear proponent of egalitarianism, which is the belief of equal rights and opportunities for all (Naik, 2009). This includes equal rights and opportunities in religious, political, social, and economic matters, regardless of gender. Unfortunately, over time, certain customs have been distorted and are now used to subjugate and oppress women in Pakistan. This perversion of Islamic principles, which condone acts such as rape, incest, and abuse of women, has been documented by Durrani (1999). This is a clear violation of the egalitarianism preached by the Quran and is a shameful practice that must be stopped.

1.2 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to analyze how the Islamic faith has been distorted and corrupted to justify the mistreatment of women in Durrani's (1999) novel *Blasphemy*. This research seeks to discover how, under the pretext of religion, patriarchy is used to oppress and restrict women in contemporary Pakistani society. Furthermore, the study investigates the various strategies used to manipulate the Islamic faith to perpetuate a system of male domination and the subjugation of women. This research also explores the role of traditional customs and values in the perpetuation of gender-based discrimination and the abuse of women in the post-colonial state of Pakistan. Ultimately, this research provides an in-depth analysis of the ways in which Durrani's novel exposes the manipulation of Islam as a tool to abuse women in the contemporary Pakistani context.

1.3 Research Questions

This study is focused on exploring the themes and characters of Durrani's (1999) novel *Blasphemy* in order to determine how the manipulation of the Islamic version of the religion is highlighted. Specifically, this research seeks to answer two questions: firstly, how does Durrani's (1999) novel *Blasphemy* explore the distortion of Islam as a tool of subjugation of women in the Pakistani post-colonial society? Secondly, how does the novel *Blasphemy* address the exploitation of religion by various figures of society? By answering these questions, this study seeks to illuminate how Durrani's (1999) novel *Blasphemy* sheds light on the manipulation and distortion of Islam in the post-colonial Pakistani society.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The misinterpretation of Islam and its teachings have caused numerous global issues such as bigotry and Islamophobia. This lack of understanding has caused a lack of empathy and understanding. Islam has often been misrepresented as a religion that is patriarchal in nature. Though there are some Islamic communities that uphold male-chauvinism, this is due to their misunderstanding of Islamic principles and the Quran. According to Fatima Mernissi (1991), this is not a reflection of Islam but rather a consequence of traditional customs such as feudalism. This study is important for understanding the plight of women in Pakistan who are oppressed in the name of Islam.

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

In her novel *Blasphemy* (Durrani, 1999), Tehmina Durrani examines the various ways in which patriarchy can be used to oppress women. Specifically, the novel uncovers the use of Islam as a form of subjugation and control of women. Through her exploration of this issue, Durrani demonstrates how a patriarchal power dynamic can be maintained through the use of religious ideology. The study of this novel has been limited to the examination of the use of Islamic doctrine as a tool of oppression, but it is clear that this is only one of many forms of patriarchy that can be used against women.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Patriarchy is an entrenched system in which men are often the dominant figures in both family and societal structures (Bano, 2003). This system of male dominance is seen to be supported through the notion of the distinction between masculine and feminine roles (Pateman, 1989). This is a distinction between freedom and submission, in which traditionally, men have been the possessors of freedom, and women forced to submit. As a result of patriarchy, women are often deprived of the opportunity to express their feelings and desires, and are also disadvantaged in terms of their education and identity (Wake & Malpas, 2013). This is a significant issue, as it reinforces gender inequality and prevents women from achieving their full potential.

Feminist writings in the South Asian subcontinent often reveal the prevalence of patriarchal societies in countries such as India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, in which women are frequently subjected to oppressive socio-religious customs and restrictions. Authors like Ismat Chughtai (1991), Taslima Nasreen (born 1947), and Bano Qudsia (born 1953) have used their works of fiction to portray the reality of female life in the Subcontinent – women who are reduced to the role of 'silent vessels' of their traditions, denied the opportunity to reclaim their autonomy and liberate themselves from their suffering. These women are often depicted as victims of control and subjugation, regardless of their language, religion, or social status (Bano, 2003).

Women have been traditionally portrayed as victims of domestic violence, but what is often not discussed are the ways in which they have actively resisted oppressive patriarchal forces and social customs. As Sandhya (2008) notes, women have employed a variety of tactics to challenge and reformulate traditional values. These women, aware of their own power, have used both their minds and bodies to fight against oppressive systems and demonstrate that they are not merely silent vessels of tradition, but are active agents of change.

In her writing, Ismat Chughtai (1990) presents a female figure that refuses to adhere to outdated customs, such as the notion of shame and honor, which dictate that women ought to be willing to sacrifice their lives for the supposed morality of their family, known as "Khandan". This female figure is a powerful representation of female autonomy and liberation, as she refuses to bow to the expectations of society and instead chooses her own path. By doing so, Chughtai highlights the need for women to be able to make their own decisions and follow their own paths, free from the constraints of outdated customs.

The works of Pakistani feminist writer Tehmina Durrani are often noted for their daring and boldness (Sandhya, 2008). Her novel *Blasphemy* is a prime example; in it, Durrani examines how Islamic clerics can take advantage of illiterate people through the use of religious customs. This book caused much controversy and debate due to its criticism of some Muslim Pirs (Durrani, 1999). In her autobiography *My Feudal Lord*, Durrani addresses the marginalization of women in Pakistan's rural areas. The memoir highlights her experiences with her former husband, Mustafa Khar, the Chief Minister of Punjab, and exposes the artificial respectability he presented to the public while concealing his criminal, adulterous, and rapist tendencies (Khan, 2008).

Blasphemy is a writing style that is both rooted in fact and fiction. It is a powerful tool of self-expression, a platform where female authorship can exist within the restrictive patriarchal society, while simultaneously deconstructing it. This writing style is a revival of the stratagems used by false Islamic leaders to subjugate women. Autobiography is a type of literature that emphasizes the origin and singularity of a person's experiences, as well as the reestablishment of the awareness of their identity and individuality (Hussain, 1998). Blasphemy is a form of writing that promotes the same principles, while also offering a way to fight the oppressive forces that attempt to control women.

In the work of Hashmi (2008), it is noted that in rural Bangladesh, men often see women as nothing more than a means of reproduction and sexual gratification. This view is a result of the postcolonial environment, which has further contributed to the oppression of women. Riaz (2012) looks at the characters of Heer and other female characters as highly gendered; their lives are manipulated and controlled by Pir Sain, showing the ideological and mental slavery of women in this society. In regard to Pir Sain's sexual use and exploitation of Heer's body, Riaz (2012) states that the man immortalizes the atrocious display of his wife's suffering by filming it. Khan (2008) delves further into the deeply embedded custom of domestic violence and abuse which is committed mostly by men, transforming the spouse's body into a platform of torture and domination. Heer in Blasphemy wishes to attend college and receive an education, but, as with Chughtai (1990), was not granted permission to do so. Chughtai also implored her parents to substitute her learning how to cook with gaining education.

Hosseini (2009) uses the character of Mariam in his novel to portray the same struggles and captivity that Heer experienced. Mariam is subjected to severe victimization by her husband, and is deprived of her identity outside of her role as wife. She is made to conform to the role of a dutiful and passive woman, which parallels Heer's own experience (Hosseini, 2009). Mariam's story is symbolic of the oppression that many women have faced throughout history, and her character serves to represent Heer and countless other women who have been denied autonomy over their own lives.

Pir Sain exploiting his spiritual authority to oppress Heer, is an example of the maltreatment and "othering" faced by many subaltern women. As De Beauvoir (1953) points out, gender is an ideological construct in which the strength of women is often overlooked and undervalued. This can be seen in Sidhwa's (2008) portrayal of a four-year old girl who matures into a woman under male domination. Likewise, in Sidhwa's (1998) work, 'Shanta' is a female who suffers double subjugation in a post-colonial, patriarchal society of Pakistan. Sulehri (1989) states that in these societies, women's bodies are 'twice colonized' (Sulheri, 1989 p. 603). This demonstrates how deeply embedded patriarchy is in post-colonial societies, and its prevalence in the maltreatment of women.

Yousafzai's (2013) analysis of Heer in Blasphemy delves into the harsh and damaging effects of a highly patriarchal society. Heer and her female counterparts are constantly trying to prove their worth and demonstrate their intelligence, not just their physical beauty. Hosseini's (2003) work also emphasizes the oppressive nature of the culture and the lack of freedom women experience in many aspects of their lives. Ibsen's (2003) play parallels this sentiment, as it is reflected in the oppressive and domineering relationship between Pir Sain and Heer. Just like Torvald, Pir Sain exercises an ultimate control over Heer, expecting her to abide by traditional roles and duties as a wife, homemaker, and mother. These works serve as a powerful reminder of the need to fight for equal rights for all individuals, regardless of gender.

Kaur (2015) is a powerful voice for oppressed women everywhere in her writing. She is an advocate for women who have been denied basic human rights and sexual autonomy. Her work showcases the plight of girls in the Haveli who are subjected to relentless subjugation and mistreatment by the figure of Pir Sain. Through her writing, Kaur (2015) is able to shed light on the need for endurance and persistence in womanhood, and creates an example of what is possible when women stand together. Her words empower others to push past their own oppression and strive for a better future.

At the passing of Pir Sain, Heer is released from the bondage of social and cultural expectations that diminish a woman's identity. According to Angelou (1994), Heer begins to recognize her own individualism and autonomy, no longer willing to accept the oppressive customs that are forced upon women. This marks a shift in Heer's outlook and a newfound sense of freedom; she is able to embrace her identity as a liberated woman, untethered from the roles of wife, prostitute, or mother.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research utilizes a qualitative approach in order to explore the subject. However, it is impossible to conduct a comprehensive exploration of the world due to the preconceived beliefs and theories that are held by the researcher (Bhaskar, 2013). Explorative research instead focuses on the application of new ideas, concepts, theories, and explanations to the existing reality (Reiter, 2017). This involves examining the subject from a diverse point of view and provides a deeper understanding of the topic.

Our approach in this study is interpretivist, which holds that there is not one single reality in this world; rather, there are multiple realities that people experience. It is argued that knowledge is essential in order to understand these realities and their complexities (Reed, 2004). The interpretivist perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding the perspective of different individuals, or the subjective realities they experience (Reed, 2004). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the diverse and unique experiences of people in order to better comprehend the reality of the world.

3.2 Research Instrument

This research study employed the use of close textual analysis in order to gain a further understanding of the novel, *Blasphemy*. Close textual analysis is a method of studying a text, such as a novel or poem, in depth in order to interpret the meaning behind the words. By closely examining *Blasphemy*, the researchers were able to identify religious hypocrisy as a tool of female subjugation in the patriarchal society of Pakistan. The researchers delved into the text to analyze how traditional gender roles and expectations were portrayed within the novel. Through this analysis, the researchers were able to gain a comprehensive understanding of how religious hypocrisy was used to uphold the male-dominated culture of Pakistan.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

In this study discussed, the theoretical conceptions of Naik (2009) and Spivak (1998) were used to investigate how a distorted version of Islam is employed as a tool to victimize women in the post-colonial society of Pakistan, as depicted in the novel *Blasphemy*. Naik (2009) examines Islamic feminism, which is a stance based on Islamic ideals and the Holy Quran. This discourse looks at the rights and freedoms of women, with a focus on the promotion of equality between men and women (Badran, 2002). Naik (2009) further states that, while men and women have some physical, anatomical, and biological differences, they are equal in terms of intellectual and cognitive abilities. Islamic feminism therefore encourages Muslims to be committed to egalitarianism and non-discrimination in terms of socio-cultural, religious, and eco-political aspects (Naik, 2009).

Gayatri Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1998) has become a defining text of the postcolonial era. Examining the concept of the "subaltern" - a term borrowed from Gramsci (1975) - Spivak explored the lack of representation and power experienced by disadvantaged and oppressed social groups in postcolonial contexts. According to Spivak, women in particular are doubly marginalized, both by the after-effects of colonialism and by the patriarchal norms of their societies. This has resulted in a situation where women's voices are silenced and they are kept in an inferior position, their lives spent "pleasing and serving" (Spivak 1998) the men in their lives, with limited opportunities for agency and self-development. Spivak's work has been highly influential in highlighting the struggles of women in third-world countries and the need for them to be granted a meaningful role in society.

Data Analysis

Patriarchy is an oppressive system that has been used for centuries to subjugate women and maintain the power of men. This system is found in many societies and is used to limit women's rights and access to resources. According to Naik (2009) and Spivak (1998), patriarchy is often reinforced through religion and culture, using it as a tool to oppress women and keep them from gaining social, political, and economic power. This is exemplified in the novel *Blasphemy*, in which a patriarchal, male-chauvinistic social structure benefits from manipulating religion and using it to limit women's rights and privileges. This is a clear example of the ways in which patriarchy can be used to keep women in a subordinate position, and the need for more equitable practices and policies in order to create a more just society.

According to Naik (2009), Islam is guided by God through the Holy Quran and encompasses principles of justice, tolerance, and egalitarianism, along with the recognition of the equality of men and women. The Quran abolishes any distinctions based on race, gender, social status, or color (Bano, 2003). Unfortunately, religion is used as a tool to infringe upon the rights of women in the feudal world (Hashmi, 2000). This is due to the prevalence of patriarchy and the empowerment of men, which has allowed Islam to be misused as a form of oppression. Durrani (1999) argues that this is a form of blasphemy and is indicative of the corrupt religious system found in the feudal world.

The narrative of Heer in G. Willow Wilson's novel *Blasphemy* uncovers the unethical and debauched behavior of Pir Sain, a spiritual leader who appears to be religious and devout. He manipulates women by

manipulating the teachings of the Quran to fit his own self-serving desires (Wilson, 2018). His instructions to women are often filled with his own immoral motives and plans. This reveals the need to be cautious of those who appear to be devout and religious, as they may actually be using it as a cover to conceal their real faces and to accomplish their own selfish goals. Ultimately, it is important to consider the intentions of those who are claiming to be religious or spiritual (Wilson, 2018). Despite being held in high esteem, Pir Sain's true nature is far more sinister. In reality, this supposed "saint" is nothing more than a murderer, rapist and pedophile (Walsh, 2019). It is a cruel irony that this man is regarded with so much reverence, when, in truth, he is nothing more than a devil disguised as a holy figure. As Heer explains in the excerpt below:

“My husband was.. a parasite nibbling on the Holy Book, he was Lucifer.. the rapist of orphans... But over and above... he was known to be the man closest to Allah.. who could reach Him and save us.” (Blasphemy: 143)

At the tender age of 15, Heer, the main character in the novel, had to become a child bride, without her consent or approval, to a man twice her age. According to Gloria Anzaldua's work, Spivak, in third-world countries, women are subjugated from a very young age, and the same was the case for Heer. The Nikah of Heer with Peer Sain was nothing more than a mere contract and was a chance for Heer's mother to gain stature and societal prominence. She said, “Your sisters will marry well. Our status will improve tremendously” (25). This quote shows the economic deprivation of women as explained by Spivak (292), suggesting that women are often viewed as little more than commodities.

It is important to recognize that Islam does not permit parents to force their children into arrangements for marriage (Naik, 2009). Instead, parents are merely allowed to provide guidance and advice to their sons and daughters in the selection of potential partners. Ultimately, it is the children who are responsible for making the decision as to who they will ultimately settle down with. This is because it is the children who will be living with the partner in the long-term, not the parents.

Pir Sain takes advantage of Heer's young age to control her completely and make her obey the patriarchal standards of society. His actions of marrying her as a child are an example of his selfishness and desire to use her body for his own sexual gratification. Heer's marriage to Pir Sain does not bring her any joy, but instead creates a sense of obedience and submission within her. When she arrives at the haveli, prayers are said that emphasize the expectation that she will bear seven male children, which suggests that the feudal world views female babies as shameful and disgraceful.

Notably, throughout the novel, Heer refers to her husband as “Sain” and “the Master” (18), accentuating the inequality and discrimination in her marriage to him. Contrastingly, Islam equates marriage to a cherished, blessed covenant for men and women. The Quran affirms that they must live with each other in peace and equanimity, and instill ideals of love, compassion, tolerance, and goodwill in their hearts (The Quran, Ar-Rum, 30.21) Marriage, a sacred pact, is a means of abstention from lechery and immorality (Naik, 2009). Pir Sain, however, is a manifestation of both.

Pir does not bear the most negligible of errors. He brutally thrashes Heer on their second day of marriage, for she defies him by greeting without wearing her *burka*. He viciously whips her for everyone to see, and confines her to a chamber for weeks. Heer eventually learns the craft of subserviently accepting the abuse Pir inflicts on her in creative and innovative ways. Ironically, he defiles her in the cloak of darkness, and in the light of morning, instructs her to perform ablution to purify herself of her “deflowered” state.

Sain coerces Heer to market her body. Where Quran decrees, “Do not inherit the woman against (her) wishes” (The Quran, Al-Nisa, 4.19) Likening her bed to a “grave” (40), Heer is sexually objectified when her husband sells her body and beauty to men of power and influence. While ironically, he strikes her publicly for not veiling her face in front of a six-year-old boy.

Pir Sain further spoils the sanctity of their marriage by permitting strangers to molest his wife in their bedroom. He even supervises the rape by instructing and conducting moves, all the while photographing and recording the depraved act.

While Islam attaches connotations of chastity and purity to covering one's body, Pir Sain desecrates the symbol of the *burka* by making the teenagers-who rape Heer-wear it so they could enter the Haveli secretly. The *burka*, thus, provides him the camouflage he needs to cloak his duplicity and transgressions. The emerald drape embellished with the 99 names of Allah that adorns Pir Sain's frame (44) is emblematic of how he curtains his wrongs and skillfully deludes the masses by distorting the institutions of Islam. He drinks milk in front of people, but behind the doors of his bedroom, he forces Heer to drink alcohol against her will, a major transgression, one of the many *gunah-e-kabira* in Islam (Naik, 2009).

Pir Sain is a personification of sexual perversions. He assaults his daughter when she attains puberty, and repeatedly compels Heer to “prepare” adolescent girls for him like Yathimri. Heer is compelled to abort one of her pregnancies simply because the imminent bulge of her stomach was an inconvenience to Pir Sain, and stood in his way of sexual gratification. He makes her ingest deadly amounts of ineffective pills to instigate an abortion that leaves her crippled and battered. According to Spivak (1998), subaltern women endure suffering with silence because their voices are unheard, same is the case happened with Heer. In the novel, we see that she remains a silent spectator of all the miseries enforced upon her by Pir Sain.

Islam offers compassion and kindness to animals as well and prohibits their maltreatment of any kind (Naik, 2009). The extent of patriarchy was, however, such that Pir Sain burnt a tomcat in the chimney for roaming around the arena reserved for females. Donkeys were regularly sodomized by young boys, yet Pir Sain never punished them. Sexual aberrations like these ran rampant and unchecked in the village. Pir Sain does not seem to be accountable to anybody as Spivak (1998) refers that male figures of society consider themselves as the most superior being. The same is the case of Pir Sain as he thinks of himself as an intermediary between the masses and Allah, “he does what he likes and gives no explanation for it.” (34). He molests almost every adolescent girl in the village, but hypocritically whips those who transgress even a little as a “corrective”, remedial measure.

Rajaji, one of Heer’s children, is similar to his father in character and believes that he has the warrant to exert control and influence over people in the twisted name of integrity. He admires Pir Sain’s prejudiced ways, because he has the aptitude to manipulate Islam to serve his own agenda. Albeit he is conscious of the shame and degradation his mother endures, Rajaji blames Heer for disgracing their community by unmasking herself and Pir Sain’s numerous brands of oppression.

Pir Sain prefers Rajaji over Chote Sain, for the latter is a pure, virtuous man who cannot bring himself to manipulate Islam. When he begins to exhort his spiritual, uncorrupt brand of Islam, Pir Sain becomes anxious and threatened by him, and, as a consequence of his insecurity, gets Chote Sain killed.

Pir Sain does not permit his family to study the translation of the Holy Quran. He asserts his position as an intermediary between the masses and Allah and disallows them from perusing it in any language other than Arabic so that they are unable to communicate with Allah themselves and cannot discern the authentic, harmonious essence of Islam. Sakhi Beebi (Durrani, 1999) urges Heer to examine and unravel the substance of the Holy Quran herself, instead of glancing through the prejudiced, intolerant lens Pir Sain offered. When Guppi, Heer’s daughter, inquires about the rationale behind reciting the Quran solely in Arabic, her grandmother threatens to notify Pir Sain about her naivety. Her eager inquisitiveness is defeated by the terror of Pir Sain’s religious absolutism.

CONCLUSION

In many Islamic communities, religious principles are used to manipulate and control the people. By selectively interpreting the Quran, creating obstacles to prevent women from accessing education, and using faith as a tool of subjugation, religious leaders have exploited Islamic beliefs in order to benefit themselves. For example, the actions of Pir Sain, who has been accused of blasphemy, highlight the hypocrisy of someone who is deemed as a spiritual leader (“Blasphemy Unmasks”, 2017). This example serves to illustrate how religion can be used to manipulate and deceive the public, particularly women, in order to maintain power.

The novel is an accurate representation of the gender divide and the capacity of women to endure their oppressive situation. Pir Sain is a representation of the traditional patriarchy and absolute control which women are subjected to. In telling the story of female subjugation and dehumanization, the novel is the first step towards giving voice to women and recognizing their suffering. It is a powerful statement of the oppressive nature of the community, and it is a ‘blasphemy’ in itself to speak of women’s rights in such a society. By doing so, the novel gives a powerful testament to women and their capacity to withstand and survive oppression. It is a powerful demonstration of the bravery and strength of women, and their ability to stay resilient in the face of adversity. It illustrates the cruel subjugation and dehumanization of women in a society that is dominated by male power and authority. The novel paints a vivid picture of the harshness of women’s oppression and degradation, and serves as a powerful reminder of the great lengths women have gone through in order to survive in a society that so often refuses to recognize them. It is a clear and heartbreaking reminder of the injustices that women have endured over the years and the struggles that they have faced in their pursuit of equality.

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