

# PAKISTANI VALUES AND THE PARADOX OF HEER'S COMPLEX PATH TO RESISTANCE IN *BLASPHEMY*; A NOVEL BY TEHMINA DURRANI

Ahtsham Zafar\*  
Dr. Salma Khatoon†  
Asma Khatoon‡

## Abstract

*Gender discrimination and religious exploitation are two of the key issues in Pakistan's patriarchal social setup. Tehmina Durrani is among those few who dare to challenge such cultures. Her novel Blaspheem brings to the fore extreme deterioration in Pakistani values which are beyond reparation. This study aims to examine how traditional Pakistani gender roles are exploited by the main character Pir Sain to subdue Heer, his young wife. This study also explores the paradox of Heer's resistance to find out how society subjugates individuals who strive to undermine those oppressive measures. A qualitative study is conducted by using Butler's Gender Performative Theory, outlined in her essay Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory (1988) and Gender Roles in Pakistan, outlined by Ali et al. (2011) which provide the theoretical framework for the research. The findings of the research showed that Pir Sain's actions were against Pakistani norms and values and that distortion of gender roles led to Heer's subjugation. It also highlights how suppression could lead to the adaptation of authoritarian, oppressive values yet the resistance of society to any appropriation of gender or its performance.*

**Keywords:** Subjugation, patriarchy, exploitation, Gender roles, performative acts

## INTRODUCTION

The subjugation of the female sex is not a recent phenomenon as history is filled with examples of exploitation and usurpation of their fundamental rights. They remain recessive to their male counterparts as the creation myth has continuously reminded them of the sole reproductive purpose of their creation. Throughout history, women have been treated as inferior and

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\*M.Phil. Research Scholar, Government College University, Lahore.

†Assistant Professor of English, Government College University, Lahore, Email: salmakhatoon@gcu.edu.pk.

‡Assistant Professor of English, Government Associate College (W), Gulshan-e-Ravi, Lahore

according to religious mythology are born from the chest bone of a male (*The Catholic Study Bible*, 2010, Genesis 2:22; Shamsuddin & Baharuddin, 2017) a female is enjoined by God to remain inferior to man and obligated to please him in every possible way. Implying such myths, every culture has ensured the hegemony of men at the expense of female rights. They lacked an identity of their own with no right to own property, enjoy freedom, choose fulfilling careers or chase their dreams. According to Professor Aurangzaib (2011), Romans deprived women of property rights; Christians considered them the perpetrators of 'Original Sin'; to Arabs, they were half the men, and Indians considered them as 'Devi', bound to be confined in the household to protect the honor of males and to rear their children. One thing common to all these cultures is inferiority to men who are the only reason for the creation of mankind; and their worth is determined only in relation to the males they are associated with.

Being a woman means doing the household chores, learning things that could please men, rearing children, living within the four walls of her house, protecting her chastity to protect the honor of the man of the household, obeying his family, and providing them with anything they need even at the expense of her happiness. These are some of the common responsibilities linked with the concept of being a woman. Over the course of centuries, these conceptions have become so embedded in the minds of people that it is hardly impossible to imagine a woman without these qualities. It is viewed as natural as the existence of the sun or the burning of fire, and defying them means going against the laws of nature. According to Klingorová & Havlíček (2015).

*The role of God, or a creator of a religion, is always taken by a male and the woman is primarily valued as a mother, especially as a mother to a son. Her place is in the household, less so at religious ceremonies or in public positions. (p. 3)*

Women were also considered demon perpetrators and evil instigators (Baruah & Thakur, 2019). Women's inquisition and witch trials during the late medieval and early modern period set many women ablaze for heresy and other demonic activities. These tyrannical acts were committed in the name of God. Women never questioned these ideologies and remained subservient to them because even religion and aristocracy, two of the most powerful institutions in any society, superimposed them as divine will. Another reason for the hegemony of these concepts is that the female sex had never tried to free themselves from the abominable state they were in.

Every era has its points of contradictions as many people opposed the cruel clutches of patriarchy. During the ancient and medieval periods, many women tried to break the clutches of patriarchy and some of them even succeeded in ruling the masses, despite popular dissent. Walters (2005) in the introduction to her book *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* wrote; “Over the centuries, and in many different countries, women have spoken out for their sex, and articulated, in different ways, their complaints, their needs, and their hopes” (p. 2). Queen Hatshepsut and Cleopatra of Egypt, Razia Sultana of India, Elizabeth of England, Ethelflaed of Mercia, and Isabella of Castile were among the famous, able, and powerful rulers of their time. Joan of Arc, Princess Khutulun of Mongolia, Nzinga Mbande of Africa, and Rani Abbakka Chowta of Ullal (Abhaya Rani) were few who fought bravely in battles and defeated their opponents showing their leadership and military capabilities. But such instances remained rare as females continue to be the underdog species of Homo Sapiens. Part of the problem was the lack of female cases in writing and few writers tried to fill that void as some males did write for them but females' representation remained negligible. Christine de Pizan was the first Western writer to live entirely by her pen while Aphra Behn, Margret Cavendish, and Dorothy Osborne were among the few who tried to break the shackles and speak for the freedom and rights of their kind.

These writers could be considered the precursors of the feminist movement but it started late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the term ‘Feminism’ emerged in France in 1880 (McChan et al, p. 1). Commenting on the onset of the movement, Walters (2005) writes;

*. . . it was not until the second half of the century that any organized campaigns – particularly for better education for women, for the possibility of their working outside the home, for a reform in the laws affecting married women, and for the right to vote – began to emerge. (p. 41)*

Writers like Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, and Simone de Beauvoir lay the theoretical framework of the movement whereas Leigh Smith, Harriet Martineau, and Emmeline Pankhurst provided the necessary political impetus as suffragists and suffragettes worked hard for the votes for women, which they eventually got in 1918 and then equality to men in 1928. Yet the centuries of oppression could not be undone by some reform bills. Women were continuously oppressed in different regions of the world with political,

domestic, marital, and religious violence committed against them. The Second and Third wave of feminism worked against marital rape, child abuse, appropriation of female body and bodily products. The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the emergence of the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed the voices raised for homosexuals, transgender and queer people resulting in the advent of LGBTQ+ as the offshoot of feminist and queer theory. It has spread across the globe with many countries like the UK, The USA, the Netherlands, Canada, and Australia, legalizing same-sex marriage and change in sex.

Many theorists have envisioned the difference between Sex and gender; sex as a biological concept and gender as its social and cultural manifestation. De Beauvoir in her ground-breaking work *The Second Sex* (1949) reckons that “One is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes a woman” (p. 293). Beauvoir (1949) has adopted the Hegelian concept of ‘being is becoming’ and has applied it in her theory of gender where gender is a historical construct than a natural fact. The term ‘Gender’ was first used by psychologist John Money to describe masculinity and femininity in societal terms. Later the term garnered widespread recognition and Gender Studies emerged as a subfield of women’s studies and all the subsequent feminist theories are influenced by gender.

Butler, one of the most important theorists in gender studies for a couple of decades, has been quite critical of gender roles and their impact on individuals. Butler’s theory is quite challenging as she has drawn inspiration from cinema studies to understand the history and construction of gender in society. In her famous work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, Butler (1990) does not view Gender as expressive of some innate reality, but as a constitution of various gender acts that are repeatedly performed. Arguing on this matter Butler (1990) claims that;

*Because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions are obscured by the credibility of those productions—*  
... (p. 190).

Gender Troubles was an ambitious work of Butler and its platform was laid by an essay entitled, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology* (1988). The essay provides the framework for the present study as the theory of Performative Acts is introduced by Butler (1998).

In light of the above-mentioned research, it could be concluded that gender roles provide a certain kind of security to the female gender. The research examines Blasphemy: A Novel by Durrani from the perspective of this theory along with Gender Roles and their expectations in Pakistan. This paper is an attempt to show that whatever Pir Sain does is his distortion of those gender roles and in the private sphere, his acts are a manifestation of the Lucifer he possesses in his body.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Religion and feudalism have played an important role in Pakistani society as these two institutions along with the military have been influential in the country's political tier. Hussain Haqqani, a former Pakistani bureaucrat and journalist, has analyzed the role of religion in Pakistani politics in his book *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military* (2005). The spiritual subjugation and sexual abuse suffered by Pakistani women and children in religious institutions and at the hands of the elite are usually not discussed, but Zaheer Ahmad Babar through his *Parliament se Bazar-e-Husn Tak* (2000) and Tehmina Durrani's *My Feudal Lord* (1991) have exposed the 'honorable' elite of Pakistan and how they have manipulated and fooled the masses, but in 'purdah' they are sexist and abusive. These works have highlighted the dark side of Pakistani politics.

Many authors have also tried to pen the sexual exploitation people suffer at the hands of religious leaders and Peers. Syeda and Alam (2021) have brought to the fore the silenced exploitation of women due to the weakness of faith by analyzing Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi's short story *Lament*. They have shown how peer culture sexually abuses minors and how such shrines have become the safe house for womanizers, and pedophiles. Similarly, Choudhary et al. (2021) have discussed the acts of Pedophilia at Madrasas in Pakistan and how silence of abuse leads to further subjugation of the victims. They have also analyzed that the physical and psychological impact of molestation on children of such a young age could be devastating. In an Islamic and conservative community like Pakistan, it becomes difficult to talk freely about the religious clergy, which makes the attempt on the children more overwhelming. Narijo and Wasan (2022) have also conducted quantitative research regarding the sexual abuse and exploitation faced by minors in religious and secular educational institutions. Their research shows that exploiters employ different methods such as pornographic films, and sex talk to seduce and get consent from minors, though such consent bears no

legal or religious value. Both girls and boys were the victims of abuse and in some cases, the girls were too young for intercourse yet they were abused by the culprits. Their study concludes that sometimes victims' parents have the idea about the abuse yet because of societal sanctions and religious issues, they choose to remain silent.

Tehmina Durrani is a prominent Pakistani author born and raised in an influential family, after divorcing her first husband Anees, Tehmina married famous politician Ghulam Mustafa Khar. Mustafa proved an abusive husband who exploited the rights of his wife and she remained confined to the house for nearly fourteen years. Her experience showed her the miserable condition of women in Pakistan where even an elite woman like her was not safe from the subjugation and exploitation of patriarchy. She decided to raise her voice for the downtrodden and became a stern advocate of female rights. Starting from her oppression, she first recorded the cruelty she faced at the hands of her husband Mustafa Khar in her book *My Feudal Lord* (1991). Her book has exposed the dirty secrets buried in the large villas of Pakistan. Her third book *Blasphemy: A Novel* is an even more ambitious project as it struck at the core of the conservative Pakistani society. Narrating the story of Heer, a beautiful fifteen-year-old girl married to Pir Sain who is twice her age, Tehmina has touched every theme considered taboo in Pakistani society like marital rape, child abuse, religious exploitation, incest, and political prostitution of spouses. Shrine culture, being the sacred goat, had never been questioned but Tehmina boldly highlighted the corruption and exploitation carried in the name of Almighty. *Blasphemy: A Novel* is a brazen tale exposing the corruption prevailing in extremely orthodox Pakistani society.

Since its publication, the novel has stirred quite a debate in academic circles in Pakistan and other countries as well. Lata Khatwani (2014) in *Surrendering Body and the Rebellious Soul! Woman Body and Space in Tehmina Durrani's Blasphemy* opens up on the resistance Heer offers to survive in a misogynistic, exploitative, patriarchal world. Heer has to do things she did not want to ; things she despised the most, but in such a mentally torturing and psychologically toxic environment she not only preserves her mental integrity but also her religious faith. By analyzing the gendered spaces in the novel, Khatwani has shown the oppression Heer faces and the resistance she offers, within those spaces, in the face of utter hypocrisy, humiliation, exploitation, and brutality.

Religion is extremely exploited by the powerful to insert their influence and maintain their power, but does religion allow such misappropriation? Ayoub et al. (2022) have tried to explore the religious hypocrisy and fraud carried

on at religious institutions, in their post-colonial feminist analysis of *Blasphemy*. Analyzing from the Islamic feminist perspective Ayoub et al. have shown how religion is being manipulated by the religious elite like Pir Sain and how they distort religion. By quoting Quranic verses and Hadiths, they have highlighted the bright side of Islam, but their actions are not in the spirit of Islam and Islamic teachings. Personal gains, power games, and political manipulation are at the heart of all such incidents as Ayoub has tried to put forth. On the other hand, Tahir and Rasool (2022) assert that the politics of religion is at play in the subjugation of women in the Subcontinent, specifically in Pakistan. Whether Islam approves or disproves Pir Sain's actions, religion is a manipulative force that forces people of weak faith to be exploited by clergy. Religious faith entraps such people in the tentacles of fake saints, womanizers, and abusive *Gadi Nasheens*.

While a lot of academics have showered praise upon Durrani for her bold yet true stance on women and religious issues, some people think that she has failed to fully convey her ideas. Indian research scholar Ashaq Hussain Parray (2021) feels that Tehmina has misrepresented Islam and the plight of subaltern women in her novel *Blasphemy*. He believes that her work could heighten the Islamophobic sentiments that will create a sense of misunderstanding among different religious communities. Borrowing from Spivak's subaltern theory and Foucault's power structure, Parray reckons that such actions as Pir Sain's are the result of bogus and deteriorating cultural values practiced in third-world countries. Durrani's project, for him, is praiseworthy but her treatment of the subject and themes is misleading as she has romanticized the plight of Heer. Islam provides certain rights to women and no person has the authority to manipulate Islam for their purpose.

Butler's gender performativity theory explains that gender is an act we repeat regularly and how gender identity is formed and different roles are assigned to or expected of each gender identity. Binding the performative theory with the gender roles in Pakistan as explored by Ali et al. (2011), this research brings into focus Heer's suffering and her exploitation that are not the result of expected gender performance, but rather the exploitation of those roles that lead to all this. This research will also focus on the aspects in which Heer resists the misery she faces and her effort to destroy the Shrine.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This Research design is based on a feminist perspective and the close reading technique is used to analyze the text. Butler's gender performative theory as explained in *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* and *Gender Roles*

*in Pakistan* as outlined by Ali et al. provides the theoretical framework for this research. In her essay, Butler (1998) explores how gender is not an innate concept or just an expression of sex but a living entity created as the product of the acts performed by the individuals. So, gender is dynamic and historically constituted concept and could change after repeated acts as these acts provide meaning to it. To maintain gender identity, the acts are iterated, as Butler (1998) goes on “Gender [is] . . . an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts” (p. 519). Butler challenges the fixed categories of sex and gender and emphasizes that gender and sex both are socially constructed concepts established by the dominant groups to assert their dominance. Traditional gender and sex binaries have allowed them to construct these concepts into concrete structures that regulate human behavior. For Butler (1998), it is the performance that makes one man and woman, without that performance gender could disappear. Butler’s concept is derived from phenomenological tradition and she has compared real-life performance with theatrical one. In theatre, the audience knows what they are watching is a performance but in real life, the demarcation between imaginary and real is so concrete that people fail to grasp the performativity of gender. Judith Butler has further distinguished between theatrical and non-theatrical spheres of gender performance; in the theatrical sphere agent is conscious of his social standing and gender identity while in non-theatrical spheres it does not care for social values. Gender Performance could be categorized into private and public spheres. In the public sphere, one adheres to societal expectations and in this sphere, politics of power and control are enacted through gender performance while in the private sphere, one’s real self comes forth. These gender performances define our being as Butler (1998) adds “Discrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished” (p.522). She further questions the stability of the term ‘sex’ and views it as a fluid category, a result of the same social roles and appropriation of the body. While discussing gender transformation Butler is of the view that it normally fails or faces strong suppression from dominant construction because it is avowed individually- in the personal sphere which lacks the political support of the public sphere. Her analysis of the construction of heterosexual identity as a way of exploitation and production of societal values is beyond the scope of this study.

The specific performance is expected of different genders in any particular society which specifies the expected gender roles. In Pakistan, gender roles are unique as they not only justify the oppression of women but also enforce gender discrimination. On the other hand, it provides a certain kind of

security, respect, and honor to the female gender. Writing about the gender roles in Pakistan, Ali et al. (2011) argue that females in Pakistan are submissive, hardworking, and fragile while good men are gentlemen, protective, and caring. They continue;

*He should also be a good leader and advisor, a fair decision maker, sincere, unbiased, cooperative, sensible, strong, composed, and elegant. A 'good husband' was described as being trustworthy, maintaining gender equity and giving decision-making autonomy to his wife. (p.59)*

### Research Objectives

- Focus on the gender performativity of major characters to assess the extent to which Pir Sain has exploited Pakistani norms and values to subjugate and appropriate Heer
- To show Heer's complex path to resistance and her gender transformation to challenge male/men dominance and to reveal the hypocrisy of the shrine

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

*Blasphemy: A Novel* is the story of Heer a girl who has beautiful dreams for life, and who wants to fly in the sky. But her life turned upside down the very night every girl dreams of. It is the story of a sister who sacrifices her honor, faith, respect, and ego for her siblings, the story of a mother who has to defend her daughter from the lust of her father, the narrative of a woman who has to watch an innocent little girl crumbling and dying under her husband. *Blasphemy* is a story of religious corruption, women's subjugation, marital rape, child abuse, and psychological disintegration. It is a saga of myriad dreams, each a vibrant flame flickering in innocent, hopeful eyes, only to be crushed under the weight of societal injustice and oppression. Talking about the representation of shattered dreams and the reality of life in literary pieces, famous Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho (2004) says "Some books make us dream, others bring us face to face with reality" (p.1). *Blasphemy* is one of such books that teach us the harsh realities of life.

Heer, a fifteen-year-old girl, is married to Pir Sain who is twice her age. She has to sacrifice her love for Ranjha but she is ready to do so as was expected of her. She has certain dreams for her wedding night, as everyone has for that special occasion. But her dreams shattered as Pir Sain had "commenced our

wedding night with an animal haste, for food and ended it satiated” (Durrani, 39). Did Pir Sain act according to Pakistani culture? Pakistan is an Islamic state whose culture is derived from traditional Indian values and the golden Islamic principle which gives equal rights to both sexes in every aspect. Pir Sain's action is a kind of marital rape, that is against the tenderness, love, and care expected of a husband in Eastern culture.

Respect is a dominant element in any relationship as mutual respect creates a sense of confidence, love, and harmony. A husband is required to respect his wife if not in personal gender space, then definitely in the theatrical public domain. He may beat or disrespect her privately but his own dignity is associated with the dignity of his wife so he should not only respect her but should make others respect her too as a good husband must “Ensure other members of the family, to respect his spouse, maintain a healthy balance between relationships (wife and household members)” (Nawaz et al. 2022). Heer's relationship with his husband Pir Sain was not based on love or mutual respect but on social contract and Pir Sain's lust. The void of emotional connection was so severe that Heer never felt at home in the Haveli. Pir Sain did not care to give his wife any care or affection so the normal relationship that is supposed to develop between married couples was missing. He beats her severely even for meeting his nephew, for taking rest while she was feeling dizzy, and even when she was pregnant with his child, and that too in front of her maids and family. Judging from a gender performativity perspective specifically in the context of Indian culture, laying a hand on your wife or any other woman is derogatory to one's manhood. Beating is always severe and once even led to a miscarriage, as Heer describes her beating in these words;

*His hand flung me across the room ... Lifting the charpai, he commanded, 'Put your hands under it.'*

*Heavy wooden bars descended on them.*

*I winced. My eyes rolled. My lips pursed. I swallowed explosion after explosion of pain.*

*'One sound I'll break your neck and crack your skull in two,' he warned.*

*Curled between toes and upturned palms, my head hung in between. There was no way to kneel, sit, or squat. The position was impossible.*

*.... Wooden bars pushed deeper.*

*I could not seal the pain within. It passed from my palms,  
through my body, into my head, and out.” (p. 116)*

Humiliating his wife in front of others and punishing her in such a severe manner is not only against the customs of Pakistani society and Islamic laws but is also derogatory to human values and anyone committing such an act should not be considered a gentleman by the standard of that culture. Her status is not only equal to men's status but also she is revered as a divine gift as Prophet Muhammad used to stand up for his girls. As an established historical situation gender expectation in Islam requires Pir Sain to treat his wife with care. Syed Ameer Ali (1992) has discussed the status of women in Islam in these words;

*The Prophet of Islam enforced as one of the essential teachings of his creed, "respect for women." And his followers, in their love and reverence for his celebrated daughter, proclaimed her "the Lady of Paradise," as the representative of her sex. "Our Lady of Light" is the embodiment of all that is divine in womanhood,-. (p. 189)*

But Pir Sain surpasses every social code, every expectation and every single moral limitation set by the society. Even when Pir Sain falls short of his gender performance, he is not punished by society as the patriarchal system always protects its perpetrators.

Male members of the family, specifically in the subcontinental context, are expected to protect the honor and chastity of their household ladies. Females having male guardians feel safe and secure even when they are not around because they know that their guardians will protect them even at the cost of their lives. The male head of the family is supposed to “be a good leader and advisor, a fair decision maker, sincere, unbiased, cooperative, sensible, strong, composed and elegant” (Ali et. Al, p. 3). Despite global criticism such values are the pride of subcontinental culture and everyone is expected to hold these values in the performance of their gender acts. But Pir Sain is not such a protector but a sex addict who cannot control his lust, even his underage daughters are not safe from it. He regularly squeezes the cheeks of his daughter and asks his wife “How old is your daughter” (p. 10). One night he takes her to his bed and tries to fulfil his lust but being afraid of her scream, he lets her go. After that, Heer advises her daughter to stay as far away from her father as possible. Incest, rape, and sex out of marriage bound are against the values of Eastern culture yet Pir Sain does all that because he is a bull impossible to leash. He not only indulges in sexual activities outside

marriage but also forces his wife Heer to join him in this hideous act and make Yathimiri and Heer watch pornographic movies, and also shoot them in the act. He does all this in what Butler describes as the private sphere of performative act. Pornography, though now spreading in the East, is a Western invention and against the principles of Sub-continental culture where husband and wife do not even talk about such acts, let alone engage in them, that too in the presence of a child with whom one is sharing the act. The study of Sanjay Joshi (2001) shows that despite shreds of evidence from Vedas and other Hindu scriptures incest remained a taboo in Indian society. Pakistani and Indian gender norms strictly stand against such acts and any performance like that is considered anti-societal and immoral.

Talking about the responsibilities of a husband in Pakistan, Ali et al. (2011) and Salma et al. (2022) claim that he should be 'protective, and caring', as that is established through repeated social performance. Butler (1988) believes that ". . . the entire performance, "acts" are a shared experience and 'collective action.' . . . gender . . . one does it in accord with certain sanctions and proscriptions" (p. 525). She has demarcated the theatrical sphere and non-theatrical sphere as well as the distinction between private and public spheres. In the public sphere of gender performance, Pir Sain performs according to his gender script and does not violate the norms of society as he is not the molester of his daughter or murderer of his son in the public eye, but in the private sphere he is a 'Lucifer'. He asks his wife if she wants other men and tortures her to the extent that she yields to his wishes as she was thrown in front of other men like a whore. Pir Sain does not restrain here but he cashes Heer's beauty by pleasing his political supporters and feudal friends. It is quite interesting to note that expecting favors in exchange for one's woman has remained common throughout history, but Pakistani and Indian societies abhor such practices because honor is considered above everything, and honor-killing remains prevalent in the subcontinent. Such acts are portrayed in the Spanish teen-drama *Elite* (2018-23), when Carla (Ester Exposito) tells her mother Beatrice Caleruega (Lola Marcile) how his father is prostituting her to save the wineries, Beatrice comments;

*On-lookers who aren't in our position think we got here without sacrifices or hard work but they don't realize, is that we are willing to do whatever it takes to keep what we have. So, do you see? Learning to love Yeray is much easier than learning to live with nothing. So, consider your future, sweetheart. (Elite S3E5, 33.54-34.12)*

Similarly, Pir Sain pimps his wife Heer to his friends and politicians to gain what he wants but he also enjoys watching the act. One thing to notice is that Pir Sain has absorbed the norms of society and despite his hideous acts in the private sphere, in the public sphere he did not introduce Heer as his wife, rather she was introduced as “*Piyari*, a whore from the city” (p. 160). In the public sphere, his wife was as venerable as the Pir Sain. Discussing the difference in the performative acts of Pir Sain in the Private and public spheres, Heer ponders; “Was his life inside the Haveli really not known outside it?”

*Was the man in my bedroom a man only I knew?”* (p. 65).

Pir Sain's hypocrisy is an act of deterioration, exploitation of religion, and utter cruelty. Yet as ‘gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanctions and taboo’ (Butler, p. 520), Indo-Pak culture and gender roles in Pakistan do not consent to the actions of Pir Sain. In the context of Pakistani traditions, his acts are so derogatory that people in Pakistan would not even talk about them. his actions are the acts of a psychopath and Satyriasis. Pir Sain was quite aware of such sentiments that's why he concealed his secret even from Heer until he was convinced that she would not dare to rise against him.

The second question deals with the resistance Heer offered by exploiting the patriarchal norms and by playing Pir Sain's game. In Pakistani traditional society in general and in Pir Sain's family in particular, subjugation and exploitation of females is done under the veil of *Purdah*. Heer, being an intelligent woman comprehends that if she wants to beat the patriarchy, she has to drench his hands in the mud. Only by playing the game she can defeat his opponents and destroy the Shrine; the major source of religious exploitation. Heer's approach to reveal the filth hidden under the cover of religion is expressed by herself, “As you lose control in a storm, you have to ride the waves to survive” (p. 139). She wants people to see how frauds like Pir Sain are making the masses their ideological slaves, how people like *Choti* and *Wadi Malkani* are molested by them, and how many unknown *Yathimiris* and *Taras* are buried under the *Havelis* of such honorable people. The only way to do so was by revealing the identity of *Piyari* and making people know that it was the honor of Pir Sain with which people had played so far. She had to break the wall of sacredness to get a chance to destroy the shrine. Revealing one's crime, specifically prostituting and that too by a woman takes temerity, but Heer had decided to go all for it. As gender is a performative act and according to societal norms she was not allowed to do anything against gender expectations. Under her *Purdah*, just like Pir Sain,

she goes out of haveli and meets people like Jagirdar to tell them the truth. She drinks whisky, lay with them like a whore, and slowly but gradually melts the veil of inviolability and purity. She does everything men used to do and as performative theory considers agents object of their performative actions. Butler (1988) talks about gender transformation in these words;

*If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style. (p. 520)*

This long quotation shows that gender identity could be changed as Heer becomes more like a patriarchal male at the end. Her acts in the later part of the novel change her identity from that of feminine i.e. submissive, and exploited to masculine i.e. dominant and exploitive. Masculinity and femininity here does not refer to man or woman rather are used as traits. Within weeks those, who once bowed their heads in the presence of Sain, were gossiping about a prostitute who happens to be the wife of late Pir Sain and mother of Rajaji, current *Gadi Nashin* of the sacred Shrine.

Heer does not stop at doing this but also learns the art of exploiting people to achieve what she wants. Her mission to destroy the shrine has a greater purpose, no doubt, but she also wants to do this to get her vengeance upon the shrine and the Pir family. She considers them responsible for her miseries, for the lack of love in her life, and for separating her from Ranjha. She wants to do it to satiate her sense of guilt and to forget the crimes she had to commit. She is willing to pay the iron price for it and becomes like her husband, though less cruel. She does not hesitate to use religion as bait to get favor from Dai, though she knows Dai could be killed. Heer's exploitation of religion is discussed in his conversation with Dai, where she lies to her about a 'dream of Kaaba, seeing herself and Dai performing Hajj'. (Durrani, p. 217). But at last, she earns what she has longed for. Her plan had worked as her revelation struck a deadly blow to the reputation of Shrine. In the epilogue when Heer visits her own grave, she hears a family of peasants, "Oh Allah, bless this soul for exposing the decadence of Shrine worship. Bless her for bringing us closer to you," (Durrani, p. 229). But it is not easy to defy one's gender performance and change its identity as the dominant groups of society counter any such attempt with utmost zeal. They crush those who dare to rise against the system that's why gender-related issues have remained neglected throughout history. The collective struggle is the

only way to defy such strong concepts but Heer was alone in her struggle. She does not find any support not even from her son as now he is the beneficiary of the system and the system always takes its toll on defiant. Butler (1988) acknowledges such difficulty "Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect...."(p.529). Heer is constantly threatened by the power structures and ultimately she has to fake her death to escape its clutches.

Durrani's *Blasphemy: A Novel* is an ambitious project to expose the religious exploitation and hypocrisy of Shrine culture. The story of the Novel is daring, captivating, and heart-touching, the treatment of the subject is beautiful, language is bold yet compelling. But in doing so she has presented the face of Pakistan and religion in such a way that people might lose faith in everything Pakistan stands for. It becomes quite difficult to convince people that Pir Sain is not a product of Islam, as Islam preaches equality of sexes, fair treatment of servants, simplicity, and God-fearing, none of which is a feature of Pir Sain. He is not a product of Pakistani patriarchy or gender norms as Sub-continental culture regards women 'Lakshmi, Rehmat, and devi', whose honor is defended no matter the cost. This paper tried to explore how traditional gender roles are exploited by Pir Sain to carry on cruelty and lust. It also analyzed that within the Performance Acts, Pir Sain has to comply with the 'sanctions and taboos' of the society. Heer's exploitation of Patriarchal norms to destroy the Shrine culture is also discussed. It is imperative to note that Heer's later actions such as her exploitation of religion, her body, and Dai are not the product of her womanhood but are the ramification of her adaptation of patriarchal norms. For this research analysis, I have intertwined Butler's views of gender as a conception of "social temporality" and his performativity theory which implies that our identity is the product of performative acts, with Ali et. al Gender roles in Pakistan. This research does not imply that gender problems do not exist in Pakistan nor does it try to deny the patriarchal subjugation of female intellect, body, and bodily products. In fact, gender inequality is one of the major problems faced by women in this region. Their rights and freedom are snubbed sometimes in the name of religion, and sometimes cultural barriers hinder their progress. This paper aims to show the positive side of gender roles and how transcending those roles worsens the condition of the female sex in Pakistan. The limitation of the research lies in the fact that the psychological analysis of characters, specifically that of Pir Sain's was not done which could provide a major insight into understanding the novel, and the purpose of the research would become clearer.

## CONCLUSION

Durrani's novel is an enlightening piece challenging the subjects considered sacred or taboo in Pakistan's conservative patriarchal society. Durrani's aim to eradicate sexual imbalance and gender inequality is remarkable and splendid. Despite being a part of the elite class, she is aware of women's voices and does not hesitate to point them out. Her works *My Feudal Lord* (1991) and *Blasphemy: A Novel* (1998) are two of the most courageous works that challenge gender conventions and social miscasting. These works question two of the most powerful and deep-rooted institutions in Pakistan: Clergy and Feudalism.

In acknowledging gender-based exploitation and domestic violence, this paper is an attempt to assert that sometimes this appropriation is not a consequence of traditional gender roles but is the outcome of breaking from these social roles. Utilizing Butler's performativity theory along with gender roles in Pakistan as outlined by Ali & Co. the article explores Heer's complex path to resistance against the socially acceptable attitude of Pir Sain and her transformation from a feminine figure to a masculine one.

A considerable degree of research is done by national and international scholars to discuss the issues of religious hypocrisy, power games, economic crises, and misrepresentation of Islam in Durrani's *Blasphemy*. Yet psychoanalytic aspect is missing from the research cycles as no research has been done in this regard. Applying the theories of psychology, one could discuss how the mental torture, suffered by Pir Sain at the hands of his father, has shaped his abusive personality. Such research could also study the mental condition of Heer who suffered at the hands of her husband. Freud's theory of sexuality could shed light on the issues of incest depicted in the novel. In short, psychoanalytic theory will open a unique and different perspective regarding the understanding of the novel.

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