

# **Female Circumcision/FGM: A Discussion in the Light of Religious and Ethical Perspective with Reference to the Novel *Princess Trilogy* by Jean Sasson**

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## **Abstract**

*Female Genital mutilation, widely known as the female circumcision is performed primarily in Arab, African Muslim dominating countries, claiming that this procedure is Islamic. Furthermore, this procedure involves the removal of unnecessarily, the healthy female genital organs that not religious neither bears any medical value. This paper explores about the long - and short-term after effects of FGM on the victims/characters of the biographical novels Princess Trilogy, explaining that sometimes medical science cannot help in improving the gynae issues these victims face due to their mutilated genitals. Furthermore, this paper also explores the psychological impact of forceful FGM, widely called circumcision over the survivors of FGM, discussed in Princess Trilogy. The study comes up with suggestions that prohibiting the unethical, non-religious, ill and fatal customary ritual to save women from deadly health complications.*

**Keywords:** Female circumcision, FGM, physical deformation, gynecological issue, Eliminating FGM, Eradicating FGM, Women's Health, Islamic circumcision, Banning FGM

## **Introduction**

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) which is commonly known as female circumcision is a custom, practiced in approximately 30 countries, most of which are Arab and African countries. The FGM victims mainly belong to Muslim, Jew and Christian communities, though this practice is more specifically a part of Muslim communities. This is regional and ignorance bound, so only the Jews and Christian who inhabit African, Arab countries, are found practicing FGM/female circumcision in their communities.

This practice becomes more hideous when it is performed on women by women. In most of the cases, men in the family decided for this painful tyrant procedure, while women believe that they are doing a good thing towards their daughters fulfill the demand of the paterfamilias. Furthermore, after this ritual is done their daughters are considers purified and ready for a noble marriage. The protagonist Princess Sultana of the



novel *Princess* was prevented from circumcision but three of her elder sisters did though in her case it was her father's decision to prohibit the practice of FGM in her his family. Princess Sultana's father was convinced by their family physician who unfolded the fatal and dangerous physical and psychological harms of FGM on its victims.

There is a misconception that this ritual is healthy as well as brings pleasure to women when they observe their matrimonial duties with their husbands. As a matter of fact, unfortunately, this procedure brings physical, psychological and mental harm to women. At this point, we find the notion of Simone Beauvoir correct that woman is not born rather becomes one (Butler 1986). Furthermore, women's long debated physique which is a well-known phenomenon. Even the great philosophers have discussed women's physical imperfection, as they believe, in comparison to that of men's perfect male physique. This insensible ideology has deep roots in the annals of history which deeply penetrated in the belief system of the societies. Therefore, this inculcated ignorant believes and one of which resulted in bringing changes to the female body and thus she becomes closer to the male concept of perfection in order to suit the taste and likes of men. FGM is one of such procedures.

Unfortunately, FGM persisted for millennia because it was performed in the name of religion which is completely wrong as it has no religious value as there is no verse in Al-Quran, neither a direct authentic *Hadith* is available in the support of FGM or even about female circumcision, which are two different procedures.

### **Our Knowledge of FGM:**

We did not know that a ritual like this existed for females too. We only knew about the male circumcision we knew, is the well-known one, which is extensively practiced in the Muslim and Jewish world. We unfortunately were fully ignorant of the existence of this procedure linked with females. Sometimes, we pitied in our hearts for male gender that they had to go through this painful procedure of circumcision, which is religiously mandatory for them. This procedure has medical benefits that are also proven by the medical science. To our surprise a few years ago, we read a novel *Princess* written by Jean Sasson and for the first time we read about Female Circumcision performed on female characters of the novel which is based on true events. It was more like shock than a surprise to us and thus some enquiry was necessary.

### **Religion and Female Circumcision:**

Male circumcision is a mandatory practice but female circumcision was a new information. The first thing was to check that if it was also Islamic such as Male circumcision.

Out of curiosity we did some enquiry and our research led us to a religious *Hadith* book *Muta Imam Malik*, where only a little description about this ritual was found but still, we did not locate the real meaning and intensity of the ritual in the book. Rather a detailed research as follows shed light on the ritual as being non-Islamic.

### The Details Religious Account on the Topic:

Dawud, A. & Ash'ath, S. (2008) spoke of the *hadith* which is presented to support the female circumcision is narrated as, "narrated by Muhammad bin Hassan as 'Abdul-Wahhab (also one of the narrators of the same *Hadith*) reveals that Al-Kufi from 'Abdul-Malik-bin-Umair, from Umm-Atiyyah Al-Ansariyyah, a female practitioner of the ritual who performed female circumcision in the city Al-Madinah, was once conducting the procedure and the Prophet asked her not to do the extreme cutting for preventing this would be better for woman and would be more likeable to her husband. Reflecting to this *Hadith*, Abū Dāwud explains that a parallel account was given by 'Ubaidullāh bin 'Amr from 'Abdul-Malik. Abū Dāwud opine that this *hadith* weak and cannot be counted as authentic for it is said in the Mursal form. Abū Dāwud further explains that Muhammad bin Hassan is not known, and thus this *Hadith* is weak."

This *Hadith*, which is considered weak by the Abu Dawud who is a renowned prophetic *hadith* scholar, is an only *hadith* directly related to Prophet Muhammad. There are two more *hadiths* on this topic but this is referred the most. If we consider this *hadith* an authentic despite its weak status, we realize that Prophet Muhammad advised the practitioner to remove the prepuce only which is completely negated by the practitioners of this age. As well as we find the character of the novel *Princess* as the victims of FGM which is totally different than circumcision described in this *hadith*, though it is weak. Besides Islamic ritual has medical value such as male circumcision. This ritual cannot be Islamic which endangered the lives and health of the female victims.

The second *hadith* that is presented to support this ritual is not related to Prophet Muhammad, as well as it also is not related by the reliable *hadith* source. The book of *Sunan al-Kubra*, *Mu'jam Al-kabir*, *Musnaf of Ib-ne-Abi Shayban* and *Musnad of Ahmed*, the known reliable and authentic *hadith* books do not contain this *hadith*. Hussain, B. (2003) refers to this *hadith* which makes circumcision mandatory for male and honourable for female. Religious *Hadith* Scholars have reservation to this *hadith*, for it does not directly addresses the topic of female circumcision as well as according to Rijjal (Islamic Scholars), Hujjaj Ib-ne-Artat as one of the narrators of the *hadith* makes it unauthentic. Yaqub Ibney Sheba, explains that this narrator was known as a person who created *hadiths* by his own. Hussain, B. (2003) further explains that Abu Dawud also consider this *hadith* unauthentic due to presence of another unreliable narrator known as Muhammad bin Hassan.

The last *hadith* which centres round the topic of *ghusl* (compulsory bath) as obligation for husband and wife, is also referred as a weak reference to female circumcision.

Imam, M. (1996), "Yahya related to me from Malik from ibn al-Musayyab that Umar ibn al-Khattab and Uthman ibn Affan and A'isha, the wife of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, used to say, 'when the circumcised part touches the circumcised part, *ghusl* in obligatory.'" She was also enquired by Abu Salama about the same *hadith* on which Hazrat A'isha did not hide her distaste and declared him a roaster

who crows with other crows without knowing the reason. Imam Malik reveal that She did not adhere a minor to speak on a topic which was far mature than his age. This *hadith* also does not contain the discussion on the topic of female circumcision but on the obligatory *ghusl*. There is only a slight reference to female circumcised part.

Almas, N. et al (2019), opine that it is to be noted that *mujansia* is a famous method practiced in Arabic language. They speak of two similar things as one such as the word *abawayan* would refer to both mother and father, or Qmarayan, which means two moons would refer to one sun and one moon. *Mujansia* is used to make the reference easier to be pointed to and it is used as figure of speech. Similarly, the word used in this *hadith* related to the topic of mandatory bath also contain the word “*Kahttan*”, which means two circumcised parts, of male and female. Which also bears the same explanation of the use of *mujansia* here. further more when this *hadith* is not about female circumcision so this is extremely inappropriate to refer to this *hadith*, in support of female circumcision.

### Literature Review:

#### i. Types of Circumcision:

In the first type Clitoridectomy, the clitoris of the victim is removed. In Excision, inner labia, with or without clitoris is removed.

If inner labia are removed and clitoris remains intact then it is known as circumcision which is also called Islamic for there is one *Hadith* (weak though), in the book of *Hadith Sunan Abi Dawud* by Imam Hafiz Abu Dawud, which defines the possibility of this kind of circumcision. Moreover, (Dawud and bin Ash'ath) explains that this *Hadith* is weak because Muhammad Bin Hassan who among other narrators of this *Hadith* is unknown and thus the *Hadith* is not reliable.

In infibulation, after the removal of victim's clitoris, inner and outer labia, the practitioner stitch the vaginal opening, leaves only a small hole, to excrete the body fluids. This is also called FGM (Organization 1998).

#### ii. FGM and Circumcision:

There is difference between Circumcision and Female Genital Mutilation for the later involve acute cutting and deforms the female genitals.

According to the weak *Hadith* (Dawud and bin Ash'ath) it is clear that Prophet Muhammad admonishingly advised a woman who was circumcising a little girl that she must not overstain for it would be more pleasing for husband and wife both. There is no instruction in any verse in the holy book Al-Quran about the circumcision and no evidence in form of *Hadith* is found in trusted, authentic and reliable books of *Hadiths* such as, Al Bukhari, Muslim and Imam Malik. Moreover, there is no evidence or any command regarding female circumcision is found in the other two Abrahamic religious books gospel and Torah (Ten Commandments).

Even if the ritual is considered religious, no mutilation is allowed to be done to female genitals. Only the removal of the prepuce is suggested by Prophet Muhammad and he forbade the removal of the clitoris which is called clitoridectomy. On the other hand, what these victims, Princess Nura, Baher and Ilhan suffered from was the vilest kind of circumcision which is called FGM. Genital mutilation is the major characteristics of FGM, which mutilated the victim's feminine private organs and thus they suffer for the rest of their lives. The consequences of such kind of suffering are discussed by (Rushwan 2013) in detail that FGM causes irreversible changes in a woman's psychological, physical and mental condition. The victims continuously suffer from several medical issues, most of which have no remedy.

Islam commands only which is beneficial and healthy for human-beings. Moreover, this ritual is also pre-Islamic. This ritual does not come from Islamic preaching and is totally customary. Cultural and customary rituals are hard to change but not impossible to change. These victims of FGM suffer from the hard blow of fate but some of them face harsher consequences of this ritual. Following are the details of these women whose suffering set extremely painful examples of FGM.

#### **The After effects of Female Circumcision on Women:**

A young girl Ayesha who at the age of ten, went under the procedure of FGM (Pharaonic Circumcision), in Afar (Jhon Howarth 2013) died of excessive bleeding from the wounds occurred during the consummation of marriage. As discussed, that in the procedure of *Pharaonic Khatna*/FGM, all the major parts of genitals such as prepuce, clitoris, inner and outer labia are first removed and secondly the wound is stitched to an extent that only a small opening is left for the passing of urine and menstruation blood. Such victims sometimes are cut open after marriage by their husbands with a sharp edge/blade as it happened in the case of Ayesha. The heavy bleeding from her wounds caused her death.

Similarly, a woman Malika (2013) also suffered from the trauma of FGM and went sterile for several months. Later there had been unspeakable suffering during the process of the consummation of marriage. Malika's sufferings continued during labor and after giving birth to her child she faced gynecological complications and was unable to move the lower part of her body. She expresses her thoughts that death was rather preferable than living such a sterile life.

(Hodal 2018) speaks of another victim, a little girl Deeqa Dahir Nurr, aged ten, passed away due to the excessive bleeding of her wounds caused during the process of FGM by an untrained practitioner. Such cases are rarely reported, and an extensive number of girls suffer the fatal blows of this hideous barbaric ritual, remain unknown.

There are several ill-fated victims who suffer from the vile consequences of FGM such as frigidity, shock, urinary tract infection, pelvic infections, tetanus and injury to adjacent tissues, cyst or keloid formation is also the expected consequences of his procedure. Furthermore, some victims due to infibulation, cannot have their periods because the menstrual blood could not pass due to blocked stitched passage, and this condition leads to infertility. (Rushwan 2013). Which is further explained by Almas, N. et al (2019), “These harmful side effects are acute pain, infection, infections in bladder, infertility, complications during childbirth, surgeries, frigidity and psychological and emotional injuries leaving scars on the body and the mind of the sufferer.” All these consequences are traumatic which may result in “no marriage” situation for these victims. The parents circumcised their daughters in order to find better proposals for their daughters so that they get happy life after their wedding. Unfortunately, these women chances of getting married turn to zero, if of the mentioned consequences, the after effects of the FGM, occurs to these girls.

Similarly, (Abdel-Azim 2013) opines that when a circumcised girl loses her clitoris, her tendency of sexual arousal is also diminishes. This results into anorgasmia which sometimes lead to frigidity. This is the situation which Princess Nura faced, after her marriage. So, when FGM victims marry, they face the double suffering.

### iii. Legal Bann on FGM and Circumcision:

Almas, N. et al (2019) explain that all types of cuttings are commonly known as FGM in West, including the type which comes in the category of Islamic Circumcision of females, which is restricted to the removal of prepuce only, though muslims scholar’s opinion vary on the nature of this procedure, as one. Furthermore, it is discussed that *Hadiths* in favor of female circumcision are not strong, which does not prove circumcision obligatory for women as well as FGM is prohibited by the scholar of Islamic sharia. Thus, this practice must not be practiced and must be declared a crime.

There is no medical value of these procedures besides these brings many harms to the victims. To keep the wellbeing of women unharmed, several countries have legally banned this practice and among them are, New Zealand, Spain, Norway, Belgium, Canada, Italy, Denmark, Cyprus, UK, Switzerland and USA. In Arab African region, it is now lawfully prohibiting in Benin, Egypt, Enteral African Republic, Burkina, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Chad, Eritrea, Kenya, Guinea, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa. Tango, Cote d’Ivoire and Tanzania (E. Edouard 2013).

This needs to be prohibited in other parts of the world and specially in the Arab countries where still the custom of FGM, is kept alive by the ritual followers.

**Research Methodology:**

Following is the research methodology implied for this paper.

**Textual Analysis:**

Textual analysis is found appropriate for this research which Frey, L., Botan, C., & Kreps, G. (1999) describe that textual analysis is a method which a scholar uses for the communication, is to analyze, to comprehend, to interpret, in order to describe the structure, meaning, content and the purposeful function of the messages that are inscribed in the texts which may be visual or recorded. The most important factor which involves in the process of textual analysis is the select the appropriate text type for the research, finding the relevant text and locating the right approach for the analysis.

Thus, the text has been thoroughly read, analyzed, comprehended and interpreted in this research to find the answers to our research question.

**Research Question and Objective:**

1. What physical, or mental trauma the characters of the novel *Princess* suffer due to the non-religious, non-medical, FGM procedure widely known as female circumcision?

**Objective:**

To find out the *Princess*' characters' physical, or mental trauma, they suffer from, due to FGM which is an unethical, and un-Islamic procedure with no medical value.

**Presentation and Discussion of the Result:**

Following is the step-by-step presentation of the content extracted from the novel as well as a thorough analysis and the discussion is done on the extracted content which is followed by the outcome and the results of the research.

**Princess Sultana Questioned by Her Fiancé:**

The protagonist of *Princess* is Princess Sultana who was questioned by her Fiancé during a telephonic communication which occurred prior to their marriage, about her circumcision for the Arab girls are bound to go through this barbaric ritual. This enquiry triggered Princess Sultana's curiosity and her elder sister Nura gave her a detailed account of the procedure. Sultana received almost all her answers for it was her questions that made her very restless. Princess Nura told Princess Sultana about her horrible experience. Prince Nura was circumcised at her early age which scared princess Nura with deformity, trauma and immense pain. Later after her marriage she suffered again due to the excessive bleeding, during the consummation process of the marriage on her wedding night. Princess Nura informed Princess Sultana that during one medical examination, she learnt from the physician that her genitalia were horribly mutilated, and so she will always have to bear pain with her husband, and during childbirth too.

The second incident reported in the novel is when princess Sultana visited Egypt and her maid Fatima seek Princess Sultana's help in order to save her granddaughter Ilhan, who was about to face the cruel procedure of *firOni Khatna*/pharaonic circumcision. Princess Sultana tried her level best to save the little Ilhan from this cruelty but failed unfortunately (Sasson 2001). Ilhan's parents decided the most brutal kind of female circumcision for her, known as pharaonic circumcision which mutilates and fully ruins the female genital organs (Organization 1998). Medically proven good for men's health, the male circumcision is a common practice amongst Muslims and Jews. This is obligatory for the men of Islamic faith and of Judaism to undergo this procedure. Female circumcision is not commonly practiced round the globe. It prevails more particularly in most of undeveloped Arab and African countries.

Awareness and the sufferings of many of the victims, convinced the legislators of several Muslim countries to prohibit this ritual. Furthermore, they have also declared it a crime against women and humanity. This is hard to believe that even after knowing the ritual to be a crime, a lot of people still practice it secretly, which mostly results in tragedies. Sometimes the death follows the procedure and soon swallows the victims. If the victim survives, later due to the complication and infections the death comes to the victims during childbirth. In few cases the new-born babies of victims also die which make this procedure more deadly and excruciating.

### **Circumcision; Princess Sultana's Ignorance:**

In the novel *Princess* (Sasson 1992) Princess Sultana's ignorance about circumcision is expressed in the following words, "Kareem then brought a puzzling subject; he asked if I had been circumcised. I told him I would have to ask Father. He cautioned me: 'no do not ask' He seemed pleased with my reply." (p. 156)

*Princess Trilogy* is a biographical novel and Princess Sultana's personality presents her as a rebellious and subversive natured woman, who could not bear any injustice towards herself or any other women in their country. Though unable to change the whole strata of the country, Sultana was always at war with her own family members, especially males. During these conflicts she was much ignorant about the reality of life.

Princess Sultana fortunately received the permission to meet her future husband Kareem and later they had their chances to have telephonic communication. During one conversation, Kareem quiet concerned abruptly questioned Princess Sultana about her circumcision. Ignorant Princess innocently replied that she will ask about this from her father. Kareem, forbid her to make an enquiry about her circumcision from her father. In-fact Kareem had his answer which made him very happy, for circumcision is not a thing which a female victim can ever forget if undergoes it.

### **Princess Sultana's Curiosity about Female Circumcision:**

Princess Sultana did not know what she was enquired about by her fiancé. It was only a novel terminology for her which was enough to make her curious and she thus planned to



look for the detail. Princess Sultana in her heart was restless to know about the phenomena which was strange and unknown to her. Ignorant of the intensity of the topic, she opened up about this during the dinner, in the presence of all the members of the family.

“In my innocence I blurted out the question of circumcision at the dinner table. . . when I looked up, I saw that everyone was ill at ease” (p.157).

Princess Sultana was surprised when she found that all her sisters and their brother Ali uncomfortable with the topic. In our opinion they would have turned uncomfortable due to the sensitivity of the topic and its discussion so very openly by Princess Sultana. Princess Sultana speaks on another occasion that it is the topic of “sexuality”, which is taboo in Arab. Speaking about sexuality is almost forbidden to the people to discuss openly.

### **Ali Interrogated Princess Sultana:**

When Princess Sultana cracked the topic on dinner table; On such an enquiry Prince Ali, who that day was presiding the dinner, sitting in the chair of the head of the family, asked angrily about Princess Sultana’s source of information about female circumcision. Princess Sultana was warned by her fiancé Kareem and so she cleverly hid the fact with a lie that she overheard a conversation of servants about female circumcision. Kareem warned her not to speak about this with anyone though he was unable to hide his happiness. This made Princess Sultana curious to know the details of the procedure and that what made Kareem happier that day after this conversation.

“Ali dismissed my ignorance with a glare in my direction . . . With our mother now dead, Nura, as the eldest child, was responsible for my knowledge of such subjects” (p.157).

Ali called in for their eldest sister Nura for now she was the eldest female in the family after their mother passed away. Mother’s responsibilities were now shifted to her, so she had to educate the other younger ignorant females of their family about certain sensitive topics.

This depicts that speaking about such topic is forbidden in the families. Even though they were female siblings and sister they do not open up about such issues with one another.

### **The Main Reason to Follow FGM:**

According to the perception of the Arab people there is a very important reason behind not abandoning this horrific ritual from the lives of their beloved daughters.

People do not very easily let go of the certain rituals, even if they realize the ill nature of the ritual. The main reason is that such practices are the set customs of their forefather which is followed by the whole society. They fear their society and so remain stuck to such customs. The importance is to bring awareness within the society. To eradicate such fatal rituals, form their roots, the need is to bring awareness on bigger level by targeting the society not focusing only a few families.

### **Circumcision is Traditional:**

“The women of my mother’s generation were uneducated, and had little knowledge other than what their men told them to be true; as a tragic result, such traditions as circumcision were kept alive by the very people who had themselves suffered under the cruel knife of barbarism” (p. 162).

This grew creepier that women who themselves have face this cruelty, make their own daughters to suffer from the same brutality. They did not have much knowledge for the generation of Princess Sultana’s mother did not attend any kind of education. Still could they not observe that the ill practice of FGM may result in mishaps to the women who experienced this? This is of course ignored for these women had to follow the set trend of their elders and ancestor. Even after getting the knowledge about the evil aftereffects of this barbarous procedure as specifically mentioned in these lines that Princess Sultana’s mother did not want to abandon this customary ritual.

“In their confusion of past and present, they were unwittingly strengthening the men in their efforts to keep us in ignorance and seclusion. Even when told of medical dangers, my mother had clung to the traditional past; she could imagine no other path for her daughters, than the one she herself had tried, for fear that any shift from tradition would harm their marriage chances” (p.162).

This is the fear and to some extent their fear is true. Nura explained to Sultana that still there are many Arab young men who like to have a circumcised wife. These Traditions are the most important ones for them which they cannot neglect at any cost. The situation becomes very intense when it comes to Arab. Even when the mother of Sultana was made aware of the dangers of the circumcision, she refused to accept the truth and wanted to stay connected with this barbarous tradition, only fearing that abandoning this ritual, may reduce the chance of marriage. Thinking that if the people would know that the girls of a certain family are not circumcised, these people will not send the marriage proposals for the uncircumcised girls. So, their chances will reduce in comparison to the girls who are circumcised. There would be a condition then they will have to choose from the leftover proposals which might not be as good as according to their own status. To keep the maximum chances of their girl’s marriages intact their mothers and other family members continue to follow the barbaric ritual.

### **Victims of Female Circumcision in *Princess Trilogy*:**

#### **i. Nura’s Circumcision:**

“I changed the subject, [sic] I asked my sister about circumcision. Her voice thin and low, Nura told me that she had been circumcised when she was about twelve years old. She said that rite has been performed on the three sisters that followed her in age” (p. 159).

Princess Nura underwent the procedure in her preteen, when she was only twelve. Afterwards three of the other Princesses suffered from the same fate.

“For more generations than Nura knew .... some miles from Riyadh” (p. 159).

Nura explained the procedure to princess Sultana by narrating the whole incident of her very own circumcision in detail. The horrific detail of the whole episode traumatized Princess Sultana for a while.

“The youngest six daughters of our family had been spared the barbaric custom owing to the intervention of a western physician who spoke for many hours against the ritual with our father” (p. 159).

Princess Sultana and her five female siblings, luckily were safe from this horrible ritual, for their father was forbidden by a western doctor.

## **ii. Nura’s Horrific Experience:**

Nura told princess Sultana that four sisters including Nura herself were circumcised when they reach the tender age of twelve. Nura being thankful, gave credit to the western doctor for insisted their father to reconsider the practice of this ritual and must not be practiced any further in his family. This doctor successfully advocated the topic and finally Princess Sultana’s father was convinced not to prohibit the practice of this FGM in his family. Princess Sultana’s mother Fadeela, was not in the beginning well convinced but later she surrendered before the will of her husband.

As we have already discussed, this had been a custom that Arab women were circumcised. Princess Sultana’s mother was also circumcised just before a few weeks to her wedding. female Circumcision was the culture and so Sultana’s mother and many women of her age were bound to follow their ancestral custom. This procedure was performed on their mothers, on themselves and then it was the turn of their daughter to undergo the ritual. Most of the people, including men and women, unaware of the harmful effect of the procedure, follow the footsteps of their forefathers just to keep their custom alive. They falsely believed that this is procedure is beneficial for the women. The medical science unfortunately suggests otherwise. For princess Sultana’s mother when it was done on her than her daughter’s must undergo the same ritual. So, she arranged for Nura’s circumcision in a village nearby their hometown.

## **iii. The Ill ceremony:**

“Nura nude from the waist down .... her laceration were dresses and bandaged” (P. 160).

Nura in a tent was asked to place herself posteriorly on a bedsheet, spread on the ground. She followed the instructions, and soon after was held tightly by four women, which restrain her movement. She was further instructed by her mother to stay still, which was done to perform the FGM easily, in absence of resistance on victim’s part. The oldest women in the gathering took the razor like sharp edge, raised in the air and Nura with her own scream felt the acute pain in her genital region of the body. She traumatized and this feeling grew more when her body was raised high in

the air and she was congratulated by the rest of the women in the tent. Later she was taken to another tent where the first aid was given to her wounds.

#### iv. Result of Nura's Circumcision:

Nura like most of the Arab girls did not know the reason of this procedure FGM performed on her. Most of women circumcised their daughters only because this is a custom in their families. Nura's mother also followed the set ritual blindly. Majority of the women do not exactly know the reason of their suffering from this horrible experience, though there are misconception that FGM enhances the victims' sexuality. Another believe is that it purifies women. These victims remain unaware of this until they found themselves in the moment when their marriage is consummated. The same horrible fate also waited for Nura until she married. Princess Nura explained in detail while educating Princess Sultana about FGM that whole procedure was an extremely terrible experience and she suffered from pain and humiliation during her FGM. Nura further explained that later during the consummation of the marriage she again suffered from immense pain and abnormal bleeding. This persisted until she constantly remained afraid in her heart in observing her duties as a wife to her husband.

"Finally, after becoming pregnant, she saw a Western doctor was appalled to see her scars. He told Nura that her entire external genitalia had been removed and that for sure, the sex act would always result in tearing, pain and bleeding" (p. 160).

This is the fate of such victims who undergo this procedure.

#### v. Hypocrisy:

Female circumcision has been a custom in Arab and African societies since ancient times. These female characters of the biographical novel *Princess*, could go to western male doctors for their deliveries and for other gynecological issues, but this ritual is performed by untrained woman of villages, to keep the procedure as secretive as possible. These women's best qualification to perform this ritual is their old age. This ritual is not religious neither healthy. The main reason behind this ritual is to keep the modesty of the circumcised women intact. These victims will dare not to get involved in an affair prior to their marriage and later after the marriage, they constantly suffer, which kills their libido and so the real goal behind this ritual to control the chastity of women is achieved.

#### vi. Baher Suffered More Due to Circumcision:

"My other three sisters visited the physicians, he said that our sister Baher was in much worse condition than Nura, and he did not know how she endured sexual relations with her husband" (P. 160).

On another occasion when Princess Baher was examined by the doctor, he was shocked to see Baher's ruined genitalia. Physician opined that with extremely

mutilated genital as Baher's, it was beyond possible for her, to maintain a healthy physical relationship with her husband. For him the possibility of the woman's relationship to her husband, in this case was beyond reality, but the relation between the couple existed which shocked the physician.

"Nura had been a witness .... a great loss of blood" (P. 161).

Due to Princess Baher's resistance, she received deeper cut which made her case far worse than that of Princess Nura's. Baher even ran off from the old woman but was caught and brought to the mat where she was circumcised. Unfortunately, her resistance could not help her instead, she was heavily injured and became a lifelong sufferer.

The humiliation and the trauma Baher endured is unimaginable. Wound heal but psychological scars never do and remain within the victim's mind for the rest of their lives.

#### **vii. Circumcision of Ilhan:**

In the book *Princess Sultana's Circle* by (Sasson 1992), it is revealed that Princess Sultana and her husband owned a castle in Egypt. She went on a visit there with her family and found her maid Fatima very upset and sad. There Fatima spoke an intensely painful epical sentence that the luckiest girl on planet earth is the one who is not born yet, and the second luckiest girl is the one who dies soon after her birth. She then revealed in response to Princess Sultana's questions that it was the matter of her granddaughter Ilhan's circumcision which troubled Fatima. She requested Princess Sultana to visit her daughter Ilham's home to make an effort, in convincing her to reconsider this matter. Fatima believed that Princess Sultana belonged to the royal family and so her daughter Ilham will consider her advice and perhaps her granddaughter Ilhan would be prevented from the fatal procedure.

#### **viii. Princess Sultana's Visit:**

Princess Sultana visited Ilham's house and she found that the residents belonged to a lower middle-class family, the house was clean and well-arranged, which depicted the managing and good household skills of Ilham. This reveals another fact that this custom was part of the society without any distinction of poor and rich. Princess Sultana found Ilham an extremely strict woman who slapped her daughter when she tried to touch Princess Sultana's cloths. Princess Sultana did her utmost best to convince Ilham to reconsider the decision of conducting the procedure over their fourteen years old daughter Ilhan. Princess explained the side effects of the procedure in detail but failed to move the rigid Ilham an inch. Finally, Ilham informed Princess Sultana about the expected arrival of her husband, which was an indirect signal of requesting Princess to leave the house. With a heavy heart Princess Sultana left but Fatima stayed there in hope that perhaps she would bring some ease to Ilhan during procedure. Moreover, Fatima was also planning to request her son in law to avoid the *FirOni Khatna*.

**ix. Abdullah's Grief:**

Princess Sultana's son Abdullah took her to Ilham's home. When Princess informed him about her failure in convincing Ilham, he was saddened. Kareem, Sultana's husband, also disavored this procedure and felt grief over the suffering of a little girl. This reveals the awareness in the educated class in the Arab world though their hands are also tied up in resolving certain issues as it happened in Ilhan's case.

**x. The After Math:**

The next day the grieved Fatima told them that little Ilhan was not spared a bit and *FirOni Khatna* was performed on her. This is the most horrible form of FGM which fully mutilates the female genital organs, results in ruining the victims' lives.

**xi. Luck:**

Blessed Ones are those who are saved from FGM. They are declared lucky by the ones who suffered from their ill fate, by the hand of their own family members.

"Nura Added that I was blessed not to have endured such a trauma" (P. 159).

Princess Nura here refers to Princess Sultana and her other younger sister who were saved from the barbaric ritual of FGM. These women are indeed very lucky for they did not suffer the terrible genital mutilation which their elder sisters did. They were saved from the physical, mental and psychological trauma and the life lasting effects of the hideous procedure.

**Kareem's conduct Gave Sultana Hope:**

Kareem could not hide his happiness when he learnt that Princess Sultana was not circumcised. Later Princess Nura explained his happiness to Princess Sultana that Kareem supports the idea of a complete women which separates him from the typical patriarchal people of Arab society.

Unintentionally, Sultana's started imagining of a better life for her, for her children and the women of her country. She realized that her husband Kareem was good natured and concerned person for the wellbeing of women. This awareness about her husband relaxed Sultana and she thought of her yet unborn children to lend a hand in her reforming activities.

**Sultana's Desire to Reforms:**

"I would be the first of the Saudi women to reform the inner circle. It would be my sons and daughters who would remodel Saudi Arabia into a country worthy of all its citizens, both male and female" (P. 163).

Princess Sultana's mind was troubled after the conversation with Princess Nura on the topic of FGM. The whole conversation triggered Princess Sultana's inner reformer, who wanted a change in the condition of Arab women. the trail of Princess Sultana's thoughts reveals her long-term planning which involve her children,

irrespective of their gender, to help Princess in her reforming cause. She plans to remodel the whole society which at that point seemed hard to accomplish but Princess Sultana continued with her struggle to support the cause of Arab women. Princess Sultana's son Abdullah attained the true spirit of her which was later fully exhibited by the writer Jean Sasson, when she inscribed the incident of Ilhan's circumcision.

### **Women; Turned to Objects:**

"Nura said it sounded to her like Kareem wanted a wife who would share pleasure, not just be an object of pleasure" (P. 161).

Princess Sultana's elder sister Nura later explained her that he was happy because he desired his wife in altogether fine and complete form. He did not want a mutilated wife for the victims of female circumcision are mutilated only to keep their chastity intact which turn them mere objects for the pleasure of men. Kareem did not desire to have an object in the form of his wife to fulfill his pleasure; he liked his wife's feminine tissues intact; not mutilated.

"I am glad Kareem was concerned for my welfare. I was beginning to entertain the notion that some women might be happy in my land, in spite of tradition that do not belong in a civilized society" (P.161).

Kareem's concern was shown in his conversation and later in his response to Princess Sultana's answer to his question about circumcision. It is her luck that she was saved from this barbaric, horrible ritual and later she was engaged with a caring person like Kareem. Princess Sultana always had a harsh experience with the men of her family, now had a sense of relief. She realized that there were men in her society who had sympathy for women and they think of their wellbeing. These lines quoted above, give a hope to the readers too that there are chances for the relief for the Arab women. It was the first time that the ray of hope lit in Princess Sultana's heart and the first thought of reform took in her mind (Sasson 1992). This thought she later transmitted in the mind of her son Abdullah and daughter Maha (Sasson 2001).

### **Findings:**

Following are the findings related to the paper.

### **FGM is Fatal:**

This procedure brings physical, mental and psychological harms to the victim. These harms are short termed and long termed. The victims face fatal consequences which may result in several gynecological complications, infertility, and in some of the cases death of mother and infant. FGM, performed by an ill-trained practitioner may also cause death of the victims. The psychological and mental trauma could also result in frigidity from which Nura suffered. Other than this several harmful infections are common. Above all, FGM may also cause paralysis in the victim. On the other hand, it is also evident that this procedure has no medical value, despite it is very harmful to the health of the

victims. According to Almas, N. et al (2019), “Medically, its harmful immediate and after effects have been proven fatal that clearly support the suggestion that it should not be practiced.”

### **FGM is Cultural:**

FGM is found as a cultural practice rather than a religious practice. It prevailed in some specific parts of the Arab, African world where people are culturally bound to practice this ritual irrespective of their religion. Furthermore, this ritual is pre-Islamic and thus calling it religious is extremely wrong. Almas, N. et al (2019), “Still, I would say that bringing awareness is very much important to bring an end to this ritual which is not religious but only cultural indeed.”

### **FGM is not Islamic:**

The *Hadith* inscribed in the book *Muta Imam Malik* (1996) reveals that it was suggested by Prophet Muhammad that, only the prepuce of the clitoris hood, is removed, in girls’ circumcision, which benefits both husband and wife. Unlike, the *Hadith*, though weak, clearly advises that only the prepuce is to be removed (if the female circumcision is performed on a girl/woman), but in the novel the *Princess Trilogy* written by Sasson, contains 3 incidents where the directions of this *Hadith* were fully neglected and *Fir’Oni Khatna*/FGM (Organization 1998) was performed on the victims. In all the incidents, the removal exceeded far more than only the removal of prepuce despite the *hadith* clearly forbids to ruin the genitals. Furthermore, this *Hadith* is classified as one of the weak *Hadiths*.

### **The Banning of FGM/Female Circumcision by Islamic Scholar:**

There is a huge difference in FGM and female circumcision. There is no solid proof that even female circumcision is a religious practice. Calling FGM as female circumcision is wrong and even calling circumcision Islamic is wrong. Conducting this customary ritual in Islamic world should be prohibited on the grounds of protecting the health of females who are an integral part of the society and fundamental part of any family (Goma 2013).

The act which is kept hidden from the people makes it more unethical and non-religious. Islam do not preach any hidden practices and the practices that need a veil cannot be Islamic as well as ethical.

### **The Real Reasons Behind This Ritual:**

There are two reasons due to which this ritual is practiced and one of which is to control women’s modesty and to make it sure that they remain loyal to their future husbands. The young Ilhan was victim of such mentality. The second important reason is to follow the ritual to remain blended in the society for if any of the people refuse to follow the ritual will find it extremely difficult to find their daughters a good match within the society. men still demand women who are gone through this procedure. Princess’ mother Fadeela



wanted all her daughter to undergo this procedure of FGM because she was concerned for their marriage. She knew if her daughters would not be circumcised, they will not get good match from the prestigious noble or royal families.

**The Role of Male Gender:**

Moreover, Power of gender plays an important role in continuing the practice of FGM. In Arab and African Muslim countries men have the power to take all the decisions about women's lives. This paper explores that they have power to unfollow the ritual of they decide to do so. It is recommended that men in these countries must be informed about the fatal effect of this procedure so they use their authority to stop this ritual such as Princess Sultana's father did. As well as we have example of Kareem who also did not favor this ritual and Abdullah who stood against FGM with his mother and helped her to stop this ritual being performed on Ilhan. Princess Sultana also said in Arab women's happiness in Arab is bound with their men, who are with a supporting hand towards them.

**An Unexpected Finding:**

There are men who want their female family members to undergo FGM as well as they also expect their would-be wives circumcised and at the same time there are men who disfavor this ritual for its medically fatal consequences.

The important point which Princess Sultana neglected to mention as a kind gesture of her father whom she always accused as an adamant paterfamilias. In-fact Princess's father prevented six of his daughters, including Princess Sultana from this tyrant procedure. He was convinced by the western physician on medical grounds which resulted in such a wise decision on his part. This was Kareem who was concerned about Princess Sultana and Abdullah supported Princess Sultana in her effort to save little Ilhan (Sasson 2001). Women need men's help and support for their protection and safety in regards of physical, mental and psychological grounds. Furthermore, these men were aware of the harms of female circumcision and FGM and so they stopped favoring an ancient ritual. There is again a ray of hope that if the knowledge about the harmful effects of female circumcision is properly conveyed, it will change the thinking of the people, specially of males.

**Women Need Support:**

Another thing which is discussed in these lines, is that without the help of men there is least expectation of the reform within the society. If women set themselves at war with their men, the situation will turn more chaotic. The societal as well as religious system set men at a place which make them the responsible ones not only to take care of women but also to give women their rights.

In most of the religions practiced over earth, men are made responsible for the betterment and wellbeing of their women. Islam also suggests the same. In this paper we

discussed about Arab, which is solely known as the most sacred Islamic country. In the novel, everywhere Princess Sultana speaks of the religion Islam that it is not practiced in Arab, though they depict being very religious in every mode of life. In Al-Quran, Surae-Al-Nisa (34) Allah says that men are given the duty to look after their women. Men have the responsibility of the wellbeing of women. They have a rank greater and women are bound to be with men in relations such as daughter, sister or wife. Men and women live in these relations in their homes so there should not be war against these closest relatives. Understanding can be developed, through discussed within the family members in a mild time. It is very important that women must not be treated as commodities and to keep their chastity intact, they must not be pushed in procedures like FGM. More specifically the rituals which are not religious must not be practiced and especially not under the name of religion. Furthermore, as discussed, this procedure bears no medical value.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation:**

According to Princess Sultana's own perception, happiness of Arab women depends on men.

"But still the unfairness of it lingered in my thoughts. We women of Arabia could find happiness only if the man ruling us was considerate; otherwise, sorrow would surround us. No matter what we do, our future is linked to one prerequisite: the degree of kindness in the man who rules us" (P. 162).

These words are indeed wise as well as they contain insight. If men are caring and considerate than women of any society will not suffer. If this ritual is forbidden by the men in the family, then women will not carry this ritual by their own. Many of the women like doing this just because this keeps the chastity of their daughters intact. This is a wrong concept, and awareness of the men can do wonders in changing the fates of women. they can be saved from suffering in the name of the religion as well as in the name of purification. This ritual in neither religious nor it purifies women.

FGM is practiced only to keep an unnecessary customary ritual alive which brings only plague to the victims. This is cruelty, which has no religious base or medical value. The suffering of all the three victims, Princess Nura, Princess Baher and young Ilhan are considerable. As we know that this is biographical novel and these victims do exist in the world, who suffered the utmost pain from the acute procedure. There are other examples of Ayesha, Deeqa Nurr and Malika. FGM proved to be the lethal most experience for these women, resulting in death of the former two and paralysis for the later. Such kind of ritual which make women objects must be prohibited as they are now in more than 30 countries in the world (Organization 2008).

Furthermore, Nawab, A. (2018) opines that people who do not favour this practice say that reasons to practice this ritual are even more disturbing than the ritual itself. The main reason is to control the female modesty. They remove that part of female genitalia which makes her happy in her husband's presence with her. According this phenomenon this ritual was created only to keep women in control so that they must remain loyal to

their husbands. This is extremely unethical and thus conducting FGM on women convert them into mere objects whose soul purpose is to entertain and fulfill men's desires. A woman's rights as human-being are neglected when FGM is performed on her. Furthermore, this procedure brings irreversible calamities upon the victim.

We thus, conclude that FGM is violation of the women's rights. FGM humiliates women's dignity of the female character in the novel *Princess* and push them into intense suffering. These characters Princess Nura, Princess Baher and Ilhan faced fatal consequences of the cultural ritual which was conducted in the name of Islamic act that is obligatory. This is untrue. Furthermore, FGM hinders women to utilize their potential to their fullest. There are millions of women who are the living example of being victimized by this custom as well as there are millions of girls who are at risk and they could be victimized any moment for despite all the fight, this practice continues to prevail, in Arab societies. The Sustainable Development Goals makes it a goal to eliminate the Female Genital Mutilation and to eradicate this ritual from the very face of earth. This is how an end can be put to all the violation of women rights. This could be the only remedy to save the women.

The core objective of the paper was to shed light on biographical novel *Princess Trilogy's* FGM victims who suffer from physical, psychological and mental trauma with the short and long-lasting effect is found true. Furthermore, the paper also uncovered the characteristics of FGM as the unethical, non-religious procedure with no medical value. Moreover, it is also found that FGM is a cultural custom known widely known as female circumcision though the former is exceptionally different than the latter. For the safety of women's health, it is required that both FGM as well as female circumcision should be prohibited. The study concludes with the suggestions that it is necessary to ban the unethical, non-religious, ill and fatal customary ritual to save women from deadly health complications.

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