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## Treatment of a Wife's Body in the Fiction of Indian Sub-continental Muslim Women Writers

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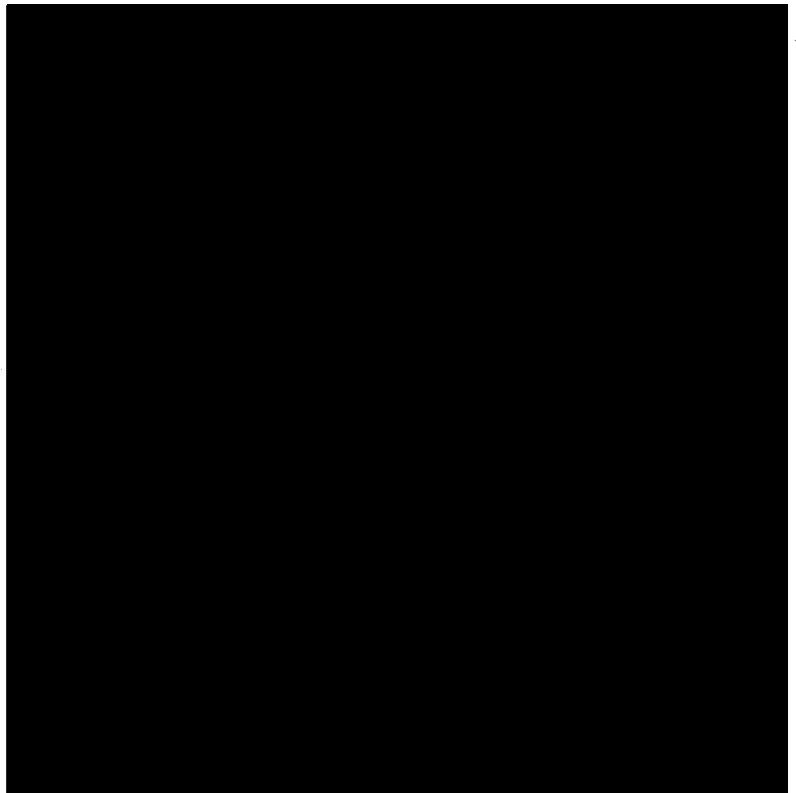
TREATMENT OF A WIFE'S BODY IN THE FICTION  
OF INDIAN SUB-CONTINENTAL MUSLIM WOMEN WRITERS

by  
Hafiza Nilofar Khan

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office  
of The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved:



August 2008

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The University of Southern Mississippi

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## ABSTRACT

### TREATMENT OF A WIFE'S BODY IN THE FICTION OF INDIAN SUB- CONTINENTAL MUSLIM WOMEN WRITERS

by Hafiza Nilofar Khan

August 2008

Ismat Chughtai of India, Tehmina Durrani of Pakistan, and Selina Hossain of Bangladesh depict some of the sociological, religious and legal aspects of wife abuse that is a chronic, yet little discussed anathema in a Sub-Continental Muslim wife's life. "Treatment of the Wife's Body in the Fiction of Indian Sub-Continental Muslim Women Writers," examines the fiction and autobiographical works of these women writers who problematize the deeply ingrained traditional modes of domestic violence as perpetuated upon the minds and bodies of Sub-Continental Muslim wives. Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani identify culture specific practices such as child marriage, dowry, polygamy, honor crimes, marital rape as primary sources of masculinist power that convert a wife's body into a site of oppression. It has been the aim of this dissertation to prove that in the absence of sufficiently adequate and specific Muslim Personal Laws pertaining to marriage, a gnawing gap exists between what the core discourses of Islamic heritage and attitude towards gender hold, and the actual situation of repression of Muslim wives that becomes apparent from the fiction of Chugatai, Hossain and Durrani. These writers contend that marriage does not entirely deprive a wife of her agency to subvert the status quo although socialization of her body under the auspice of the institution often proves devastating for her irrespective of her class, age and location.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

And it is my body, after all that is the site of your utmost confusion.

--Minal Hajratwala

In the name of those married women

Whose decked up bodies

Atrophied on loveless,

Deceitful beds

--Faiz Ahmed Faiz

A wife's body in the Muslim societies of the Sub-Continent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) is often the site of moral exhortation and patriarchal control. The primordial story of human creation where Hawa(Eve)is created out of Adam's crooked rib in order to provide him a help-mate, and is eventually punished with painful childbirth for her transgression, has considerable impact on the enculturation of the wife's body as a subordinate, contaminated, evil and sinful entity. The concept of marriage in the Islamic subconscious as a contract of ownership/authority of a man over a woman further reinforces the idea of a wife's body as a commodity for domination and sexual enjoyment by the husband. Indeed, in Islam a wife is not obliged to contribute to the expenses of the family; however, whatever benefits she receives from her husband, are often considered to be in return for the 'gift' she makes of her body. This kind of marital treaty coerces a wife's body to conform to the rigid compartmentalization of ideal wife and self-abnegating mother. The visualization of a Sub-Continental Muslim wife as the embodied form of love, sacrifice, devotion and purity, can also be an outcome of the influence of feminine archetypes of Sita, Savitri and Yashoda in Hindu mythology.

Most Sub-Continental Muslim wives themselves attach utmost value and dignity to their social and biological roles as a wife and a mother. Traditional marital

norms form such a huge part of their inherited consciousness that these wives do not see their bodies as disenfranchised in any way. Instead, in keeping with the cultural meaning ascribed to them, the wives force their bodies to accept and accommodate the idea of male anxiety over them. At times they go to the extent of repudiating their own bodies, or de-sexing and locking them in a space of non-enunciation.

This dissertation is an exploration of attitudes towards a wife's body in Sub-Continental literary thought. It particularly aims at deciphering the ways in which Sub-Continental Muslim women writers view, evaluate and represent a wife's body in their fiction. On one hand, their writings often project a wife's body as a site of surveillance and oppression. It is literally marked in the name of marital rites, and forced to go through humiliation for its inadequacy to reproduce. It is also mangled and annihilated in the name of family prestige. Many repressive socio-religious mechanisms operate against the concept of a wife's bodily freedom and self-fulfillment. On the other hand, in the modern feminist thought of Sub-Continental women writers, a wife's body is also the site of abundant energy, desire, pleasure and innovation, allowing the woman to follow the trajectory of resistance and empowerment.

In my dissertation, I examine the fictional and autobiographical writings of three Sub-Continental Muslim women writers, including Ismat Chughtai from India, Selina Hossain from Bangladesh and Tehmina Durrani from Pakistan, in order to produce a comparative analysis of their treatment of a wife's body. These authors use a wife's body as a conceptual tool to examine certain discursively constructed social determinants that deprive a wife of rights over her own body. One such social determinant is marriage. By way of commenting on the need to authenticate a woman's body through marriage, Ismat Chughtai's narrator in her short story, "A

Morsel,” holds: “An unmarried woman is considered to be a burden for all creation, the ensuing sorrow leaving its mark on each individual, making everyone accountable” (129). The narrator further adds, “What helplessness! If you weren’t married you were like an open wound; people tormented you with talk about possible cures. . .” (130). Besides projecting the censured and negative image of an unmarried Muslim woman as it appears in the collective imagination of South Asian Sub-Continental Muslim societies, the narrator’s observations also reveal the pressure of wifehood on a woman’s body. The fiction of Hossain and Durrani similarly reveal that women in the Sub-Continent are made to feel incomplete, imperfect, deficient and even diseased if they are not legally tied to men through marriage soon after they reach puberty.

Despite the fact that the Quran highlights the importance of marriage for eligible men as well as women (Surah 24, verse 32), in the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani underage girls are married off by their parents in the name of religious duty. From an early age, daughters are generally brainwashed by their families into believing that marriage is the ultimate goal in their lives. They are told that through marriage alone can they can attain a certain kind of stature and control in their new household. Though young, aspiring brides desire the position of mistress of the household, they are eventually disillusioned with marriage; that they are in fact subordinates becomes evident to them in many overt and covert ways. They soon realize that they are no more than a mere burden in their new home, which is in many cases ruled by their mothers-in-law. They are also often disappointed by their position as a co-wife with hardly any authority. Considered more like property by their husbands who use, abuse and dispense with them at will, these wives find their freedom of movement, speech, association and even thought curtailed. An attempt at

domesticating and regulating their bodies is made not only by their husbands, but their in-laws as well. Thus these wives suffer from various kinds of psychological and physical maltreatment. They soon learn that they cannot expect egalitarian sexual relationships within marriage. They are also disheartened to find that they cannot even enjoy emotional intimacy or companionship with their husbands, who in most cases are superior not only in status, but are also much older in age.

Most of these wives merely exchange hands between possessors when they move from their father's house to their husband's house. Within the periphery of marriage most of them produce unpaid labor, and many are used as machines for reproduction. Moreover, they often have to undergo the ordeals of unfair inheritance rights and dowry demands. In several cases they are also subjected to the humiliation and insecurity of polygamous relationships, arbitrary divorces or desertion. In extreme circumstances, in the name of honor killing they are murdered. Because of the constraints, obligations, exclusions as well as punitive measures that a wife's body often has to endure in marriage, Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani do not hesitate to express their reservations about this primarily patriarchal social institution. In fact, at times they brutally critique the structures of domination and essentialist ideas of this institution about a wife's status and role for the negative impact it has on her body.

Like Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani, Sub-Continental Muslim feminists such as Dr. Riffat Hasan, Asma Jahangir, Taslima Monsoor and Roushan Jahan to name only a few, challenge the encoded patriarchal inscriptions upon a wife's body made by the Islamic establishment, particularly that of the Muslim Personal/Family laws concerning marriage. Middle Eastern Muslim feminists such as Leila Ahmed, Azizah Y. Al Hibri, Fatima Mernisi, Amina Wadud, and Ziba Mir Hossaini similarly critique the predominantly patriarchal elements of Muslim Family Laws for the conformity

and atrocity that it metes out upon the body of a Muslim wife. These Muslim feminists, along with their Hindu counterparts such as Madhu Kishwar, Jyoti Puri, Meenakshi Thapan, and Rinki Bhattacharya to name only a few again, explore the labyrinth of a wife's bodily/sexual experiences in order to decode the many tropes of violation that effect the body's materiality as well as its psyche. By raising important questions such as whether the body of a wife belongs to the woman, and whether it is possible to visualize the wife's body as an instrument to fight the establishment these feminists help elucidate a theoretical angle on female body that deserves special attention and scrutiny.

Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani problematize the ideological discourses produced not only by the patriarchal institution of marriage but also by the family, the state, religion and the law in order to explore the embodied experiences and perceptions of Sub-Continental wives. Their aim is to identify the wife's body as the locus of masculinist power in different social, economic and historical settings. Their works provide innumerable instances of traditionally orchestrated institutional discourses and practices that maintain the oppression and regulation of a wife's body, irrespective of age, education, location, class and caste. By identifying links between various forms of oppression, and locating patterns of domination, these writers assertively challenge patriarchal discourses and renounce the hierarchical authoritarian mindset therein. As Hajratwala's quote at the beginning of my introduction suggests, Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani recognize the confusion surrounding a wife's body as being generated mostly externally, but deeply affecting it at various levels. Their analysis of the technologies of subjection, their methods of investigating indigenous social practices, and particularly their campaigns for change

within patriarchal family and legal strictures help illuminate the way a Muslim wife's gender and body politics is generally perceived.

Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani locate the wife's body in the intersection of many oppressive socio-legal practices to depict its vulnerability; nonetheless, these writers do not project the body of a wife as absolutely repressed and docile. They create a theoretical space for articulation of the wife's subject position and agency. Indeed, a wife's capacity for freedom and autonomous action are limited; however, by appealing to the silenced truth of her everyday experiences, Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani project the wife's body with considerable agency to resist patriarchal power, and to negotiate her position within the institutions of oppression. The complexities embedded in these writers' attitudes towards various hegemonic institutions, and their problematization of the wife's body, has led to this critical analysis of Sub-Continental Muslim woman's marital body. In four chapters, "The Child Bride's Body," "Dowry and Honor Killing," "Muslim Personal/Family Laws: Polygamy and Marital Rape" and "Wifely Agency," I attempt a feminist critical analysis of patriarchal mores that collaborate with Islamic social practices and family laws in order to delineate their impact on the Sub-Continental Muslim wives through different stages of their lives.

Chapter 2, "The Child Bride's Body" deals with causes of early marriage, and its effects on the bodies of girls under eighteen in Muslim Sub-Continental societies drawn by Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani. Despite state laws against child marriage, child brides are programmed to submit to their husbands, and crippled in the pretext of being sheltered by none other than their parents. The vital role parents play in these societies in grooming their daughters as "ideal" future wives, and thrusting them into matrimony even before their bodies and minds mature, is discussed in this chapter. I

draw upon Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary technologies of power in order to examine how some everyday practices or strategies of normalization act upon a young girl's body. My aim is to explore how the girl-child's body's "elements, her gestures, her behavior" are manipulated in the process of molding her as an 'ideal' future wife (Discipline 138). In this chapter I further delineate the sexual exploitation of underage girls by their husbands, along with the physical and psychological effects of teen pregnancy and child widowhood. Moreover, the social practice of 'mock marriage' that was prevalent amongst the noble families of India is discussed here in order to cast light on the regulatory power of this norm upon the bodies of adolescent maids working in the *zamindar* or landlord families of North India.

In Chapter 3, "Dowry and Honor Killing" I examine the two age-old cultural practices of dowry and honor killing that are still responsible for the psychological as well as physical anguish of many Sub-Continental Muslim wives. I contend that the internalized and socially reinforced ideology of women's inferiority is behind the continuation of dowry-related torture of a wife's body. I believe that by regulating a woman's right to property ownership, family laws affect her social and economic status. By exploring the original version of dowry practice according to Islam, I analyze the reasons why it has taken its present, formidable and oppressive social form, as represented in Hossain's "Motijan's Daughters" and Chughtai's short story "Kallu," "Wedding Shroud," and "Mother-in-Law," as well as Durrani's fiction, Blasphemy. I further analyze the phenomena of honor killing in the extremist Muslim societies of the Sub-Continent. I explore the reasons behind the prevalence of this practice in which mostly women are slain by their close relatives in the name of family honor. My aim is to detect the impact of such practice on women in a society

where the legal and religious authorities are more sympathetic towards the criminal than the victim.

In Chapter 4, “Muslim Personal/Family Laws: Polygamy and Marital Rape,” I investigate the jurisdiction of Islamic Personal/Family Law to legislate polygamy and marital rape. The institution of Muslim marriage in the Sub-Continent is largely defined and constrained by Islamic Personal Laws that allow polygamy and covertly support marital rape. I explore the writings of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani to establish that these two social practices convert a wife’s body into a readily available site of violence, exclusion and abuse. In Hossain's “Parul’s Becoming a Mother,” Durrani’s My Feudal Lord, and Chughtai's The Heart Breaks Free, the authors denounce polygamy as a pernicious discursive power that can easily convert into an instrument of threat to a wife’s security. In Blasphemy and My Feudal Lord, Durrani deals with the impact of the practice of marital rape on wives who are victimized, but have no legal or societal recourse. I argue that Muslim Personal laws on polygamy are firmly rooted within the framework of patriarchy, and are turning into a significant source of disadvantage for Sub-Continental Muslim wives. I contend that because of the predominantly masculine interpretations of the Quranic verses, Sharia texts and Personal laws on polygamy, social practices such as polygamy and marital rape are turned into tools of oppression.

Chapter 5, “Wifely Agency” scrutinizes a wife’s power in the writings of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani to assert independence. Though a Muslim wife, as depicted by these writers, is mostly disempowered and physically ostracized, she is also capable of renouncing the social compass that directs identity formation, and articulating self-composed discourses. The strategies or agential tools a wife employs to resist marginalization and enter into the struggle over meaning are often as



unrecognized as the use of silence and scandal, or as common as the use of her sexuality. It is not uncommon for a wife in the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani to deconstruct the image of the desexualized good wife and re-appropriate her womb to subvert and threaten patrilineality. The power of negotiation and retaliation are also visible among the wives in the fiction of these authors. These devices allow them to challenge the isolating routines of daily life steeped in domestic labor, and claim the right to control their bodies through decisions regarding marriage, reproduction and divorce. Foucault argues that power circulates throughout the social body, rather than emanating from the top down, and he claims that wherever there is power, there is resistance. Based on these arguments, I contend that though patriarchal social structures secure the power of husbands over wives, giving the latter limited options for agency, the wives are not entirely passive victims. As resistance is grounded in these women, they are capable of challenging dominant gender norms and altering certain 'normalizing' practices, thereby making their lives more bearable. Although Foucault does not provide any emancipatory account of subjectivity that is easily attainable, he holds that power is constructs that upon which it acts, and sees a subject as a product of discursive power. Foucault's placement of hope in the marginalized subject has encouraged me to contend that there are ways in which a Muslim Sub-Continental wife's self-understanding, her bearing and potential can be positively constructed by the very power relations that she seeks to transform. Most importantly, the unique ways in which Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani theorize a wife's resistance through her body, have inspired me to visualize this body as capable of engendering subjective, emancipatory epiphanies.

It should not be assumed that in the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani, all husbands are oppressors, and all wives are weak or subject to oppression; however,

many Sub-Continental Muslim wives similar to those that these authors depict have remained indifferent about their own self-identity. Some have even posed opposition to their own development. The kind of postcolonial feminism that Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani practice, aims at raising self-awareness and promoting individualism among Sub-Continental Muslim wives. These writers want to see the Muslim wives of their communities enjoy freedom of choice, and egalitarian privileges with their husbands. Through their sagacious writings they have tried to encourage Muslim wives in their respective countries to be self-sufficient both economically and intellectually, and take up their right to control their own bodies and lives. Though their work is dedicated to the emancipation and empowerment of the Sub-Continental Muslim wife, it should not be assumed that these writers discourage women from getting married, or that they prescribe a man-free world. These writers are also not merely interested in recording the history of wives' repression; rather, they explore the root causes of discrimination and deprivation of wives, and are eager to diminish the dominance and authority that husbands generally command. They believe that if they can remove marital injustices then not only will the wives benefit, but the husbands, children, and other family members will also gain in the process. This dissertation is an attempt at joining hands with authors who are relatively unknown in Western academia in order to highlight their efforts to break the cycle of subjugation and dependence of Sub-Continental Muslim wives. I believe that my personal experience as a Muslim wife who has gone through a self-initiated divorce, and who is now married to a non-Muslim, has helped me problematize the pros and cons of a Muslim wife's existentiality in a way that can be considered useful to all wives.

*Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991)*

Ismat Chughtai was born in Badayun, India. Her father was a Civil Servant. Her early childhood was spent mostly in Jodhpur. She received her B.A degree from Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow, and from 1939-41 she taught at Raj Mahal Girl's School in Jodhpur, eventually becoming inspector of schools in Bombay. She began her literary career in the 1940s. Considered to be one of India's foremost Urdu writers, she is the winner of the Ghalib award for her Urdu drama, Tanhai ka Zahr (1977), the Makhdoom Literary Award of Andhra Pradesh Urdu Akademi for writing the script for the film Junoon (1979), the Soviet Land Nehru Award (1982), Iqbal Samman from Rajasthan Urdu Akademi (1990), and she was closely connected with the Progressive Writer's Association. In contrast to the bland endorsements of the ideal daughter, wife and mother typical of women's literature before her time, most of her female protagonists bear the distinctive marks of a staunch patriarchal society on their bodies. Moreover, the stark reality of the sexually frustrated wives, oppressed daughters-in-law or despondent maidservants projected in her writing are often redefined in terms of opportunities for self-awareness and empowerment.

Chughtai acknowledges her literary indebtedness to Rashid Jahan, one of the leading Urdu women writers to have pioneered Indian feminist literary aesthetics. A doctor by profession, Jahan wrote short stories and radio plays that appear in the collection Aurat Aur Digar Afsane (Woman and Other Stories). Chughtai modeled many of her heroines after Jahan's women characters who are self-confident and self-possessed. In the introduction to The Crooked Line, Tahira Naqvi notes that "Rashid Jahan. . . symbolized for Chughtai the woman who had broken ties with the suffocating aspects of tradition and who was fearless and undauntedly bold, much like Ismat was to become" (xiii). Chughtai's bold and radical mind can be sensed even in

her decision to be cremated after death, instead of being buried in the traditional Muslim style.

*Selina Hossain (1947-)*

Selina Hossain is one of the most courageous and prolific writers of contemporary Bangladesh. Former Director of the Bangla Academy and the winner of the prestigious Bangla Academy Purushkar for her life-long contribution to Bangladeshi literature, she is also the recipient of the British Council Fellowship at the University of London, and the Ford Foundation Individual Grant for fiction. Thus far, she has eight collections of short stories, five collections of essays, and thirty-seven novels to her credit. Her stories have been translated into several languages including English, French, Russian, Kanadi, and Malay. She has also recently edited two volumes of Gender Encyclopedia (2005), and a critical book, Women in Ibsen's Plays (2006). She considers Rokeya Begum to be her literary role model and appreciates her pioneering endeavors in establishing a female literary tradition in Bengal.

In her own work, Hossain tries to present characters with deep convictions in the challenges and realities of the post-liberation social conditions in Bangladesh. Her works generally represent Bengali women who are drawn from the marginal or subaltern groups of society. These women protest structural determinism and systematic practices of domination both within and outside the family. In search of coherence, meaning and purpose in life, they refuse to accept the 'virtuous' role thrust upon them by society. To initiate an alternative or autonomous perspective, they appropriate, negotiate or reconfigure the world through agencies often considered uncommon and unique. To gain first-hand experience of the lives lived by her protagonists, Hossain often leaves the comfort of her home in Dhaka and visits remote

villages and coastal lines of Bangladesh. Proficient in many colloquial languages of Bangladesh, her privileged class has never been a barrier while trying to help the marginalized women of her country.

*Tehmina Durrani (1951-)*

Tehmina Durrani belongs to the renowned Abdali family of Pakistan, which traces its ancestry to Afghanistan. She is the daughter of the former Governor of the State of Pakistan, and former Chairman of Pakistan International Airlines, S.U, Durrani. Her maternal grandfather was knighted by the British Raj. Durrani grew up in the high society of Lahore, Pakistan, but soon learnt to criticize the lifestyle of the fashionable ladies with whom she mingled. Her feminist activist responsibilities often bring her to the doorsteps of women below her class and status. Durrani left Pakistan and spent nine years in London when her ex-husband, Mustafa Khar, was sent into exile. Her autobiography, My Feudal Lord, won her Italy's Marissa Bellasario prize, and has been translated into twenty-two languages. Her novel Blasphemy (1998) is based on a true story and exposes the Pakistani *pirs*, or clergy who exploit the masses under the garb of Islamic traditions. Durrani has also written a biography, A Mirror to the Blind, based on the life of Abdul Sattar Edhi, a social reformer. Currently she is working on the second volume of this biography. She is also writing a book on the war children of Afghanistan. Durrani recently married the former Chief Minister of Punjab and current President of the Pakistan Muslim League, Mian Shahbaz Sharif. She has joined the Muslim League and is now an active member of her ex-husband, Khar's rival political party.

Because of historical events since the Partition of 1947 and the Liberation War of 1971, as well as complicated personal choices, the fates of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani have followed diverse paths. With her decision to remain in Mumbai after

the Partition, Chughtai became a minority Muslim woman in the Indian Sub-Continent. Because of her birth and parentage in what was then East Bengal, Hossain calls herself a Bangladeshi woman, and despite having spent a considerable part of her life in England and the Middle East, Durrani identifies herself as a Pakistani writer. Though differences in age, nationality, native language and ethnicity exist among these writers, they have several markers of collective belonging manifested in their geographical proximity, historical and political convergence, and religious similarities. These markers facilitate a comparative study of their works. As Sub-continental Muslim women who share common historical roots in Mughal India, each of these authors has familiarity with Persian and Urdu cultures, and with the Muslim code of life brought over from Middle East. Their Muslim heritage and upbringing is manifested in their works through their delineation of Islamic customs and practices absorbed from childhood; however, though Islam permeates their writings in many ways, there is certainly no uniform Muslim voice that emanates from them, and their works cannot be stamped as exclusively or overtly Islamic as such. Indeed, it is reductive to isolate the Muslim elements in their writing, and naïve to overlook Hindu as well British influences from colonial and postcolonial times. Their innovative plot structures and language can be read as subverting conventional male narratives, providing further justification for critically analyzing their portrayal of Sub-Continental Muslim wives' bodies.

*The Literary Traditions of Ismat Chughtai, Selina Hossain and Tehmina Durrani*

The literary traditions from which Ismat Chughtai of India, Tehmina Durrani of Pakistan and Selina Hossain of Bangladesh emerge, is linked to the works of a few late 19<sup>th</sup> to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Urdu as well as Bengali Muslim fiction writers.

Chughtai, who began her career in the 1940s, composed her entire oeuvre in Urdu.

Durrani of Pakistan also has an Urdu heritage, though the works that I analyze here are originally written in English. Selina Hossain writes in Bangla, providing the imperative to consult not only the Bengali Muslim writers who came before her time, but also some of the Bengali Hindu literary giants from whom she drew inspiration. Despite differences in their medium of expression, age and location, these writers share many literary predecessors and influences because of religious, historical and cultural affinity. As Sonia Amin points out in her article, “The New Women in Literature and the Novels of Nojibur Rahman and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein,” the *Ashraf* or elite class in Bengal had always looked to the seats of Sharif culture (mainly the Urdu speaking elite) in the North for literary inspiration. Both the Urdu and Bangla speaking Muslims of the Sub-Continent have been commonly influenced by ideological sources that emanated from the Deoband, or the Conservative Muslim School, and the Progressive or Liberal Muslim School of writing in Aligarh, India.

The Deoband Movement (1866-1947) began in *madrassahs* or institutions that provided Islamic education to the Muslim community throughout the Sub-Continent. The most famous of these institutions was the seminary in Deoband, which played a central role in unifying the religious as well as nationalistic fervor of Muslims until 1947. The Deobandees incorporated many features of the British educational system into their own academic system, such as dividing students into regular classes, keeping attendance registers and taking written examinations. They also took advantage of modern technology although they were basically conservative and opposed to many of the modern views appropriated by the Aligarh school of thought. Calling the Deoband school of thought an “orthodox Islamic discourse,” Amin holds that it aimed at reconstructing the *Sharif* culture by looking at the bygone religious principles of Islam with nostalgia (122). Muslim writers of the Sub-Continent who

propagate the Deoband ideology emphasize themes that fuel the regenerative and revolutionary spirit of Islam. They are part of what Ali Ashraf calls the “neo-revivalist spirit” that strives for the preservation of traditional Islamic values (223).

During the 1930s Freedom Movement, a group of men and women formed the left-wing Progressive Writers’ Association to distinguish themselves from the Deobandees. Rashid Jahan, Sajjad Zaheer, Ahmed Ali and Mehmuduzzafar were some of the leading members of this association. They authored the group’s 1935 manifesto in London after their collection of controversial short stories, Angare, was banned and burnt by the United Provinces state government. Poets such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Sardar Jaffri, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Kaifi Azmi, Sahir Ludhyani, Firaq Gorakhpuri, and fiction writers such as Munshi Premchand, Krishan Chandra, Beddi, Saadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, Rashid Jahan, and Hayaatullah Ansari all belong to this progressive movement. As Lakshmi Holmstrom notes in the Introduction to The Inner Courtyard, this group became famous for its rootedness in Marxist thought and “strong emphasis on realism and social comment” (x).

According to Ashgar Ali Engineer’s article “Urdu and its Contribution to Secular Values,” these writers

were committed to secularism and composite culture and fought against orthodoxy, religious bigotry and traditionalism. Many of them were Marxists and others nationalists. All the great names of Urdu literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century belong to this group who set the value of secularism.

The writers who subscribe to this liberal school of thought are generally not as deeply committed to Islamic ideology as their Deoband counterparts; in fact, some of them are highly critical of the creation of Pakistan and partition of India on the basis of religion. One can easily trace the influence of these two North Indian movements to the Urdu and Bengali Muslim fiction writers who began their career after the Muslim



Renaissance in the 1870s. Commenting on the women protagonists in the works of Urdu writers such as Ashraf Ali Thanavi, Nazir Ahmed and Rashidul Khairi, and the heroines of Bengali writers such as Nojibur Rahman and Nurunnesa Khatun, Amin holds that they have much in common because “they not only emanated from discourses which though declared as exclusive, overlapped; they were also the creation of a new middle class which was circumscribed by a homogenizing colonial regime” (125). The rising need to distinguish the native culture from that of the British colonizers on one hand, and the necessity to catch up with what was thought to be 'modern' on the other, molded in an idealistic way the women characters in the works of these authors. These women characters were more like what Amin calls “instrument[s] for social recasting,” rather than real life women (136). Drawn mostly from the middle class, these characters had beauty, grace and kindness, along with some management capabilities and basic education. They were romantic, but they had to practice restraint. Their modernity had to be in tune with their virtuosity. Their authors emphasized the importance of order and efficiency in their domestic roles, and upheld the sanctity of home because of the encroaching effects of colonization. Nonetheless, these women characters resemble very much the Victorian model of the Perfect Woman or the 'angel in the house' in their combination of ideal wife, companion, caregiver and mother. Hence, although the women praised in the novels of Nazir Ahmed (1836-1910) and Rashidul Khairi (1864-1936) are a cross between the Deoband and the Aligarh versions of the ideal woman, they can also be compared to the Victorian model of true womanhood. While they are beautiful, educated and romantic on the one hand, they are also pious, dutiful, domesticated and restrained on the other. Their romantic love is allowed expression only within the confines of 'respectable' Muslim tradition. They are subordinate to their father or

husband and rarely projected as independent, income-earning members of the family. They often suffer in silence and die in the essentially static space they are allowed within the institution of marriage, but they hardly complain. Though the moralistic and reformative novels of Nazir Ahmed depict their interest in women's education, this education is geared towards cultivating the qualities of a suitable housewife and good mother. As can be gathered from Kaniz-e-Butool's article, "Reforms of Women as Reflected in the Novels of Nazir Ahmed," in Mirat-ul-Urus [The Bride's Mirror] (1869), which is often cited as the first novel published in Urdu, Ahmed emphasizes the necessity of imparting the kind of education to daughters that can help them lead a happy, domestic life. According to Butool again, in Mushinat [The Chaste Woman] Ahmed preaches monogamy, but he also emphasizes his belief that in order to win her husband's heart, a wife has to practice self-sacrifice and hard work.

Like Ahmed's heroines, Khairi's heroines such as Saliha, Naseema, and Zaheda are capable, pious and chaste but, as Amin affirms, they are "usually trapped in unhappy marriages and bear their lot in dignified silence and work" (124). Like the women in Behesti Zewar (1905), the famous behavior manual for women by the Deoband author Ashraf Ali Thanavi, they are fashioned not so much for entertainment of readers, as for moral instructions for women.

As Sonia Amin delineates, the social novels of Nojibur Rahman (1860-1923), the Bengali Muslim author of Anowara (1914) and Goriber Meye (1923) are also didactic and moralistic in their attitude towards women. In both of these novels, women's chastity is put to the test; however, Rahman's heroines depict exemplary, virtuous lives in the end. They disavow all types of illicit relations and emotions and advocate a purely archetypal and romanticized image of a woman who is a 'perfect' companion, wife and mother. Rahman's heroines are also educated, though primarily

in Religious Studies and Home Economics. Their greatest virtue is their ability to receive and follow instructions from their husbands. Anowara, in the novel of the same name, can read Urdu, Arabic and Persian. Though she refuses to speak to unknown men in the court in compliance with the strict purdah system of the time, she is able to write down her statements. Her husband acts as her superior and proudly takes over the responsibility of molding his wife. In Rahman's Goriber Meye, Nuri is also eager to become educated. Under the tutelage of her husband, Nur, who is a teacher at a government boy's school, she receives a well-rounded religio-secular education that helps mold her into a competent woman of the time. Her husband supervises every aspect of her life from the clothes and jewelry she wears, the hairdo she courts, and the delicacies she prepares in her kitchen. In return, she does everything to keep her home tidy and to please her in-laws. When Nur's job requires that he goes to a distant province, the couple exchanges love-letters written in what Amin calls, "true pseudo-Victorian fashion of love within matrimony with a Bengali twist" ("The New Woman" 136). The heroes of these novels are products of the Muslim Renaissance (late 19<sup>th</sup> to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century); hence, though some of them practice polygamy, they are liberal and encourage their wives to improve themselves. If the wives are obedient, and willing to learn from their husbands, they enjoy a relatively comfortable life, but they are still not encouraged to seriously pursue a career outside of home.

Nurunnessa Khatun (1894-1975) is amongst the first few female novelists of Muslim Bengal. Like most of her male contemporaries, she depicts her heroines strictly following patriarchal dictates, and hardly protesting the existing order of things. As Amin records in The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal: 1876-1939, in Khatun's first novel, Swapnaadrishta (1924), the woman protagonist shows

reverence for the system that insists on female invisibility by not appearing in person in front of the male protagonist. She appears briefly in a dream sequence and even there she is behind a veil; generally, Khatun's Muslim women characters do not brazenly violate norms of social decorum. Such restrictions bring to mind Deena Forkan's observation in her dissertation Toward an Ecriture Feminine, on the restrictions and limitations of early Muslim women writers who were Rokeya's contemporaries. According to Forkan, they "were forced to write in a mode and language that was inimical to the feminine consciousness" (32). Yet, not all writers from 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century felt the compulsion to abide by patriarchal plot constructions.

There were a couple of progressive writers in India who broke the traditional patterns of plot construction and characterization. For instance, Mirza Hadi Ruswa's classical Urdu work, Umrao Jan Ada, written in 1899, started a new tradition in Indian fiction. Umrao, Ruswa's female protagonist was kidnapped from her home in Faizabad when she was eight years old and sold to a brothel in Lucknow, North India. Umrao, who grows into a beautiful woman, is also a highly gifted poetess with a mind of her own. Sick of the brothel's commodity culture, she falls in love with a Nawab and refuses to entertain all other customers no matter what they are willing to pay for her services. When the Madame of the *kotha* tries to remind her of her status as a public woman who can never truly claim any man, Umrao threatens to run away. She hopes that the Nawab will marry her and help her escape the life of a courtesan. Unfortunately for her, when faced with the threat of disinheritance, the Nawab gives in to a marriage arranged by his father and Umrao's love is spurned. Umrao is greatly disheartened, but has no suicidal thoughts; rather, she flees the brothel with one of her admirers. This admirer turns out to be a notorious dacoit. He is hunted down and

killed by the police. Umrao is left alone once again, but she sets up her own establishment and survives by performing for the provincial gentry of Kanpur. She is discovered by Mirza, one of the cronies of her Madame, and brought back 'home' to Lucknow. To prevent any future escape, the Madame prompts Mirza to file a false lawsuit against Umrao, claiming that she is his legal wife. Just when Umrao is extremely perplexed and is trying to find a way out of this ordeal, the British lay siege to Lucknow. The panic and confusion of the siege allows Umrao to escape again. This time a refugee, fate brings her back to her original home in Faizabad, but her family does not acknowledge any ties with courtesan Umrao. Heart-broken at being treated as a pariah in her own village and by her own people, Umrao goes back to Lucknow and her old profession. She spends the rest of her life engrossed in writing poems that fetch her enormous fame among the male literary giants of her times, including Ruswa himself. Umrao's characterization made such an impact on the Indian cultural/literary world that in 1981, and again in 2006, movie versions of the novel were released by Bollywood. The story of Umrao was also dramatized in 2003 by Indian television.

Nazir Ahmed's later novels are not strictly reformatory, and show genuine concern for and understanding of his women protagonists. As Kaniz-e-Botool contends in her essay, "Reforms of Women as Reflected in the Novels of Nazir Ahmed," Ahmed's novel, Aayama (Widows, 1891) is an early example of its kind which advocates widow remarriage through his rendering of the character of Azadi Begum. Botool further holds that "this is one of the foremost attempts in Urdu literature to analyse the psychology of women" (99). Not many authors from Ahmed's time attempted to delineate the psychological needs of a woman, lay aside a widow.

All in all, during the 19th century a wide variety of representations were added to the image of an Indian ideal woman, depending on the ideological inclination of the writer. While some of the Muslim writers patterned their heroines on the Muslim models such as Prophet Mohammad's mother Amina, his wife Ayesha, Mughal Empress Noor Jahan, or warrior Razia Sultana, Hindu writers designed their female models on epic women such as Sita, Savitri, or Shakuntala, or on women saints like Mira Bai. Nonetheless, both Muslim as well as Hindu writers also drew heavily from the qualities of the Victorian ideal of True Womanhood, and accordingly represented very chaste and dutiful women. As Amin contends, they further recognized and celebrated the need for transformation as seen in the Edwardian model of the New Woman. The Edwardian model allowed their women protagonists to be free spirited to some extent, and to indirectly question gender relations and the oppression of women. There were yet others, who preferred their version of the Indian New Woman to be a composite of the above two types but, as Amin points out,

None of the constructions of the New Woman was free from the ambivalence and anxiety that society felt toward this phenomenon. How far could she be allowed to go, striding/gliding through the pages of literature, as she did? These anxieties were caught by writers Hindu, or Muslim, male or female. (129)

Perhaps because of the above apprehensions, the female protagonists of this era were still not allowed to brazenly reject patriarchy or openly question the inviolability of the domestic order. They were primarily burdened with the role of women as repositories of tradition, who are denied active participation in public, political or economic spheres. Of course, in the case of Bengali Muslim writers, the Brahma or Hindu Bengali models of ideal Indian femininity had a great impact on the image of the ideal woman in their fiction. Hindu Bengali women writers such as Swarna Kumari Debi, Anurupa Debi, Nirupama Debi, and Shoilobala Ghoshjaya

were more ambivalent towards patriarchal norms than their Muslim counterparts. In her article “A Different Voice: Women Writing in Bangladesh,” Roushan Jahan holds that, although like most of their male contemporaries these writers consider marriage, love and motherhood to be very crucial means of self fulfillment in a woman’s life, “they were more critical of the double standard of sexuality and social restrictions on women’s mobility and choice” (118-119). In Swarna Kumari’s Kahake (1898) for instance, the woman protagonist Mrinalini talks about her story of love with more than one man without guilt or reserve. In “Women’s Women: Images of Women in Women’s Fiction in Bangla,” Humayun Azad holds that Mrinalini “suffers from the common curse in a woman’s life, i.e., marriage . . . and ignores the patriarchal injunction that the love of a woman is only for her husband” (87). Mrinalini does not believe that a husband is a god on earth. She also does not believe in a marriage of convenience, and she demands chastity in men as well as women. Moreover, Mrinalini is well versed in English literature. She quotes from Byron, George Eliot and Shakespeare. Through Mrinalini’s zest for life, and her courage to be non-traditional, Swarnakumari Debi projects a unique version of the New Woman.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and Sharatchandra Chattopadhyay (1876-1938), the male literary giants of Hindu Bengali literature, also adopted an ambivalent tone towards patriarchy. Their women characters adhered to and simultaneously questioned patriarchal norms. Roushan Jahan notes that: “Tagore and Sharatchandra had drawn very sensitive portraits of women in transition, torn between the pressure to conform with the norms imposed by society and rebellion against them” (118). One finds positive and strong portrayals of women in Tagore’s Bimala in Ghore Baire (1916) and Sharatchandra’s Kamal in Shesh Prashna (1931). These women break

through many patriarchal barriers by taking interest in education and occupations outside the home. In Ghore Baire, Bimala, the beautiful wife of the rich Bengali noble, Nikhil, falls in love with his friend Sandip, a passionate revolutionary poet. Nikhil is aware of his wife's affair with his friend, but as a mature and loving husband, decides to let his wife follow her heart. He also considers the fact that Bimala was a child-bride when she had to go through an arranged marriage with him; hence, he allows her the space to make an independent decision. Bimala finally outgrows her passion for Sandip and diverts her energy to the nobler cause of eradicating the British out of Indian soil. Tagore renounced the institution of child-marriage and dowry at an all-India conference as early as 1887. His works like Dena Paona (1890), Choker Bali (1902), Noshtonir (1901) and Chondalika (1933) voice the anguish of Indian women on account of child-marriage, the ban on widow remarriage, and dowry. These works also reflect Tagore's fight against the cultural czars of Bengal for woman's emancipation and equality.

Sharatchandra similarly depicted women who were developing a sense of identity despite all odds. One of his female protagonists, Kamal, asserts her individuality by living and traveling by herself, and by having affairs with several men at a time. Through Kamal (usually a man's name), Sharatchandra challenges the norms of traditional Bengali romantic novels. When the novel was published in 1931, Sharatchandra was negatively criticized for his exceptionally bold portrayal of Kamal by the conservative school, but highly applauded by his women readers for his innovative ideas on womanhood. Sharatchandra's campaigns for widow remarriage, women's education and women's freedom are depicted through many of his novels. For instance, he portrays the suffering of a child bride in Bardidi (1913), and the



misery of a woman forced to marry an elderly, previously married man in Debdas (1917).

Amongst Bengali Muslim women it is Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932) who is considered to be the first and foremost feminist to have strongly motivated the women of her society towards self-realization and self-determination. Rokeya was committed to the cause of women's emancipation. Her interest in promoting women's education was not limited to the basic knowledge of running a household, or rearing children. She emphasized the need for scientific and technological education for women. She campaigned against the excess of *purdah* observance in The Secluded Ones, a collection of forty seven anecdotes documenting the absurdity of *purdah* customs among the Muslims and Hindus of North India. In Padmarag (1924), Ayesha Siddika is chaste, pious, selfless and simultaneously independent. This New Woman of Hossain is also bilingual, and her English poems have fetched prizes. She is an idealized combination of beauty and brains, and also successfully manages her brother's estate. She loves a man, yet has an independent spirit; hence she renounces the prime supremacy of marriage in her life. Hossain's women protagonists also break away from conventional love-plots and marriage traditions in her utopian satire, "Sultana's Dream" (1905). In this short story, Hossain's need to question the inviolability of domestic order and reappraise the gender roles in her society is expressed through a dialogue between Sultana and Sister Sara in Ladyland, an imaginary country. In Ladyland women are able to reverse the accepted social order. Here men stay behind closed doors to observe *purdah*, while women dominate the public sphere and are involved with scientific projects. Death is not the inevitable end here for women trying to defy the limits of "respectable" female behavior. The self-sufficient females of this land find an alternative space in a war-free, peaceful

atmosphere of communal living. Though they strip men of their traditional powers, they do not deem it necessary to banish them altogether from Ladyland. The men are entrusted with the domestic responsibilities of child-rearing and cooking.

Commenting on Hossain's treatment of men, Roushan Jahan holds,

Women in Ladyland are powerful, but to portray a society where women are in a position of power, Rokeya did not find it necessary to eliminate men or to propose anything so drastic as Charlotte Perkins Gilman did a few years later in Herland, in which parthenogenesis was the means for continuing a unisex society. (*Sultana's 4*)

Jahan points out the fact that Hossain's story, which antedates by a decade the more popularly known story by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, aims at poetic justice for Indian women of Hossain's time. The Muslim women in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were thrust into seclusion and powerlessness because of male dominated socio-cultural practices. In a witty and often humorous, strongly satirical style, Hossain undercuts the male ideology that stood in need of reform.

Though some of the literary forerunners of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani as mentioned above, deal with many women's issues, they do not directly address questions about the matrix of women's bodies. They write about domestic themes of love, courtship and matrimony. The writers before Ismat Chughtai, Selina Hossain and Tehmina Durrani also delineate what Sonia Amin calls "emancipation" themes dealing with women's rights to education, public spaces, and to equal treatment under the law. Nonetheless, they avoid detailed and introspective treatments of women's bodies and sexuality. Indeed, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain dares to discuss problems in gender relations in her society during the early part of the twentieth century, but she never deals with the topic of women's bodies and sexuality in the bold and explicit manner of the authors under study here. Ahktar Mahal is one of the very few early Bengali Muslim women writers to have directly addressed the theme of physical

desire in a woman. As Amin's research shows, there are passionate references to female yearning, and self-reflection in Mahal's first novel, Niyantrita, serialized from 1927 to 1928. According to Amin the kind of vivid and sensuous passages describing forbidden physical encounters that Mahal portrays in this novel were rare at the time she was writing.

Since most of the early writers considered their main aim to be reforming a society struggling under the grip of colonization, very few of them thought of rendering much importance to the body of a woman the way Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani have done. These three women writers do not follow any prescribed feminist praxis, mode or language to deal with the woman's body. By way of introducing Chughtai, Shukrita Paul Kumar writes:

Writing in the man's world, delineating mostly the microcosm of the women, discerning women's modes for empowerment or looking at women as victims of exploitation by men or other women in the patriarchal society, Ismat entered the literary scene as though sounding a clarion call for awareness and change. (Ismat 15)

In 1924, when Chughtai was a thirteen year-old girl, she started writing romantic stories that she hid under her pillow and later destroyed. Since Muslim girls from 'decent' families were not supposed to read or write about romance, in those days Chughtai had to be discreet about her interest in fiction. Stubborn by nature, however, she soon threw all cautions aside and plunged into writing about taboo subjects in one story after another. "Kafir," her first short story published in 1938, is based on a love-hate relationship between a Muslim girl and her Hindu boyfriend. "Gainda," also published in the same year, is a story about an illegitimate son born to a fourteen year-old widow. In 1942, her highly controversial story "Lihaf" was published. Since it dealt with same-sex love, when she sent it for publication it was assumed that the writer was a male, and that Ismat Chughtai was a pseudonym used to

hide 'his' real identity. It was still difficult for many people in early 20<sup>th</sup> century India to believe that a Muslim woman could be so daring, or so shameless to write about homosexuality, and even claim the piece of writing as her own. When most married women were still only reading behavior manuals for women such as Gudar ka Laal (1905), written by Walida Afzaal Ali (mother of Afzaal Ali), or Behesti Zewar (1905) by Thanavi, Chughtai had already read Lady Chatterley's Lover, some ten years earlier, and was trying her own hand at sexually innovative subjects. In his preface to Ismat Chughtai: Makers of Indian Literature, M. Asaduddin contends: "She registered the presence of women in uncompromising terms and boldly portrayed them in their multifarious dimensions, most notably, the hitherto unexplored and unmentionable dimension of female sexuality" (7). According to Asaduddin, the society in which Chughtai began writing clearly practiced segregation of sexes and proclaimed sexual repression as a virtue. Chughtai shows the effects of such repression on her female protagonists' body and mind in much of her writings.

Chughtai also captured so-called forbidden issues on her canvas, such as the sexual titillation felt by a young wet-nurse during breast-feeding, a child's discovery of adult sexual behavior, the first sexual stirrings of teenage girls, a girl's thrill of discovering a laced bra, the sexual fantasies of college girls, a girl's infatuation for a friend's father, the art and pressure of enticing men, and the sexual molestation of young girls by the maulana. She strongly believed that there was a need for women writers to write about 'womanly' themes, for those were often ignored, or not considered literary enough by male writers of her time. Such apparently 'trivial' or prohibited subjects gained a philosophical and existential dimension in Chughtai's hands because of their ethnographically detailed and critical yet sympathetic treatment. In the introduction to Chughtai's novel The Crooked Line (1944), Tahira

Naqvi underscores the “acceptance of sexual impulses” and “awareness of a sexual identity” in Chughtai’s female characters (viii). Chughtai’s treatment of middle class Muslim women’s “psychosexual” life is a unique exposition of this issue (vii).

Chughtai wrote about taboo subjects during a time when Indian Muslim culture was largely orthodox, not to gain cheap popularity but to preserve the fine nuances of Indian Muslim women’s representations in literature.

Like Chughtai, Hossain acknowledges the importance of delineating female sexuality in fiction. She endows her women characters with a keen sense of physical sensuality that is unprecedented in the writings of her male counterparts. In her novel, Warp and Woof, a married woman’s sexual desires are extensively portrayed. Her maternal instincts are also shown to be equally overpowering. Hossain celebrates the wife’s body as a source of power and affirms its corporeality positively in short stories such as “Parul’s Becoming a Mother,” “Motijan's Daughters,” “The World of Love and Labour,” and “Akali's Life at the Station.” In many of these stories, Hossain tries to thrust the shame of seduction and illegitimacy upon the seducer, usually a man, rather than the seduced, most often a woman, challenging man's pride in his virility. In her short story, “In Retrospect,” which I have recently translated into English, Hossain depicts the moral courage in young girls of Bangladesh who set aside their sexual/marital desires during a period of national crisis such as the language movement of 1952. In this story her heroine, Bithi, prioritizes her role as a student revolutionary, fighting for her right to speak in her mother-tongue, over her need to reciprocate love and accept the role of a wife.

Hossain’s fiction also provides a template for relatively new sexual themes such as the psycho-social and physical consequences of rape victims of the 1971 liberation war in Bangladesh, the impact of *fatwas* or religious decrees on women’s

sexuality, and the rise of the trafficking of women for sex work. Nargis Akhtar has recently made a movie based on Hossain's short story, "A World of Love and Labor," which is about man's infertility and the impact of polygamy on wives. Although Hossain often explicitly narrates sexual themes, her readers do not label her as a sexually provocative writer, as they brand younger Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen. There are several reasons behind this distinction: in the first place, the kind of public image Hossain has in her society is vastly different from that of Nasreen's. A very polite, soft-spoken, unassuming and genuinely caring woman in person, Hossain enjoys respect not only from conservative groups, but also from progressive groups in Bangladesh. Though she breaks many taboos in her speeches and her writings, she is considered an 'insider' trying to constructively criticize her own society. By and large, her audience does not take offense at her critique; rather, they appreciate her heart-felt intention to improve her society. Hossain is always in the media's eye, but she is seen making some kind of contribution in her humble way to eliminate the sorrows of the women of her country. Be it through raising charity funds for women and children suffering from AIDS; by establishing hospitals in remote villages for helping to educate people about birth control, immunization, AIDS, nutrition, and childcare; through raising awareness by organizing lectures and workshops; or by giving shelter to victims of domestic violence through the Lara Foundation fund that she has initiated, Hossain is ever active in trying to improve the condition of Bangladeshi women.

Though Nasreen might have similar intentions to bring about change in Bangladeshi society, her public image creates a barrier between her noble intent and her final achievement. By posing for photos which show her with a cigarette in one hand and the Quran in another, by dressing in ways which are often associated with a

fast lifestyle and by brazenly attacking mainstream ideology, she has earned a predominantly negative image in her society. Her books were banned and *fatwas* were ordained against her. Though consequently she gained a following amongst the Hindus of India, and Sweden offered her residency, her acceptance of the Swedish offer has further hurt her image in her home country where she is considered a traitor. While Hossain's liberal feminism has room for slow and subtle change in society, Nasreen's radical ways of overthrowing the status quo are considered shocking not only by the *mollahs* and the male chauvinists of Bangladesh, but also by many of her female contemporaries. Indeed, both authors have their own prescription for eliminating social ailments; however, because of her direct involvement from the grassroots level to the very top, Hossain's treatment of female sexuality definitely has a far-reaching impact on all classes of Bangladeshi women, whereas Nasreen has been able to touch only those classes of women who approve of the kind of shock-treatment she provides. This is not to suggest that Hossain shies away from opening up the discourse of sexuality, or from and trying out alternative modes of empowerment for women. Married twice herself, Hossain has whole-heartedly accepted her non-Muslim, British son-in-law. During my innumerable meetings with her over the past five years I had the opportunity of discovering a very witty, humorous, hardworking and enterprising woman in her.

Durrani has similarly earned my admiration as a strong woman of purpose and determination who does not back away from exposing the secrets of her own, her family's, and her country-men's sexual lives in public in order to subvert the powers of feudal and oppressive patriarchal authorities. Her autobiography, My Feudal Lord (1992), is written mainly to pull down the artificial facade of respectability that her ex-husband, Chief Minister of Punjab Mustafa Khar, and feudal lords like him,

outwardly present to the world. In her book, Durrani shows that while Khar tries to pass as a highly concerned and sensitive person to his country people, in reality he is a criminal who can be accused of adultery, marital rape, incest, and child-molestation. To narrate the lustful escapades of her own husband and challenge the patriarchal leaders of her country, Durrani had to let the world know of her own sexual transgressions as well. In her autobiography, she shows the courage of narrating her own adulterous relationship with Khar while she was still married to Anis Khan, Khar's adjutant. Sexual betrayal of Anis costs her custody of her daughter Tanya, but Durrani is so smitten by Khar's charismatic personality that she divorces Anis and agrees to become Khar's 6<sup>th</sup> wife. She soon realizes her mistake, as Mustafa abuses her physically and mentally, strips her, rapes her, and starts an affair with her thirteen year-old sister, Adila. Durrani had four children within thirteen years of her marriage to Khar and developed gynecological problems from the pressure of repeated pregnancies.

Social pressure and conditioning encourages Durrani to tolerate Khar's torture for several years. First, she was born to renowned parents, and had pressure from her natal family to keep her unhappy marital life and her sister's affair a secret. As Mustafa Khar's spouse, she was in the limelight already, and had followers of her own. She risked losing the potential for her own political group in Pakistan, and also losing friends if she dissolved her marriage. She was further taking a huge chance with the religious authorities of her country in whose eyes she would become a confirmed adulteress and a divorcee if she revealed their secrets. She would also lose a huge amount of money. The worst thing to lose was the custody of her children. None of these alter Durrani's strong determination to stand up for herself and avenge her oppressors. Not only does she divorce Khar, she writes about her own



oppression, and also about the oppression of those women in her family and society who become perpetual victims of men's sexual violations.

In her autobiography, Durrani then talks about her own father's polygamous marriage at a late stage of his own life with his secretary. She also writes about the devastating effects of her father's second marriage on her mother. For exposing details of her own and her family's intimate life in public, Durrani's father called a public press conference and publicly disowned her. For divulging the sexual aberrations of the social elites, political leaders, and religious heads in her autobiography, and later in her novel, Blasphemy, Durrani continues to face the wrath of Muslim Pakistani extremists. Yet, she finds it incumbent upon herself to maintain her protest against the bodily atrocities against wives, and to expose the sexual shenanigans of powerful men in Pakistan. She hopes the narration of her personal sexual/marital experience and those of other women in her community will help strengthen those women who are in similar situations but have not gathered enough strength to break the silence of their own similar oppressions. Since Durrani writes in English, she has been able to attain a wide readership, and impact a cross-cultural group of women suffering from sexual/domestic violence in various Muslim countries of the world.

As a feminist activist dedicated to the wellbeing of Pakistani women, Durrani made it her mission to save Fakhrah Yunus, her step-son's wife, when Khar's son, Bilal, disfigured her face with acid for allegedly having a lover. With resolve she tries to prove that a woman's importance in Islam is not just as bearer of children, and caretaker of her husband, but as a complimentary partner, and also an individual deserving of love and respect in her own right.

As progressive feminist writers, Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani provide a uniquely complex and controversial portrayal of the Sub-Continental Muslim wife's body, opening up new avenues of theorizing the body in literature. Despite the politicization of Islam and the rise of *fatwas* in their respective societies, the courage that these writers depict by providing the female body a center stage in their writing deserves appreciation and attention.

Although the presence of South Asian women is increasingly felt in the fields of Postcolonial Literature, Women's Studies, and Cultural Studies today, South Asian Muslim women in general, and Sub-Continental Muslim women like Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani in particular, are still marginally represented in these disciplines. The reasons behind their insufficient representation are manifold. First, as Herbert L. Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi contend in Women in Muslim Societies, though the largest number of Muslim women in the world are concentrated in South Asia, there has been scant scholarship produced about them because of the tendency, particularly among Westerners, to regard only the Middle East as "the land of Muslims par excellence" (2). In the words of these critics,

seldom for societies outside these countries [Egypt, Iran, Turkey, and Palestine] is there enough textual information to develop a nuanced picture of gender relations or to grasp the myriad complex issues affecting women throughout the Muslim world. (1)

Second, the relative absence of Sub-Continental Muslim women's representation in these disciplines can be traced back to the joint political conniving of British colonizers and Hindu Zamindars against the Muslims of the region. In her article, "Politics of Religious Identity," Salma Sobhan explains this connection:

By the time the British had established themselves firmly in India and had begun to allow the inhabitants of the country a voice in running it, the Indian Muslims had dropped into second place in the race. This was because, after the abortive war of independence in 1857, there had been a conscious policy of discrimination against them. (67)

What Sobhan argues by way of establishing the reasons behind the systematic deprivation of Muslims is further reinforced by Ali Ashraf's comments in "The Impact of Islam on Modern Bengali Poetry." According to Ashraf, "The British had conquered the Muslim Kingdom, hence their primary policy was to mistrust the Muslims and support the Hindus. They therefore tried to crush the Muslims politically, economically and educationally" (217). Ashraf explains that British administrators such as Warren Hastings and Lord Cornwallis took away the trust funds meant for supporting Muslim schools, and introduced English in place of Persian as the State language in the Sub-Continent. He also describes how Hindu pundits, Christian missionaries and college authorities were employed to replace words of Arabic and Persian from the "Bengal language," dictionaries and college text books with words of Sanskrit origin. The purpose behind such excision was to create "a literary language that was intended to reflect Hindu culture and not Muslim culture" (218). According to Ashraf, such aggression and encroachment on the part of the British and the Hindus alienated Muslims and compelled them to boycott everything British; however, economic, political and cultural development eventually meant Muslims would adopt British ways and the English language. Muslim men did not want to lag behind in the race for modernity started by the British; hence, despite their decision to shun the British, they began learning and practicing English.

Since the main reason for appropriating the colonizer's culture was not inspired by a genuine desire for change, but by the desire to derive the public benefits of mimicking the rulers, most Muslim men did not want their women to be involved in the British culture in any way. Nonetheless, Sobhan contends that Muslim men kept Muslim women aloof because they did not wish to eliminate their complacency with the "woman question" of the day. In the name of preserving tradition, they

allowed their women to learn only Arabic and their regional languages, and discouraged them from joining English medium schools, or Christian missionary schools. This kind of parochial nationalism created a chasm between Muslim women and their Hindu or Christian counterparts with regard to education for women. In her article, "The Secluded Ones: Purdah Observed," Roushan Jahan comments on the inability of Muslim men to perceive the loss faced by Muslim women because of the men's conservative attitudes. She notes:

The Muslims priding themselves on their comparatively liberal laws concerning the status of women, had so far been condescending to the Hindus. That there had been a real change in the situation and status of Hindu women wrought by the sociocultural reform movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and that in the 1920s Hindu women were not as disadvantaged as they had been earlier, seemed to have escaped their notice. (22)

In the early 1880s, the Reformist and Nationalist movements initiated by British men and women such as J. E Drinkwater Bethune and Miss Cook, and Indian Hindu men such as Rammohon Roy and Ishwarchandra Bidyashagar somewhat improved the condition of Muslim women who were interested in education, and encouraged them to write. Among Muslims, Sir Syed Ahmad, Altaf Hossain Hali, Amina Tyabji, Faizunnesa Chowdhurani, Karimunnesa Khan and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain strove hard for the regeneration of their people. Ahmad tried to open the minds of Muslim men and women to English literature, science and technology, just as he endeavored to acquaint the British with Indian ways. In Aligarh, he launched a movement that aimed at producing an intellectual class of Muslims that did not have to deviate from the fundamentals of its faith as it appropriated some European ways of schooling. Owing to Ahmad, Hali, Tyabji, Chowdhurani, Khan and Hossain's relentless efforts, by the end of the nineteenth century primary school and college level education for Indian Muslim women was facilitated. The intellectual revolution brought about by

these pioneers encouraged Muslim women to read and write fiction in English as early as 1905.

Indeed, Muslim women did not consider writing in English to be the only form of intellectual revolution. They wrote in their respective languages such as Urdu, Bangla and Hindi as well. Because of the lack of adequate translations of their writing in English, coupled with Muslim patriarchal imperatives and the politics behind a male-dominated academic tradition, their writings have been relegated to the margins, misunderstood or dismissed. This dissertation is to a great extent prompted by my general desire to address the exclusion of Sub-Continental Muslim women writers, and the paucity of their writings in canonical literatures of English departments. My specific aim, however, is to examine the matrix of a wife's body in the works of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani that spans the mid-twentieth century to the early twenty first century. As a woman who was born and raised in Pakistan until my early teens, a citizen of Bangladesh for three decades, and a person who claims heritage from Indian Muslims, I share many identity markers with these authors and the wives they depict. My familiarity with some of their struggles and strategies for making the Muslim wife's body visible has inspired me to delve into a comparative study of their works.

## CHAPTER II

## CHILD BRIDE'S BODY

Marriage is a critical turning point for a girl, allowing her to translate into reality latent reproductive capacities and thereby realize her claim to womanhood in the eyes of the community. . . . The pressing obligation on the part of parents to marry off a girl underlines the high cultural value attached to wifehood. (64)

--Seemantini Niranjana

The custom of child marriage that gained popularity in the Sub-Continent during the bygone era of feudalism has successfully made its way into the present age of capitalism and trans-nationalization. Although most of the socio-political conditions that were prevalent then are dying out fast, people are still continuing the practice that derogates the concept of fundamental human rights. As social critics of their respective communities, Ismat Chughtai, Selina Hossain and Tehmina Durrani condemn parental complicity and governmental laxity with regards to matrimonial alliances that expose millions of adolescent girls as well as some boys to lives of dire misery. To help reduce the spawning of child marriage, in their fiction they delineate the injustices and consequences of this gender-based violence that transfixes married girls in particular in a limbo like stage between childhood and adulthood.

In this chapter, I analyze the fictional as well as autobiographical writings of Chughtai, Durrani and Hossain to ascertain certain discriminatory and disciplinary practices that are imposed on Sub-Continental Muslim girl children while they await their impending marriage in their fathers' home, and later, when they step into their husbands' homes. The role of maternal figures in grooming girl children as future wives, and the effects of internalization of patriarchal marital dictums by the girl children themselves, are issues that I discuss here by way of scrutinizing literary representations of the child bride's body. This chapter also probes into practices such

as 'mock marriage' and the ritual of the *pir's uthni* (*the saint's camel*) that have been delineated by Chughtai and Durrani in their fiction in order to prove that these culturally specific practices violate a girl child's body under the auspices of marriage. My aim in this chapter is to prove that the social construction of the child bride's body through marriage is largely a mechanism to control her female sexuality and force her to conform to hierarchical masculine norms. The writings of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani provide ample guidelines for exposing the ills of the Sub-Continental social constructions that convert a girl-child's body into a ready site of oppression through child-marriage.

Although the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights bans child marriage, many girl children in the Indian Sub-Continent are still forced into marriage before reaching puberty. In her book, Indian Women: From Darkness to Light, Shoma A. Chatterji gives an idea about how widespread the practice of child marriage is in India. According to Chatterji, in one-third of Indian districts, including Rajasthan, Jammu, Kashmir, Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad and Kerala, this social practice is rampant. The average age of marriage for girls in these places is less than 15 years. Chatterji regrets the fact that despite several laws such as the Age of Consent Act of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the Sarda Act of 1929 which was further amended in 1978, the Civil Marriage Act of 1954, there are still so many enclaves, Muslim and Hindu, where child marriage is rampant in India. Commenting on this national problem, Jamila Verghese holds in Her Gold and Her Body, that according to The International Planned Parenthood Foundation's latest report, out of four million marriages which take place in India, three million include girls under eighteen (238).

Child marriage is common in Bangladesh as well, although legal steps were taken to restrain child marriage as early as 1929 when the Child Marriage Restraint

Act restricted marriage before the age of 14. In 1982 the limit was raised to 16, and 1984, the minimum legal age of marriage of girls was again raised to 18; however, legal measures to restrain child marriage have not been effective. According to Parvez Babul in “Early Marriage, Inequalities and Violence Against Women,” more than 70% of brides in Bangladesh are less than 18 years, and over 26% of those girls are between the ages of 8 to 13 (3).

In her book, Ethics in Social Practice, Hasna Begum holds that “the most important code regarding marriage in Bengali society is to marry daughters when they are still girls” (66). Begum cites historians of medieval Bengal to prove that marriage before the age of puberty had been in vogue in Bangladesh for centuries. She further cites Bengali folk tales which depict girls who have reached puberty while still in their father’s house as socially condemned. The parents of these girls are berated for not being able to arrange their pre-pubescent daughters’ marriage. Hence fathers sometimes banish their daughters to the woods if they fail to arrange a marriage for them before they reach puberty. Begum cites the legends of Rupavati and Kajalrekha, whose fathers banished them because they could no longer tolerate the criticism and wild gossip of their neighbors about their adolescent daughters. According to Hasna Begum, “from the stage of girlhood the women-folk attained matrimonial status and hence their whole existence was destined to revolve around that status till they die” (67). Begum’s observation undergirds the hapless condition of girl-children who are chafed by the notion of woman-as-wife even before they grasp the meaning of the terms ‘woman’ or ‘wife’.

Like Begum, Jitka Kotalova is against the early marriage of girls. Commenting on forced early marriage for young girls amongst poor parents of Bangladeshi villages, Kotalova concedes:



A woman's maturity is signaled by the onset of the menarche, an event which separates her definitely from non-related men as well as from the status of "*nabalok*" [immature]. . . . relevant to the universal imperative of marriage for women is that union with a man is to be synchronized with the first occurrence of the menses. (74-5)

Kotalova disapproves of the haste with which parents arrange their daughters' marriages. She further shuns the practice of withdrawing *shabalok* girls (who have started menstruation), and are waiting to be dispensed through marriage, from public as well as private places occupied by men other than their close male relations. She describes the separation of public and private spaces as well as the delineation of skills prescribed for Bangladeshi village boys and girls in order to depict how the girls are restricted while boys are encouraged to push the horizon of occupational possibilities as far as they can.

Despite the numerous negative impacts of early marriage, the practice is still very much in vogue amongst the Muslim as well as Hindu families of the Sub-Continent. The stories of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani explicate several socio-economic as well as religious reasons for child marriage. These writers commonly diagnose a sense of ownership or authority that parents muster over their children as one of the deep-rooted causes behind child marriage. Irrespective of class, many parents in the Sub-Continent tend to hold an unquestionable sway over their children. Most children accept this parental possessiveness and obey their parents' orders as part of their religious or moral duty. Taking advantage of such power, many parents arrange for their children, even their sons, to be married much before they begin to truly understand the meaning of marriage. In "The Veil," Chughtai shows the sad fate of Kale Mia and Goribi, who were forced into marriage when in their teens by their parents. Goribi was fourteen while Kale Mia was only seventeen at the time of their marriage. As the word *gori* in Urdu suggests, Goribi is fair, hence considered

extremely beautiful by general Indian standards. *Kale*, on the other hand, means black in Urdu, and Kale Mia is so named for his dark complexion. While Kale Mia had a complexion complex, he further assumes that because of her fair skin and beauty, Goribi would be proud, and disrespectful of her husband. Terrified of the idea of having to handle a very beautiful wife, he runs away to his maternal grandparents' house in Jodhpur, and confesses his fears. Instead of complying with his requests for cancelling the wedding, his grandparents employ "physical force" to coerce him into going back home and marrying the girl chosen for him (3). The following words of the narrator:

In those days defiance was dealt with severely and a beating or two was not at all uncommon. Under no circumstances could an engagement be terminated; such an act would bring eternal shame upon the family...

prove that even boys had no say in their marriage, and their guardians had the right to coerce them to the extent of physical brutality (2).

Though Kale Mia and Goribi marry each other under parental duress, they are both extremely stubborn and immature youths. Their married life turns into a tragedy not only because of parental authority and intervention in matters of child-marriage, but also because of their own character traits. While Kale Mia, brainwashed by his guardians, expects his young wife to obey his orders and lift her veil on her wedding night, Goribi refuses to do so. Socialized by patriarchal discourse, she insists that it is a man's prerogative on his wedding night to unveil his wife with his own hands. Her refusal to abide by his commands makes her young and arrogant husband so mad that he jumps out of the window that very night and return after seven years, only to make the same demand again. Though Goribi dresses her self as a bride one more time, she again refuses to lift her veil with her own hands. This kind of childish adamancy on both sides ruins their marital life. Kale Mia turns towards prostitutes, and Goribi

spends the rest of her life as a virgin bride despite her marriage. “There was no question of divorce in those days. Once married you stayed married,” informs the narrator, highlighting the ordeals of wives in particular who were unhappy in marriage, since they did not have other options like going to prostitutes or finding another marriage partner (Quilt 4). Neither Goribi's parents nor her in-laws entertained the idea of a second marriage for this beautiful yet unfortunate girl. These guardians fail to critique the traditional imperatives of marriage and catapult the poor girl from her suffering because they see her only in the role of an ‘ideal’ woman. According to their marital ideology, such a woman marries only once, and is an embodiment of love, devotion and purity, no matter what kind of deprivation and constrain her body has to go through.

Chughtai's fiction, The Crooked Line, and The Heart Breaks Free deal with similar problems of abusive parental authority with regard to marriage of their children. In The Crooked Line, Shamman's parents make the decision regarding her marriage when she is still a teenage girl. She is engaged to her cousin Aju, whom she cannot stand once she turns into a woman. Although Shamman breaks this engagement without the knowledge of her parents, a sense of guilt follows her for going against parental decision. Her job as a school teacher helps her get away from home and avoid marriage for a while. Aunt Qudsiya in The Heart Breaks Free is married at fifteen in order to comply with her parents' wishes. Despite the fact that her husband takes a second wife, she is not permitted to divorce, or to have another man as a friend. Her parents compel her to live a life of widowhood for the sake of their own honor. Chughtai's short story, “Touch Me Not” also reveals what little control a girl child has over her body in the face of parental authority. The narrator's comment, “The fact is that the moment her mother stopped feeding her, she came to

adorn Bhaijan's bed," explains the child bride's inertial role with regard to her own marriage (Lifting 95).

Hossain's fiction is also replete with examples of girls forced into marriage by their parents during early adolescence. In The Shark, the River and the Grenades, for instance, Buri's mother arranges her marriage as soon as she reaches puberty. In "The World of Love and Labour," Fulbanu's father conspires to marry his daughter to a much older man when she is just eighteen. In Durrani's Blasphemy, Heer is only fifteen when her mother forces her into wedlock. Heer's daughters, Diya and Munni, are married to the two sons of their debauched uncle at fourteen and thirteen under their father's command. Children who dare to oppose their guardians with regard to choice of a life partner, or who choose their own marriage partner against the wishes of their parents, are often reprimanded, deprived of their inheritance, or even killed by their families in the name of 'honor killing.' Moreover, parents often consider delay in marriage as damaging to the family's reputation. They do not trust their daughters with their newly discovered sense of sexuality, and fear that either by eloping, or by getting pregnant out of wedlock, the girls would destroy the family honor. It is assumed by the parents that in spite of being warned about the consequences of their 'fall,' girls might forego restraint and give in to their lust. About the disciplining of the girl child's sexuality by parents, Niranjana holds: "Her alleged inability to exercise restraint is seen as necessitating external controls on female sexuality, especially in the form of an early marriage and motherhood" (63). It is generally believed by the parents that in order to "control and channelize the active/emergent female sexuality, and also to guard and foster female virtue," early marriage is essential (63). These parents in fact, partake of the sexual colonization of their daughters' bodies by homogenizing and stultifying them in the name of security.

Poverty provides another explanation for parental culpability in arranging marriage for their girls at an early age. Poor families regard girl children as economic burdens because of the dowry system, and believe that the younger the girl child's body, the lesser the rate of the dowry that has to be given with her. Highlighting the importance of timing a daughter's marriage, Kotalova holds that "since puberty affects her evaluation at the time of marriage negotiations," parents hasten to marry their daughter off as early as possible, and with as little dowry as possible (190). Parents feel that keeping a post-pubescent daughter at home for too long lessens her value in the marriage market. Parents thus reinforce the cultural irony that turns their own daughters' bodies into sexual objects for sale.

Hossain, however, objects to the use of child marriage as a safeguard against poverty. She holds that early marriage is no answer to the demands of poverty. In her words, "If this happens, this happens not because of poverty, but because of a low level of culture. It is, in the final analysis, a question of values. And values must change" ("Culture" 17-8). Hossain eschews the excuse of destitution for child-marriage. She believes that it is in reality, lack of appreciation for a girl child's sensibilities, freedom and possibilities that compel parents to impose marriage on their young daughters, and render their bodies disenfranchised.

Child marriage in the Sub-Continent is not always a symptom of poverty. Though some families in debt consider the marriage of a daughter to be a necessary survival strategy, many realize their dreams of prosperity and status by selling their nubile daughters to rich Middle Eastern Sheiks or even local landlords in the name of marriage. Greedy matchmakers motivate parents of girl children to marry their daughters to rich and old widowers, or already married grooms living abroad.

Criticizing the ‘Gulf Lucre’ of Hyderabadi Muslims and their practice of marrying daughters to much older and much-married Arabs, Chatterji opines:

Marriages of minors to aging money banks from West Asian countries have become rampant. In reality, this is a veiled practice of girl-running indulged in by none other than the girl’s parents themselves who assume the role of pimps for their growing daughters. (Chatterji 48)

Like Chatterji, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan also blames greedy parents in her article, “The Ameena Case.” In this article she discusses the 1992 incident in which a Hyderabadi Muslim father sells his daughter as a child-bride to an Arab named Yahya Mohammed al-Sageih for Rs. 6000. Rajan regrets that: “Muslim law equates maturity with puberty, but also permits child marriage (i.e. marriage before puberty) at the discretion of the guardians” (64). In fact, Sub-Continental parents have been engaged in the practice of betrothing their children even when they are still in their cribs.

Telephone marriage of young girls with rich men from Middle-East has become a new fad in the Sub-Continental marriage world. In Chughtai’s short story, “Sacred Duty,” the parents arrange a match for their daughter over the phone with a groom who works in Dubai on a monthly salary of twelve thousand, has free board and lodgings, and is allowed a free vacation every year. The narrator comments: “Developments in the Arab World had opened up fortunes for many a nubile girl. The sudden spurt of wealth had brought prosperity to many a family” (*Lifting* 129). The mother in the story has great hopes of visiting her daughter in Dubai during the month of ‘Khali,’ and taking the opportunity to perform Hajj on her way back. The father claims to be a progressive man, who is a supporter of education for girls and their freedom of choice in marriage; however, when he hears of his daughter’s elopement, his blood starts to boil, and he devises ways of killing them both.

In “The World of Love and Labor,” Hossain derides Bangladeshi parents who sell their young daughters to older grooms not because of poverty but for sheer greed for landed property. In this story Fulbanu’s father, Amzad Mian arranges his daughter’s marriage to a sixty-two year-old man who has two more wives. Fulbanu, who is just eighteen years old, clearly sees through her father’s greed and hates the commodification of her body. “This is not a marriage. This is a business transaction,” she boldly screams in anger against her father (113). To Kasem Mia, her would-be husband, she speaks her mind thus, “My father wants to sell me and buy the land, doesn’t he? If there’s to be a marriage it will be for free; without buying and selling” (113). She secretly leaves her village and marries Kasem Mia, whom she considers fit to be her grandfather, only to ensure that her father does not get the better part of the deal by selling her body in exchange for a few acres of land in his own name. She also resents the fact that after her father’s death, her brother will get a share in the land.

Not every girl child can protest parental injustice against her body as Fulbanu does. The economic frustration of parents and their desire for family ties with higher class people often compels young girls to forgo considerations regarding their bodies and place their families before themselves. In Blasphemy, Durrani depicts the fate of Heer, a young teenager who is forced by her mother to be the third wife of a much older *pir* (religious leader) so that she can boast of her status, and marry the rest of her children well. Heer hears her mother proclaim:

We are extremely lucky. After your father’s death, people did not think we were worth anything. Your marriage will restore our dignity in the community. Your sisters will marry well and your brother will get a good girl and a good job. Our status will improve tremendously.  
(25)

Heer gambles away her life because she is too scared of becoming a burden to her widowed mother; however, her mother has no qualms about her family living off the dividends of Heer's imprisonment in the name of marriage. Similarly, Chughtai's story "By the Grace of God," also depicts a greedy and diplomatic mother who converts her daughter's body into a conduit through which social merit and prestige pass to her family. Like Heer's mother in Blasphemy, this mother nonchalantly sacrifices Farhat, her twenty year-old daughter at the altar of marriage to a sixty-five year-old, already married man. She also exploits her daughter's body by keeping her dower money for her other children's future, instead of giving it to her.

Authority, honor and greed are not the only reasons why parents arrange early marriage for their daughters. A sense of religious duty also goads them to facilitate the evil practice of child marriage. As Jahan comments, Muslim parents feel enormous pressure to provide a girl with a symbolic shelter through early marriage. In her words, "finding a suitable boy and marrying a daughter off is still felt to be the paramount duty of a parent" ("Right" 63). Verghese points to similar pressure on Hindu parents as well. According to her, "religion brands the father who has not done his duty by his daughter, and has left her unmarried until 'the proper time'" (41). Many parents object to delay in their children's marriage since according to them it means disregarding natural urges in young people for copulation and propagation. They genuinely believe that early marriage offers protection for their daughters from the dangers of sexual transgressions, and provides the care of a male guardian. According to Chatterji, many parents believe that "early marriage renders easy adjustment on the girl's side" (47). Indeed, many parents are of the opinion that if girls marry at an early age, it would ensure their obedience and submissiveness within their husband's household, thereby limiting the possibilities of inviting trouble. These



parents are ignorant of many of the negative effects of child-marriage wrought upon their daughters' bodies. With no education, nor awareness about human rights, their attitudes towards this practice have remained the same as parents' attitude centuries ago.

There are yet other reasons behind the practice of child marriage in the Sub-Continent. As Chatterji observes, specifically amongst the people of Jammu and Kashmir, child marriage is used as a means of increasing the population of this area. Devastating natural calamities like famine, earthquakes and epidemics kill thousands of people in these regions at a time. War and violence further reduce the population necessary for sustaining the areas agrarian economy. Girls in this region are married off in childhood to ensure a longer reproductive span, and most of them have 10 to 14 children. In general, people here believe that "more children have the merit of active assistance from more members on the farm" (Chatterji 47). The discourse of tradition oppresses the bodies of Kashmir and Jammu's girl brides despite the fact that according to the 1993 Convention on Human Rights, religion and custom cannot override universal human rights. Chatterji regrets the fact that the Civil Marriage Act that sets the minimum age for marriage as 21 for boys and 18 for girls applies to civil marriages only, and does not supersede any personal law. Muslim Personal Law, however, which runs parallel to civil law, allows child marriage under certain circumstances. Thus Muslim parents can circumvent the law to allow for the crime of child marriage.

Like Chatterji, Hossain is also utterly frustrated by the negligence and disparity of law in Bangladesh with regard to child marriage. In "Security of the Marginalized Women," Hossain complains:

Though a law against child marriage was passed in 1929, such marriages continue down till today. . . . This was amended in 1984 and

men and women could marry at the ages of 21 and 18 respectively or older. It was said that if anyone married a girl under 18, this would be considered a punishable crime. The person conducting the marriage would also be liable to punishment. Even so, child marriage continues in the villages. Even the law can't safeguard women. The family and society has marginalized them. (20)

Hossain regrets that child marriage cannot be abolished all that easily, and the child bride's body has to suffer innumerable odds on account of the revival of Islamic fundamentalism in the Sub-Continent. She also undercuts the strong hold of traditional families that believe that wife-hood and maternity are the most important expressions of femininity.

Hossain further regrets the fact that a negative attitude towards a Sub-Continental girl child often begins when she is still in the mother's womb. Even if a female fetus is not destroyed upon conception, or killed right after birth, in many cases parents view the girl child as a huge liability that can be shed only through marriage. In "Culture and the Child: The Bangladesh Perspective," which is an essay on children's rights and Bangladeshi cultural attitudes, Selina Hossain maintains:

In our culture, all children are not equal; the boy-child is treated more favorably than the girl-child. The logic is simple; the boy-child is an asset while the girl-child is liability. (Culture 22)

The boy child is more valued because he is expected to earn money, and add to the family income. The boy child also provides security to the parents when they are old, while a girl child is looked upon as a drain on the family property because she has to be married off with a huge dowry. Because a girl child is considered someone else's property, to be eventually delivered to her rightful owner through marriage, right after birth discriminatory familial practices are meted out against her. These practices are noticeable not only amongst the poor, but also among the middle and upper classes who perpetuate all kinds of direct and indirect oppressions against a girl child, forcing her to grow up with innumerable limitations and sacrifices. For instance, though

calories and protein intake aids in reducing nutritional deficiencies among children, girls are taught from a very early age to be satisfied with very little food and forced to make sacrifices in preparation for their future life as wives. The following excerpt from Chughtai's autobiographical essay, "Childhood" points to the fact that middle class girls are no exception when it comes to teaching girls the virtues of frugality and self-negation as a prerequisite to becoming 'perfect' wives:

We were given only tea. . . . If she forgot to mix sugar in the tea, there would be another hassle. When I asked for sugar she would snap, 'Damn! How much can I do with just a pair of hands? I can hardly breathe. Dying for sugar, ant that she is.' Well, that was it. When after complaining feebly for a while, I would drink the tea without sugar, and she would exclaim: 'Oh God, how greedy can you be! Couldn't you wait a minute? Drank it just like that! Such greed – that, too, in a girl. . . . when I asked for food, I would get the reply, 'Eat me, oh yes!' The food would be rotten – either too hot or too cold. If I asked for a piece of meat, I would be told, 'Tear out a piece from my body.' If I said, 'Give me egg as you've given to Chunnu,' pat would come the reply, 'Yes, I've brought the egg cage, so I have to dole out eggs – as though my father is . . . ' (Lifting 50-1)

In her early childhood stoicism is ingrained in Chughtai and she is taught that an ideal girl is one who is content with little, all in the hope of making her an "ideal" wife in future. Ironically though, even when Chughtai checks her desire for sugar, and decides to do without it, she is reprimanded for being greedy and impatient. Patience is yet another quality that is emphasized in girls, while it is accepted that boys are demanding by nature. Again, like Chughtai many girls are deprived of nutritious food like eggs or meat, while their male counterparts are encouraged to have them. This is because it is believed by most people in the Sub-Continent that boys are the future wage-earners and care-takers of the family, while girls are mere liabilities, to be shed through marriage. The above quote also shows that it is often another woman who discriminates against her own sex. In this passage it is Chughtai's elder sister who is managing the food department, and as evident from her language and attitude, it is

obvious that she has very little concern for Chughtai's health or feelings. As young girls like Chughtai see their mothers, aunts and older sisters eat leftovers only after the male members of the family have had their share of food everyday, they internalize the practice and accept their own marginal position. This acceptance of their inevitable fate as girls becomes so entrenched early on in life that most of them do not oppose the idea that they are considered to be less important than even their younger male siblings in various ways.

Parvez Babul reinforces the fact that the process of discrimination against a girl child's body begins in her infancy. In the context of Bangladeshi girl-child Babul notes:

Among so many problems girl children face, the problem of malnutrition, obstacles to express their own views, opposition to be educated, empowered and to move freely, without having rights as human being etc. may be commonly cited. (3)

Babul believes that though both Bangladeshi girls and boys suffer from malnutrition in general, it is the girl children who suffer more than the boys, and their growth is stunted as a result. He is of the further opinion that rural girls suffer more than urban girls when it comes to the type of nutrition that is required for proper physical and mental growth. He holds that because of gender discrimination in infancy, after the age of one year the mortality rate of girl children becomes higher both in the villages and towns.

Like Babul, Jamila Verghese is quick to berate Indian parents for discriminating against a girl child right after her birth through unequal distribution of nutritional supplementary diet and health services at the household level. In the words of Verghese:

If by some strange miracle the baby girl survives, she is tolerated but never allowed to develop at the expense of her brothers. . . . nourishment is literally taken out of the baby girl's mouth and given to

them. In the weeks and months following her earliest days of life, the little girl becomes a victim of death by neglect. Available figures show that such deaths are on the increase. (39-40)

Both critics hold that discrimination against the girl child that begins with the lack of supplementary food should be eliminated not only because it coincides with higher infant mortality rates, but also because of its grave impact on their bodies later in life.

For most Muslim Sub-Continental girl children, as for Chughtai, to be a girl child seems to be her undoing not only because of discrimination in food allocation, and disparity in health related services, but also because of the discrepancy concerning education. Girls are usually not provided equal access in the field of education, and hence cannot achieve their full potential. Because of the social value system that perceives them primarily as future wives and mothers, girls are generally perceived as homemakers. Rural parents in particular emphasize the development of their daughters' basic domestic skills. The ideal of domesticity is so internalized by the girls themselves that they start believing in its sole importance in their lives. In Hossain's short story "Widowhood," Asia is one such teenaged girl who believes that it is not necessary for a woman to be very intelligent. After observing her mother in the kitchen, she holds: "To maintain a kitchen not much intelligence is required" (Selected 208). Her uncle, Bhopal, also believes that too much intelligence for a woman mars a family since it might encourage her to step outside the prescribed limits of gender relations. As soon as her family members notice signs of Asia's intelligence, they become eager to save family name by arranging her marriage before she is eighteen. Parents like Asia's save money for dowry rather than investing in their daughter's education. Diagnosing the general psychology of Bangladeshi parents in this regard, Roushan Jahan maintains that "they feel that educating a daughter is

like watering a plant in the neighbor's garden because the fruit would be enjoyed by others i.e., the conjugal family of the daughter" ("Right" 63).

Another reason for the problem of lack of education amongst Bangladeshi girl children is fear of financial loss. According to Jahan, since girls are married away without any financial returns for the future, and the government has no social welfare or health insurance system for retirement security, parents do not deem it necessary to invest their meager income in their daughters' education. Jahan also provides yet another reason for the problem:

The deteriorating law and order situation in the 90s coupled with political protests and violence has deepened the parental anxiety about their daughters' personal security and sexual harassment on the way to and from school. ("Right" 65)

Agreeing with Jahan, Babul underscores the fear of young village schoolgirls getting kidnapped or molested on the way to and from school as a major cause of neglecting the girl child's education. This kind of insecurity, Babul argues, mars their marriage prospects, and creates unwillingness amongst marginal parents to send daughters to the school. Consequently, rural parents in Bangladesh prefer to keep their girl children at home, rather than providing them with a school education. Hossain's Monjija and Shanti in "A Modern Day Granny" and Meghla in "Way Back Home" are Bangladeshi village school girls who are raped and threatened with abduction and mutilation by acid. In fear of molestation by local terrorists in an environment without civil law and order, their parents prefer to see their daughters married and safe, rather than educated. These parents emphasize the importance of guarding the chastity of their daughters, considered more valuable in the marriage market than education and a career. Commenting on the dilemma faced by Bangladeshi families in this regard, Saira Rahman Khan observes in The Socio-Legal Status of Bengali Women in Bangladesh: "The fear society has regarding the sexuality of women is one

of the main reasons why girls are taken out of school, the reason for child marriages and the imposition of *purdah* in its various forms” (150). Khan points at the preference of parents for an all girls' school over a co-education school because it has provision for gender segregation, and girls do not have to bother for “*purdah*” or veiling. If there are no schools just for girls in the area, then parents feel compelled to emphasize the '*purdah*' obligation for girls.

In Chughtai's work as well, one can find instances of Indian parents who zealously guard their daughters' 'purity' rather than promote their education. In “The Rock,” the narrator provides the reason for Bhabi's early marriage, explaining, “The previous year her sister had eloped with a Christian, so her parents, worried that she might do something similar, took her out of school and quickly married her off” (73). The fear that they will lose control over yet another daughter's sexuality compels Bhabi's parents to arrange with haste the marriage of their fifteen year-old daughter. Sexual transgression by one girl in the family or even in the neighborhood is often alarming, and enough for many parents in the Sub-Continent to panic to the extent of curtailing the regular activities of the rest of the girl children.

Chughtai concedes that even middle class parents do not consider education for young girls to be of prime importance because it can hamper their marriage prospects. It is commonly believed that intelligent girls do not necessarily make docile and domesticated housewives, and hence are unhappy in marriage. In her autobiographical piece, “Caravan Dust,” Chughtai writes about the double standard her own family exercised in the context of a girl-child's education in these words:

Our family was progressive but this attitude was acceptable only for boys. I was after all just a girl. . . . Too much education was dangerous. In our home, there was no restriction on speech and deed but this standard was only applicable to men. When I exercised the same liberty, I would be scolded. (28)

While Chughtai was in the ninth grade proposals for her marriage began to arrive. Despite the fact that she did not want to marry, and insisted on continuing her schooling, her mother finalized her wedding with a Deputy Collector. Chughtai devised an ingenious plan to get herself out of her impending marriage. She begged one of her cousin brothers to declare his intentions of marrying her. This cancelled her engagement with the Deputy Collector, and Chughtai managed to go to IT College in Lucknow, but the efforts of grooming her as an 'ideal' wife continued. Chughtai was chided, particularly by her mother, if she showed disinterest in embroidery and cooking, and her academic achievements were not appreciated. Though one of Chughtai's elder brothers, and her grandfather encouraged her to learn Persian, Urdu, and some English at home, throughout her life Chughtai lamented the fact that her parents created no congenial atmosphere for honing her reading or writing skills. Chughtai's short story, "Sacred Duty" can also be seen as her acrid comment on the careless attitude most Indian parents hold towards their daughters' education. In this story the narrator exposes the shallow worldview of such parents thus:

Their daughter was like a flower. She had wanted to continue her education, but an opportunity like this doesn't come one's way everyday, so the girl was silenced with a few words of censure. What was to be gained by going on to get a M.SC or becoming a doctor?  
(Quilt 21)

Samina's parents believe that marrying women with a high level of education is a difficult challenge, as men often prefer to marry women with no or little formal education. Highly educated women not only have a mind of their own, they are also usually matured in age by the time they are ready to marry. Their knowledge and experience poses a double threat for prospective grooms. Hence Samina's parents do not wish to miss the opportunity of easily marrying off their daughter while she is still young and not so highly educated.



In many of her short stories Chughtai draws the picture of the crumbling state of Muslim girls' education in the 30's and 40's in India, and the general vogue of early marriage. In "The Eternal Vine," for instance, the sisters vie each other, trying to get their middle aged widowed brother a second wife no older than 12 to 16. The same sisters consider education for girls to be an unnecessary exposure, capable of inviting shame on the family. Aunt Imtiaz is another character in this story who is quick to attack "Shehzadi Begum's grand daughter, who had brought shame upon the family; every day she got into a sedan-chair and traveled to Dhankot to attend school there," instead of settling down in marriage (Quilt 41). 'Decent girls' were not expected to aspire towards a career; they were supposed to prefer the home life destined for them. The narrator in this story further tries to explain the general disdain towards girls' education through this comment: "In those days, going to school was considered as unseemly as singing or dancing in films today" (41). Chughtai presents girls' education as a hindrance to their marriage in her fiction as well. In The Crooked Line, the Manager Sahib asks, "I say, does one find educated girls among Muslim families?" which further speaks of how education was considered to be a bane for a Muslim girls' marital life by their own parents and guardians (179).

Durrani's fiction similarly depicts Pakistani parents who do not have much faith in the educational system as helping their daughters in any way. For these parents as well, marriage is the cure-all for their adolescent daughters. Hence when the school-going Heer in Blasphemy shows her preference for further education rather than marriage, her mother retorts furiously and declares her own decision regarding a proposal for her daughter:

How can you be so selfish, child? You must carry your share of responsibility towards your sisters and brother. You are fifteen years

old, you can't sit at home forever. As young girls must not remain unattached, I am going to say yes. Besides, I don't have the money to educate you. (25)

Thus she puts an end to all further arguments about her education, and seals her daughter's fate with the stamp of marriage. Heer's mother's disregard for education for her daughter, her concern for her chastity, and her efforts to protect her family honor by giving her away in an early marriage are commonly shared by many Pakistani parents. When a girl is born, these parents usually mourn her as a risk to honor, and when a son is born, they celebrate because a protector has arrived. In the same fiction Toti says, "Girls are a burden that must be shed as quickly as possible" (85). In other words, girls are to be married away because of the social emphasis on virginity or 'chastity' of girls in Pakistani culture. Heer comments on her mother's diligence in imparting the values of obedience and subservience upon Pakistani daughters, stating:

Ma lectured me at every opportunity. "Uphold your father's honour by showing good breeding. Always remain subservient to your husband's will. Never put yourself in a position where you need to give explanations or make complaints." (31)

Like many Pakistani mothers, Heer's mother believes that a daughter's virtue ensures a father's own religious and social security in this life and in the hereafter.

In India and Bangladesh as well, mothers and grandmothers devise rigorous practices of disciplining their girl children's bodies in different ways in the hope of marrying them off respectfully. For instance, they restrain their daughters' movement, space, speech, dress and more importantly, their sexuality because they believe, and from childhood they condition their daughters to believe that their only important role in life is to be an ideal wife who is chaste and virtuous. They teach their daughters to run the household with efficiency and particularly to know how to

cook. Overall, they try to inculcate a sense of pride in their daughters regarding their marital status under all circumstances.

In "Childhood," Chughtai highlights the lectures she receives from her mother and elder sisters early in life about gender roles and her future duties as an ideal wife. In the words of the writer: "As we came out of the khus room, Chunnu and Shamim would run to play games, but, being a girl, I would play with dolls. They say playing with dolls teaches one good conduct" (Lifting 52). Girls are discouraged from playing games which involve running and jumping outside the house for two reasons. First of all, playing with boys and acting like a tomboy can give them a bad reputation, but more dangerously, it can rupture their hymen before marriage, giving the false impression of not being virgins. Perhaps because of these fears Chughtai's mother does not permit her to ride horses like her brothers do. Moreover, playing with dolls is supposed to build socially accepted gender roles in a girl that will come in handy once she becomes a wife and mother. The doll's accessories, the cooking utensils for the doll's house, the baby doll's feeding bottles and diaper changes are supposed to provide an early lesson in housekeeping, cooking and nursing. Playing out a doll's wedding is also supposed to prepare young girls for the actual painful ritual in their lives of leaving their natal home for their marital home. Chughtai, however, hated her truncated childhood because of these commonly held beliefs among the women in her own family. Though very early in life she is made aware of the difference and concomitant inferiority of her body compared to that of a boy child's, she was not the type of girl to accept prescribed gender roles without question. She wants to be able to go hunting and play football outdoors like her brothers, but she is reprimanded each time she expresses such a desire. She writes, "Chunnu after all, was a boy. His faults were no faults. However, the girls must be

perfect; otherwise, they would ruin their husband's families" (54). The assumption is that Chunnu and boys like him will get married whether they have a good reputation or not because that is their sexual prerogative. Boys like Chunnu will also have money and education for marriage. Girls on the other hand, have to prove their competence and good breeding because they are considered to be 'fallable' by nature, and usually have neither the opportunity nor money for education.

Though Chughtai protests prescribed norms vehemently even as a child, fear of marriage grips her early in life since she is constantly reminded that she does not have any admirable feminine qualities, and that she would ruin the family into which she would be married. According to her family members, as "a foul mouthed, impertinent girl," she was bound to get divorced and "dumped back ignominiously into her parents' house" (*Ismat* 72). Chughtai tries to retaliate against all the worries over her marriage by refusing to marry. She thinks, "how could any idiot divorce me if I didn't get married in the first place?" (72). In her autobiographical writings, she narrates the challenges that she had to overcome as a girl child whose parents were bent on getting her married. In her fiction, *The Crooked Line*, Chughtai mirrors the pressures for and hatred of marriage that she had to endure as a girl child herself in a middle class Muslim family during the early twenties and thirties. Like Chughtai, her character Shamman is engaged to her cousin while still in her teens. Like Chughtai, when she is older, Shamman breaks her engagement and eventually marries a man of her own choice.

Chughtai's mother, however, cannot understand her daughter's tomboyish actions, and is very apprehensive about her marital future. She tries to teach her young daughter some of the complications behind gender politics in marriage pretty early in life. In her autobiography, *Caravan Dust*, Chughtai comments:

I soon learnt why my mother was scared. It was a man's world, she said, made and marred by man. Woman is just a part of his world, the means for the expression of his love or hate. He either worships her or rejects her according to his mood. Women have to resort to feminine wiles to achieve their goals: patience, cleverness, intelligence, and the ability to make man dependent on her. For this, she had to be coy while fixing buttons; to die making rotis; to do with her own hands those trivial, facile jobs that could easily be done by servants; and to take his excesses with bowed head so that he would be ultimately shamed into falling at her feet. (Ismat 25-6)

The first part of this quote depicts an unquestionable acceptance of the patriarchal order by Chughtai's mother. She comes across as a mere puppet in the hands of her husband, and displays no other desires for her daughters than turning them into similar brainless showpieces. Interestingly enough, what the above passage also depicts is, while Chughtai's mother appears to have totally internalized the patriarchal discourse in rigidly enforcing the trope of the 'ideal' wife upon her daughters, in reality she actually subverts the cycle of oppression. By encouraging her daughters to master the art of acting and masquerading in front of husbands as docile wives, she underscores the skills women have to muster in order to get their way. Chughtai's mother's tactics for winning over husbands' hearts also underpin the dupability of husbands whose egos need regular stroking in order to surrender. From personal experience she knows that sly maneuvering which includes compromising, lowering self-esteem, demonstrating interest in menial house-hold chores and becoming indispensable to husbands in bed is important for keeping a marriage intact.

In her fiction, The Crooked Line, through the characters of Bari Apa and her mother-in-law, Chughtai again depicts the concern Indian mothers and grandmothers show regarding young girls' sexuality, morality and marriage. The narrator of the novel comments on their anxiety over female body in these words: "Since Noori was growing up the mother-in-law constantly admonished her daughter-in-law to watch her step, and mother-in-law and daughter-in-law became intent on finding a match for

Noori” (132). As soon as Noori, Bari Apa's daughter, is engaged, her mother insists that her daughter practice frugality with regard to dress and food. The narrator gives an idea about the disciplining that Noorie undergoes for the sake of marriage in these words:

... daily expenses were slashed, and both mother and daughter began a life of frugality. Noori would wear old, shabby clothes with demure pride. Everything was being set aside for her dowry even though the boy was still studying for his matriculation and was to leave for England after his exams. Noori was to pass seven years of waiting in this fashion; but, intoxicated with the ardor of dreams about the wonderful life to come, she ignored everything; she wore these tatters lovingly in anticipation of the wedding dress that she would don one day. (132-33)

Noori is encouraged to put away her best clothes, and her mother saves every penny in order to have an impressive *jahez* once she is ready for marriage. The idea of saving up for *jahez* is similar to the Western concept of a hope-chest that many girls are introduced to by their mothers in order to be able to display an array of fineries to her in-laws. Often the dresses in the *jahez* are hand embroidered and decked with mirror work or beads by the girl herself as a proof of her fine art skills and patience.

By delineating the character of Noori, Chughtai draws the picture of the psychological and behavioral change that descends upon many adolescent girls as soon as they learn that they are about to be married:

When Noori arrived she exhibited a very bashful and submissive exterior . . . She was also conscious of herself as someone very mature. Abandoning her mischievous behavior, she had adopted a serious manner generally associated with married women. (132-33)

Noori's frolicsome pranks are admonished, and her playing hours are curtailed. She is disciplined to act in a more feminine fashion in order to coax an only son from a very wealthy family to marry her. Her status as a fatherless girl puts extra pressure on her to act like a grown up and be prepared for marital commitments. Chughtai feels sympathetic towards girls like Noori who are betrothed before attaining puberty

because their marriage generally proves to be physically, intellectually and emotionally devastating for them. Chughtai's objections to early marriage for girls are expressed through Shamman's reactions in the novel to Noori's marriage in these words:

She glanced at the unwed bride. Tomorrow she too will bow before her god. Noori will diminish and exist only as a man's woman. Rocked by feelings of pride and satisfaction, Shamman idled into sleep. (159)

Shamman is relieved by the fact that she does not already have to be like her cousin, about to lose her own identity in marriage. Shamman detests the way the Sub-Continental Muslim cultures generally encourage the wives to take the husbands last name, and to view them as the unquestionable God on earth. Her aversion of a wife's submissive role in marriage gets further expressed in her following reaction to Noori's decision of early marriage:

She felt Noori was like a cow. Having made a deal for her youth for a maher of ninety one thousand rupees, she was now leaving with a man. Not like some fool, but all properly with signatures on paper so that if she writhes painfully later the noose around her neck can be tightened. (162)

Shamman feels that Noori has been cheated in this bargain where her entire youth, and the rest of her life in fact, was sold for a cheap bride price offered by her in-laws. Like Chughtai, Shamman sees early marriage as a deep-rooted cancer in the Sub-continental cultures that is eating up the minds and bodies of girl children.

The suffering, self-denial and self-restraint demanded of young girls are acts of femininity that Chughtai regards as nothing more than an unwanted hypocritical hoax. In her article, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," Bartky similarly considers femininity to be an artifice, or an achievement. In this article she cites from an unpublished work of Judith Butler where the latter terms femininity as "a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which

surface as so many styles of the flesh” (64). In The Crooked Line, yet again Chughtai tries to undercut the social system that forces the enactment of femininity by portraying the character of Sanjhu. Sanjhu is a child-bride, compelled to play the role of an ‘ideal’ wife by displaying contentedness, sacrifice and innocence. Chughtai’s narrator laments Sanjhu's fate thus:

Sanjhu, the unfortunate girl, was one of those women who come into the world gracefully, and live respectably in their parents’ home until some man weds them and takes them away. Then, as long as their strength holds out they bear children, nurture and raise them, and ultimately, burdened with some chronic disease, suffer painfully until Allah puts them in their graves, and everyone can’t help but say, “How commendable! What a virtuous wife she was!” (40)

Girls like Sanjhu are applauded because they surrender their self-identity, and their right to disagree with family members in lieu of so-called marital peace. Their lives are a kind of non-existence that pleases others, but kills their own quintessential spirits.

Chughtai’s novella, The Heart Breaks Free, provides another instance of regulatory marital norms that affect young girls like aunt Qudsia. Since Qudsia’s husband has left her for another woman, and she is forced to live under parental jurisdiction, she has become a high risk factor for her family. She is chided for singing songs, reading novels and neglecting the afternoon prayers. Objections are raised even about the way she walks. “All good women were disturbed by the sight of girls walking about brazenly. Decent girls walked respectfully, taking small steps,” exclaims the narrator of the story, voicing the opinion of senior ladies around her (48). In the same novella one can find more examples of ‘proper’ gesture and posture prescribed by mothers for young girls through expressions such as: “Amma had always warned us that girls from good families don’t stand with their hands on their



hips, only nautchis do” (16). “Nautchis” are dancers who perform in plays staged for the entertainment of lower-class people.

The grandmothers in the Sub-Continent are also responsible for brain-washing their granddaughters regarding the necessity of marriage in their lives. Verghese comments on the role of Indian grandmothers in high-lighting marriage in the lives of girl children thus: “As she grows the little Indian girl finds out from the stories her grandmother tells her, that her wedding day will be the culmination of all her hopes” (40). Indian mothers similarly indulge in bedtime stories, lullabies and nursery rhymes that are like many Disney fairy tales such as Snow White, Cinderella, or more recently, The Little Mermaid, infested with the idea that in marriage alone can a maiden find the ultimate fulfillment of her being. Seemanthini Niranjana underscores the role played by Indian mothers in grooming daughters for marriage in these words: “the transition from girlhood to woman is supported by implicit instructions from the wider community as well as the mother” (62). Niranjana explicates the fate of Indian girl children whose movements are monitored, and of whom unquestionable allegiance to patriarchal norms is demanded. These girls are chided for leaving home needlessly, and their behavior is restricted as well. Especially after puberty, their ready laughter or smile, their indecorous gait or walk, and their friendly ways with men are frowned upon by the senior women as well as the men in their families.

In Bangladeshi societies likewise, mothers teach daughters to become obedient wives and submissive daughters-in-law before they reach puberty. Kotalova and Babul both emphasize the role of Bangladeshi mothers in the overt teaching of daughters to protect, conserve and maintain household goods. The mothers emphasize skills that will in future render them ‘good’ daughters-in-law. In the words of Babul:

Between the ages of 5 and 8, girls learn to prepare, process, cook, serve food, wash dishes, clothes and tend domestic fowl, goats etc. . . . all of the jobs are taught to the girl children of poor families as a part of training to get themselves ready for early marriage, as they can do the jobs like adult women properly after going to husband's house earlier. (3-4)

Under patriarchal sanctions, carried out by the mother, the girl child is predominantly stationed inside the kitchen and steeped in domestic chores. The girl child's initiation into the world of unpaid domestic labor is due to the praises and accolades her mother bestows as a successful breeder/trainer of an 'ideal' housewife. Living in a world that does not allow the mother many avenues for showing her own merits as a successful woman in public spheres, she uses her daughter's reputation as a perfect home-keeper to enhance her own self-esteem. Although she often hates her own confinement within the four walls of her house, particularly in the kitchen, she cannot dream of a different life or career for her daughter. She hopes that eventually the house and the kitchen will turn into sites of empowerment for her daughter as she becomes indispensable to her in-laws as a domestic help and cook. This kind of a convoluted thinking on the part of the Sub-Continental mothers, forces their young daughters into a life of domestic slavery in the name of good house-keeping and marriage.

In order to procure a 'respectable' family and a 'suitable' groom, a Sub-Continental Muslim girl's dress also comes under scrutiny upon reaching puberty. Great emphasis is placed upon covering up the 'objectionable' parts of a young girl's body, such as the head and the bosom. The head is targeted along with the chest because hair and breasts are both considered to be erotic zones, capable of sexually arousing the onlooker. Perhaps because the Quran specifically addresses the men folk to ensure that their women have their head and bosom covered, the men assume that the women's bodies are erotic sites, and need to be covered as much as possible. The reason given in the Quran (in verse 24:31, and also in 33: 59) for covering up the

women's body is partly for showing modesty, but more importantly, for differentiating the believers from the non-believers. Muslim men are also required to cover their body for the above reasons, however, most of them assume that a woman's body is the locus of beauty and tenderness, and hence needs more protection than a man's body. Muslim parents similarly believe that their daughters are like delicate flowers that need to be placed under shade. They convince their daughters to cover up their heads not only as a sign of modesty, and respect to the elders, but also for self-protection. Hence loose, coarse attire covering up legs and arms are expected to veil body contours, as opposed to tight fitting or transparent clothing that might extend sexual invitations. *Shalwars* (loose pants) and *kameezes* (tops/shirts) or *sarees*, instead of shorts and frocks are considered more suitable for ensuring decency, and hence preferred as general attires for girls. In Hossain's story, "The Story of Amina and Madina" the father approves of his daughters' dress and is pleased because "they have covered their heads with the ends of their respective sarees, put on blouses with sleeves going down to their wrists, and their eyes are looking downward" (Selected 75).

The mother of these sixteen years old girls keeps a strict watch over her daughters, and their father is eagerly waiting for two good grooms for their marriage. Along with their dress, their mannerisms, which include speech, gesture and posture, are also put under critical surveillance. In the hope of fashioning them as suitable candidates for the marriage market, they are encouraged to be gentle, subdued and bashful, and to follow the tenets of 'ideal' womanhood. The parents boast that no one has ever caught their daughters ogling men, as their eyes are always looking downward. As Sandra Lee Bartky posits, their "female gaze is trained to abandon its claim to the sovereign status of seer," and as 'nice' girls they learn "to avoid the bold

and unfettered staring of the 'loose' woman who looks at whatever and whenever she pleases" (67). Contrary to Bartky's western concept where direct eye contact is considered to be sign of confidence, in the Sub-Continental culture, straight eye contact for a long time during conversation, specially between people of opposite sexes, is not encouraged. According to the Quran, it is the gaze that has to be veiled first, and *haya* or modesty ought to be expressed through the eyes. Lest their daughters be considered discourteous and shameless, thereby decreasing good prospects for marriage, Sub-Continental parents encourage their daughters to lower their gaze occasionally or avoid peering directly into the eyes of men.

The girls internalize these gendered cultural codes as dominant virtues, and try to manifest them through their body language such as averted eyes, inclined heads, and subdued voices. Most of these girls want their parents' approval and fear communal ridicule. Like Foucault's inmates of the Panopticon, these girls turn into self-policing subjects, developing "a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (201).

Like Babul, Kotalova and Niranjana, Bartky emphasizes the extensive influence that "parents as well as teachers have in admonishing girls to be demure and lady-like, to 'smile pretty,' to sit with their legs together" (74). In Hossain's fiction, The Shark, the River and the Grenades, Buri's boldly unembarrassed manner of speech and comportment are interpreted as signs of impertinence, inviting an avalanche of reprimands from her mother. When her elder brother warns their mother about Buri's upcoming age and the possible threat to their family honor, she does not defend her daughter; rather, she chastises her child and gives a quick consent for an early marriage. Buri realizes that she has to escape before she gets entrapped in marriage; however, as soon as she reaches puberty, she is married to her much older

and once married cousin, Gafur. The story narrates Buri's deep anguish at being physically confined to the place of her birth because of marriage to a close relative.

The disciplining of girl children is not limited to restricting their movements, or hiding offensive body parts. Religion is introduced early in their lives for mainstreaming their moral and ethical sensibility. As Kotalova asserts, "a spiritual quality is added to increased physical restraint in the form of elementary religious instructions regarding compulsory prayers and fasting" (73). Hossain's sisters, Amina and Madina have incorporated *namaaz* (daily five times prayers compulsory for a Muslim) and recitation from the Quran as part of their sanctifying and disciplining routine. In Chughtai's fiction, The Crooked Line, Shamman and Noorie have to learn the daily Quran lesson and say *namaaz* from a very young age as part of their disciplining project. A *maulvi* or religious teacher is appointed for them, and they are regularly rebuked if they fail in their lessons. It is not that Muslims boys are exempted from religious indoctrination, but in their case, it is not the only education that is emphasized. They are encouraged to graduate from home-based religious training to join *madrasas* or primary schools. For the girls, however, religion is used more as a gender-based disciplining measure. They receive their religious education mostly at home. While they are still very young, they might be allowed to go to the *madrasa* with the boys, but their religious education is required primarily for enhancing their value in the marriage market.

The disciplining of a girl child's body that starts with her birth, and is reinforced during puberty does not stop with early marriage. On the first night of their marriage it is demanded that child brides produce literal proof of their virginity, and remain chaste throughout their lives. In Blasphemy, through the ritual of Heer's chastity test on the first morning of her married life, Durrani exposes a marital

practice in certain parts of Pakistan that puts a child bride through a humiliating and frightful bodily experience right after marriage. Heer narrates the way her sister-in-law performs this crude practice on her in these words:

His sister walked in, removed the white bed sheet splattered with proof of my virginity and walked out with it. Embarrassed, I sat down to face a glass of milk, a fried egg, chicken curry and a paratha, but could not eat. (40)

Heer's sister-in-law is allotted the responsibility of ensuring that blood stains are clearly detected in the sheets used by the newly weds as prove of the bride's 'purity'. She is also required to publicly display the sheet to the elderly female members of the family for their approval. Fortunately for Heer, she passes the test. Girls who fail such test are often sent back to their father's house and have to spend the rest of their lives as spinsters.

Niranjana's study on Indian marital culture similarly projects the instant supervision of the bodies of child brides by husbands and their families. She also points out that it is not just a premarital necessity that these girls practice restraint regarding their chastity and morality, these are vital requirements of their post-marital life as well. In her words:

If early marriages are seen as one way of placing controls on female sexuality, the effort does not end here. Even after marriage, a woman's behavior is believed to be in need of constant supervision, as suggested by the refusal to allow a wife to visit her natal home too often. But more commonly, restraints are imposed on a woman's movements and activities within the village by reiterating that her primary responsibility lies towards her husband and family. (65)

From Niranjana's observations it can be argued that since women are not allowed to develop a clear perception about their individuality, interests and freedom right from their childhood, as adults they do not deem it necessary to safeguard the above traits. Moreover, since their husbands continue the process of physical and moral restrictions on them that their parents had initiated, they often cannot and do

not vehemently oppose it. Caught in the vicious cycle of gender socialization these young brides fail to see the constructed nature of their body and sexuality.

In her fiction, Chughtai frames the realities of violence against child-brides who are turned into cowering non-entities because of bodily discipline and abstinences. In her short story, "The Rock," Bhabi was no more than fifteen years old when she was married, and "she still had some growing up to do" (Quilt 73). In her husband's presence, "she trembled like a cow about to be butchered" (73). Though raised in a non-conservative family, and schooled at a convent, after her marriage her husband and in-laws start keeping an eye on her. Her husband becomes very anxious to turn her into a typical housewife. When she gradually gives up using make-up and styling her hair, not only her in-laws, but also her parents are relieved. While her husband exercised regularly, she was encouraged to court an appearance that declared that she was a 'simple' housewife. "She was a housewife, a daughter-in-law, and she was everyone's darling; why should she dress up and deck herself out like a prostitute to please people?" wonders her sister-in-law (75). Bhabi's subordinate role in her marital home is easy and complete because of her tender age.

Chughtai emphasizes the far-reaching psychological and physical damages that a child bride has to endure because of sexual abuse in early marriage. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita quote Chughtai on this issue in these words:

[Her friends] were married off around the age of twelve and I saw their lives. They told me that terrible things happen on the wedding night and after. They warned me never to get married because it was a painful business. I was terrified. I knew nothing about these matters. Neither did my parents tell me, nor was there any literature available. Also the whole business of marriage seemed to be dreadful – sex, cooking, beatings from the mother-in-law and all the other in-laws. (127)

Since most of Chughtai's childhood friends were not given any prior knowledge of the sexual act either by their mothers or elder sisters or already married

friends, it often came to them as a shock and a painful experience. Their husbands also often did not bother to take the time to initiate them into the act. As a result they looked upon intercourse as an unavoidable physical duty rather than an enjoyable experience. The stories of her friends' forced sex with their husbands filled Chughtai's young mind with permanent horror and affected her own sexual relationship with her husband at a later time in life so much so that Chughtai mentions about often getting drunk before having sex with her husband.

Durrani's fiction also reflects upon the psychological and physical damage that a child-bride often has to undergo owing to her own unpreparedness and her husband's inconsiderate rush for sex in marriage. In her fiction Blasphemy, Heer voices her strong protest against the injustice of sexual servility and violence thrust upon a Pakistani girl child in the name of marriage. She ventures to record:

Stripped naked, I felt a mountain of flesh descend on me. . . . With only the sheer will to be, I remained alive, barely. He had commenced our wedding night with an animal haste for food and ended it satiated. The shrill ring of the early morning alarm shrieked and I jumped up like a frightened bird. Did I sleep that night or was it some kind of death? (39)

Because of the utter insensitivity and haste on her husband's part, Heer's marital dreams are smashed on her wedding night. As she stands shivering in the midst of a pool of bloody water in her bathroom, her body aches and her ego feels shattered. Sobbing helplessly, she craves to crawl back inside her mother's womb for warmth and security. Later when she finds it difficult to walk without experiencing excruciating pain as her thighs rubbed against each other, Heer wonders why her family had celebrated her wedding with such pomp and splendor, and beautified her for days together if they were to unleash upon her this kind of madness. Her marriage seems to be an evil contract that has assigned her to a cruel god on earth. In sheer perplexity she utters these words:



The preparation, the ritual, the ceremony and the slaughter. Its terms were specified by our faith, sealed with social and familial norms . . . . Was this repeated in every corner of the world over and over again?  
(39)

As Heer's husband turns her over onto her stomach, and she is forced to stuff the bed sheet into her mouth to control the pain ripping through her, one cannot help visualizing the long term impact of such violent sexual exploitation on a child-bride's body and mind. Pinned under her inconsiderate brute of a husband, Heer wonders why, if all women go through a similar kind of torture, they still want their daughters to get married. Heer's perplexity further illuminates the fact that in Sub-Continental societies, sex is generally not discussed with young girls even when they are being prepared for a wedding. It is left for the husbands to handle the issue. If the husband is gentle, patient and caring, the girl is lucky. If, on the other hand, he turns out to be a brute like Heer's husband, then the girl's initiation is accompanied with the kind of agonizing terror that Heer has to go through. She is left with permanent psychological and physical scars that make it very difficult for her to visualize sex as anything more than a marital duty that involves violence.

In fact, the physical torment Heer undergoes is tantamount to marital rape and bespeaks the horror that many child-brides have to endure; however, as I discuss in detail in chapter three, in patriarchal societies where a wife's body is still considered to be solely her husband's property, rape by a husband is not recognized. Again, since it is considered a wife's duty to fulfill the sexual demands of a husband, coercion and compulsion are sanctioned despite any unwillingness on the part of the wife to have sexual intercourse with her husband. According to Saira Rahman Khan, existing Muslim Personal laws on marital rape are very confusing, and these laws become more powerless when it comes to early marriage. Khan holds that if a girl is below eighteen and married, then marital rape cannot be proven because her marriage

itself is illegal. Babul, who also realizes this loophole in the Bangladeshi law, holds that greater specificity is needed in international legislation and declarations on the illegality of non-consensual sex within marriage. He suggests that the declaration to eliminate the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children should include forced/early marriage as a key emerging issue (8). As Heer's story makes clear, in many parts of the Sub-Continent people are not generally aware that the law can help girls who are in a sexually abusive relationship. Neither the girls nor their parents are aware of the sexual rights of women in marriage. Like Heer and her mother, they feel they have no choice but to tolerate the sexual oppression being perpetrated in the privacy of their bedroom.

Though parents hope that early marriage will render easy adjustments on the girl's side, marrying them away at an age when their decision-making power is limited, or when they cannot exert their own will, renders them easy victims of domestic violence or battery. Durrani's Heer exhibits a prime case of the physical abuse that child-brides often go through. Married at fifteen to a thirty-six year-old man, fear of her husband's assaults becomes so ingrained in her psyche that even his foot steps or the whiff of the *attar* (non-alcoholic perfume) he uses makes her tremble. When her husband beats her for the first time in full view of everyone, including the maids, she feels extremely humiliated. Her dreams of becoming the mistress of her own home gradually shatter with each whimsically ruthless flagellation, giving rise to the realization that, "Just as a fraction of a moment separates the past from the future, childhood ends as you cross over your father's threshold" (34). In Sub-Continental Muslim societies like Heer's, child brides are often punished like children. Even when they are older and have grown kids of their own, their husbands do not treat them like adults. They are chastised by their

husbands for small things like food not being served on time, or clothes not being washed properly. Because young wives are mostly economically and emotionally dependent on their husbands, and encouraged to remain so, they never develop a sense of independent subjectivity. The husbands on the other hand, never give up the role of authoritarian guardians, claiming it as their religious right. It is also commonly believed by the people that the part of the wife's body that the husband hits, goes to heaven. Moreover, wife battery is so common, particularly in the villages, that no one even considers it to be unethical or immoral if the wife is a child bride. It is assumed by most people that what a husband does is for his wife's own good.

Enslavement through early marriage can further turn a child bride into an easily available unpaid domestic laborer. Taught by her mother to be obedient to her husband at all cost, Heer does not dare protest her domestic subservience. When her husband commands: "Knead the dough and prepare the meal for lunch and dinner. Boil the milk and prepare tomorrow's breakfast, without any assistance" (47), she obeys without any verbal objections. Inside her mind however, seeds of hatred for her life of complete and relentless servitude are sown. This hatred becomes apparent when she moans, "The kitchen was hot, the loneliness complete. There seemed nothing left for me to expect from life, and yet it had just begun" (48). The anxiety of preparing meals of large proportions at bionic speed, waiting on the elders of the family and cleaning up the dishes pervades, making Heer feel that she is forced to part with her childhood and thrust into the role of a mature adult overnight. Heer's fate as a child laborer is shared by millions of Sub-Continental child brides. These young brides' contributions to their marital household are not acknowledged because they do

not generate cash income, and also because they are often too young to bargain for their labor's worth in any form.

The marriage of girl children at an age when they cannot be expected to understand the full implications of accepting life-partners can have many adverse and tragic complications in their lives. For instance, a young girl who is still interested in playing with dolls and children her age, may not care to engage in a mature conversation with her husband, who is often much older than herself. She may also not be physically and mentally prepared to sexually respond in a manner expected by her husband. Motherhood may further not hold much significance for her. These incompatibilities in marriage may become causes of breach in marriage. As Chatterji asserts, a child wife may face, "the trauma of not being accepted by the husband when it is time to accept them" (49). In other words, by the time a child-bride is old enough to love and appreciate her husband, he might get tired of waiting for this change in her and find reciprocal love and physical contentment in another, more matured woman. In Chughtai's "The Eternal Vine," the beautiful sixteen year-old child bride Rukhsana has a similar problem. Her forty year-old husband, Shujat never finds her to be compatible. No matter how hard she tries to catch up with her husband's age and outlook, the generational gap exists between the two. In fact, as her young body keeps blooming despite pregnancies and endless domestic chores, her aging husband gets extremely envious of her youthful charms and allegedly suspects her of having affairs with other men. "The Rock," by Chughtai, shows another considerably older groom who does not find his young wife of much interest for long. Like Rukhsana, Bhabi in this story is a child-bride also who tries to suppress her free spirited self and turn into the reserved and domesticated wife that her husband wants her to become. Ironically, her husband ends up having an extra marital affair with a 'smarter' and yet

younger woman, whom he marries only to divorce later as well. By depicting the repressive mechanism of child-marriage as it devalues the bodies of child-brides like Rukhsana and Bhabi, Chughtai incorporates these suffering bodies into contemporary feminist theory on body and sexuality.

Hossain provides another theoretical angle to the incompatibility problem between young wives and their much older husbands in The Shark, the River and the Grenade. In this fiction, she depicts how a child bride like Buri soon finds her much older husband, Gafur's physical warmth extremely boring. The narrator comments on her melancholic condition in these words:

Gafur asks little of her. He rarely disturbs her. Nevertheless, she cannot endure Gafur's presence. And the silence of her mind becomes impatient. She feels like running away, alone. She throws herself out in to the chilly night of Kartik. (15)

Even after marriage Buri remains restless for she has a boundless thirst for the unknown. Neighbors raise a mountain of gossip about her uninhibited ways and manners, but that does not deter her from desiring more of nature's bounties, and feeling sad if denied. Buri remains unfulfilled in married life because, despite being a kind-hearted husband, Gafur cannot match her exuberance, and her mysteriously youthful mind. Though the Sharia imposes upon a husband the duty to ensure his wife's physical satisfaction, older husbands like Gafur, do not and often cannot fulfill this requirement. As a result, young brides like Buri become vulnerable to the materiality of their own bodies which are grounded in emotion, warmth and desire. By focusing on the young brides' sufferings that originate from physical incompatibility in marriage, Hossain depicts a kind of epistemic violence that the discourse of early marriage perpetrates upon their bodies.

Dowry-related torture can further compound the physical ordeals in a child-bride's life. According to Babul's report, more than 70% of domestic violence occurs

for dowry related reasons, and that too mostly upon 13-18 year-old wives (5). In case of the inability to meet dowry demands, child brides can be more easily subjected to ill treatment and harassment by the husbands or by their family members than their older counterparts. As Heer's mother observes, the size and quality of her dowry often determines the status of a bride in her new home: "Heer's worth will be based on her dowry. A girl is respected for what she brings from her father's home" (27). Heer's mother, however, cannot match the standards of her son-in-law's family, and ends up receiving a bride price for her young and exquisitely beautiful daughter. She is very grateful to her son-in-law for the occasional gifts he lavishes on her and her family; however, in exchange for all these favors, Heer's body pays the dividend. Though Pir Sain never pressures her to bring money from her mother, he uses and abuses her body as his bought property. Heer is practically imprisoned within the four walls of her marital home. She is not allowed to visit her natal home, and her mother or sisters are also not encouraged to visit her. In the confines of her home, she is beaten and raped by her husband, who prostitutes her for the enjoyment of other men. The Pir's serial exploitation of Heer's body and labor that almost kills her, is not faced by familial or communal criticism because not only the men but also the women of his society are indoctrinated into believing that a bride who does not bring 'sufficient' dowry can not expect smooth sailing in marriage.

Early marriage can lead to further body related oppression such as, teen pregnancy. The burden of maternity at a very young age can jeopardize a girl child's body and mind. Hossain's "Akali's Life at the Station," Chughtai's "Tiny's Granny," "The Rock," and "Touch-Me-Not," and Durrani's Blasphemy all reinforce the fact that adolescent mothers carry a higher risk of mortality during childbirth than adult mothers do. In "Touch-Me-Not," Chughtai depicts Bhabijan, a child-bride who

suffers several miscarriages and still-births, and whose life is in jeopardy because of her complicated pregnancies. Though this bride dodges death each time, an added misery befalls her: owing to the “nausea that made her throw up all the time” and “a sick pallor that gave her the look of a sweet potato turned bulbous,” her husband loses interest in her and she lives under the constant threat of a second marriage (Lifting 96). She painfully realizes that:

If she failed in this one conjugal duty, she would have to forgo all bridal comforts. She had reigned so long on the strength of her beauty and charm. Now she was perched on a boat her husband was prepared to topple. Where could the poor thing go? (97)

With little education, and no one else to provide for her, Bhabijan desperately looks forward to birthing a child that would make her life secure. She feels the pressure to conceive despite the fact that her juvenile body cannot handle pregnancy.

Because they are pregnant at an age when their own bodies are still not mature enough to give birth, child-brides not only suffer from different kinds of physical deficiencies that obstruct their natural growth, they also face untimely death. About premature pregnancies which cause higher rates of maternal and infant mortality

Babul concedes:

More adolescent mothers die during pregnancy and childbirth than mothers who are older. Also there is higher death rate among babies of adolescent mothers. The main risks to adolescent mothers are toxemia, abortion, hemorrhage and obstructed labor. (5)

According to Babul’s statistics, Bangladeshi girls between 15 to 19 years of age give birth to 15 million babies a year, but the majority of these young mothers have never been to an antenatal clinic, or received help from a professional midwife because these do not exist in their areas. Lack of such facilities invite different kinds of hazards upon their bodies, and ultimately cause death.

Like Babul, Verghese is also concerned about the child- mother's health.

Commenting on the risk to the child bride's own life owing to several still births and complicated pregnancies, Verghese argues, "By the time she reaches her peak productive period, the girl wife's death rate shoots up. There is a definite connection between early marriage and death due to childbirth in the peak productive period"

(45). Verghese is also of the opinion that if a child-bride somehow lives up to the age of 35, she is likely to have produced at least five children. These deliveries affect her health, and the pressure of raising kids also hinders her own mental development.

Verghese's fear regarding the toll a child-bride's body has to take owing to too many pregnancies is shared by Chughtai in The Crooked Line. In this fiction, the narrator exclaims, "The word 'wife' made Shamman shudder. It seemed to her that there were dozens of babies and thousands of worries sucking on Noori's young body like leeches" (153). Shamman's fear of a battalion of children overwhelming a mother's world is born out of her personal experience of being the tenth child of her mother. With so many brothers and sisters, Chughtai hardly received the attention due to her as a child. Her mother, who was sick and tired most of the time, hired nannies, and her elder sister was responsible for taking care of her and her other siblings. Chughtai's father was one of those Muslim men who believe in the widely prevalent view that contraception is forbidden in the Quran. This kind of misinformation amongst the Sub-Continental Muslims leaves the wives with no autonomy over their bodies with regard to number of pregnancy, and interval between child-births. Especially a young bride is easy to convince that sex for women is for reproduction rather than for enjoyment. A young bride also easily accepts her socially fabricated gendered role of motherhood despite the fact that her multiple pregnancies leave her malnourished and fatally ill.



In her short story, "The Rock," Chughtai presents Bhabi, another child-bride who is married at fifteen, and by twenty-three has produced four children. With each child she gains ten or fifteen pounds, her hair thins because of the frequent pregnancies, and "her body slackens like dough left out overnight" (74). As a result of her weight gain and saggy body, her husband, who is nine years older yet looks much younger, divorces her. She is completely devastated by the turn of her fate, but having lost her beauty she is also left with hardly any self esteem. When her husband announces his decision for a second marriage, she begs at his feet for the opportunity to stick around his household as a mere servant to him and their children. If Bhabi's body was not overburdened with multiple pregnancies beginning at a time when she was a child herself, she would not have lost her youth and beauty prematurely. Unfortunately, there are many women like Bhabi who are burdened with teen pregnancies that take a toll on their own physical growth, and threaten their marriage as well.

In Blasphemy, Durrani's protagonist Heer also exemplifies adverse effect of multiple teen pregnancies on a child bride's body. Married at fifteen, she turns into a "tormented maid at eighteen" (78). By the time she reaches thirty, she has mothered five children. While her unmarried sisters bloom with the expectancy of life, she has "no youth, no love, no hope" (78). Heer's husband overlooks the ordeals her body goes through because of his irresponsible sexual practices. Moreover, he forces her to abort a child because she conceives it right after the month of Ramadan, during which he had to practice sexual abstinence. Heer's husband's actions bespeak of the limited options that child-brides have in marriage with regard to their sexual freedom. It also underscores the distinct advantages the husbands enjoy in every kind of decision making, including ones directly affecting their wives' bodies.

Sub-Continental Muslim child brides do not just have to carry the load of multiple pregnancies or forced abortion alone; they have the added burden of producing only sons. Heer experiences the brunt of this practice the moment her mother-in-law greets her as a newly wed bride with these words: “May Allah bless your first steps into our home. May He give you seven sons” (36). Heer further narrates her reception in these words: “She beckoned with her hand, and, turn by turn, women came to gaze at my face, circle my head with crisp notes, and pray for me to have seven sons” (41). Heer’s description of her reception provides a glimpse not only into her mother-in-law’s mentality, but also into the mentality of the community women in general who are socialized into valuing sons over daughters. The communal obsession with sons and the consequent fear of the female child is expressed lucidly once again in the following words:

When I became pregnant. . . Around me, there was only one prayer from every mouth, when so many were needed. “Allah grant a son to the master and six more after this one,” they said every time I passed by. (52)

The Sindhi community that Heer belongs to is no different from the other Sub-Continental communities that prefer sons over daughters. Sons are regarded as the carriers of the family name and tradition. Sons are also preferred because they are supposed to take over the responsibilities of their parents as they grow older. Because of the securities that parents enjoy on account of a son, when Heer delivers a boy child, immediate jubilation fills the air. On the fortieth day of her son’s life she wears gold ‘kimkhab’ clothes and glittering gems. Women dance joyously around her. Wives of wealthy landlords present her with gifts of gold. Recounting her mother’s reaction at her ‘great accomplishment,’ she holds: “Ma beamed with pride at her first grandson. Thereafter, every moment she saw me, she kissed me and prayed passionately, ‘May God bestow more honor and respect upon you than he already

has” (91). Heer’s mother is relieved to hear that her first grand child is a boy because in her eyes that solidifies her daughter’s position in her husband’s household. It is still a common practice amongst Muslim men to remarry up to four times if their wives cannot produce sons. Particularly if they are wealthy and powerful like Heer’s husband, then it is assumed that they are entitled to aspire for a son as the ‘appropriate’ heir of their reign and estate.

Heer’s husband, however, is not satisfied with just one son. When he receives tidings that his next child is to be a female, his face turns dark, and his wrath becomes obvious. Heer narrates the arid atmosphere that surrounds the family, and the anguish her own body suffers at the arrival of her first girl child:

When my first daughter was born, petrified of Pir Sain’s displeasure at the birth of a girl, I stuffed my mouth with a cloth to control a cry of anxiety. He did not even glance at the bundle. She would always be a bundle to him. Ordered into purdah at birth, my daughter would remain in that prison till her death. (78)

What Heer understands as her anathema of producing a girl-child, is shared by many Sub-Continental wives, but if the wives are not adults themselves, then they are totally unable to protest against social practices that demean their daughters. Hossain’s stories also berate Bangladeshi culture where the pressure of son preference is trust upon newly wed young brides. The first thing that the sixty two years old Kasem Khan says in “The World of Love and Labour” to Fulbanu, his eighteen year-old wife is: “I want a son. The family line must continue” (143). Fulbanu is one of those few extraordinarily courageous child-brides who dare confront their husbands. Because of her insistence Kasem Khan is forced to go through a medical examination that proves his impotency, but by that time he has already acquired four wives in the hope of getting one son. Moreover, despite the medical report, Kasem Khan stands in total denial of the fact that a man’s body can have any kind of shortcoming. He

insists that the problem must lie with Fulbanu's body for she is a woman, and everyone knows that a woman's body is inferior and cursed. He threatens to teach Fulbanu a lesson once they get back home for unnecessarily humiliating him in public. Kasem Khan's reactions unravel the deeply rooted traditional/religious belief that a woman's body invites subjugation because of the inherent weakness of its sex.

The Sub-Continental Muslim marital culture proves frustrating for a child bride not only because it inculcates the practice of son preference, but also because it devalues many of her rights in other areas of day to day conjugal life as well. In the villages or in the traditional families more commonly, there are many gendered practices prevalent around the food culture for instance, that compel a child bride, or any bride for that matter, to eat after the male members and senior women of the family have been served. As shown earlier, this kind of gender discrimination begins against a girl child while she is still in her father's house; unfortunately, it continues even after she moves to her husband's house. As Verghese acerbically remarks, "Throughout her life it will be her unique privilege to watch the men and the boys eat before her. . . ." (39). Babul regrets the plight of Bangladeshi girls who go through a similar cycle of deprivations and despair when it comes to food, first in their parents' houses, and then in their husbands' households as well. In the words of the critic:

. . . forced to marry earlier, become mother earlier, divorcees earlier, women earlier, older earlier and last of all died earlier! In a word, they are life-term imprisoned in the jail of so many "earliers"! But yet in the jail of EARLIER they have to eat LATER and less, after the husband or in-laws, which is kept for the girls/ women by the grace of men! (3)

In many Sub-Continental Muslim families the child bride is encouraged not only to eat later, but also to walk and sit behind her husband. In Bangladeshi families, a newly-wed bride is instructed to express reverence for her husband by bowing down and touching his feet. These localized displays of power mold the psyches of child

brides early in marriage, and ensure their subordination at the level of the micro politics of everyday life.

Even if a child bride's body survives the trauma of multiple childbirths and a deferentially marginalized existence, the possibility of early widowhood can devastate it completely. In his article, "The Fictional World of Ismat Chughtai," Asaduddin writes:

The difference between the ages of the husband and the wife would be staggering, but none would think it incongruous. In fact, in almost all Indian literatures, the image of a decrepit, dying old man survived and mourned by a youthful, adolescent wife is so common that it hardly needs any emphasis. (125)

The beautiful Aunt Rukhsana in Chughtai's "The Rock" is a child bride who becomes a young widow at twenty-eight. When people come to mourn over her husband's death, they express remorse for the great beauty that will be wasted, but no one foresees a new future for her through remarriage. The child widow in Chughtai's short story "Gainda" is still in a stage when she has not given up playing with dolls, but she is already aware that as a widow she is not allowed to embellish her body in any way. So she does not deck herself up in real life with colorful clothes or ornaments. When asked by her friend, who is also a little girl, about her decision to avoid all kinds of fineries, Gainda repeats what she has heard her elders tell her: "When a girl's husband is dead, who will she deck herself up for?" and adds, "A wife wears sindoor [red powder married Hindu women apply in the parting of their hair] or bangles for her husband only" (Lifting 3). While playing with fake makeup, however, her heart's desire for breaking all restrictions around widows surfaces. Gainda and her friend, the narrator of this story, hide from the rest of the world and embellish each other's hair partings with brick powder and apply *bindi*, the red spot married Hindu women wear. They pretend to be coy like newly married brides and giggle

away like innocent girls at the little secret they share. Once caught in the midst of their game, Gainda is chided by the narrator's sister-in-law for braiding her hair which is another privilege only married Hindu women are allowed. Her early widowhood turns Gainda into a flower without any scent. This is why the narrator hides her friend's real name and calls her Gainda or Merry Gold. In her fiction, The Crooked Line, Chughtai depicts the ordeals of young widows again who are not allowed to do any kind of fashion. Bari Apa in this story, who is modeled after Chughtai's own elder sister, becomes a widow while still in her teens. Befitting the dress code for widows in her community, she is not allowed to wear colorful dresses and ornaments appropriate to her age. Like Gainda, she is also not allowed to part her hair in the middle. Though often mistaken for a virgin, her world is constricted around her two little children, and only sorrow and tears are her companions. As a result, she turns very ill-tempered and disagreeable. She is eventually sent back to her parents' house where she is expected to guard her chastity, and avoid men. "Consideration of the family honour was bound to keep chains on the young widow's feet" informs the narrator (131). Though she tries hard to "annihilate her own femininity for the sake of her father's honour," she fails to stifle her own desires completely (32). Her shrewd mother-in-law cannot wait till her daughter-in-law's youth has waned away so that she is soon "out of danger" (131). When finally, "like a hissing, swaying snake, her youth scuttled away in the twinkling of an eye," her mother-in-law is relieved (131). The narrator comments on the power that the mother-in-law holds over her child-widow's body in these words: "By warning her of impending old age at every step as if it were the plague, she hoped to squeeze her of whatever life she had left in her. Like a living martyr, Bari Apa kept her head up and maintained silence" (131). The image of the 'ideal wife' is imprinted upon Bari Apa's psyche even though her

husband is dead. Indeed, widows in Islam never had to go through *sati*, or compulsory immolation at the dead husband's pyre that the Hindu widows had to suffer. Neither are their heads shaved, nor are their bodies deprived of protein and other nutrition, like the Hindu widows' bodies. Widow re-marriage is not banned in Islam, yet it is often discouraged, and a child-widow because of her tender age is expected to follow tougher codes of restrictions than those thrust upon older widows in general.

From the fiction of Hossain, Durrani and Chughtai it becomes apparent that early marriage violates the human rights of girls in many Sub-Continental Muslim societies. These writers aim to make young girls and their guardians aware of the different rights pertaining to their health, education, personal freedom and growth that a young girl should be allowed to enjoy. The writers also want to help young girls regain control over their sexuality for they believe that it is grossly curtailed in marriage, depriving them of a life of dignity and self-respect. As part of the project to save the girl child's body from being robbed of the chance to enjoy 'normal' growth and experience, in her short story "Gainda," Chughtai delineates the complexity of Gainda's child-marriage, child-widowhood, pubescent sex and resultant motherhood with great understanding. Although Gainda is chided by the ladies of the house once she produces a baby with the master's son, despite being a child-widow, the narrator in this story displays sympathy towards the poor servant girl. The narrator understands Gainda's situation better than the other ladies not only because she and Gainda are childhood friends who grew up playing together, but also because the narrator is aware of the part that Bhaia, or the son of the house has played in enticing Gainda. So while the rest of the world holds Gainda responsible for her sexual 'transgression,' through the narrator's voice Chughtai tries to provide reasons

for the clandestine affair, and justifies it in ways beyond the apprehension of common people who insist on abiding by traditions. In the narrator's eyes and in Chughtai's eyes as well, Gainda is entitled to survive with grace because she unveils the truth that sexual urge is the most primal and pressing urge in humans, specially when they are at the prime of their youth, and despite the status of a widow. In fact, the narrator, and her creator both appreciate the young mother's will in Gainda to live even when the man who impregnated her deserts her, and most of the people around her refuse to see the injustice done unto her.

Chughtai and Durrani are both aware of still other types of oppressions on girl children in the name of marriage. In their fiction they highlight the sad fate of those Sub-Continental Muslim girl children who are victims of the traditional social rituals such as, "mock marriage" and the *Uthmi* practice still prevalent in certain pockets of India and Pakistan. According to these historically and culturally specific practices, the masters or local guardians or religious leaders, instead of their parents and husbands, yield power over the bodies of girl children. In her short story, "Lingering Fragrance," Chughtai portrays the tradition of "mock marriage" amongst the Zamindar (land-lord) families of India to depict how it constructs authority over the bodies of adolescent village girls hired for domestic labor. These girls are used as sex slaves by powerful elderly women, rather than men in authoritarian positions. Wives of Zamindars or Begums (upper-class wives) assign newly recruited servant girls to the bed-chambers of their young sons in the hope of initiating them in the art and intricacies of sex. The elderly women also see this as a way of preventing young men of elite families from going to prostitutes and contracting venereal diseases. The disciplinary power invested in the Zamindars' wives invades the bodies of girl children, and seeks to regulate their force, operation, movement and even speech. In



the “Lingering Fragrance,” the lovely Sanobar is ‘gifted’ to the older Sahibzada at barely fourteen years of age. Haleema is another teenage maid sent to Chamman Mian’s room at night by none other than his mother in order to “seduce” him. Young maids like Gultaar, Sanobar, Sarvari, Haleema and Mahrukh in “Lingering Fragrance,” and Asha, Chamki and Lata in The Wild One, are girls from poor families, often deserted by their parents while still babies. At times they are also bought through negotiation and treated as personal property by their owners. They have no one to tend to their marital or maternal interest, let alone challenge the status quo on their behalf. While they are allowed to serve their young masters in every sense of the term, love, marriage or children with any one of them is considered taboo. If the girls get pregnant, they are dispatched to the village right away in order to give up their baby. Their lactating bodies are brought back to the palace to help the daughters-in-law with suckling their young ones. The narrator of “Lingering Fragrance” comments on the wretched condition of these young mothers who receive no recognition for social services such as wet nursing in these words:

How pathetically the wretches would wail and cry! Like animals they groan for their young. Breast filled up with milk, causing intense pain. Often they would burn with high fevers. Sometimes one of the Begum's babies was brought in for suckling. How they would enjoy the pleasure of taking the baby to the breast. But such delights were ephemeral. Ladies of noble birth cannot be expected to breed like animals, just to give their maids the pleasure of suckling! (919)

Bodies of servant girls like Sanobar and Haleema silently bear the consequences and injustice of such traditions. Sanobar becomes pregnant at fifteen and, being very frail, gives birth to a sickly child. When she becomes pregnant by Hashmat Mian, he soon loses interest in her. It is understood then that she will have to leave for the village to deliver the baby, but she refuses to go. She has a brawl with Hashmat Mian, who kicks her fully pregnant belly. She suffers from pain for three days and no one rushes

for a doctor. She dies on the third day. Haleema is also considered a 'health hazard' the moment it is discovered that she is pregnant. Plans for getting her 'repaired' are underway. She is to deliver her baby in the village and then return to serve as the wet nurse for Najma Bitiya's newborn baby. Since Najma Bitiya, the Begum's daughter has plans to tour Europe after her delivery, it is decided that Haleema will save her from her breast feeding duty by offering her own breast milk. In his article, "Ismat Chughtai: Makers of Indian Literature," Asaduddin comments on the irony of the fate these young mothers had to endure:

While their children languished, they had to return alone, their breasts tingling with milk, to spend the rest of their lives as maids. If they were lucky, they would breast feed the Nawab's legitimate offspring because the begum could not afford to allow their own breasts to sag by doing so. (89)

During her delivery an ambulance arrives to the rescue, although neither she nor her child gets any recognition in the palace. Haleema comments on the fate of children like hers in the Zamindar culture:

If he was shameless and hard like his mother, he might survive among the other maid-children, never to be recognized by his father. Grow up to become a servant . . . iron clothes, polish shoes. If it was a girl, she would be given the ultimate honour of rubbing someone's feet . . . to be sent, later on, to the village, to pay off her debt to life. (211)

Haleema's ironic comment on her child's future clearly shows how she and her future progeny are stuck in a vicious cycle of exploitation devised by the powerful women of their own community. In "Sociological Dimensions of Ismat Chughtai's The Quilt and Other Stories," Subhas Chandra comments on this seamy side of *mahal* [mansion] culture involving exploitation by upper class women of bonded girl children.

Chandra observes:

One of the important traditions of the mahal was to present young, succulent maids to the nawabzada [son of a Nawab], before their formal marriage with girls of respectable families, to teach the young

men the ways of the flesh and give them experience for the impending job. (158)

Chandra holds that the Begums ensure equitable distribution of young girls among brothers and cousins in order to avoid rivalry and jealousy. The young man, upon whom the innocent girl is thrust, is neither allowed any choice in the matter of girl, nor permitted to get serious enough to contemplate marriage. He is only allowed to use the body of the girl allotted to him as springboard for accumulating sexual experience. Indeed, once in a while sensitive and rebellious men protest against this kind of liaison with maids as nothing short of fornication. They develop genuine love and sympathies for girls the system uses only as ploys, and are willing to lose everything for them, but these men are very few in number. More deplorably, their own people doubt their sanity and brand them as eccentrics. Chamman Mian in this story is one such young Nawab who does not believe in exploiting the maids' bodies and genuinely falls in love with Haleema, the maid assigned to him. He also dares to express his desire to marry Haleema. Once his strong determination to go against the status quo by marrying Haleema is made public, he is deprived of his inheritance, and forced to live a poor life with his wife. Haleema is one of the few mahal maids whose love blossoms into marriage, and who finds a genuine friend and husband in Chamman Mian. By depicting a monogamous husband and caring father in Chamman Mian, Chughtai presents the possibility of an alternative lifestyle for the otherwise marginalized maids. Chamman Mian loses everything in his fight against sexual exploitation of innocent women, but through his determination to rescue Haleema he becomes one of those rare yet much admired male characters in Urdu fiction who prove that some accepted cultural practices can be and ought to be challenged. In her novella, The Wild One, Chughtai draws yet another admirable male character in Puran, who is also a young son of a Nawab, and who falls in love

with his teenage house-maid, Asha. Like Chamman Mian, Puran displays unusual courage by rejecting socially constructed sexual norms, and accepting Asha as his true love. Although society cares only for the bodily services that Asha can provide, Puran demands respect for Asha as a woman in her own right. Unlike Chaman Mian, however, Puran is forced into marrying a young woman chosen by his parents. He is unable to love his wife, and eventually she leaves him for another man. Puran believes that Asha died in a plague, but he cannot forget her for a moment. Fate does bring these two lovers together again, but they are not as lucky as Chamman Mian and Haleema. While tuberculosis kills Puran at the prime of his youth, Asha sets herself on fire when Puran dies in her hand before they could finally be united in marriage. Despite the tragic ending, this novella, particularly the character of Puran can be read as a mouthpiece in the hands of Chughtai through whom she raises awareness about feminist men who are willing to dismantle accepted sexual/marital norms that oppress poor young women, and also upper class young men.

The sexual exploitation and deprivation of this socially marginalized group of young Indian women can be compared to the sufferings of the young Pakistani women who are sexually abused for the tradition of the *pir's uthmi* in Pakistan. This tradition is described in the following words in Durrani's fiction, Blasphemy:

the *pir's* she-camel would be left to wander around the village freely until it chose a house before which it sat down. This signaled that the unwed daughter of the house was to be dressed as a bride and offered to the *pir*. Deflowered, the girl would be sent back home to live untouched by another man for as long as she lived. What was '*halal*' [sanctioned] for the *pir* became '*haram*' [not sanctioned] for everyone else. (147)

Durrani criticizes the above tradition in which the *pirs* or religious heads of certain areas of Sindh enjoy the privilege of sleeping with virgins who are chosen randomly by their wandering camels settling down in front of their homes. These girls are given

nice clothes, jewelry and food while with their so-called husbands, but once these men's sexual hunger is satiated they send them back to their fathers' homes. Once used by the *pirs*, these girls are not allowed to marry anyone else in order to show respect to their religious leaders. Their desires for marital home and motherhood are curtailed in their youth by patriarchal social practices over which they have no control. Their parents and the rest of the community conspire in this practice of oppressing young girls. For the rest of their lives they remain imprisoned by the dominant discourse of authority practiced by the *pir* culture of Pakistan.

The inhumane practices of child marriage and its equivalent versions have been gnawing the conscience of writers like Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani. They feel compelled to devise ways for saving the child bride's vulnerable body from getting sucked into a vortex of misery, drudgery and debilitation. As part of their drive against child-marriage through their fiction they try to raise consciousness about the negative consequences of early marriage. Through their interviews, essays and autobiographies as well, these iconoclastic writers try to pass the message that if parents can be persuaded to keep their daughters in school, part of the problem of early marriage might be solved. In "Security of the Marginalized Women: The Bangladesh Context," Hossain reminds her audience that:

Free education has been provided for girls. But they haven't been given a way to remain in school, either by her family or by society. The family wants to ensure a girl's future through child marriage. The society creates physical and mental obstacles. So even if there is an opportunity to be educated, it is not possible to grasp it. So, lacking education, insecurity becomes the center of a girl's life. (28)

Like Hossain Chughtai also emphasized the need to educate girls in order to help them gain confidence and self-dependency in life. As her autobiography reflects, she was persistent about educating herself like her brothers did, rather than getting married at an early age. From her mother's life she had gathered the fact that

marriage often comes hand in hand with motherhood. So when her father suggested that she can study at her in-laws place, she was quick to reflect: “If the collector [the man she is supposed to marry] is anything like my father, what will I do? Produce a kid every year or give exams,” (*Ismat* 258). In her autobiography, she also narrates the incident where she threatened her parents to convert into Christianity and take the opportunity for free girls’ education if they imposed any barriers in her way to higher education. Like Hossain, Chughtai contends that parents have to unlearn certain patriarchal discourses regarding girl’s education that they have internalized, and allow their daughters to think beyond marriage. Both writers contend that keeping in mind their own girlhood as a time of many harsh realizations, denials and discriminations, the mothers in particular, should restrain the urge to pass on to their daughters the same age-old lessons in repressive gender roles, and make provisions for their daughter’s education. Hossain however, regrets the fact that Bangladeshi mothers often act as patriarchy’s main instrument in structuring the lives of their daughters according to culturally specific imperatives. In “Security of Marginalized Women,” she complains that a Bangladeshi “mother is not at rest until she can give her daughter in marriage. She tells her daughter, ‘unless you are married, I won’t be able to go to heaven’” (27). She is simultaneously aware that since these mothers are mostly uneducated and marginalized themselves, they can not openly challenge or reorient familial entitlements and expectations of girl children. Hossain derides Bangladeshi law for discriminating against a mother when it comes to the question of guardianship of her children. In the words of Hossain:

The law doesn’t give a woman guardianship of the children. The prevailing law regarding guardianship was promulgated in 1990. This law has given the rights of guardianship to the father. In the absence of the father, the paternal grandfather or paternal uncle takes this responsibility. . . . Under this law, the mother is not the child’s natural guardian. She merely gets the custody of the child. And if a woman

goes to court asking for custody of her child, questions are raised about her character. (21)

It is also a fact that according to Bangladeshi law, if a woman marries a foreigner, her child will not be a Bangladeshi national. Hossain's younger daughter is a victim of this law, as I am, for none of us have been able to confer our citizenship to our daughters who were born in Bangladesh but have non-Bangladeshis as their fathers. According to Hossain the State ought to understand the importance of a mother's role in her daughters' life with regards to her rights to survival, development, protection and participation in income-earning opportunities.

In order to rescue the girl child from the vindictive clutches of early marriage Hossain further suggests compulsory registration of all births and marriage. Like Durrani, she also demands that the attitudes of religious leaders, political activists and lawmakers with regard to early marriage and sexual exploitation of underage girls have to go through a drastic change. These writers believe that only with the joint efforts of family and state will the girl-child be freed of the curse of turning into a child bride.

Besides using literature as a means of protest against child-marriage, Hossain and Durrani adopt the role of feminist activists in order to work with local NGO's that are devoted to helping girl-child in different ways. Hossain and her husband have opened a charity organization called Fareea Lara Foundation, named after Hossain's eldest daughter from her first marriage who was a commercial pilot but died in a plane crash at the age of twenty eight. Among other things, this organization provides health-care facility for villagers and helps build awareness pertaining to a girl-child and her mother's health, education and basic human rights. Every Saturday doctors from Dhaka go there and offer free service and medicine and advice to the villagers. Durrani is associated with a NGO in Pakistan that works for social rehabilitation of

battered women and children. In her biography on Abdul Satter Edhi she highlights the contributions made by Edhi Foundation that is also dedicated to the service of homeless children and abused women in Pakistan. Hossain and Durrani believe that as writers they have a duty to mould opinion by bringing vital issues to the forefront. Hossain believes that women writers in particular, have the extra responsibility as the less privileged class of the society to write for uplifting women's causes. In her article, "The Writers on the Wall," Anjana Rajan quotes Hossain insisting: "We should make people aware that this is a patriarchal system, and that progress in society is not possible if fifty percent of the population is not given its rights". One of the major aims of Hossain, Durrani and Chughtai is to help the girl-child regain control over her body and sexuality by shunning the practice of child-marriage.



### CHAPTER III

#### DOWRY ABUSE AND HONOR CRIMES

All acts perpetrated in the private domain of the home to secure women's subordination; and which is rationalized and sanctioned by the prevailing gender ideology. It is thus seen as going beyond the legal definitions of physical assault, to include psychological and sexual violence. (1)

--Poonacha and Panday

Domestic violence is perhaps the least discussed of all crimes in the world.

There is a tendency to keep it hidden behind closed doors in almost every culture and country. On November 30, 1989, a United Nations report acknowledged for the first time the universal nature of domestic violence. Shoma A. Chatterji notes, "For the first time ever, violence against women within the home became an officially acknowledged part of the UN agenda" (26). From the comments that some of the members of the United Nations made as they marked the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in 2005, it can be concluded that this global problem is still a long way from being eliminated. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour urged nation states to challenge societal attitudes that support gender discrimination, and adopt specific legislation addressing domestic violence.

I define domestic violence as abuse that occurs between family members who live in a common home. Since this form of violence usually exists between relatives, there is the possibility of repeat victimization of women by husbands, fathers, sons and other male members. Spousal violence, however, comprises the majority of domestic violence incidents. Jane Connors, law lecturer at London's School of Oriental and African Studies who authored the 1989 UN report, similarly holds,

It is a popular misconception that the home is a place of safety. Violence against women in the street does occur, but the more likely place for it to happen is in the home. The person most likely to perpetuate the assaults is the husband. (Chatterji 26)

Connor's report which indicates that intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence in a woman's life and more prevalent than assault or rape by strangers or acquaintances, is aptly reflected in the cases of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In these countries where most wives are solely dependent on their husbands for their sustenance, men generally feel that they have the right to perpetuate violence against their wives. Bina Agarwal's contention about Indian societies that there is a "high incidence of domestic violence against women, varying by class, but cutting across class," holds equally valid in case of Pakistani and Bangladeshi societies as well (48). For instance, Hina Jilani and Eman Ahmed maintain that in Pakistan,

To say that domestic violence is restricted only to the low-income groups in society is a myth. An informal study conducted by the women's Ministry revealed that 80 percent of women are subjected to domestic violence. (180)

According to a 2006 survey conducted by The Center for Health and Population Research (ICDDR,B) and World Health Organization (WHO) on 3,130 urban and rural women of reproductive age (15 to 49 years) in Bangladesh, 60 percent of women have been physically and sexually abused by their spouse at least once. Two thirds of these women have never discussed their experience of violence and almost none accessed formal services for support (Ameen 3).

In this chapter, I explore the fiction of Chughtai, Durrani and Hossain in order to critically analyze two types of domestic violence, namely dowry abuse and honor killing, which are the most rampant forms of violence against women in Muslim communities of the Sub-Continent. Many theories associated with increased

hypergamous marriages, colonization, modernization, consumerism, unemployment, deteriorating status of women, structural asymmetry between families, tradition and family pride provide explanation for the prevalence of dowry abuse and honor killing. In this chapter I argue that these two forms of cultural violence are primarily rooted in the discourses of male privilege and gender bias.

As I have discussed in Chapter 1, the environment of male privilege is set early in a boy's life as he finds himself in the midst of a society that blatantly prefers sons over daughters. Better nutrition, healthcare, education, and job opportunities than those provided to his sister, accompanied by a complete lack of accountability for his male chauvinistic attitudes, eventually furbish a boy's sense of entitlement to male authority and male aggression as a husband and a father. Commenting on Indian men, Huma Ahmed-Ghosh holds that they are so pampered as boys by their parents that after marriage too they want to continue the process of feeling important and special. Ahmed-Ghosh further opines that because of the knowledge of their own exalted position in family and society, Indian men are perpetrators of domestic violence. On the contrary, servility is ingrained in daughters from childhood by parents. As adults their internalization is carried over, and women often start believing in their own subordinate and sacrificing roles as wives and mothers as the natural order of things. Some women consider catering to the physical, sexual and emotional needs of men and perpetuation of male progeny to be the sole reasons of their existence. Even worse, some believe that they deserve beating and disciplining just because they are the 'inferior sex'. Women's emotional and economic dependency, along with denial of their rights and resources serves as excuse for male abuse. In the male-dominated patriarchal Muslim societies of the Sub-Continent, misinterpreted religious doctrines and prejudiced socio-legal practices also directly or indirectly support gender

discrimination against women by propagating set gender roles and divisions of labor both outside and within the household. Women are often considered second class citizens, and daughters and wives are not treated any better because of male power dynamics which are often manifested in the desire to control and discipline the female sex through culturally recognized practices such as dowry abuse and honor crimes.

That marriage is an oppressive institution in general, is something that Chughtai had learned early in life from her female relatives and childhood friends who were married. While among of girl students of Hyderabad in India, Chughtai once stated, “As for the question of man-woman relationships based on friendships and compatibility, the climate of this country is just not conducive to it” (*Ismat* 108). In her autobiography, *Caravan Dust*, Chughtai further comments: “Though marriage is supposed to toll the death-knell of friendship, ours survived with tremendous stubbornness” (*Ismat* 31). These negative statements point to the unavoidable domestic skirmishes and turmoil in most Indian marriages. In another meeting with girl students from Bhopal, Chughtai suggests that as wives, “if you cannot lend a hand, at least you can lift your weight off their shoulders” (*Ismat* 109). Though Chughtai explicitly tries to goad Indian wives to be self-reliant, this comment can also be understood as her indirect advice for achieving a non-violent, dowry free relationship. In her fiction *Ismat* Chughtai portrays dowry abuse as one of the common forms of domestic violence in the lives of Indian wives.

In “Security of the Marginalized Women,” Selina Hossain also points at the evils of dowry that devour a wife’s mind and body. In her fiction too, Hossain depicts dowry violence as a rampant phenomenon in the lives of the Bangladeshi wives in order to raise awareness of such a heinous practice. In a personal interview, Hossain narrates her experience with dowry violence in her own family. As her mother did

not receive substantial financial backing from her natal family in the form of dowry, and her father was the sole earning member of their household, he was often abusive and disrespectful towards her mother. Childhood memories of her mother's vulnerability in the hands of her husband made such a lasting impression on the writer's mind that as a feminist activist today, Hossain has made it her passionate mission to inculcate the importance of independence amongst lower class women, especially maids and garment industry workers whose husbands beat them on a regular basis on account of dowry.

Tehmina Durrani's writings also bespeak the ubiquity of dowry violence in Pakistani families. Her fiction, Blasphemy delineates the ordeals of poor Pakistani parents with marriageable daughters on account of dowry. Her autobiography My Feudal Lord, however, demonstrates that even daughters of wealthy parents with financial backing are not safe in the hands of abusive husbands because of male privilege that is not subject to effective scrutiny in Pakistani societies.

Encyclopedia Americana likewise defines dowry as "the property that the bride's family gives to the groom or his family upon marriage" (321). In the Indian Sub-Continent, the word dowry has an extended connotation: here it is often understood as property that the bride's family is obliged to provide to the groom and his family. According to Nusrat Ameen, in Bangladeshi law dowry stands for "whatever is presented, whether before or after marriage under demand, compulsion or social pressure as consideration for the marriage can be said to be dowry" (40). The demand for dowry is cleverly cloaked as a voluntary 'gift' given to the daughter out of love, though she has hardly any claim over it.

The practice of dowry is not rooted in Islamic law, but as a result of assimilating Hindu customs, dowry over time has become a part of Muslim culture of

the Sub-continent. In her dissertation, "The Cultural Picture of Dowry System and its Reflection in Bangla Literature," Maleka Begum argues that dowry in its contemporary form did not exist amongst Sub-Continental Muslims before the twentieth century. She traces the origin of dowry to the caste system prevalent amongst the Hindus of the Sub-Continent. According to Begum, in 12<sup>th</sup> century India, upper caste Hindu men, especially Brahmins, exploited marriage as a source of living and through multiple marriages began the oppression of women. In order to climb the ladder of social prestige and secure a position for themselves in heaven, fathers of daughters engaged in severe competition to procure an upper caste son-in-law. The girl's parents also had to face the fear of being outcasts in society if they failed in their duty to give away their virgin daughter in marriage soon after she reached puberty; hence they tried hard to meet the demands of the groom. In turn, the guardians of upper caste prospective grooms exploited the situation of scarcity of such candidates in their favor by getting their sons into polygamous marriages with girls from upper or lower castes as long as they provided a fat dowry. Like Begum, Ameen argues that the concept of dowry in Bangladesh originated from ancient Hindu custom. However, both women activists reflect upon the ancient tradition of Hindu marriage where the word dowry was synonymous with unconditional gift. In the words of Ameen:

An approved marriage among Hindus has always been considered to be a kanyadaan that is the gift of a daughter. According to Dharmashastra (code of religion), the meritorious act of kanyadaan is not complete till the bridegroom is given varadakhshina in the form of cash or kind. This was out of love and affection and in honor of the bridegroom. The quantum varied in accordance with the financial position of the bride's father. Similarly, articles were given to the bride which constituted stridhan, that is property of the bride. These were meant to provide financial security to the couple in adverse circumstances. However, no compulsion whatsoever was exercised by the bridegroom and his family to obtain varadakhshina and stridhan.

(40)

Ameen concludes that in time these two aspects of Hindu marriage have assumed the name of 'dowry.' Like Begum, she laments that not only in Hindu societies, but in Muslim societies as well, dowry has come to stand primarily for something equivalent to groom price. Citing the case of Bangladesh she holds that the practice that originally entailed a father's voluntary and unconditional giving away of a small amount of his asset to his daughter to help her start a new life, has over time given way to a practice of mandatory obligation. The amount of the dowry provided is seen as a reflection of the social status of the bride's family, thus providing pressure on their purse. Despite Islamic decree to keep marriages as simple as possible, dowry rates are escalating and wedding extravaganzas have become the norm in the Sub-Continent, forcing many middle class women to remain single. Dowry-related socio-economic and moral degradation aptly reflect sheer greed for wealth and status as a prime reason for which many men exploit the institution of marriage, and turn their wives into its scapegoats. To become rich overnight by embezzling the father-in-law's property in the shape of dowry, they do not hesitate to divorce, remarry or even murder the wife. Chughtai presents many stories of Indian men whose sense of self-importance make them shamelessly demanding at the wedding alter. Through the narrator of her short story, "Kallu," she complains about the scarcity of eligible bachelors amongst the Muslims of North India who do not expect exorbitant dowry for marriage. In the words of the narrator: "These were bad times; nice young men were nearly impossible to find, and those who were around demanded that a car and a fare to England be included in the dowry" (Quilt 58). The narrator's frustration in the face of outrageously high dowry demands is clear: "Such demands could be taken into consideration only if there was one girl in the family to be wed. But here there were many" (Quilt 58). Chughtai's story blames the downfall of the political economy of

India right after the Partition in 1947, on the escalation of dowry demands and inflation in the marriage market. The loss of land, property, and jobs during this time in Indian history resulted in low income and status in many Muslim families. Many eligible Indian Muslim men left for Pakistan, leaving behind a huge number of Muslim women of marriageable age. Most of the men that stayed in India acted like greedy opportunists, ready to exploit dowry as a booster for male privilege.

Chughtai's short story, "The Wedding Shroud" portrays marriageable Indian girls as economic liabilities for whom a 'reasonably decent' dowry has to be paid before they can be married. In this story Kurba's widowed mother sells little pieces of her gold jewelry one by one to add to her daughter's dowry. She cannot wait to see her daughter married despite all the expenses involved because she has another young daughter waiting to be married after Kurba. Kurba's fragile and tuberculosis-ridden body keeps getting worse as she awaits a selfless and generous prince charming to love her and whisk her away from the monotony of life. Her mother spends as much money as she can feeding expensive food to a prospective groom, yet Kurba's fate does not change since there are girls with better dowries to offer.

Rising unemployment since Independence in 1971, especially in rural areas, can be seen as one of the reasons for the persistent demand of dowry amongst contemporary Bangladeshi males as well. Added to these uncontrollable economic perils is the impact of Islamization that began in the 80s with Zia-ur-Rahman's regime, and led Bangladeshi men to reinforce their beliefs as the best deserving sex on earth. In "Motijan's Daughters," Hossain portrays such a typically jobless yet self-centered husband in Abul. Despite being worthless as a bread earner of the family, he feels entitled to demand a watch and a bicycle as part of his dowry. When these goods are not delivered within eight days of his marriage, he starts humiliating his



new bride. Abul is also a ganja addict and a womanizer who wants to support these habits with the help of the dowry money procured from a second marriage. Such desires in Abul mirrors Sudha's husband, Sudhir Chandra in Anurupa Devi's novel, Milon (1923). Anurupa Devi, a Hindu Bengali writer who was Hossain's literary predecessor, was also highly critical of the social practices such as dowry that jeopardized the security of women in Bengali societies. Indeed, unlike Abul in Hossain's story, Devi's protagonist, Sudhir is financially better off, yet both share the belief that as men they are more privileged in society, and more deserving of a better dowry. After seventeen years of married life, Sudhir Chandra thinks of getting married again for another dowry. Sudha's rich grandfather rescues her from the crisis by offering her an inheritance of 15,000 taka, which was in fact used as dowry to prevent her husband from getting married again. Motijan, however, is not that lucky: with no rich relative to come to her rescue, she has to tolerate all kinds of abuse in her husband's household. Motijan's predicament because of dowry is indicative of the fact that the situation of Bengali wives has not altered much in the last two decades.

Nusrat Ameen explains the shift from 'pon' (bride wealth) that was given to the new wife to 'dabi' (dowry) that is reserved for the groom as an effect of the socio-economic changes, specifically the shift from an agricultural economy to an urban-based, capitalist economy. Ameen also blames the recent emergence of dowry in Bangladeshi society for the commercialization of marriage. In contemporary India and Pakistan as well, dowry practice has been escalating concomitantly with affluence and commercialism. This greed among Bangladeshis is pervasive: educated affluent urban dwellers, as well unlettered poor rustics all want to join the race of consumerism. In Hossain's story, "Kundola's Darkness," the reason why Mustafiz harasses his wife is his desire to get out of the village and seek a well paid job abroad.

Chughtai's "The Wedding Shroud" also presents a greedy Indian groom who uses the prop of a dowry in order to get a high paying job in town and establish himself in society. In lieu of "fifteen tolas of gold" and "a job at Barre Saheb's office," Hakim-ji is prepared to marry whichever of the ugly daughters the father is willing to hand over with the dowry (Quilt 105). In "Poison," Chughtai portrays another dowry-hunting groom whose greed for a lucrative job compels him to break his engagement with his long time love and marry elsewhere. The narrator tells us, "Mr. Numan's plush job was a fringe benefit of his marriage, a gift from his influential father-in-law; were it not for this, he may never have left his childhood fiancé, Ayesha Begum" (Quilt 154).

Chughtai's novella, The Heart Breaks Free, presents the prevalent practice during the early twentieth century of men departing to the Queen's land for a foreign degree, and feeling entitled to ask for dowry money from the father-in-law to cover their expenses. In this novella, Aunt Qudsia's husband agrees to marry her on condition that he will be sent to Europe for higher education. Qudsia's father obliges the son-in-law, and soon after the wedding sends him off to England; however, once he earns his medical degree he marries a British woman and returns home to open up his clinic in Mainpuri. Qudsia is totally forgotten by her greedy and heartless husband, despite the fact that it was with the help of dowry money obtained from her parents that he was able to receive an education, and establish himself. Qudsia, however, is not divorced, but expected to accept her common fate and spend her youth in her father's house. Though her husband neither considers returning the dowry, nor provides maintenance money for her as his first wife, no one in their society admonishes him for his misdeeds.

A shift from caste-based dowry practice to education based dowry practice is also visible during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Bengal. According to

Begum, men who did not originally belong to the aristocracy used the dowry they received in marriage to pay for their education. On the other hand, in the hopes of securing prestige for themselves in society, many Bengali fathers opted to pay for the entire educational expenses of the groom, which often included the fare and tuition to a foreign country. Despite having written short stories denouncing the practice of dowry, in his real life well-known author Rabindranath Tagore ended up paying handsome dowries for two of his daughters, Renuka and Meera, to get foreign-educated and sophisticated grooms. According to Begum, in the year 1901, Tagore regularly sent ten pounds to Renuka's fiancée, Shatendranath, who had gone to London to study medicine. Meera's husband, Nogendranath, went to America for higher studies on Tagore's money, though he broke his marriage after he returned home. Like Aunt Qudsia, Meera suffered a life of dejection despite belonging to a wealthy family.

In Padmarag (1924), Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, whose writings have a strong influence on Selina Hossain, similarly criticizes the appropriation of education or degree-related dowry practices by Muslim Bengalis. In this novel, Latif returns from England as a barrister and his uncle suggests that he demand the inheritance money of his fiancée, Zainab, as part of his dowry before the wedding takes place. Since Zainab is underage, her brother objects to the transfer of cash before she is eighteen. Latif is forced by his uncle to break his engagement since there is no dearth of fathers who will pay a handsome dowry for a son-in-law with a foreign degree. Under the influence of his uncle Latif begins to visualize himself as a bona fide candidate for a fat dowry, and breaks his engagement with Zainab. Though Latif cannot be directly held responsible for extorting dowry, he cannot be exempted from the blame of condoning the practice since he is an educated adult. In this story, Hossein also tries

to highlight the impact of dowry practice on Zainab, who feels utterly humiliated and objectified when her marriage breaks for disagreement regarding dowry. Though later Latif keeps searching for her so that he can apologize, she decides to evade any meetings, and with the help of a friend she starts running Tarini Bhaban, a shelter home for women who want to establish themselves outside the institution of marriage.

Nurunnesa Khatun is another Bengali Muslim writer who is Selina Hossain's literary predecessor, and whose work had great influence on the latter. Begum holds that Khatun's novel Swapnodhrishta (1924) protests against Bengali Muslim fathers who provide education to their sons in order to reap the interest from their investment in the form of a substantial dowry and elevated status in society. In Bhaggochokro (1926), Khatun again rebukes Muslim fathers of rich girls who lure young men with considerable dowries for higher education. Like Nurunnesa, Hossain reproaches fathers who wish to extract their investment in their sons' education from the fathers of their daughters-in-law; however, she feels that dowry used to help a poor but honest and hardworking fiancé is not an entirely bad idea. Indeed, she is in favor of providing full rights to the daughter over her inherited parental property, yet she is of the opinion that investing a portion of this property to help an honest and hardworking husband may not be a very bad idea. I agree with Hossain in believing that a certain amount of a daughter's parental inheritance can be given to her husband for improving their lives together, but I do not think that the husband or his other family members should forcibly claim any part of it for self aggrandizement. Ameen expresses reservations regarding the way a daughter's entire "dowry is considered an 'investment' or capital for helping to establish the groom, for example, by opening a business for him or providing the money for his trip abroad to find a job etc" (40). Jamila Verghese similarly laments the continuation of a dowry practice in

contemporary India as a means of pampering male ego. In the words of the Verghese, "Indian bachelors these days are helped up the social ladder, given an entry into the business world, or educated in foreign countries all on the strength of a 'father-in-law scholarship'" (128). Just as it should be unacceptable on the part of a father to use dowry as bait for catching prospective grooms for his daughter, it should be unethical on the part of a man to think that it is his father-in-law's obligation to help him financially; however, a society that sees women as means of begetting wealth and prestige through marriage, overlooks such dowry-based misconduct on the part of its men.

If the ability to give or extract a large dowry is not considered as a sign of any kind of agential power, and if a meager dowry is not interpreted as an insult intended towards a groom's parents, or an inability on the part of a bride's parents, then dowry practice may cease to take the formidable shape it is assuming now. Unfortunately, as Julia Leslie points out, a groom without a price tag is assumed to have some defect in him: "He and his family are liable to be treated badly" (30). Madhu Kishwar also believes that the fear of "being treated shabbily is one important reason that keeps some grooms' families from seeking a dowry less wedding" (30). While there are many reasons for seeking dowry, and innumerable examples of men in Sub-Continental literature who demand dowry, there are very few examples that can be cited to prove that men also detest dowry exploitation. Sharatchandra Chattopadhyay's male protagonist in Parineeta (1914) is among the few educated Hindu grooms in Bangla literature who denounce dowry and seek to marry only for love. Also, in Gholam Mostafa's fiction, Bhangabook (1952), the mentality of educated Muslim men is against the practice of taking groom price. Most Sub-Continental men, however, approve of dowry and consider it to be their unwritten right to expect it in

some form or other. In his article, "Dowry: A Survey of the Issues and the Literature," Werner Menski condemns the practice of dowry for being more widely epidemic than Sati, a practice where Hindu brides' bodies were burnt on the pyre of their dead husbands. Indeed, dowry is practiced in the Sub-Continent irrespective of race, religion and class. Despite the fact that it is considered a punishable offense to give or take dowry, and there are many negative effects of dowry on a woman, marriages in the Sub-Continent have become quite impossible without some form of dowry. Chughtai's short story, "Kallu" deals with the stress and woes of being born a woman in a family of many marriageable women because of escalating dowry demands. In this story, "Nanhi, Safia and Salima, having completed their education, were now waiting to get married. But husbands were difficult to come by" (Quilt 58). Their waiting causes stress in their parents' lives as well, as they feel compelled to constantly search for eligible bachelors for their daughters who will be happy with a reasonable dowry. Once an offer for marriage for one of their daughters arrives from the new Deputy Collector in town, the father becomes eager to accept it. Though the mother initially raises an objection because the same deputy collector was employed at their house as a servant boy in his childhood, eventually she agrees to give her daughter's hand to him since there are no specific dowry demands from his side. The daughter's consent is not deemed necessary, and it is assumed that in a family full of girls queued for marriage, she is extremely lucky to have found a groom with no demands. Though the daughter in this story is given no option to choose her own groom, she does not complain about that limitation; rather, she is happy to move out and make room for the sisters whose marital fates hung in a pendulum for the yet to be announced amount of dowry that will have to accompany them as brides.

The obligation on the part of a woman's guardians to pay her dowry is not only a perfect reflection of her secondary status in Sub-Continental societies it is also the leading cause of battery and murder of young brides. The story of "bride burning," by a husband and her in-laws, who pour kerosene on a wife's body and ignite it, but pass it off as a kitchen accident is very common in the Sub-Continent. A woman who is victimized for insufficient dowry may also commit suicide upon finding herself in a situation where she feels she can neither disclose her ordeals to her parents and upset their poor economic condition, nor tolerate the humiliation and oppression she is forced to endure. In connection with dowry abuse Faustina Pereira regrets that "not only do women face difficulty in claiming what is rightfully theirs, but also many are subjected to physical and mental torture for not being able to pay the dowry demanded by their husbands" (19). Pereira feels that the wife whose body is exchanged in the horrific practice of dowry is utterly helpless since she is neither the instigator of the situation she finds herself in, nor the problem resolver. Despite such a neutral role, a woman is often resented not only by her marital family but also by her natal family when her dowry fails to meet the generally accepted standards. Usually in a joint family it is the brother or his wife who resist the dowry demands made by a woman's husband on account of the common pool of resources.

Parents who make false promises of dowry or pay belated dowry open their daughters to the risk of mental and physical torture. Since these parents accept the concept of dowry in its contemporary form as "a unilateral transfer of resources by a girl's family at her marriage to the groom's family in recognition of the latter's generosity in inviting the girl to their home permanently," women have become vulnerable (Ameen 41). Hossain is acutely aware of the devastating effects of considering daughters as an onus to be rid via marriage. In her short story,

"Kundola's Darkness," Shiuli endures endless beatings by her husband, Mustafiz, because he believes that his father-in-law has shifted the burden of a useless daughter from his own shoulders to his son-in-law's, but has not duly compensated him. Mustafiz wants his wife to get more money from her father, but Shiuli knows that her father is a poor man and cannot support her were she to go back to her natal home. She also knows that her father had sent her to her husband's house in the first place in order to avoid feeding one more mouth, and she does not want to become his burden again. While Shiuli feels totally helpless in life, Kundola, her seven year-old daughter cannot figure out why her mother cannot get help from her grandfather, or even run away from home. Shiuli wants to tell her daughter about her own father's incompetence, and her husband's complicity in turning her into a burden again by constantly nagging for dowry, but decides to keep quiet. Perplexed by her father's regular threats for money and her mother's inability to seek shelter at her own parents' home, Kundola wonders if she is also her own father's burden. Shiuli cannot, and does not tell her daughter that some day she too will become her father's burden because of the practice of dowry. Shiuli however, does not live to see her daughter repeat history. When her husband's threats and battery fail to achieve his goals, her helplessness infuriates him so much that he suffocates her to death by thrusting a pillow over her face. Mustafiz regrets his act momentarily, but quickly justifies it by thinking out loud that a father who sends his daughter without a dowry deserves to see his daughter punished. When he sees Shiuli foaming in the mouth after death, he feels scared. Quickly he throws her body on the floor and ties her neck with one end of a saree and attaches the other end to the fan. When neighbors and police show up at the scene, he manages to pass the incident as a suicide. Since Shiuli is like those daughters in Bangladesh whose parents feel relieved by marrying them



off as soon as they achieve puberty, no one is bothered to investigate her murder. Shiuli's predicament brings to mind Begum's criticism of the mentality of Bangladeshi parents who use marriage as an excuse to force their daughters into dependence. Begum notes: "Since marriage has become a prime legal source of sustenance for a wife, the husband is getting the chance to voice the demand for dowry" (2). Kishwar and Leslie likewise complain about the way dowry payments in India are increasingly viewed as a form of gratitude payment to the groom and his family for accepting a daughter and helping her parents shed an unwanted burden. Unless Sub-Continental parents change their attitude towards their daughters and consider them to be equally vital and dependable like their sons, dowry related problems that entail suffering for their daughters as well as for themselves, will keep multiplying.

Parents who fail to provide dowry for their daughters are not the only ones who invite hardship for them. Well to do parents who visualize dowry as a means of procuring a share of property for a daughter in her husband's family, also contribute towards their daughter's oppression. Because of the fact that daughter's are permitted to inherit their father's property in Islam, parents give their daughter a share in their wealth; however, they do not hand it directly to the daughter herself. Instead, they give it to her groom or his family, and consider it a future investment to secure a share for the daughter in her husbands' household assets. This indirect way of assuring the daughter's wellbeing is yet another reason why dowry is considered an unconditional and compulsory offering to the groom and his family. Since the daughter is in a way disinherited and sent to her in-laws' house as a dependent, the family that accepts her has to be compensated either with hard cash or material goods such as flats, cars, refrigerators, televisions, etc, given directly to the groom's father or to the groom

himself. In some cases a small portion of dowry is kept aside for a wife's personal use, in the shape of her clothing or jewelry, but generally she is not given substantial cash. Some mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law however, confiscate even those private possessions from the bride, in order to give them to their own daughters. Kishwar is resentful of the system that allows a woman to retain only limited rights over her parental assets, and converts her into an asset that begets more assets. In the words of Kishwar:

Disinheritance of daughters by their natal family is the crux of the problem. The share women acquire in their marital family's property is not allowed to them in their own right, but comes to them through their husbands. Hence, women inherit more often as widows than as daughters or wives. This is the main reason why dowry given at the time of a daughter's wedding comes to be seen as an offering to her in-laws rather than her exclusive personal property. Through this dowry her parents are buying a share for their daughter in her husband's family property. (26)

Although Kishwar addresses Hindu parents in particular, it goes without saying that many Muslim parents also disinherit their daughters by giving their inheritance in the shape of dowry directly to their husbands. Lack of permission to handle their own property leaves a woman in a vulnerable position at the very outset of her married life, and programs her to submit automatically. It also deprives her of the experience to handle major monetary issues in time of emergency. Nonetheless, parents often give the entire dowry to their son-in-laws in the hope of ensuring life-long sustenance for their daughters. Despite the fact that the Supreme Court in India defines dowry in accordance with the older concept of "stridhan" (bride wealth), and technically recognizes a wife's full right over her inherited property, no one in a Hindu woman's natal or marital home acknowledges the importance of her total authority over her own property. It is because parents do not consider their daughter's right over her own property that although The Dowry Prohibition Act of India stresses that dowry

payments have to be returned to the wife in case of divorce, and to her family in case she dies childless, neither her family nor her husband's family shows any concern if it is not restored.

Indeed, in dowry-related domestic violence it is a woman's husband and his family that play a major role in harassing her for the remaining payment due. According to Saira Rahman Khan, a mother-in-law's attitude towards her daughter-in-law's dowry is usually more aggressive and critical than others' and results in grave consequences for the new wife. A mother-in-law reacts in this manner perhaps because she internalizes the patriarchal social system in order to find a place of approval for herself in it, or because she merely repeats the dowry oppression that she had undergone as a bride herself. None of these reasons justify her act; moreover, if the amount of dowry is low or secured only after incessant bargaining, the wife is usually not safe in the hands of the mother-in-law. In Chughtai's "Mother-in-Law," a young bride is unable to bring 'sufficient' dowry for her mother-in-law. Throughout the day this prototypical mother-in-law, who is given no other name, keeps on muttering about the meager dowry: "What did the fellows give their daughter as dowry? . . . Ai, what wonderful gifts! Imitation bangles and chrome-plated pots" (Lifting 194). Her interminable grumbling goes on even in her sleep. The daughter-in-law feels totally helpless hearing her mother-in-law complain about "the tasteless zarda served during the wedding feast and the wooden bed with moth-eaten legs that was given as dowry" (Lifting 194). The wife in this story has no complaints from her husband. In fact, he is smitten by her youthful charms and never raises the issue of dowry, but it is the typical mother-in-law who has internalized the patriarchal norms of male supremacy and privilege who uses her dowry stick to beat the daughter-in-law with every opportunity she manages.

Similarly, Hossain's "Motijan's Daughters" also depicts the daily harangues of mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. In this story Gulnur, Motijan's mother-in-law, starts pestering her for the dowry that was promised to her son by her father. Since her father keeps giving false assurances, Motijan's life becomes a living hell in her husband's household. Because Motijan arrives with a bare minimum dowry, Gulnur forces her into domestic labor and grudges her every bit of food and shelter given to her. She also humiliates Motijan by tying her to a pole like a cow and forcing her to eat grass. Though Abul has nothing better to do than frequenting the prostitutes' dwelling, Gulnur hardly admonishes her son. She knows that if her daughter-in-law runs away or even if she dies, her son can marry again for a second dowry, without any difficulty. Her avaricious son does not bother to alleviate his wife's misery; rather, he tacitly accepts his mother's phallogocentric demands and ill treatment of his wife.

Despite changes in the law and educational awareness, the general attitude of the people of the Sub-Continent towards dowry remains rooted in a patriarchal mindset. With regard to India's Protection from Domestic Violence Act of 2002, Ahmed-Ghosh maintains that it is still too patriarchal and supportive of male privilege. Many critics believe that the tussle over dowry is but one cause of maltreatment and suffering of a Sub-Continental wife. Despite carrying 'decent' wealth from the parents' to the in-laws' house, a wife's position may not be enhanced. Her marital family may remain dissatisfied with her and cause her endless grief. After years of listening to the narratives of harassed wives Kishwar now realizes that it is a mistake to see dowry as the prime cause of the harassment of wives. She holds that criticism of the dowry practice is in fact veiled criticism of the wife herself and the entire package deal that she represents: her family, her ancestry and her

upbringing. A wife may be taunted or tortured just because she is an insecure newcomer, despite being from an affluent family, or being educated, skilled and attractive. The family hierarchy allocates a subservient and dependent status to the wife, and this often encourages sadistic people in more powerful positions to torment her. Kishwar and Ahmed-Ghosh see the kind of residential arrangement there is for wives, where they are required to leave their natal home and come and live in their husband's home, as a strategy of domination. In the words of Ahmed-Ghosh:

The very shift for the bride into her husband's extended household is an expression of the power of the patrician (her husband). Here the new bride is powerless in the midst of strangers and alienated from her family and friends. While she is rendered powerless, her husband and his family members exercise authority over the relation and the new bride.

What can be deduced from the above observations is that the very culture that restrains and devalues a woman the moment she is born, and continues to do so as she moves to her marital household has to be combated. In other words, marriage cannot be allowed to become what Menski calls, a wife's "structural point of institutionalised weakness" by a woman's guardians (59). Parents and husbands have to acknowledge equality of partners in marriage, and a wife's labor and contributions within the household have to be considered.

Although men and women of all walks of life have been protesting against the dowry system in the Sub-Continent for quite some time now, abolition of dowry transactions through the Dowry Prohibition Act was officially announced only in 1961 in India. This legal Act underwent various amendments during the 70s and 80s in India, when feminist activists like Kishwar arranged public protests to focus on anti-dowry campaigns, and boycotted dowry marriages. In the 1970s, and 1980s alarmed by increasingly irrational dowry demands and growing violence, Bangladeshi and Pakistani governments also attempted to curb the trend by making dowry illegal.

However, as Pereira's research on Bangladeshi society shows, of all domestic violence cases that are reported in this country, 70 percent are related to dowry. The ratio of dowry violence is high in Bangladesh also due to the fact that the father or brother of a woman who is harassed for dowry feels that it is a personal attack on the family, and encourages the woman to file a case. They also hope to get some of the dowry money back in case of divorce or death of the woman. When the same woman complains about domestic violence for opposing her husband's extra marital relationships, or for incompatibility on account of his generally violent nature, the male members of her natal family often either turn a deaf ear or advise her to rectify her own ways.

Since dowry-related crimes are categorized as domestic violence, and considered to be under the 'private sphere' of law, the police are not fully enthusiastic about pursuing these cases. Doctors, lawyers, counselors – no one looks at the issue from a human rights point of view; they all want to preserve and uphold male privilege in the name of marital tradition and family harmony. This kind of negligence and discrimination discourages dowry victims from officially reporting dowry-related crimes. In India the parliament passed a new law criminalizing bride burning and other forms of dowry related harassment in 1983. However, the communalization of Sharia (Muslim Personal Laws) has left Indian Muslims beyond the reach of these State interventions, including criminal sanctions for dowry related violence and murder. Since the family matters is legally constructed as a communal issue and not the State's concern, The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1986 exempts people to whom Muslim Personal Law applies.

Also because of lack of support systems, such as shelters, counseling services for dowry battered wives, or rehabilitation programs for perpetrators, thousands of

wives of all classes and religions of the Sub-Continent are left psychologically scarred for life, or dead. It is pertinent to note that dower law (*Meher*) in Islam is a practice that is meant to recognize a woman's contributions as a spouse and a mother, and also to prove a man's ability to support her. Surah 4, Ayat 4 of the Quran dictates, "Give women their dowries as a free gift. But if they of themselves be pleased to give you a portion thereof, consume it with enjoyment and pleasure." It is a Muslim woman's marital right to stipulate her own *meher* in her marriage contract. According to Taslima Monsoor,

. . . the Muslim tradition provides that the family of the groom should give a dower, payable on demand to the bride, which the Islamic law specifies to be paid to the bride and not to the father. This dower (*meher*) system implied that the prestige brought by a chaste woman and by the children she would bear was worth a considerable investment. (31)

In a Muslim marital contract the amount of *meher* has to be specifically mentioned, though payable in cash or kind, and preferably paid before the marriage is consummated. Ironically this Islamic family law that is favorable for women has taken a back seat in the Sub-Continental societies today, while dowry has turned into a popular custom. Citing the case of Bangladeshi Muslim families, Mansoor laments:

. . . a recent study of the metropolitan city of Dhaka found that although the Muslim family laws in Bangladesh require husbands to give dower to their wives, 88% of the women in the survey did not receive any dower". (36)

Some husbands tactfully request for an exemption from their wives on the payment of *meher* while they are still new brides. Because of lack of knowledge about the law, or out of sheer decency and desire to win over their husbands' hearts many wives grant waiver on this payment. Most husbands, however, do not even bother to raise the issue with their wives; they consider it to be paid with the expenses of day-to-day necessities. Pereira regrets that, although the Quran clearly mentions the right of a

woman to quote the dower amount, and separates it from her maintenance cost she is almost never consulted about her *meher* or dower. Her male guardians on either side consider it to be a subject to be dealt with among them selves. Pereira further points out that despite having the rights to demand the amount of the dower at any time during marriage, and to refuse to cohabit with the husband upon non-payment, a Bangladeshi wife generally does not ask for her dower either out of fear for herself or for fear of being deprived of the right to see her children. Because the section dealing with dower in the 1961 Muslim Family Laws Ordinance does not specify any fixed method for delivering the dower, in most cases husbands take advantage of this gap in the law. Some husbands opine that the full sum of the dower can be treated as deferred, others seldom think of paying their wives any part of their dower. In India the Dowry Prohibition Act, also officially announced in 1961, does not bar a Muslim husband from giving *meher* or dower to his wife. Moreover, in case where a husband divorces his wife, he is required to pay her dues. Despite such laws, there are very few instances where a man is honest enough to clear his dower dues in case he opts out of a marriage. In Chughtai's "The Rock," Bhaiya is one such rare husband who willingly parts with his house in Delhi as part of his dower payments to his wife. Bhaia is in love and wants to remarry. Before divorcing his wife, and leaving her with the kids, he decides to compensate her loss by returning her dower. Most husbands in the fiction of Hossain, Chughtai and Durrani do not fulfill this financial obligation towards their wives either during their marriage or even as they divorce them. Pereira believes that if the institution of Islamic dower were properly implemented, it could compensate for the wives' household and other contributions, and could also somewhat realize their claims to matrimonial property; however, she regrets the fact that the concept of a wife's matrimonial property is not reinforced in



the family law system in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, despite demands by respective women's movements for its recognition.

Unable to extract their dower in most cases from their husbands, women are interested in securing at least their dowry from their parents. With it they can create a good impression, earn respect and avoid the awkwardness of going empty-handed to a new home. As wives who have benefited from dowry transfers narrate their stories to Kishwar, she eventually admits the futility of her early strategy of eradicating dowry. In fact, she now concedes that in the absence of any effective inheritance rights for daughters, dowry should be given to them during the time of marriage. Julia Leslie similarly justifies the need for dowry, even if it is an inadequate compensation. She posits:

a daughter clings to her dowry because that is all she is likely to see of her parental inheritance. Men (fathers, brothers, male relatives) resent having to find large sums of cash and moveable items as dowry, but they would far rather pay dowry than give a daughter or a sister equal inheritance rights. (34)

Both Kishwar and Leslie believe that dowry is traditionally justified in terms of giving the daughter her inheritance at the time of marriage; however, they argue that to avoid dowry abuse, women's inheritance rights have to be simultaneously reconsidered. In other words, daughters have to inherit in the same manner as sons. They have to be allowed to keep their property in their name, and they should also be able to enter their marital homes as equal partners, and not as disinherited dependents.

Indeed, abolishing dowry or providing inheritance rights and dower alone cannot elevate the helpless position of wives. In order for them to fight dowry harassment and the violence perpetrated on their bodies, their subjectivity and independent decision making capabilities have to be acknowledged and nurtured as well. They have to be equipped with the resources and abilities to define, control and

guard their monetary interests before they step into their husbands' houses. Like their brothers, they have to be entrusted with family property, and allowed freedom of the cocoon that binds them to the hearth alone. If they have independent earning potential and status, coupled with self confidence, then as Kishwar puts it, "gifts given by her parents, whether or not they are termed 'dowry', will not make an appreciable difference either way" (16). In an article titled, "The Downfall and Abasement of Women," Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain begged Bengali society not to spend an exorbitant amount of money to deck their daughters with gold and silver jewelry for their marriage. Instead, she suggested that they invest in knowledge that could make their daughter truly beautiful. Hossain writes: "Why do we weep when we cannot get bridegrooms for our daughters? Why not give the girls their education and let them earn their own living?" (25). Unfortunately, in today's Sub-Continental world even educated and high profile women figure as frequently among victims of dowry as unlettered rustic women. No matter what class she belongs to, before marriage a woman's body is typically seen as her father's property. Through marriage her body is commodified again since it is used as a means to transfer wealth from her father to her husband under the guise of the socially sanctioned phenomenon of dowry.

Shobha Venkatesh Ghosh, who marvels at the culpability of parents as well as husbands in dowry-related violence, contends: "Feminists now agree that the practice of dowry is not so much the cause of violence as a specific and virulent manifestation of a perverse culture of gendered violence" (61). Indeed, as long as the Sub-Continental societies accept the principle and privilege of male dominance, instead of embracing equality and mutuality amongst siblings and in intimate relationships, dowry abuse in the shape of domestic violence is here to stay.

### *Crimes of Honor*

Like dowry-related crimes, crimes in the name of honor are prevalent in all three countries of the Sub-Continent. Like dowry abuse, honor crimes occur not only among the less educated rural families, but also among the rich and elite urbanites. Women are more likely to become victims of honor crimes than men. A crime of honor is usually defined as the threatening, abusing, or even killing of a woman by a close male member of her family such as her father, brother, husband or son, for engaging in, or being suspected of engaging in, sexual practices outside marriage. Transgressing familial laws and customs, refusing to marry the man the parents select, or eloping with someone and marrying according to one's own choice may invoke crimes of honor. Honor crimes may be perpetrated in order to "wipe away" the shame a wife imposes on her family by refusing to live with her husband or by divorcing a husband.

Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani's fiction looks at different facets of honor crimes in their respective societies, and presents the local socio-economic contexts within which these crimes occur. In Hossain's short story, "Honor," a Bangladeshi village husband kills his wife because he suspects her of an adulterous relationship. Durrani's Blasphemy presents a son who imprisons and threatens to kill his mother for engaging in extramarital relationships. The father character in Chughtai's "The Sacred Duty" threatens to kill his daughter for eloping with a Hindu boy and marrying him. Through these stories the writers try to identify the role that honor crimes play in obfuscating gender relations in contemporary Sub-Continental Muslim communities. These honor crimes are treated as accepted custom, rather than serious crimes in the respective communities that the writers project because they are linked to a man's, his family's and community's honor.

The concept of honor, as delineated in these stories, is not seen as a common principle of behavior for both men and women. Because of gendered notions of ethics and morality, honor is often considered as an attribute of men only, in contrast to the embodiment of shame for women. A man's honor, however, is not primarily determined by his feeling of self-worth or social status or even by his valor, integrity or contribution towards his family. Male honor and his family's dignity and esteem are directly and inextricably linked to the chastity of the women of his family. Hence, men as depicted in the fiction of Hossain, Chughtai and Durrani, are more concerned with the control, regulation and 'protection' of female behavior and sexuality than with any other means of enhancing honor. As the male members of the Muslim household are privileged to determine acceptable patterns of behavior for the female members, they act as a kind of 'morality police,' authorized to take action against the women who are deemed to have transgressed traditional social norms at some point in their lives. The honor ethic is so valued that the male members of the family do not hesitate even to resort to murder in order to protect the family honor.

This honor ethic, which can be traced back to the pre-Islamic period, continues to remain in force today, ensuring female inferiority and subordination, and male supremacy and authority. Because of the perception of female sexuality as insatiable and dangerous, and the elevation of female chastity to a highly desirable symbolic virtue, many Muslim women as portrayed in Chughtai's, Durrani's and Hossain's fiction become pawns in the struggle for male honor. In a social system where the security of a man's honor is concomitant upon the sexual purity of his female relatives, to literally confine them within the four walls of home, as well as to the traditional roles of marriage and motherhood, is a common practice. Muslim women's subjection to familial norms, values and codes of behavior force them to

believe that lawful sexual relations take place only within a marriage approved by the family; self-initiated sexual relations are to be shunned. The reputation of women depends mainly on their willingness to observe the rigid rules governing sexual relationships and their ability to preserve the perception of their chastity. Implicit acceptance of the notion of woman's body as a repository of male, family and community honor is thus prevalent amongst women of different classes. Since such a gender biased code of honor still exists in the Muslim societies represented in Hossain's, Chughtai's and Durrani's fiction, its accompanying culture of violence is also flourishing. Proud and self-centered fathers, husbands, uncles and sons, who occupy the dominant position in most aspects and activities of life, retain their honor through the vengeance and totalitarianism of honor crimes.

Hossain's "Honor" demonstrates how a heinous murder passes as a respectable ritual killing in the name of honor in a Bangladeshi Muslim village. Latif, the husband in this story murders his wife, Maleka, when he as much as suspects her of adultery. Her alleged illicit relationship does not need to be proven for the punishment to ensue. That Maleka longed for a man who would not merely hunger after her body, but love her for who she was, is reason enough for her husband's wrath. On one occasion she is seen talking to Manikka, who is interested in her, but for whom she does not particularly care; this is enough for her husband to accuse her of igniting sexual desires in another man, and inviting undue attention to herself. She is considered to have failed to comply with accepted norms regarding her sexual behavior not only by her husband but also by her own brothers, who blame her for marring their family's prestige. Her brothers never bother to bring charges against Latif, or give a proper burial to their sister in the family graveyard; rather, they feel relieved of her, and her vulture-eaten body is left to rot in the waters of Shomeshwari

river. The insensitivity that Maleka's brothers demonstrate bespeaks the power of male chauvinism that overrides even blood relationships. The reckless actions on the part of the males in Maleka's life are embedded in a culture that is reminiscent of the Pakistani culture that Hina Jilani and Eman Ahmed's explain:

this idea is rooted in the cultural notion that women are the custodians of family honor, and by entering into an illicit relationship, they tarnish the family's reputation. Whether a woman is actually guilty of the charge is often considered irrelevant, since it is the public perception of her guilt which affects the honour of the family. (153)

A product of a cultural ideology that equates women's chastity with family honor, Latif slits Maleka's throat and throws her body into a pond by way of defending his honor. The story depicts how easily a wife's chastity can be surveilled and found lacking in a society where the idea that a man's honor is predicated largely on his ability to control the sexual behavior of his womenfolk still prevails. The honor ethic is also primarily a matter of external appearance, focusing on what other people have to say about a woman's role; hence, Maleka's husband and her brothers are more concerned about how the villagers scrutinize her activity, rather than the activity itself or their own reaction to it. Only a few people, such as the teacher and his wife, refuse to pay heed to hearsay and believe that, irrespective of the accusations against Maleka, her husband should not have taken the law in his own hands. According to the teacher, "If you don't like your wife, you can always leave her to fend for herself. If she loves anyone else, she can go to him. This does not give you the right to kill her" (Selected 43). Yet, most village women internalize the ideology of male honor, and believe that to challenge its practice would bring a loss of respectability for themselves and their families. They make Maleka the focus of ugly and vicious rumors and justify her murder, effectively becoming complicit in the continuation of

male instigated honor crimes. Their effective participation in their own victimization continues the cycle of patriarchal oppression.

While the double standards of the mostly uneducated villagers in this story who consider a man like Latif, with four wives, to be virtuous, but frown upon a woman's desire for true love from someone other than her crude husband is understandable, the attitude of the educated police officer from Durgapur is extremely quizzical. A blind champion of male and family honor, he thinks that Maleka is rightfully murdered for being sexually provocative. Like most men in the village, he believes that the responsibility of protecting the family honor befalls the men. When he is told that another man was hanged for murdering his brother's wife in the name of family honor, he retorts, "Of course he would be hanged. We still abide by British laws. There is no end to the damages done by the British to this country. The British law has not yet reached a level where it can protect family honor" (Selected 44). The police officer refuses to document the crime and make the report publicly available. Though Hossain's story does not depict the legal consequences of wife murder, it can be assumed from the attitude of the police officer that even if the case had been taken to court, the perpetrator would have received very little penalty if any because of his privilege as a husband. Since there is social acceptance of certain forms and degree of intra-family violence in Bangladesh, and there is a general culturalist resistance to women's rights, in the name of preserving culture and tradition government officials often tend to overlook its typically patriarchal and often misogynist mindset. Although domestic violence implicates the State and the community, and it is not a private matter or only women's problem, those involved in policy making demonstrate great reluctance in recognizing and dealing with domestic violence. Their attitude towards this issue is strongly rooted not only in their social beliefs and

ideology about gender and family relationship that supports male supremacy and sense of entitlement, but also in the economic and political realities of their country. In repudiating the concept of women's honor and British jurisprudence the police officer exposes his and his society's postcolonial male obstinacy as well. By underscoring the inadequacy of the Bangladeshi State officials in its commitment to women's rights in this story, Hossain joins the agenda of Indian postcolonial feminists such as Ania Loomba and Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan who criticize the Indian government's anti-colonial and nationalistic stance that utilized the women force in driving away the colonizers, but later failed to keep up to its promises towards the cause of women.

Durrani also censures the State officials for their deliberate avoidance of the women issues in postcolonial Pakistan. Her autobiography My Feudal Lord relates the story of her own ex-husband, and ex chief-minister of Punjab, Mustafa Khar's involvement in an honor crime that he justifies as a crime of passion. When Safia, one of Khar's wives falls in love with Ghulam Murtaza, her younger brother-in-law, Khar's brothers call him up at the Governor's House in Pakistan. He is told that his wife has been unfaithful to him. Since none of his other wives had dared to stray, he had hard time accepting the reality of the situation. Durrani is appalled that it does not matter to him that, "he had ruined her (Safia's) life, that he had married Naubahar, that he visited her (Safia) for a few hours in six months, that he never loved her" (200). With great regret and horror she comments in her autobiography, "the feudal law allows a man all this. A woman cannot betray him. This is the supreme sin. It attacks the masculinity of the male. He becomes a cuckold and the object of sniggers and whispers" (200). When Safia poses an affront to his carefully cultivated macho image, Khar is so crushed that he rushes to Kot Addu to beat Safia mercilessly and



insert red chili powder into her vagina. Safia's maid Ayesha is also tortured, and has to be taken to the hospital with fractured ribs. Khar tries to justify his punishment by citing a convoluted Islamic *hadith* or oral traditions related to the words and deeds of Prophet Mohammad (sm). According to him, "In Islam if you kill your wife in a fit of passion, when you discover her with another man, it is not a crime. God forgives you. You have committed a crime of passion. It is for your honour" (201). In feudal societies of Pakistan, a Muslim husband's prestige is enhanced when he can brag about the multiple women under his sway. Yet if a wife, like Safia or Maleka, who has been ignored for another woman for years, even dares to redress her grievances by finding an outlet through another man's love, she is ruthlessly battered by her husband and his family for the sake of honor. It is pertinent to note here that when Khar spotted Durrani at an official party and expressed the desire to make her his wife, she was already married to his adjutant, Anees Khan. This did not deter Khar from pursuing her and continuing an illicit relationship with her till she divorced Anees and marry him. Khar was married himself at that time to Safia, yet he did not bother to consider the impact of his actions upon his wife, or upon Anees.

Mustafa Khar's indiscriminate actions are reminiscent of an article, "On Radha and Krishna," by Chughtai where she protests similar hypocrisy in Hindu husbands. She points out that in Hindu mythology Radha, a married woman who had an unbounded, reckless and rebellious passion for her lover, Krishna, is turned into a figure of worship. Chughtai wonders why,

If the respectable woman, resorting to subterfuge, dares to engage in illicit love, she either drowns or dies after taking poison. A married woman's husband is her god, but the wedded Radha belongs to Krishan and not to her husband? (*Ismat* 135)

Chughtai is bemused by the fact that while the devotees are enthralled by the legendary love affair of Radha and Krishan, under no circumstances would they

tolerate their own wives clandestinely meeting their lovers. She laments the irony that while men bow their heads before Krishan of stone, they fail to grasp the wisdom of his words. They forget that “if the man is free while the woman is enslaved, their union can only be fraudulent” (Ismat 137). In other words she advocates equal rights and compatible ethical codes for both men and women in a society where honor crimes are seen as a male prerogative.

Women activists in Pakistan have similarly criticized the mitigation of sentences in cases of honor killings as condoning violence against women and sanctifying male criminals as honorable. Dr. Riffat Hassan and Asma Jahangir, two prominent Pakistani activists in the field of human rights, call the practice of honor killing totally unIslamic and demand laws against it. In an open letter to the Pakistani President, General Musharraf, Hassan writes:

Muslim societies, in general, appear to be far more concerned with trying to control women’s bodies and sexuality than with their human rights. Many Muslims when they speak of human rights either do not speak of women’s rights at all, or are mainly concerned with how a woman’s chastity may be protected. They are apparently not very worried about protecting men’s chastity.

Hassan is highly critical of the hypocrisy embedded in the Muslim male attitude that denies women their rights in the name of protecting their virtue. She condemns patriarchal institutions and social norms that sanction wife murder on grounds of honor. She also makes a series of recommendations to the Government of Pakistan to fulfill its obligation to provide women with effective protection against violence perpetrated in the name of honor. Part of Hassan’s crusade against honor killing includes her protest against men’s right to adjudicate moral offenses committed by women. In order to check the high rise of honor killing, in 1999 she founded The International Network for the Rights of Female Victims of Violence in Pakistan. A believer in progressive Islam, Riffat contends that the Quran upholds human rights

and equality for all, and honor killing is only a cultural distortion of Islam, not a reflection of its embedded ideologies. It is contemporary feminist theologians like Hassan who have taken the onerous job of clarifying the role of Islam not in the eyes of the Muslims themselves, but also in the eyes of the non-Islamic world.

Like Hassan, Hina Jilani and Eman Ahmed criticize violence against women in Pakistan, and concede that the traditional concept of honor killing and other forms of domestic violence are rooted in the perception of women as the property of male members of the family. Indeed, Jilani and Ahmed acknowledge that this attitude is prevalent across the globe; however, they emphasize that in Pakistan it is reinforced by customary practices and the legal system. In their words:

Underlying all the factors that contribute to the denial of the right of life to women is the deep-rooted mindset which views women as commodities and places a low value on their lives. This colours the attitude and response of all those who play some role in dealing with the issue – the family and community, the law enforcement agencies and the institutions charged with the dispensation of justice. The act of taking the life of a woman is thus often condoned and justified, and those who commit it go unpunished or are given minimal punishment on cultural, moral, religious or technical grounds. (151)

Exposing the existing legislation's loopholes, Jilani and Ahmed concede that the law provides that the death penalty cannot be imposed when the legal heirs of the victim are direct descendants of the offender. Thus, men who have children from their wives know that if they murder their wives they will not be punished in the same manner as a common murderer, but merely receive a few years of imprisonment. It is because of such patriarchal legal cushioning that privileges the men that despite ratifying the CEDAW pact, Pakistan cannot rid itself of blatant breach of human rights.

Among other things, to ensure that violence against women in Pakistan is addressed by the state, and changes to certain domestic laws according to international human rights standards are implemented, a private sector organization

named Amnesty International has been formed. According to Amnesty International's 2007 report, every year hundreds of Pakistani women get killed in the name of honor. The report underpins how honor killings are rooted in the cultural and patriarchal perceptions of family and marriage, institutions that foster male domination and extreme seclusion and submission of Muslim women. The report further scrutinizes Pakistani traditions that allow commodification of women as the framework of such killings. It holds that because men virtually own the women, and react with violence if their proprietary control is challenged, women generally assume a submissive role as part of fate, and attempt to embody the honor of the family and community. The report further highlights the failure of the authorities such as police, judges, and state officials in Pakistan to prevent honor killings. The government of Pakistan is taken into account for allowing gender discriminating laws to thrive despite ratification of CEDAW pact. According to this report the women of Sindh (Southern province of Pakistan) in particular are major victims of 'karo kari,' or honor killing. Durrani's Blasphemy is a burning example of an honor crime involving the regulation of female sexuality in a Sindhi society. In this novel, inspired by a true story, a son accuses his mother of promiscuity, calling into question her honor, her competence as a good, chaste wife and dutiful mother, and threatens to keep his children away from her. This son symbolically kills his mother, by declaring her dead to him. Heer is the unfortunate mother who becomes victim to an honor crime, as rumors of her promiscuity spread like fire in her husband's community. She is also forced by her brothers-in-law to accept her symbolic death and stay behind locked doors.

Though the rumors about her are partly true, Heer cannot be totally held responsible for her extra marital relations. After sexually abusing her in innumerable

ways, her husband, Pir Sain introduces her as Piyari, a whore from the town. Under the guise of her *purdah* her husband smuggles her out of the *haveli* through a secret back door, and allows his male friends to have sex with her. To satisfy her husband's sexual fantasies and avoid battery, Heer lets him videotape her otherwise taboo activities with strange men. During his lifetime, the Pir continues his exploitation under the guise of divine authority. Heer keeps taking the abuse because of fear for life, and also because she internalizes the ideology of women's inferiority. After his death, however, Heer exposes her husband's ugly deeds, by selling copies of his blue films to a Pathan. She hopes that the sex tapes would spread the truth about her sexual oppression in the hands of her own husband. She personally visits the houses of those men her husband had forced her to have sex with, and exposes her real identity as the mistress of the shrine to them. Despite knowing that if the shrine is pulled down, she will have to go with it, she makes its master's secrets public. In order to expose the filth of the shrine she has to take off her *burqa*, symbol of her shame, and expose her body. She comments:

To me, burying the evil and preserving my reputation meant preserving the evil. No exposure meant maintaining the status quo. That meant no change. I knew I had done the wrong thing for the right reason.  
(208-209)

Heer has to pay heavily for the consequences of taking on the devil in his private domain. She has to expose herself as a whore in order to expose her pimp husband. Most people call her a woman of ill repute and believe that she should have spent her old age thanking Allah for granting her respite from a cruel husband, instead of flaunting her own shame. Since Pir Sain is actually nowhere to be seen in the sex films, these are used as evidence against Heer alone. Indeed, Pir Sain looms large in the background, but he is only a shadow; consequently, disgrace starts falling not on the shrine, as she had expected, but on Heer alone.

When Rajaji, her son, finds out about the rumors, he fumes, “never has a finger been pointed at a woman from this house like it has been at my mother” (203). She begs for his mercy and argues that it is his father who had ruined her life. She tries to convince him that the rumors are old, and the people are talking about the past. Despite all her attempts to justify her acts, he hisses at his mother like his father, “I can look up at no man because my mother is a whore. I keep my eyes down, in case the face I gaze at is her lover’s” (204). She reminds him of his father’s sins, and asks him what shame he feels now that he knows the extent of her violation at his father’s hands, but her son does not accept his father’s part in the scandal. Instead, he attacks her motherhood, and accuses her of being selfish enough to make shoes out of her children’s skin:

My father did not parade you naked in the street and introduce you as my mother. Whatever his ailment, he kept it away from us. He did not throw his filth at his descendants. He behaved selfishly only with you. You have been selfish with all of us. I will protect my heirs from your shadows. (210)

Rajaji’s reaction depicts not only blind support of a son for his father, but also his gender role expectations from his mother. A typical product of his patriarchal society, he expects selfless sacrifice from his mother at any cost. His contempt towards his mother is further reflective of a society that is organized around male privilege, a society where it is acceptable for men to explore their sexuality, but women must pretend to be asexual. Rajaji’s hostility towards his mother highlights yet another important aspect of male privilege and hierarchy in Pakistani society: this society entrusts a grown up son with power and authority over his mother only because of his sex. Once a woman becomes a widow, she falls under the guardianship of her adult son, and is often treated as a minor. It is because of this automatic transfer of control and ownership of the women in the family that Rajaji does not hesitate to use

derogatory language and demonstrate a discourteous attitude towards his mother. When Heer tries to remind him of his uncles' sins, and his own incest, Rajaji retorts: "You have some nerve to tell me about sin. Keep away from me or I'll burn you at the stake some day" (212). Though Rajaji flares up easily, calling his mother a liar and accusing her of sneaking out through the back door, his real anger towards her is not as much for pointing out his and his father's wrongs, as it is for tarnishing their family honor (212). When he screams: "You shamed me in front of the jagirdar. You went to every door, announcing yourself as Heer, mistress of the Haveli, honour of the shrine," his real concern for his family's name and prestige comes to the forefront (206). Heer wonders helplessly why the male members of the Pir family do not look at their own evil practices, or why her son, Rajaji does not tell them about the "heroes" who were accomplices in Pir Sain's crimes? She is also baffled at the silence of everyone about the shadow looming in the film. The reason why the men in her family show no interest in the 'truth' is because they are afraid of losing their own face in the community if their leader is proved to be a wife exploiter and a debauch. Their fear is manifested in the following words:

Never before has an exalted and revered family such as ours been shamed like this. There can be nothing more grim. We walk like thieves instead of pirs. Soon, we will be buried in scandals instead of in holy tombs. (213)

Since women are treated as the reservoir of family name and tradition, these men do not expect Heer to disclose her ailments to the world under any circumstances. Heer tries to argue with them that Pir Sain did nothing to protect her honor. She retorts that the woman they curse was born in this shrine, not in her mother's womb. She cries to her son: "I pleased your father beyond my duty. I owe nobody here anything" (206). She cannot believe that her own son can so easily erase the knowledge of his father's unforgivable crimes, and etch only her ones on his mind. She reminds him that

everyone knows of his evil deeds, but they do not speak about them. She even thrusts the videos in front of him and asks him to watch them with his wife who is, in fact, his sister, to find out what kind of movies his father made of his mother. She points out that while he will recognize many of the men in the videos, she does not know them. None of her pleadings and proofs affect her son's patriarchal mindset that conceives a woman as nothing better than instigator of the 'original sin' of man. He chooses to deny his father's crime, claiming that since he cannot be seen anywhere in the films, his father has nothing to do with them. He insists that his mother is the shameless one, calling her a serpent living in his father's sleeve, and threatens to make an example out of her if she dares to malign his father's good name again. He instructs her to take her old place in the kitchen, and insults her by delegating the job of managing his trousseau to a parental aunt instead of his mother. Finally, Heer breaks down under the pressure of the discourse of male privilege. She begs for forgiveness at her son's feet and promises never again to stain the shrine and cause them shame, but he tells her in no uncertain terms that she is unworthy of living amongst them, and slams the door at her face.

As Rajaji begins to treat his mother like a disreputable maidservant, she fears that if he can verbally abuse her so openly, he can also beat her with the *khajji* whip. Heer fears only her son's autocratic wrath, and fails to take into account the fury of all those people she threatens. In fact, she takes on an entire male legacy of *pirs* as rumors about her and the shrine circulate. While Rajaji conspires with his paternal uncles, Heer remembers how one of them had spent his entire life in incest, but nobody wanted to kill him. The other was a pesticide thief but questions about his soiling the family reputation were never raised. When these ruthless uncles feel threatened that the power of the shrine will dissipate, they advise their nephew to lock



up his mother and declare her mad. They threaten to do it themselves if he fails, and they believe that the community will respect them for taking such a stand. When she is found praying at the shrine with her assistant, Dai, they lock her in the room behind the store where in utter loneliness she writes and reads her own letters. They barricade the doors with wooden planks, nail them up and mark “the tomb of a woman possessed,” confirming the power of male rhetoric to unanimously declare a sane woman as insane (216). Because of the norm of strict ‘purdah’ in some Islamic communities, these men have no problem “entombing” Heer. No one outside the Haveli feels or questions her absence. As Periera points out, Muslim men easily benefit from “women’s seclusion, invisibility, chastity, silence and subordination,” since these “become the standard currency by which men secure their honor and position in society” (98). Heer’s sufferings cannot be mitigated since she is confined within the four walls of her own home and rarely any outsider is allowed inside her residential compound. Even her natal family is permitted limited access to her, and all her brief excursions outside her restricted abode are escorted by some one or other. In the name of maintaining order and discipline at home and society, the male members of her marital family imprison her in a community where to open up the family to public and state intervention is unimaginable.

It is, however, her son Rajaji who completely breaks her heart when he declares that if he could put her to death it would give him great pleasure. Rajaji stands over his mother and growls, “She is a curse. She gave our family nothing but shame. I pray she dies before she can sting us like a snake again” (222). Later he adds: “If she dies, she is not even worthy of a burial place in our graveyard. Her epitaph will be a black mark on the shrine. I want no reminder of her” (224). Heer dies a million deaths as she sees her own son fall prey to a discursive force that

devalues her contributions to his family, and even her existence in order to protect the facade of male chauvinism. Upon the insistence of his uncles, and in order to save his hereditary title as a *pir*, Rajaji walks up to his mother as she lies half dead on a stretcher, and pulls the sheet away from her face. Their eyes stare at each other, and though his fill with tears as he bids her farewell, like a god he pronounces her dead. Heer's brother and sisters carry away her emaciated body to a place far away from Pir Sain's jurisdiction. Only by embracing self banishment and burying her old identity as a *pir's* wife and mother, is she allowed to live a fresh life. Heer's mournful departure from her marital home underpins the hard fact that in a restricted Sindhi society demands for protections and greater rights for women can be easily condemned as heresy or apostasy.

Durrani resents the fact that in Pakistan because of conservative interpretation of *sharia*, socio-cultural norms of masculine authority, feminine obedience as wards of their men rather than full legal subjects of the state, and legitimacy of violence to maintain this arrangement, the harms that women suffer go not only unpunished but unrecognized as harms. In order to bring under public scrutiny the official and popular indifference to the interest and needs of women who are victims, she has taken up the challenge of helping women like Fakhra Yunus, a victim of acid burn by her husband, Bilal Khar. When Yunus tried to escape domestic violence by leaving her husband Bilal Khar, son of Durrani's ex-husband, Mustafa Khar, he felt that his prestige was hampered, and his authority defied. In order to teach his wife a lesson, he stealthily goes to her parental home and douses her with acid while she is still asleep. Durrani proves Pakistani women's resilience in the face of such oppression by helping Yunus leave the country despite opposition from the government. When the Interior Minister denied Yunus passport on the assumption that it would create a bad

image of Pakistani women in the eyes of the world, Durrani protested with the help of media and finally she was allowed to leave with Yunus for cosmetic surgery in Italy. Since the case in 2001 Durrani has been associated with Smile Again, an NGO that helps women who have been disfigured in domestic violence cases. In order to provide justice women like Yunus, as a women's rights activist Durrani has also begun to pursue the agenda of bringing criminal law to bear on intra-family violence. It is her contention that if the theocratized government of Pakistan fails to commit resources to protect women from violence at home they will fail as a state to assume and exercise responsibility. Durrani's remonstrations against men's purported sense of honor in chastising women is echoed in Hina Jilani and Eman Ahmed's complaint about Pakistani men whose "false values of honor and the customary domination of women have provoked extreme reaction to women's exercise of self-determination" (164). Durrani's attempts at making international standard of rights a reality for Pakistani women, and her fights for a doctrine of equal protection of the law has been misinterpreted as violation of Quranic principles and acceptance of Western cultural homogenization. Durrani ignores such false accusations and continues in her struggle for women's right since she believes that it is not just against rejection of religion and culture, but a broader struggle against authoritarianism.

Like Durrani, Chughtai denounces the preservation of false sense of male honor in Indian Muslim societies at the cost of women's basic right to a life of happiness and freedom. She undercuts the codes of honor that are deeply entrenched in the Indian Muslim society in her short story, "Sacred Duty." In this story, male honor is defined as an ideological mechanism used to control the behavior and sexuality of daughters. The story begins with Siddiqi Saheb arranging his only daughter, Samina's wedding over the phone with a rich Muslim boy working in

Dubai. Though the boy is not very handsome and a bit short as well, he considers him to be a perfect match for his daughter. Samina protests, and expresses her desire for higher studies, but she is silenced with sharp reprimands from her parents who disregard her wishes and distribute wedding invitations. Samina, however, does not pay any heed to the concept of family honor and elopes with her future life mate. When a letter announces the news of Samina's wedding, her parents' receive a terrible shock. Samina's father, Siddiqi Saheb, and her mother cannot believe that their beloved daughter has actually married someone of her own choice. Though Siddiqi Saheb considers himself to be a progressive man who believes in women's education and freedom of choice, he simply cannot fathom how his own flesh and blood could dare to dishonor his family as well as his faith by running away from home, and that too with a Hindu boy! When his wife hears the news of her daughter's civil marriage she is so shocked that she literally faints. The parents decide that the only thing to do under such circumstances is to go to Allahabad and kill the daughter as well as her groom. They keep contemplating how to kill the two "deceitful youths;" they think of wringing the daughter's neck with their bare hands, since she has brought such "disrepute" that facing friends and relatives has become difficult for them. Siddiqi Saheb's anger knows no bounds when a newspaper with photographs of the couple's Hindu wedding arrives from Allahabad. In his eyes his daughter's shamelessness became apparent not only through her willing conversion to Hinduism, but also through her immodest smile and artificially demure look in the photograph. Seeing the lessons on the ideal conduct of modesty, virginity and selfless love that she had been taught all go in vain, arouses his rage and disgust to such a degree that he instantly starts thinking of killing and bomb blasting. With his wife, he plans throughout the night the perfect weapon and method of murdering their daughter.

They discuss using a gun first, then a well sharpened knife, and finally agree on using their bare hands to strangle her to death. Indeed, unlike Salman Rushdie's Muslim Pakistani father, in his novel Shame, who murders his daughter for marrying a British boy, Samina's father does not end up killing his daughter. Instead, he devises other means of winning back his lost honor: he plans to accept the daughter only if the son-in-law becomes a Muslim and they go through a Muslim marriage. In this way he thinks he can even out with the groom's parents who had forced the couple to perform a Hindu marriage in order to keep their family honor. He obstinately argues: "We must have the nikah even if I've to go to jail or be hanged for it. He made me appear a fool before the whole world, and I'm not going to let him get away with it" (Lifting 139). To devastate the groom's father, Sethji, and take revenge for the humiliation bestowed upon his own family, he also flashes the Muslim wedding in the papers and declares that the couple will perform Hajj on their way back from England.

Interestingly enough, Sethji's youngest daughter had once broken the honor norms of her family by falling in love with a dark-skinned Christian professor. In order to avoid social scandal and dishonor at that crucial moment of his life, "Sethji had the young man cleverly whisked off to England on a government scholarship" (26). When it comes to someone else's daughter committing a similar breach of family honor, however, he does not seem to be the least bothered: he encourages the girl to betray her family and religion and adopt his own. As both fathers force each other's children to convert and make a farce out of religion and marriage, Chughtai mocks men who are overtly concerned about their own prestige, but unable to defend that of others. The entire story is written as satire and Chughtai does not let Samina become a total victim of honor crime. She and her husband finally escape from the grips of parents on both sides who are more concerned about what others might say,

rather than genuine concern for their children. By using humor as the pervasive tone in this story, Chughtai exposes the absurdity of religious hypocrisy in Indian patriarchy committed in the name of honor.

Like Chughtai, Hossain voices her detestation for honor crimes prevalent in her own society in order to reinforce the stranglehold of patriarchy and cultural authenticity. In "Wave," Hossain's protagonist, Parul's body is used as the terrain for preserving Bangladeshi culture, but she is not as lucky as Chughtai's character Samina who escapes her role as boundary marker for her community. Parul's father, Sheikh Chand murders her for defiling his honor. When Parul runs away from college with her lover Chunnu, Sheikh Chand cannot rest in peace until he teaches his daughter a lesson for going astray. As Parul marries Chunnu and starts leading a contented life, her father spends ten thousand taka to find out the whereabouts of the couple. He tracks down the two lovers and manages to get Chunnu arrested on false charges of robbery. Then, without a word to his wife, he appears at the door step of the house where Parul has been residing with her husband and his aunt. Parul is dragged out of the house and her resistance and queries are silenced with a hard slap across her face. Next, Sheikh Chand thrusts his daughter on a trawler and embarks upon a deadly journey on the river Andharmanik. Thousands of questions crowd in Parul's head but she is so scared of her father's wrath that she dare not ask anything. Suddenly Sheikh Chand pulls out a dagger and orders his daughter to say her last prayers. Parul is so baffled by her father's action that she forgets how to say her prayers. She knows that her father is really angry with her, yet she cannot believe that his sense of honor is stronger than his love for his daughter. Sheikh Chand is bent on avenging those whom he believes have insulted him, be they his children or enemies. He starts mumbling about how he has taught Chunnu a lesson for daring to fall in love

with his daughter, and with a dagger chops off his daughter's head. As if this cold-blooded murder is not enough to assuage his thwarted sense of honor, he chops up her body into pieces and throws them into the river. Not answerable to his wife or the people of his community, Sheikh Chand believes that he has done the right thing by defending his honor. Sheikh Chand's action reveal how the male members of a family are implicated in honor crimes, yet their behaviors are sanctioned by the community since they are seen as moral guardians of the family, and entitled to the right of self-defense. Urbanization and education appear to have relatively little impact on their valuation of honor, and a man who kills another man for defiling the honor of his wife or daughter is supposedly protecting his property and acting in self defense.

One can detect many reasons behind the continuation of dowry and honor-related domestic violence in Muslim communities in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The accomplishments of the women's movements with regard to eliminating domestic violence in the Sub-Continent have been fleeting and illusory because the public/private dichotomy is fiercely maintained in this region. Jilani and Ahmed contend:

Domestic violence, by definition falls in the private sphere. Since it is considered an internal and private matter, friends, family and the law turn a blind eye to it, and the police refuse to register an FIR for assault and battery on the complaints of the wife. (181)

Because of socio-cultural determinants such as the need to silence private crimes and safeguard family honor, often a woman's own relatives, friends, police and judiciary members do not deem it necessary to interfere. The problems for women who wish to take legal action against abusive family members are thus innumerable. Complaining that wife abuse is not sufficiently dealt within the legal arena of Bangladesh, Ameen holds that the law is far more involved with 'stranger'

violence against women, such as murder, rape or trafficking. There are no specific domestic laws to deal with abusive husbands or parents or in-laws. According to Ameen, different cases of domestic violence are often filed under the same and inappropriate legal provisions (e.g. as dowry offenses). In order for women's sufferings to be eliminated, Ameen suggests that wife abuse must be made into a cognizable offense, and the attitude of society, especially of its professionals dealing with such offenses must change. Indeed, women should be encouraged to expose the crimes that are done unto them in the privacy of their homes. If a few bold and elite women like Durrani step forward with their personal grievances, then many ordinary women might gather the courage to break the silence that condones domestic injustice towards them and breeds their subservience.

Unfortunately, as Sobha Venkatesh Ghosh's contends, there are hardly any specific laws in India pertaining to wife battery, though new legislation has been passed in the case of 'sati,' as well as in cases of obscenity and procurement of minors for prostitution. In 1983 and 1986, the category of 'cruelty to wives' was considered by Indian criminal law; yet, because of the way the term 'cruelty' was defined, "the mundane or nonphysical forms of violence of everyday life" fell outside its arena (52). Like Ameen, Ghosh takes issue with the fact that:

...domestic violence is dubiously sutured to dowry demand and harassment, with the result that often in the perception of the police and the legal machinery, a claim to cruelty cannot by definition, be made unless appended to the claim to dowry harassment. (52)

Ghosh points out that in December 2001, the Government of India published a bill on domestic violence; however, feminists across the board have rejected the proposals of the bill on grounds that it falls short of their expectations and might actually prove harmful for women who are steeped in domestic violence. Feminists rejected the basic premise of the bill that demanded that marriages be preserved at any cost. They



also rejected the bill because it said nothing about women's right to child custody, matrimonial property, or to continued residence in the matrimonial home in case of dispute between spouses. Only recently a new Domestic Violence Bill has been passed in India which gives a wife the right to residence.

Though feminist scholars demand that the law should reach into the home to prevent or punish interpersonal violence, and new laws ought to be formulated, because women themselves often perceive violence against them as a private problem and resist intervention, it has become almost impossible to find a remedy for domestic abuse against them. As evident from Heer's case in Blasphemy, many wives are caught in the whirlpool of a violent relationship, but having internalized the ideology of their own inferiority and vulnerability, they lose the desire to find a way out. Ameen contends that women sometimes voice their grievance but "are often restrained by an invisible chain in asserting their rights" (119). Shoma A. Chatterji calls it a "masochistic defense mechanism" that prevents abused Indian women from crying out for help from under an ocean of silence (23). Muslim societies in the Sub-Continent generally encourage women to be passive, selfless, and tolerant. They are taught that it is not honorable to protest or fight back the male status quo; therefore, many women willingly offer themselves as scapegoats for violence, and think that they have somehow contributed to the honor of the family unit by remaining silent about their oppressions. Some women also do not consider themselves abused unless they experience severe physical injury.

With limited support structures, and no alternative behavioral patterns for women to supersede traditional roles circumscribed by culture, Patricia Uberoi's words seem to aptly comment on the present scenario around domestic violence: "Of course there remains a long way to go to break the silence around domestic violence,

and to ensure that the family home is a safe haven for all its members” (210). In order for women to feel safe within their own homes, Sub-Continental Muslim societies have to break male hegemony and end cultural support for domestic violence. Husbands, fathers and sons have to be held accountable by everyone for their cruelty towards women. The patriarchal indoctrination of police, doctors, lawyers and counselors have to be countered as well by recruiting more women in these disciplines. Women themselves have to realize that marriage is not the only goal for them. They have to learn to resist their objectification and struggle to improve their socio-economic empowerment by working both inside and outside of home. Only after all these social components are accomplished by Sub-Continental Muslim societies, may one expect to get rid of the culturally legitimized domestic crimes such as dowry and honor killing.

## CHAPTER IV

## MUSLIM PERSONAL / FAMILY LAWS (SHARIAT LAWS):

## POLYGAMY AND MARITAL RAPE

The Muslim Personal Law (*Shariat*) Application Act, which was introduced in pre-Partition India in 1937, is the same code of family laws that has been accepted by the Pakistani government, as well as the Bangladeshi government with slight modifications. Under the supposedly benign umbrella of these laws, while a Sub-Continental Muslim husband enjoys many benefits, a Sub-Continental Muslim wife does not. For instance, while a wife might have to accept the fate of sharing her husband with up to four co-wives in a polygamous marriage, polyandry is strictly prohibited. Again, while a husband may unilaterally divorce his wife, she has no such rights. Moreover, under Muslim Personal Laws of the Sub-Continent, a divorced wife receives maintenance money from her husband only during the *iddat* period, which is just three months after the divorce has been finalized. She is not supported till she remarries. Discrimination with regard to a Muslim woman's choice of partner also exists under the current Muslim Personal Laws of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. A Muslim woman is discouraged to marry a non-Muslim man, while a Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim woman. Last but not least, if a wife is raped by her husband, there is still no specific Muslim Personal Law to ensure punishment for this violation. Because patriarchy has a strong hold in the Sub-Continental social milieu, many Islamic Personal Laws as constructed, interpreted, and practiced favor a husband's rights and privileges. In this chapter, I critically analyze the link between Muslim Personal Law and issues of polygamy and marital rape as they appear in the fiction of

Ismat Chughtai, Tehmina Durrani and Selina Hossain. My aim is to establish the fact that polygamy and marital rape are built around discourses that validate male virility, and monopoly of male interpretation of *Shariat*, but have a devastating effect on the mind and body of many Muslim wives.

Leila Ahmed's comment: "Family law is the cornerstone of the system of male privilege set up by establishment Islam"(242), bespeaks of the patriarchal nature of Muslim Personal laws in Middle Eastern countries. In her article "An Introduction to Muslim Women's Rights," Azizah Y. Al-Hibri similarly critiques patriarchal elements of Muslim family laws, explaining,

Unaware that Satanic logic provided the underpinnings of a patriarchal world, most Muslim jurists (like their societies) uncritically upheld central thesis of patriarchy, namely, that males were superior to females. This central patriarchal assumption distorted their understanding of Qur'anic text and led them to develop oppressive patriarchal jurisprudence. This patriarchal jurisprudence then became the basis of state laws that have oppressed women for centuries. (53-4)

Al-Hibri finds patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an (*ijtihad*s) unacceptable not only because they are in contradiction with its concept of *tawhid* or unity of God, but also because she finds them to be outmoded to a large extent. She demands reexamination and reformation of some of the Muslim Personal Laws in the light of the changes that have occurred in modern human consciousness.

Like Ahmed and Hibri, Hossain protests against the patriarchal nature of some of the Muslim Personal Laws practiced in the Sub-Continent, and advocates for a uniform civil code for Bangladesh. Hossain argues that the government in Bangladesh should have a standard law for all citizens, thereby avoiding discrepancy in the arena of a wife's rights under the various sects of Islam, and under different religions practiced within the country. In Gender Biswakosh, an encyclopedia of gender in Bangla that she has recently co-edited, Hossain writes:

Because of lack of a uniform Family law in Bangladesh, in every family, women of different religions are facing similar types of oppression. Despite the fact that the state laws are equally applicable for all citizens, or that in the eye of law all humans are equal, when it comes to matters of the family, their respective religious laws are applied. . . . Because of a vast discrepancy in the various religious laws, women have to bear with different kinds of oppression despite being citizens of a modern free state. (63)

Hossain cites the examples of Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan to show how they have changed their Personal Laws in the light of equality between the sexes. She also cites India as an example where the discrepancies between different religious laws have been minimized in certain matters with the help of a uniform civil code; however, she regrets that in Bangladesh there has been no success in this regard. She is also resentful of the fact that the state does not want to bring about any changes claiming that it would mean intrusion in private affairs of the citizens, or encroachment of religion. Hossain contends that upgrading some laws does not mean altering the basic fundamentals of Islam; rather it means honoring women's rights that are already accorded to them in the Quran. As a Bangladeshi Muslim wife who has suffered State backed gender discrimination because of marrying a non-Muslim American, and producing a child with him, I hope that the current Family laws of Bangladesh become less and less patriarchal over time. I also agree with Hossain and opt for a common civil law for Bangladesh, based on the best provisions for wives' in all religions practiced in Bangladesh.

Shabana Azmi, one of the leading Muslim feminist activists of India, similarly believes that a uniform civil code is required to ensure gender justice in India for women. Discussing Muslim Personal Laws in India in "Women Stand Up for Your Rights: The Real reason Why We Need a Uniform Civil Code," she writes: "For far too long women have been victimized and justice has been denied to them under the pretence of personal law." Azmi believes that the principles of *Shariat* and the

jurisprudence drawn from them have become antiquated, and have lost touch with tenets of the Quran that highlights human dignity, justice and peace. Hence she posits that some of these laws should be put under scrutiny to match the mainstay or basic norms of Islam. In fact, it is not only the Muslim Personal Laws that she has qualms with. She suggests that India has only a uniform civil code for all its citizens:

The time has come to place personal laws of all religions under a scanner and reject those laws that violate the Indian Constitution. Personal laws of all religions discriminate against women on matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance and so on. There is an urgent need to cut out the just and equitable laws of all religions and form a blueprint for a uniform civil code based on gender justice.

Hossain and Azmi both relate the current suppression of Muslim women to the monopoly of male interpreters of *shariat* laws concerning the family.

Flavia Agnes however, contends that Muslim wives began with a better footing than their Christian or Hindu counterparts, but later, particularly after India's Independence in 1947, fell behind. One of the positive provisions of the Islamic law of marriage has been that it is a civil and dissoluble contract for Muslims. Agnes comments on the benefits of Muslim marriage as a contract in these terms:

The principles of a contractual marriage provided a better scope for defining women's rights than the status of marriages under the Christian laws of feudal Europe during the corresponding period. (33)

According to Agnes, Christian and Hindu marriages were traditionally viewed as indissoluble sacraments because of their links to indivisibility of feudal land. Not till the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Europe made a shift from feudalism to capitalism, was marriage transformed there from status to contract. Agnes points out that not until the late nineteenth century (1882) married women in Britain obtained the right to own or dispose off her own property without her husband's consent. Before that time British law did not consider a married woman as an individual identity. Upon marriage a British woman lost her identity and merged with her husband's identity. She could

not enter any legal contract or sue any one. A Muslim wife on the contrary, enjoyed property rights even during the days of Prophet Mohammad. Not only has she long enjoyed the right to stipulate her dower or *meher* (a share in her husband's property), and legally claim her maintenance, she was also given the right to freely use or dispose off her own property long before her Hindu or Christian counterparts. Agnes further maintains that even in 1898 the succession rights of a Muslim wife were superior to those granted to Hindu wives under the Indian Succession Act.

Like Agnes, in Wiebke Walther also holds in "Woman in Islamic Law, in the Koran, and in Tradition," that Muslim wives were doing better than European wives because in Islamic marriage there is no joint ownership of property; the wife can keep her inheritance and income to herself or do away with it as she wills. A Muslim husband on the other hand, is legally obliged to pay for his wife's sustenance (food, clothing and shelter), even if she is wealthy, but a Muslim wife is not legally bound to support herself or her children. Again, a Muslim wife cannot be totally disinherited by her husband through a will because of the One Third Rule regarding testamentary succession. According to this rule, a Muslim father or husband cannot will away more than one-third of his property. A Muslim woman is also granted a defined share of property under the scheme of succession laws in Islam. Shahida Lateef similarly observes that even in 1935 Hindu women had no rights to husband's property. The contractual concept of Muslim marriage was adopted not only by Anglo-Saxon Law, but also by Hindu law in 1955. Muslim women still have the property rights, but unfortunately, they are often rendered powerless to exercise them. Many socio-political reasons can be traced to explain why particularly after Indian Independence Sub-Continental Muslim wives have lost their previously privileged position. Increase of child marriage and dowry, devaluation of *meher*, return of *purdah* and

reinforcement of Islamization among other things are some of the reasons that have hindered Muslim women's marital rights in the sub-Continent. Like Agnes, Lateef also regrets the degradation of Indian Muslim women's conjugal rights over time:

Muslim women's rights to divorce, inheritance, repudiation of arranged marriage and dower had been eroded over time and their restitution was urged by all leaders of the women's movement. (163)

Lateef points out that though the *Shariat* Act in 1937 and the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 may be regarded as having advanced the rights of Muslim women in India, with the passage of the Hindu Code Bill in 1956, the drawbacks of the *Shariat* Act emerged. Amongst other rights, the Hindu Code Bill gave the Hindu wife rights to property, maintenance, divorce and adoption, but because of the continuation of polygamy and unilateral-divorce rights only for husbands, Muslim Personal Laws have been increasingly seen as detrimental to the status of Muslim wives.

### *Polygamy*

On the basis of the overall Quranic perspective on marriage that propounds amity and reciprocity between spouses, and also in the light of modern Islamic perspectives of marriage that emphasizes equality, many Muslim countries have declared polygamy unconstitutional. Absence of religious wars in the old fashion way where thousands of Muslim men died at a time on the battlefields, along with changes in socio-economic conditions of women, have resulted in quite a number of Muslim nations abolishing the practice of polygamy altogether. Laws in Tunisia, Turkey, Morocco and Malaysia, for instance, have declared polygamy illegal; however, conditional or circumstantial polygamy is sanctioned in the Sub-Continent. Exponents of polygamy in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh are convinced that a complete prohibition of polygamy, coupled with the husband's unrestricted right to



unilateral divorce, might prove damaging for the first wife because a man determined to marry a second wife would feel compelled to divorce his first wife. Therefore, they find it more beneficial for the Muslim women to permit polygamy under specified conditions than to oppose it outright. It is my contention that continuation of polygamy whether conditional or not, is harmful for a wife, and ought to be shunned in order to provide a new perspective on the myth of male sexual power.

Though permission to practice polygamy in Islam was granted as a remedy for surplus and destitute women in society, some men adopt polygamy for selfish and phallogocentric reasons such as, excessive sexual drive or lust, preference for sons over daughter, desire to flounder status and affluence and also just to add variety or change in life. Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani decry the institution of polygamy because according to them it presupposes the low status assigned to wives in their societies. In impassioned and ironic language they often write about female exploitation and oppression in light of the contemporary reality of polygamy. In the section, "More from Autobiography," Chughtai protests against polygamy in these words: "If women can't have more than one husband, then it is equally unlawful for men to have more than one wife" (*Ismat* 83). Like Chughtai, Selina Hossain contends in Security of the Marginalized Women: The Bangladesh Context, that polygamy should be abolished in order to avoid blatant gender discrimination. In her novel, Atomic Darkness, Proshanti is her mouthpiece to lodge complaints against the institution of polygamy in Bangladesh where a wife has to endure the stings of humiliation, jealousy and destitution for polygamy. Durrani's autobiography, My Feudal Lord, expresses her indignation for polygamy as a socially and legally accepted practice that eventually supports machoism at the cost of existing wives' self-respect and happiness. From their writings it can be inferred that, although polygamy might have been a useful

practice in the past for a certain group of women, it has gradually been converted into a corrupt practice of unbridled lust in most cases. According to the writers, the practice of polygamy has also become devoid of justice and equity, and is thus no longer conducive to the welfare of women or the community. Because of these reasons although polygamy is considered legal in the Sub-Continent, they hold it in contempt.

I contend with Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani in believing that polygamy should not be legalized in today's day and time because it is easy to use it as a weapon of oppression against women, and also because it is symbolic of women's marginal status in society, and her hierarchical subordination in family. Although not too many cases of polygamous marriages are noticeable amongst the middle or the upper middle class of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh today, it is still a rampant phenomenon amongst the lower classes and the elites of these countries. Having more than one wife is seen by men in these classes as something sanctioned in the Quran itself, acknowledging the power of their virility and authenticating their sexual needs. Polygamy may be a blessing for women who are poor, old, sick, or barren because their husbands do not necessarily have to divorce them in order to remarry, but most educated and self sufficient women abhor it because of the false notion of manhood that it instills in husbands, and because of the emotional and physical vulnerability it thrusts upon existing wife/wives.

It is pertinent to note that the verse on polygamy in the Quran has a definite socio-economic context. Historically, after the battle of Uhud in order to economically and emotionally support the huge number of war widows and orphans, official permission was given to Muslim men to marry more than one wife. This permission was also granted in order to check the greed of those people who were

embezzling the property of orphan girls entrusted with them. Ashgar Ali Engineer highlights that polygamy was introduced not only to ensure a home and a husband for every Muslim woman who had lost a father or husband in a war fought in the name of Islam, but also to protect the economic interests of unmarried girls who were left in the care of their own greedy relatives and guardians. In his words,

Following the extant practice of taking more than one wife, the guardians were allowed to marry these orphan girls up to four as a lesser evil to their unlawfully consuming their properties. (54)

Though Engineer acknowledges the beneficiary reasons for allowing polygamy during a certain period of Islamic history in order to handle a social crisis, he strongly feels that “in the changed social context, it would be injuring the Quranic spirit of social and conjugal justice to retain the institution of polygamy except in extraordinary circumstances” (56).

Like Engineer, A.D. Ajijola similarly argues that Islam generally does not like the idea of a man having more than one wife at a time. He argues that only during wartime or other circumstances, when women outnumber men and many of them can find no husbands, should polygamy be allowed. The exceptional circumstances under which polygamy is allowed in Sub-Continental countries include any kind of demographic situation where women greatly outnumber men, or a situation where the wife is sterile or senile. Polygamy is also permitted in case a wife is imprisoned for criminal charges for a prolonged period of time; however, it is a necessary condition in the Quran that men who take more than one wife treat all of them equally. If a man fears that he cannot treat all his wives equally then he is discouraged from having more than one wife. Surah el Nisa in the Quran holds: “And if you fear that you cannot act justly towards orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you but if you fear that you will not do justice between them, then marry one only” (4:3).

Further on, the same Surah of the Holy Quran says that “you will never be able to do justice among women,” thus warning against the humanly impossible task of maintaining absolute impartiality between wives (4:129). Because of this later addition of the Surah, some Muslims consider polygamy totally outlawed in Islam. Others, however, insist that since Islam allows conditional polygamy, the Quranic apprehension regarding treating wives equally should not be seen as an absolute negation. S.R Khan opines that though,

this injunction [to treat all wives equally] can be seen as a sort of hidden deterrent to those who looked at the practice of polygamy as a way to procure or marry more wives when the present ones bored them...

men in general tend to overlook it (86). Khan also provides the five conditions or regulations laid down in Section 6 of the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961, that a man needs to abide by before he can enter into a polygamous marriage. For instance, he has to seek The Union Chairman’s permission to remarry. He has to provide a fee with the application form and state reasons for remarriage. He also has to obtain written permission from the Arbitration Council. Most importantly, he has to seek his present wife’s permission in writing and include it in his application to the Arbitration Council. According to this statutory law, a man who enters into polygamous marriages without the permission of the Arbitration Council may be thrown in jail for up to one year, and fined up to five thousand taka. He may also have to pay immediately the entire amount of dower due to his existing wife or wives. Despite these judicial attempts to regulate polygamy and provide justice, many wives like the ones characterized by Hossain, Chughtai and Durrani, suffer oppression either because their husbands are illiterate and unaware of these laws, or because they believe that breach of such laws hardly holds any serious retribution. Khan however, regrets that most men in Bangladesh either bribe the Union Chairman, or beat up the

wife till she submits. Some even send their wives back to their natal families without providing any specific reason. These men do not care about their wives' sentiments or physical conditions if these intrude in their way of gratifying their own carnal or material gains.

Nawal el Saadawi is similarly aware of the kind of argument men tend to put forward in the name of polygamy in order to defend their virility and their greed. She is quick to retort that though Quran stresses the need for equal treatment of wives,

Logic suggests that to marry several wives implies a preference, a preference for the new wife over the preceding one. This preference in itself is sufficient to make equality and justice impossible even if the man were to be the Prophet himself. (196)

Saadawi holds that often husbands think that justice means equal distribution of material wealth amongst wives and not the love and affection borne by the husband for his women. On the contrary, she believes that women often do not consider marriage to be just a source of material gain; it is also valuable to them for the profound exchange of emotions and feelings it makes possible between a man and woman. Saadawi further argues that in a situation where a husband has four wives, even if he treats them equally, it still means that each wife has only a quarter of the man, whereas the man has four women. In her words:

The women here are only equal in the sense that they suffer an equal injustice, just as in bygone days all slaves were 'equal' in that under the system of slavery. This can in no way be considered equality or justice or rights for women. (140)

I agree with Saadawi in contending that most educated and self-aware women today do not bother as much about money or other worldly goods, as they care for their own prestige, individuality and space. I similarly support Amina Wadud Muhsin's views in this regard, as she opines that distribution of material goods can

not be the prime measurement of justice between wives, and emphasize the following criteria she underscores for testing a man's sense of equality:

fairness is based on quality of time, equality in terms of affection, or on spiritual, moral and intellectual support. These general terms of social justice are not considered with regard to just treatment with wives. (83)

Indeed, it is very difficult for a man to be absolutely egalitarian in a polygamous relationship. Perhaps because of this reason Ajijola insists that the question of whether a man is or is not doing justice to his wives cannot be left to the conscience and decision of the man himself; the law must intervene in such 'private' affairs of a man if he intends to be in a polygamous relationship.

In the work of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani, the husbands practice polygamy without abiding by the rules of the Quran, or the rules of law. These husbands do not and in fact cannot treat their wives with equal justice, dignity and affection, and do not even bother to bestow equal material goods on them. They also do not bother to seek their wives' permission before getting into a new marriage, or provide reasons for their polygamous marriage though by law they are required to do so. The writers provide an intimate glimpse of the sexual double standards of husbands, based on the myth of virility, but resulting in emotional, physical and financial catastrophe for Sub-Continental Muslim wives. In "Under Lock and Key," an autobiographical piece of writing, Chughtai expresses her bewilderment at the men in her family for misusing the privileges provided to them through polygamy. Her own father's whimsical second marriage despite protests that he dearly loved her mother had hurt and confused Chughtai. Trying to rationalize her father's need to marry another woman while protesting to be in a blissful marital relationship, Chughtai remarks, "maybe the other woman was quite different from my mother. For centuries man has been seen to be seeking change" (Ismat 43). She was relieved

when her illiterate and simple mother managed to pull family support in her favor and forced her husband to divorce his new wife within months of their marriage. In this same autobiographical piece Chughtai further shows distaste for her paternal uncle's relationship with Budhya, a washerwoman. Indeed, her uncle did not marry Budhya and treated her with all due respect of a second wife, but because he believed that men are allowed to have up to four wives, he went without much hesitation and had a son from her. He also gives this son his ancestral home as part of his inheritance though he never agrees to marry his mother for she is a lower class woman. He is scared that marital union with her will tarnish his family name, but he is not worried about enjoying her favors as his mistress. Chughtai believes that her uncle could get away with his lascivious actions because "even after marriage, many men think it their right to run after other women. It is actually considered a sign of their manhood" (*Ismat* 44). Through her uncle's affair Chughtai captures the general acceptance amongst the people of her society of the gender biased discourse that man's need for variety in sex is more intense than woman's, leading him to be instinctively polygamous. Chughtai's uncle's long lasting relationship with his maidservant, along with Uncle Masud's affair with his cleaning woman in her story "Aunt Bichu," and the Nawab's sexual relationship with Nayaab Banu, his maid, in her novella, *Lingering Fragrance*, point to the continuation of the old practice of considering slave or captive women and even maid servants as part of men's property, whom they were entitled to use sexually even if they did not marry them. Though like Chughtai's aunt, Nawab Begum also has no option but to tolerate her husband's clandestine affair with her maid, Aunt Bichu however, punishes her husband by considering him dead, and herself to be a widow for the rest of her life for sharing her bed with her maid. Indeed, Aunt Bichu is an exceptionally courageous wife; not most

Sub-Continental women have the strength to firmly oppose their husband's sexual laxity the way she does. Most Sub-Continental Muslim wives can be compared to Nawab Begum instead, who only pass acerbic comments on men's infidelity in marriage, but somehow are forced to accept the fact that "all men of the family tasted a morsel here and there" (Quilt 199).

In The Heart Breaks Free, Chughtai once again delineates the topic of married man and their sexual laxity leading into polygamy. In this novella she depicts the sufferings of Aunt Qudsia, who turns into a sexually frustrated wife because of her husband's sudden, unannounced second marriage. Aunt Qudsia's husband goes to England for higher studies, and falls in love with a British woman. Soon he marries this woman without his first wife's knowledge, and brings her to his country. He does not divorce his first wife, but he also does not care to inquire after her wellbeing. She is left at her parents' home to spend the rest of her life in lonely and enforced stoicism. Even close family members such as her mother and grandmother fear her blooming body, and consider it to be "forbidden fruit" for other men. When Aunt Qudsia complains about her Indian husband's second marriage to a British woman, her mother reprimands her for criticizing her husband's deeds, explaining,

You wretched girl! Have you no pride in your wedded state? He hasn't done anything wrong, the Shariah allows a man to have four wives. You are not the only one in this world, there are thousands who suffer like you, but they endure hardship gracefully. A man is unfaithful by nature. (53)

Through Aunt Qudsia's mother remarks Chughtai underpins the internalization by women of the general belief that *shariat* or religion sanctions polygamy because it views a man's promiscuity as part of his biological make up. These lines also depict the socialization women receive as wives to honor the institution of marriage under all circumstances, and to accept men's betrayal as part of their uncontrollable, hence not



so deplorable, nature. Aunt Qudsia's husband, on the contrary, feels free to enjoy another woman's body by exercising his right to have multiple wives. In "Progressive Literature and I," Chughtai writes the following lines with perhaps Aunt Qudsia in mind, who tolerated her husband's infidelity and injustice for the sake of religious sanction of polygamy. In the words of the author,

When the lonely and faithful wife of the husband who had gone abroad, sang songs of the pain of separation, accusing her husband of having a cosy time with another woman while she herself remained tied to the chains of virtuosity, burning her heart out for him, the Progressive Movement was rejuvenated. (129)

By placing the woes of an Indian Muslim wife who is hegemonized by the patriarchal discourse of polygamy on the progressive writers' political agenda at a time when anti-colonialism, nationalism and modernism were the issues of major concern for her contemporary male writers, Chughtai made a very bold move towards amelioration of Muslim wives' oppression in post-colonial India of late forties and fifties.

Chughtai concerns herself not only with the aspect of emotional deprivation of wives in case of polygamy, she also underscores their physical and economic hardships. In her short story "By the Grace of God," Chughtai presents an insensitive husband in Imdad Mian, who physically transports his first wife to her natal home to live with her father, while he uses her absence to settle down with his new wife. Imdad Mian's actions bring to mind Saira Rahman Khan's observations about one of the most common physical effects of polygamous marriages upon Bangladeshi first wives. Khan explains,

One of the most common rural practices is sending the wife back to her parent's home while her husband goes off to get married to a younger, prettier village belle. The first wife is rarely called back into her husband's home – or else she is ordered to return, only to be treated like a slave or a domestic worker. (87)

According to its proponents, polygamy is thought to be an honorable and compassionate system because it protects the older, sick, or barren wife from divorce, while ensuring progeny for the man who may take a second young and healthy spouse. Imdad Mian does not divorce his old wife outright; nonetheless, she is dispatched with haste and left in her father's house for the rest of her life. Like Qudsia, she is not adequately compensated for her losses. Leila Ahmed denounces the evil of polygamy because of the economic disaster that it lands upon first wives like Imdad Mian's first wife:

For women of the middle and lower classes, uncushioned by personal wealth or wealthy families, polygamy could bring destitution, not just emotional and psychological stress, should a new wife gain enough ascendancy to bring about the divorce of the first wife. (109)

Since polygamy does not ensure that a man will not abandon or divorce his existing wife, Ahmed's fears that is often more financially harmful than good for women. Imdad mian spends 55,000 rupees as bride price to procure a young wife like Farhat for himself. The brand new apartment that he buys and decorates in his second wife's name must have cost another fortune. From the point of view of the first wife, all of this is her financial loss. Even if she is not divorced, because of her husband's polygamous marriage, she has to recede to the village, and miss out on the benefits of city life, which further adds to her financial and status loss. There are very few husbands like Bhaia, the husband that Chughtai portrays in her short story, "The Rock," who do not divest their wives of all monetary rights as they part ways. Bhaia gives his house in Delhi as Bhabi's *mehar* before divorcing her and remarrying. Most husbands in Chughtai's fiction do not care to do provide any maintenance or financial compensation to their wives once they decide to leave them.

Like Chughtai, Durrani voices the pain of housewives in Pakistan who face not only emotional rejection and physical maltreatment, but also economic destitution

owing to their husbands' misuse of the practice of polygamy sanctioned by religion and law. In My Feudal Lord, Durrani enumerates her ex-husband Khar's multiple marriages in order to show the psychological, physical and economical effects of his callous attitude on his existing wife as he marries another one. Khar's elders arrange his first marriage with Wazir, his cousin sister in the village. Wazir gives birth to a son; however, Mustafa soon feels stifled. He leaves her because she is illiterate and escapes to the city where he meets Safia, an airhostess, and marries her. Poor Wazir suffers psychological anguish in silence: "Her humiliation was compounded when the elders dissolved her marriage to Mustafa and gave her to her much younger brother-in-law in marriage" (196). This saves her the indignity of going back to her parents' home as a divorcee, yet it also strips her of any agential power in the matter of her own marriage.

Initially Safia's effervescence and aura of independence attract Khar to this beautiful airhostess. Once she becomes his wife, and he gets more involved with politics, he rarely has time for the girl he "plucked from the skies and planted in the waters of Muzaffargah" (98). Safia is also relegated to the margins of his existence like his first wife, and forced to stay in his village home in Kot Addu. While Khar enjoys unlimited freedom himself, so insulated is his wife Safia's life that even when her daughter is hit by severe diarrhea because of lack of medical facilities in Kot Addu, she is not allowed to bring her to the city. Durrani reminisces upon the loneliness and rejection of Safia, who is left to fend for herself even when her first son, Bilal is born:

Once they were married, Mustafa reverted to type. He stifled all those qualities of Safia that had endeared him. He put her behind the veil and sent her off to Kot Addu. The poor girl was expected to behave like the 'ganwar' she wasn't. Books were banned and seclusion from the bad ways of the city was the norm. Safia lived in Kot Addu for seven years. It was a long and tiring flight into oblivion. (198)

Safia's angst because of her husband's neglect is compounded by the physical and mental entrapment he devises for her by thrusting her behind closed walls and *purdah*. Safia's restrictions regarding access to media and books, further add to the ordeals of her forced exile. Khar however, remains aloof from Safia and enjoys his own life in the town. Soon he meets Noubahar, a beautiful courtesan, and marries her without anyone's knowledge or permission though according to Pakistani Personal Laws, he is supposed to procure his existing wives' consent and file a formal request for remarriage. Khar's political and economic power in his region is so great that he knows that he will not to be held answerable for any of his legal or moral lapses concerning matrimony. He therefore continues to boost his manly ego by marrying, and controlling women from different walks of life.

Khar tries to manipulate Noubahar's body and mind too by cutting her off from all kinds of outside influence. Soon after marriage she is forced to stop singing and dancing and turned into her husband's "private property" (Feudal 199). Though her status in society is raised as she becomes Khar's wife, she is installed in a rented house like a decoration piece and she is financially hurt once she has to give up her business. Like Safia, she is provided a separate home, but she also does not have any choice in deciding where she wants to live, or how she want to live. Her fate however, is worse than Safia's since she is divorced and sent back to her old home to make room for Sherry, Khar's latest wife.

Though one feels sad for Naubahar when she is divorced, yet one also finds her punished rightly for exploiting the practice of polygamy herself, and willingly becoming Khar's third wife. As a man in his patriarchal society, Khar however, is not reprimanded in anyway for exploiting the privilege of polygamy bestowed upon men. Because of the support he gets from his male dominated society for proving his valor

by marrying younger and smarter girls, as soon as Khar's political career blossoms, he marries a woman fit to maintain open house for his political cronies. Sherry fills the necessary role of a great hostess in Khar's life, so he marries her. Within no time however, Khar's eyes fall upon Durrani and he starts wooing her right under Sherry's nose. Once Sherry finds out about her husband's newfound love, first she sulks alone like his previous wives, but then unlike them, she divulges her painful secret to other women in her society. This subjects Durrani to severe criticism from women for being the "other woman", and compels her to stay away from socializing. During this time Khar acts more perversely by using Sherry to convince Durrani to come to his parties. In order to save her marriage Sherry swallows this insult too, and comes to plead to Durrani to join their parties again. Yet she feels so trapped and hopeless at her own situation as a Muslim wife whose husband can not only easily find an excuse for giving her a unilateral divorce, but also legally procure another woman as one of his four wives, that she threatens her rival with plans of her own impending suicide if she continues seeing her husband.

Though Durrani regrets putting Sherry through the pains of a polygamous marriage, her own happy days with Khar are also very limited. Soon she finds herself in Sherry's helplessly jealous and suicidal predicament as her husband puts her through her own misery on account of his incestuous relationship with her younger sister, Adila, whom he intends to marry. The following excerpt demonstrates the existential crisis that Durrani's soul experiences, as the possibility of divorce looms large in front of her:

I lay down on my bed in a state of shock. I wanted to crawl into a corner, to go back to the security of my mother's womb. I was forlorn and miserable. Shattered pieces of my life were strewn on the floor like shards of glass. They cut my very being as I tried to pick them up. I wanted to just exist in oblivion like a speck of dust avoiding a sunbeam. (Feudal 104)

Durrani's contortion of her body into the embryonic posture is symbolic of her own insecurity and her acute sense of alienation owing to a failed marriage to a man who makes a travesty of the practice of polygamy to satisfy his lust for younger women.

Khar first utilizes the power of his manliness to attract naïve and young women like Safia, Naubahar, Sherry and Durrani herself into marrying him, and then he uses the privilege of a Muslim husband as the caretaker and guardian of his wives in subordinating them. He never concerns himself with the obligation of a Muslim husband to treat his wives equally in all senses of the term. When Durrani becomes Khar's wife she narrates her own unease at being a co-wife in Khar's household in these words:

I could not believe that I was a second wife and that I had accepted the status. I would be very concerned about the amount of time he would spend with her. I did not want him to neglect Sherry. There was no room for favorites. In fact I felt extremely guilty and uncomfortable all the time. I would feel conscious when he held my hand in front of her or showed his affection in some other way. I did not want to hurt her. I sensed her hurt. I could never forget that she was pregnant and therefore felt doubly humiliated. (Feudal 224)

Durrani's concerns here bespeak the shortcoming not only of Khar as a husband, but of most men in polygamous marriages since they find it impossible to bestow equal affection, money, facilities, favors, inspirations and time amongst all their wives.

These limitations however, do not necessarily bother Khar or men like him though they have a grave impact on their wives' emotional lives and their self-esteem.

Durrani narrates her own helplessness at the hands of a husband who constantly craves for variety in women without providing them any kind of stability or security in these words: "He outgrow(s) his women, even as they tried to settle down and grow roots. Those very roots made Mustafa restless" (202). The effects of Khar's desires to marry Durrani's younger sister have the most devastating and self-damaging effect

on the writer; she seriously starts doubting the capability of her own body in holding her husband's undivided attention and mourns,

I looked into the mirror. I felt that I had to change. I must look like her. I must change my whole personality. It's the only way. May be my marriage would work then. He wants her not you. Look at you. In your white clothes and high ideals. This is not his kind of woman. Adila is. And yet . . . He loves you. He says so. All the time. The mirror stared back. I moved away. It reflected more than my image. It reflected my mind. I heard his voice. It was sinister. "No other woman can be like you. But I want you to be like a 16 year-old. I want romance again." (Feudal 345-6)

Durrani recoils at the idea of having to act and react like a naïve teenaged girl, at thirty seven, and especially after having mothered five children. She knows that even if she changes her entire appearance, her clothing style, her personality, and annihilates her entire identity for her marriage, she cannot win in this situation since she cannot beat time. She also does not know how to nurture romantic notions about a husband who can claim his rights to polygamy at any time and bring rivals into her home. Since Adila is Durrani's own sister, the latter stands in a worse condition. According to Islamic law, a man cannot marry two sisters simultaneously, so she has to be divorced in order for Khar to marry Adila. Though Khar is aware of this rule, he wants to have his cake and eat it too. He neither makes up his mind about divorcing Durrani, nor gives up his desire for her sister. Caught in this limbo, Durrani can keep her sanity only by reaching out to God through prayers. She can neither turn towards her relatives, nor knock at the doors of the court because she knows that nowhere she will get the kind of assurance and assistance that she needs to live a life of dignity that is due to her as a woman, a partner in marriage, and as a mother. Since Khar lives in a society that maintains double standards regarding male and female sexuality, he is not overtly concerned about the consequences of his multiple marriages or his extra-marital affairs becoming public; rather, he is more worried about disciplining

Durrani's sexual life with an added severity because she was married to another man once before. In his mind, a woman who has sexual experience with more than one man is not to be trusted. Durrani's frustrations in the hands of a husband who objectifies her and treats her like an instrument of his sexual fulfillment because of her past sexual history are well expressed in these lines:

I was scared of letting any feelings show. I was afraid that my slightest response to his advances would reinforce his image of me as some sort of common slut. This was a feudal hang up. The feudals believe that a woman is an instrument of their pleasure. If she ever indicates that she has derived pleasure, she is potential adulteress. She is not to be trusted. Mustafa did not even realize that he had crushed my sensuality. The consequences of refusing were too frightening. I would go through the charade realizing that I was functionally necessary. (Feudal 51)

Like the Victorian wives who had to pretend to be disinterested in sex in order to prove to their husbands that they are decent women, Durrani has to curb her natural sexual instincts while with her husband lest he thinks that she is a 'loose' woman. Living a lie at the core level of her marital relationship eventually kills Durrani's interest in conjugal life and sex. Durrani's sexual dilemma is also reminiscent of the tight rope that many Muslim wives have to walk between being a 'good' woman and a 'bad' woman because while their husbands fall for the 'bad' or sexually aggressive women, they feel threatened by sexually aggressive wives.

In her autobiography, Durrani is vocal not only about her ex-husband's double standards regarding male and female sexuality, but also comments on her own society's discrepancy in judging sexual conducts of men and woman differently. According to her, because of easy sanction of polygamy as well as divorce, a man like Khar in her society could get away with flaunting his virility. Durrani is further aware that because Khar is also a political figure of import in Punjab his natives overlook his



sexual excesses, and highlight his communal services instead. Durrani comments on his society's gullibility and culpability in pumping Khar's macho image thus:

He never tried to live down the image of a much-married man. A society that does not frown upon polygamy and which accepts divorce as the logical end to a marriage that has gone sour, helped him in this regard. People were willing to forgive him his ardor. They shrewdly balanced his political acumen against his romantic interludes and decided that the former carried more weight. (Feudal 206)

Durrani regrets that while her husband's society measures his worth by the economic benefit he renders upon them as their political representative, they refuse to see the economic loss he causes his wives owing to his lusty nature and inclination towards multiple marriages. Durrani writes about Khar's economically inconsiderate nature towards his wives by explaining, "Mustafa had never placed any property in any of his wives' names. He said quite blatantly that he was never sure about how long his marriage to them would last" (94). Khar shows his deliberate irreverence for Durrani's financial state when he tries to make her pay for her freedom through divorce. When Durrani finally decides to leave Khar, he tries to make it as expansive as possible for her. He makes sure that she is stripped of all the money they had in the joint account, and inherits nothing by way of marital property. Durrani describes the conditions Khar lays down for divorce, stating, "He wanted the properties in London. He wanted the children. He wanted my house in Lahore that I had bought after selling my property in Islamabad. He wanted to leave me penniless" (Feudal 353). Khar never marries Durrani's sister, but Durrani divorces him after much deliberation and legal and familial resistance. She incurs huge financial loss, and is left only with her home in Lahore.

In her autobiography Durrani openly takes issues not only with her renowned husband but also with other successful Pakistani men such as Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, and her own father for using polygamy as a means of finding fresh zest in their own lives

while devastating that of their wives in multiple ways. Commenting on her father's unannounced polygamous marriage, and its psychologically damaging effects on her mother, she states: "She was the picture of grief. Her poise and her commanding demeanor had just crumbled. She had lost her self-esteem," (Feudal 327). Durrani's mother feels so embarrassed by her husband's dalliance that she is never able to forgive him. Despite having a rather antagonistic relationship with her mother, Durrani is able to sympathize with the wronged woman in her mother because she herself feels like one on account of her own husband's betrayal. Though both these women are from different generations and married to men of different nature, they are both victims of the patriarchal society's marital favors allotted to men on the basis of their assumed sexual superiority.

In her fiction Blasphemy, Durrani depicts Heer, another Pakistani wife who tolerates her husband's need for sexual diversity, keeping in mind his sexual rights in polygamy, but dreads the consequence of confessing her own likings for a boy before marriage. Heer's husband, Pir Sain however, was married twice before he marries Heer. Though his previous wives are dead when he marries Heer, and he does not marry any of the young maids he sexually exploits, he also does not allow any other men to marry them. He detests her husband's promiscuity and constantly lives under the fear that her husband might marry one of these maids, or divorce her. She voices her apprehension in front of Amma Sain, her mother-in-law, and wants to know if her husband can marry Yathmri, the maidservant. Her mother-in-law replies, "He can marry whomsoever he pleases. It is his prerogative" (121). A sufferer of her own husband's polygamous marriages and affairs, Amma Sain advises the daughter-in-law to become indispensable to her husband in bed. About the licentious nature of men in their community she holds, "This is common among men here. Almost all wives go

through the humiliation of their husband's attachment to maidservants" (Blasphemy 120). Amma Sain's comment explains why the Pir does not make much of an effort to hide his affairs; any objection might only lead him to marry the woman in question, or worse, divorce the one who has problems with his lifestyle. Amma Sain's advice to Heer further underpins the helplessness of wives in a society where not only polygamy is accepted, but unilateral divorce by women is impossible. Instead of unmasking their husbands' licentious nature, and leaving them for good on account of that, they have to try to win over their hearts by keeping them sexually satisfied. Divorce is very difficult to procure for a Muslim wife like Heer or her mother-in-law also because these women have no independent source of income. Confined within the four walls of their homes, and forced to live the life of an entirely dependent person, they lose the spirit or means to go to the court and win the case against husband's cruelty. Indeed if a Muslim wife has the right to divorce stipulated in her kabin-nama, or their marital registration paper at the time of marriage, it may be easier for her to divorce her husband, but Heer did not have any such thing in her favor. Pir Sain is aware of all the legal barriers his wife has were she to seek divorce. Because of his knowledge of his wife's legal disadvantages, he maintains unflinching double standards regarding his own and her sexual rights. While Heer is not allowed even to interact with a nine year-old male cousin, and expected to remain behind the veil in front of most men, including her own adult son, he has sex with adolescent servant girls at regular intervals right in his bedroom. As a *pir* or religious leader, Heer's husband also finds it easier to release his sexual energies on unsuspecting victims such as his women followers who cannot have children with their husbands. He drugs them and has sex with them till he impregnates them, but no one dares to question the morality of his virile act. Most people believe that the pir's power of

intercession with God makes the barren women pregnant. Those who suspect any kind of foul play keep their mouths shut for fear of getting killed by the Pir's cronies. Close male members of the pir's family, like his brothers and sons also feel empowered because of their religious heritage, and one common way they display their masculinity is by having several wives and innumerable sexual encounters with women under their patronage. Many pirs in the Sub-Continent have acquired a bad name in society because of misuse of their virility in the name of safeguarding helpless women.

The effect of the sexual promiscuity of fraudulent pirs can often be discerned on their wives who like Heer indulge in excessive smoking and drinking in order to keep the fear of finding themselves in a polygamous marriage at bay. As Heer overdoses on quinine in order to abort an unwanted pregnancy and stop her rivals from taking over her husband fulltime, her desperate attempts bring to mind the helpless situation of many wives in Sub-Continental *Pir gharanas*, whose bodies shrivel up and make them look much older than their age because of health hazards they invite upon themselves in order to hold their husband's sexual interest in them. Severe competition, intense loneliness and a sense of loss always surround these women like Heer on account of their husbands' potential polygamous marriages or threats of polygamy.

Like Durrani, Hossain uses her fiction to protest against the legalization of polygamy in Bangladesh because of the way it magnifies the false notion of masculine virility and also because of its negative impact on existing wife or wives. Latif, the husband in "Honor," by Hossain, is a Muslim husband like Durrani's husband Khar or Pir Sain, who desecrates the marital privileges entitled to him as a Muslim man, and maintains one sexual norm for himself, but another for his wife.

Though he has completed his quota of what religion permits by having four wives at a time, so vehemently he objects to his fourth wife Maleka's alleged desire for another man, that he murders her. Maleka's ghost is Hossain's mouthpiece for denouncing the system of polygamy for men, and strict monogamy for women. She says,

A man who lives with four wives in his house is considered virtuous. He is said to enhance the prestige of his family. On the other hand, a woman who is merely hungry for some love, and wants to live her life differently, not as one of four wives, bears all the blame. She supposedly is a dishonor to the family and that is why she must die.  
(40)

Latif is thirty-six years older than Maleka, but because of the prevalent myth of male virility as a long lasting thing, he still feels that man's age does not matter when it comes to marriage. Maleka however, is like Chughtai's young wife Farhat in "By the Grace of God," who cannot fall in love with her much older husband, and suffers psychological as well as sexual anguish because she cannot legally satisfy her craving for a passionate relationship in any way outside of her marriage.

In "Parul's Becoming a Mother" Hossain again projects the psychological, physical, and sexual frustrations of a wife whose husband takes a second wife without her permission, and without even divorcing her, but who cannot pay back her husband in the same coins because society will declare her to be a pariah if she did. When Abbas Ali, Parul's husband forsakes her one fine morning never to return again, she wonders what could be the cause for his sudden desertion. She is confident about her sexual abilities and her household efficiently. Hence she is baffled at what could have compelled her husband to seek another wife. Especially since they had lived as a happily married couple for a year and a half, Parul can not fathom the total negligence and alienation from the man whom she had accepted through the social bond of marriage. Hossain's narrator of the story informs the reader of her physical ailment, melancholy and state of insanity on account of her husband's rejection in marriage:

A troubled thought keeps ringing in her mind – when does one cease to need another person? Why did the man leave? Why did he have to leave? This “why” twists around and strangles her mind like a rope, a tough rope that causes the veins on a dark or light skin to show. At times the vein bursts open and shoots out blood. When she feels like scratching away something with her bare hands, she vehemently shakes up the bamboo post causing the weak roof top to tremble. (162)

Parul tries to assuage her sexual urges by jumping into the cool water of a pond, but that does not help. In order to relax her tensed body, and kill the empty hours after work, like Heer, Parul gradually indulges in the habit of smoking cigarettes. When that fails to calm her agitated body, she tries to take revenge on the society by sleeping with several men, but not disclosing the paternity of her child once impregnated.

Mushfiqa’s fate in Hossain’s short story “After the Last Letter,” is like Parul’s in the sense that her husband also surprises her with a second marriage without any apparent fault on her part. Though these two women belong to two different classes, and their ways of handling their catastrophe is different; however, their psychological and sexual frustrations are alike in many ways. They are both steeped in a world of desolation and dejection because of their husbands’ desertion. Endless time weighs upon both of them and they seek consolation in their children. Unlike Parul, however, Mashfiqa does not adopt unhealthy habits like smoking, or take revenge on a society that sanctions polygamy by transgressing socially prescribed sexual mores for women. She does not even complain to her in-laws, or let her husband’s action interfere with the care she provides for her sick mother-in-law. Moreover, she tries to hide the pangs of dejection from Tushar, her son. Because of keeping her emotions bottled up, Mushfiqa eventually falls sick. Her appetite drops and she loses all interest in worldly things. She prefers to hide away from the world, and survive somehow by taking up teaching as a profession. The kind of sacrifices Mushfiqa

makes, are not easily possible by most women today. Mushfiqa is, however, like those Bangladeshi wives who lose the urge for remarriage just because they are jilted once. The discourse of women's sexual submissiveness as opposed to men's sexual dominance is so prevalent in Bangladesh that even if a young wife like Mushfiqa spends her entire life serving her in-laws and not contemplating divorce, no one will regret the waste of her youth; rather, they will appreciate her ethical and moral values.

Hossain's "Motijan's Daughters," presents another Bangladeshi wife in Motijan who suffers silently because her husband courts other women, and keeps her under the constant threat of remarriage. Though Motijan's husband never actually has a second marriage, like Pir Sain, he womanizes without being bothered about his wife's sentiments because the practice of polygamy is there to legalize his affair. Motijan's mother-in-law also wants her son to remarry, first, for a better dowry and then for a grandson. Even though he is not willing to take on the financial burden, emotional responsibilities and commitment that polygamy demands, he feels entitled to remarry, and receive accolade for his manliness. Like Parul, Motijan avenges the injustice done unto her by having children out of wedlock.

Proshanti, in Hossain's fiction *Atomic Darkness*, is not quite as bold as Hossain's Motijan, yet she is another admirable wife character in Hossain's oeuvre whom the writer creates in order to express her resentment towards polygamy; or what Proshanti calls, "a trite, average behavioral pattern of a husband"(47). Like Abul, though Anupam is not in a polygamous marriage, he quite openly maintains extramarital affairs. In his middle class society polygamy is looked down upon in certain quarters. Perhaps because of this, or perhaps because of the economic expanses it involves, Anupom avoids a second wife, yet keeping in mind his polygamous rights he does not deem it necessary to harness his heightened libidinal

urges. Because of her husband's promiscuous nature, Proshanti compares him to a typical husband who is like an animal tied to a pole. Just like the confined animal that has to resign itself to its tied fate, a typical husband reconciles himself to his tied position in marriage. Like the uncouth animal again, he tries out the limits of his restrictions by pulling at different directions, grazing at whatever he can lay his mouth on. Indeed, Anupam's taste in women is different than that of her friend's husband who ensnares servant girls, because he handpicks his mistresses from the upper class posh category of women. Anupam acknowledges that his wife has many legitimate allegations against him, but he does not know how to explain or resolve the complications that have arisen in marital life for what he believes to be his own inborn, uncontrollable nature. In her novel, Hossain undercuts Bangladeshi husbands like Anupom who believe that men are biologically inclined towards polygamous relations, and need not put much effort in restraining their libidinal drives. As her revenge on Anupom's licentious nature as it were, Hossain allows Proshanti an unforgettable get-away with Tatian, a soul-mate she discovers while vacationing alone in the isles of Bali. Though Proshanti's affair with Tatian is very short lived, it is extremely reassuring and a permanent source of rejuvenation for her.

Most wives in Bangladesh who are in polygamous marriages are not as bold as Motijan or Parul, or as lucky as Proshanti. Most of them suffer like Kasem Khan's wives in Hossain's short story, "The World of Love and Labour." Kasem Khan ruthlessly beats up his wives if they raise any objection against his marriage. Tamiza is Kasem Khan's second wife who does not accept the idea of her husband's latest marriage. As she grows aggressive and hurls out invectives at the fourth wife to be, her doubly angered husband calls her names and violently punches her several times. When she gives in submissively, he orders his first wife to start cooking for his



wedding feast. As the previous three wives writhe and sneer in anger and jealousy at the arrival of the fourth wife, Kasem Khan starts getting ready for his impending wedding with full enthusiasm. The insensitivity of a husband like Kasem Khan towards his existing wives may seem inhuman, but there are many men in the Sub-Continental societies who neither bother to obtain their wives' consent for bringing a co-wife for them nor hesitate to torture their wives if they pose a threat to their male privilege of polygamy.

In his book, Muslim Law, Syed Khaled Rashid highlights a proposal that was made in a seminar on Muslim law in India, suggesting that taking permission from the first wife before getting married again should not be made compulsory. Rashid argues for the proponents of this proposal, suggesting that,

...of course it hurts when her husband takes a second wife. It hurts her emotionally. It could also hurt her economically . . . . The emotional injury must be weighed against the interests of the husband, the second wife, and the society in general. A matter involving the interests of several parties should not be decided with reference to what happens to one party only. It is admittedly at the cost of the first wife, to some extent that Islam permits polygamy. But it does so in view of the higher interests of the society. (79)

Rashid suggests that a man should not be obliged to give any reasons as to why he wants to take a second wife since it is a very delicate and subjective matter. Rashid explains the reasons behind such objections by holding that primarily,

Emotional urges, the nature of disability from which the first wife is suffering or the social considerations prompting a second marriage all belong to the private sphere of one's life. Their exposure will not only destroy the peace of homes, but the fear of such an exposure may also drive some people unwillingly to divorcing the first wife, causing hardship to her and the children. It is also feared that obliging the man to justify his intention by giving convincing reasons would give the courts in this country far more powers of restraining this practice than desirable. (78-9)

The ideology placed in this proposal in favor of men's right to remarry without seeking existing wife or wives' permission are in direct contradiction with what

Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani propound in their writings. As feminist activists and social reformers of their respective societies, these writers want to raise awareness amongst the Muslim wives about their own rights, albeit limited, in Islam. According to these rights, a Muslim wife can restrict polygamy through her right to enter into a pre-marriage agreement. In this agreement or *Kabinnama* she can stipulate that her husband will not contract a second marriage during the subsistence of the first. If her husband enters into a second marriage without her consent, she can exercise her right of delegated divorce. She can also demand that he should provide her with a separate residence in case of second marriage, and polygamy entitles her and her children to maintenance allowance. As seen from the cases of most wives in the fiction of these writers however, their husbands abscond without as much as a word, and none of the above stipulations hold any effect because although such husbands are liable to criminal prosecution, their second marriages contracted in contradiction to these various statutory provisions are also considered valid. Hence they do not worry much about taking off suddenly and settling elsewhere while their wives are left stranded and stunned in most cases. Often the dejected wives are neither sterile, nor physically infirm or insane, yet their husbands desert them for other women mainly because of the discursive construction of gender privileges allotted to them by discriminatory government policies and tacit social connivance.

The pangs of indignity and dereliction faced on account of their husbands' polygamous marriages by scores of wives like Durrani herself, and by Heer, Bhabi, Aunt Qudsia, Parul, Motijan, Proshanti or Mashfiqa bring to mind the real life situation of Malak Hifni Nassef, one of the leading early feminists of Egypt, who was cheated into a polygamous marriage. Leila Ahmed quotes from "Or Co-Wives," Nassef's article on the miseries of a wife whose husband takes another wife:

It [co-wife] is a terrible word – my pen almost halts in writing it – women’s mortal enemy . . . . How many hearts has it broken, how many minds has it confused and homes destroyed, how much evil brought and how many innocents sacrificed and prisoners taken for whom it was the origin of personal calamity? . . . [It is] a terrible word, laden with savagery and selfishness . . . . Bear in mind that as you amuse yourself with your new bride you cause another’s despair to flow in tears . . . and children whom you taught to sorrow, weep for her tears . . . . You hear the drums and pipes [at a wedding], and they hear only the beat of misery. (182)

Though Nassef’s sufferings are shared by many Sub-Continental wives, unfortunately the common belief in the region, as relayed through the voice of the father in Hossain’s short story, “The World of Love and Labor,” is still that “men can marry as many times as they like” ( *Golposhomogro* 314). Because of currency of such social discourse of male virility, many poor fathers like the father in Hossain’s story, give their daughters in marriage to much older men with children. The husbands in Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani’s fiction also easily buy the myth of male virility, and hold opinions similar to M. Iqbal Siddiqui and Syed Khalid Rashid. Siddiqui and Rashid believe that, men in general have a more active sexual impulse than women do. They also opine that some men are gifted with extraordinary strength and vitality. According to Siddiqui, for such men it is not humanly possible to restrain the powerful instinct of mating and if such “abnormally sexed” men are compelled to live a monogamous life, they would break their nerves and go against their natural impulse (188). Siddiqui is of further opinion that with successive births a woman becomes physically weak, and “her fires are slackened,” but a man whose vigor and youth lasts for longer cannot remain satisfied with such a woman (190). He suggests that in order to avoid treading the path of immorality and sin, such a man should be allowed to have more than one wife. Rashid similarly holds that in order to avoid a life of debauchery a man should be allowed to participate in polygamy. In his words, “it is the only way to check adultery, concubinage and prostitution, and many sexual

offenses which have become so common today” (76). Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani’s views regarding male/female sexuality vastly differ from those of Siddiqui and Rashid’s opinions. Like Saadawi these writers believe that in Islam it is not only the man whose sexual needs, desires or powers are acknowledged. Islam also recognizes these in women.

Saadawi is amazed at the discrimination that is practiced in the name of religion when it comes to sanctioning sexual license. She cannot understand why the necessity for men’s sexual satisfaction is considered the most important thing, even more important than his family’s, his wives’ or his children’s rights. She questions in utter bewilderment,

Why has religion been so lenient towards man? Why did it not demand that he control his sexual passions and limit himself to one wife, just as it demanded of the woman that she limit herself to one husband, even though it had recognized that women’s sexual desire was just as powerful, if not more so, as that of men? (139)

Saadawi blames patriarchal Islam for maintaining such double standards when it comes to women’s sexual pleasure. She is appalled by the fact that in some Muslim communities even death can be the penalty if women so much as look endearingly at men other than their husbands. Saadawi’s attempts at acknowledging Muslim wives’ sexuality and dispelling the false image surrounding it are reminiscent of similar attempts made by Haideh Moghissi, the Iranian feminist scholar.

Moghissi holds that although Islam recognizes the right to fulfillment of sexual desire in both men and women, because of hierarchical concepts of sexuality and gender discrimination in the realm of sex and desire, patriarchal Islam makes it harder in practice for women to achieve sexual satisfaction. Moghissi regrets the fact that while it is presumed that a Muslim husband might have sexual drives that cannot be satisfied with only one woman at a time, and provisions are made for this problem,

a wife's sexuality is overlooked and strictly confined within the institution of monogamy. She points particularly to Shi'ia Muslim men and mourns the fact that while they are allowed to marry up to four women and hire as many temporary wives as they can afford through mut'a or temporary marriage, a Muslim woman under no sect of Islam, whether Shia, Sunni or Maliki, has such facilities. Like Saadawi, Moghissi complains against such discrimination in these words:

This special allowance made to men in effect nullifies women's right to sexual pleasure as recognized in Islam. Since Islam strongly discourages solitary sex and severely punishes homosexuality, marriage is the only permissible framework within which women can seek sexual pleasure. In polygamous union, women's rights to sexual pleasure are confined to one quarter of a man. (23)

Moghissi's protestations against obliteration of women's sexuality in Muslim societies, along with her objections against Muslim husband's aggressive sexuality, are shared by Amina Wadud Muhsin as well. Muhsin sees polygamy as a practice that has been misused to sanction men's unbridled lust. In an angry outburst against the misinterpretation of its Quranic version, she writes:

If a man's sexual needs cannot be satisfied with one wife, he should have two. Presumably, if his lust is greater than that, he should have three and on until he has four. Only after the fourth Quranic principles of self-constraint, modesty and fidelity to be executed. (86)

Thus, Saadawi, Moghissi, and Muhsin all stand against patriarchal double standards regarding a wife's sexuality. They also argue that though Muslim men enter into polygamous marriages arguing that Quran allows them to have four wives, in Islam monogamy is the preferred system; polygamy is allowed only under exceptional circumstances.

Unfortunately, polygamy is misused by men not only as an excuse to hide their extended libido, or lust, but also for gratifying son preference, that is desire for a male heir to continue lineage. In Chughtai's short story, "By the Grace of God,"

Imdad Mian is a 65 year-old man who already has a wife and four daughters, yet he marries the twenty year-old Farhat in the hope of procuring a son. Imdad's mian's cravings for a son bespeaks not only a man's desire to ensure that his son inherits most of his property, but also his egocentric need to see his name thrive in this world after his death. Farhat's mother Sakina, who has totally internalized such needs in men, has no objection to such a marriage; however, when Farhat does not produce any children even after six years of her marriage, her mother starts getting alarmed. She is worried for her daughter because "people are beginning to hint at a third try! No scarcity of girls. The best of families will offer their daughters to him on a silver platter" (143). Farhat eventually produces a son, but not with the help of her husband, or the potions that her mother procures from the *hakeem*; she has an extra-marital affair. During her affair Farhat enjoys the tacit acceptance of her mother, not so much for her own wellbeing, as for her mother's selfishness. Farhat's mother believes that Imdad Mian is so desperate in his need to father a son and prove his manliness that he will not question the paternity of the child even if he suspects foul play. Indeed, Imdad Mian raises no qualms despite the fact that his son has blue eyes, and looks nothing like either himself or his wife! Legally the son belongs to him, and unless the real father raises an issue, and the mother is ready for divorce, he does not need to worry. Farhat however, is devastated since she is separated from her lover, and forced to raise her son as Imdad Mian's own flesh and blood. Farhat's case is hopeless because she can neither seek divorce on the grounds of sexual incompatibility, nor claiming the rights and privileges accorded to a woman in patriarchy. Like her mother, she is forced to subscribe to the myth of male virility.

Hossain also depicts the culpability of society in allowing polygamy in the name of a man's right to male progeny. In her short story, "World of Love and

Labor” the sixty-two year-old Kasem Khan, who already has three wives, marries the eighteen year-old Fulbanu in order to have a son with full consent of her father. On their nuptial night her husband demands, “I want a son. The family line must continue” (Golposhomogro 319). It never occurs to him that it may be his own impotence that explains why his wives cannot have any children. He keeps marrying and condemning one woman after the other in the hope of producing a male heir. When the workers at the family planning center tell him that the problem of not having children could be either the man’s or the woman’s, Kasem Khan’s male ego is severely injured. Bewildered he wonders, “could one accept the fault of a man? Was ever a man at fault? Wasn’t it always the woman. The sterile woman!” (Golposhomogro 320). His arrogance is punctured when the doctor tells him that his sperms die before they reach his wife’s ovum. Many men like Kasem Khan in the villages of Bangladesh are still living in a cocoon of male patronization, totally unaware of the scientific advancements in the world of genetics.

Fulmoti’s husband in Hossain’s fiction Atomic Darkness is another uneducated Bangladeshi husband like Kasem Khan who attempts to procure a son by exploiting the provision of polygamy. When Fulmoti, his fifth wife, also produces a daughter, he beats her up and compels her to leave his home. Unaware of the role that male chromosomes play in deciding the sex of a child, he marries again as soon as Fulmoti leaves with her daughter. His polygamous franchise helps him find another wife without much ado.

Like Chughtai and Hossain, Saira Rahman Khan protests male tendency in Bangladesh to use polygamy as a means of procuring sons. She thinks that it is not justifiable that a man should be allowed to practice polygamy because of his existing wife’s inability to produce any children, lay aside her inability to produce sons. She

regrets that “such deficiencies are always blamed on the wife and woe betide, any woman who dares even suggest that her husband may be at fault!” (86). Amina Wadud likewise does not accept desire for a male child as a valid condition for a man’s second marriage. She emphasizes the fact that “there is no mention of this as a rationale for polygamy in the Qur’an” (84). Siddiqui however, argues that if a woman is barren then her husband should not be denied the right to remarry. In my opinion, since a Muslim couple can adopt a child, even a barren woman should not have to suffer humiliation on account of polygamy, and share her husband with a co-wife in order for him to satisfy his fatherhood.

Indeed, like the exponents of polygamy such as Siddiqui and Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, who are concerned about the misfortune of surplus women in society who cannot find a husband or who cannot be mothers, I sympathize with women who are deprived of a proper stable family life, but unlike them I do not believe that polygamy in Islam is still serving the interest of these women as it was originally intended. Moreover, I concede that most women today do not think of marriage and motherhood to be the sole aims of their lives. Many educated and economically solvent South Asian women prefer to live alone, and value their freedom of association over a marital status as a co-wife. Hence I have strong reservations against Siddiqui’s contention about polygamy that: “If the West were to follow Islam in this respect today, all the destitute and helpless women there could become members of decent families, and prostitution and immorality can be effectively stamped out” (184). Siddiqui assumes that prostitution will stop only if women can be converted into wives. He fails to note that men’s lust, and not women’s poverty has a lot to do with the continuation of prostitution.



What is most apprehensive about the arguments posed by the proponents of polygamy is, while they are overtly concerned about marriageable extra women in society, they are not that much worried about the plight of the forlorn wives who are disregarded for a new wife. Wahiduddin Khan, for instance, is of the opinion that if a woman, who is the object of a man's desire, is willing to enter into the married state then there is no cause for objection. Indifferent to the effect of this kind of agreement upon a man's current wife or wives, he contends, "The present age gives great importance to freedom of choice. This value is fully supported by Islamic law. On the other hand, the upholders of 'feminism' want to turn freedom of choice into restriction of choice" (189). Wahiduddin Khan is oblivious of the freedom of choice that a married woman would also like to utilize, but does not either because she fears destitution or for the sake of her children. Though Khan regards polygamy as purely a matter of an adult man and woman's own conscience and in keeping with Islamic precepts of liberty, like Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani I refuse to support polygamy as a necessary part of the Islamic moral order. Even though Sub-Continental Muslim Personal law permits polygamy under special circumstances, I opine that it is a violation of married women's rights, and being a co-wife is undesirable and objectionable to most women. In a language fraught with a sense of the terrible cost this custom entails for wives and children, Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani narrate the sad plight of wives who are cheated emotionally, physically as well as economically by husbands who practice polygamy. Polygamy should be shunned not only to relieve married women of multiple oppressions, but also for curbing the myth of male virility that it propagates.

*Marital/Spousal Rape*

In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh there are no specific provisions either under Muslim Family/Personal Laws (Shariat laws) or under the Penal Code that provide a wife protection from marital rape. Not only are current laws insufficient to tackle the issue, many people of this region still do not visualize marital rape as a criminal offense. Even wives themselves hesitate to label their husband's unacceptable sexual aggression as rape. They believe that it is impossible for husbands to rape their wives, and marriage vows automatically abdicate their right to deny sex upon demand to their husbands. Because of such misconceptions cases of marital rape often go unnoticed and unreported. In their fiction, Durrani and Hossain voice their staunch opposition to marital rape as a social crime. According to these writers, marriage neither gives a husband a unilateral right to intercourse with his wife, nor permits him to cater his wife's body to others for sexual use. Husbands in the fiction of Durrani and Hossain however, randomly abuse their wives' bodies since they believe that marriage means free license for sex. By critically analyzing marital rape as delineated in the writings of Durrani and Hossain, I concede that patriarchal interpretations of the Quranic laws, and gender biased social discourses are greatly responsible for a Sub-Continental Muslim wife's sexual violation in the hands of her own husband.

According to a report on wife rape from Wellesley Centers for Women: "wife rape is the term used to describe sexual acts committed without a person's consent and/or against a person's will, when the perpetrator (attacker) is the woman's husband or ex-husband." The Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) similarly defines spousal rape as "a woman's unwilling sexual intercourse with her husband on the sole will of and coercion from the husband" (29). Though most definitions of marital rape incorporate physical force and aggression that a husband applies while having sex with his wife, it is also marital rape when the force is more

restrained -- just enough to gain sexual access into the wife's body, but not enough to cause severe injury. It is also considered marital rape when a husband orders his wife to perform sexual acts for him or for other men against her will. In an article on marital rape, Aurangzeb Haneef adds:

It is still marital rape if a woman does not resist anymore. Many times the woman has never considered that she had a right to say "no". She is taught that she is not entitled to voice her desire or lack of it. She is taught to take abuse and accept force. To the extent that some women accept violence accompanying sex as a norm.

Thus a wife does not need to be involved in a bloody physical encounter for it to be rape; sex against her will is rape whether it is a stranger or her husband forcing himself upon her. Sex even with the tacit consent of the wife may also be considered rape if that is a result of latent fear in her of doing something wrong by rejecting her husband's approaches. Because marriage in the Sub-Continent is a fundamentally gender differentiated institution that presumes male authority and control, and female subordination, the wife accepts forced sex as part of the marriage deal.

Durrani and Hossain's writings abound in instances of different kinds of marital rape. In chapter one, I have already detailed the sexual violence that is perpetrated upon child bride Heer in Durrani's fiction, Blasphemy. In this chapter, I highlight the adult Heer's chronic and complete victimization in the hands of her husband, Pir Sain. Despite having several children with this man, Heer never feels entrenched in Pir Sain's household because of his growing sexual appetite, fostered with the help of virility pills. Because of her moral upbringing that has taught her that to satisfy a husband's sexual needs is a wife's sacred duty, she feels strangely compelled to have sex with her husband whom she finds otherwise detestable. Also, Heer fears that if she does not allow her husband to have forced sex, he will not spare raping even his own daughters. Once Pir Sain starts having sex with adolescent

maidservants and orphan girls right in Heer's bedroom, she realizes that she has a hard battle to win. Before her husband forces her to indulge in orgies organized by him with women below her status and younger than her, she tries to get drunk. In her intoxicated stupor, she hopes to blur the humiliation of the hideous scenes unfolding before her eyes, and involving her body without her mind. To be able to satiate her husband's physical hunger in the month of *Ramadaan* when sex is restricted while fasting during the day, Heer has to go through a forced abortion as well. Nothing seems to contain Pir Sain's ever-growing sexual perversity, and such depraved and debauched ideas invest his mind that he does not even hesitate to make his wife follow him under the veil in order to perform sexual acts with his cronies while he sits and watches. Younger boys are also brought into Heer's bedroom in the dead of night and forced upon her for her husband's sexual enjoyment. Such sexual violence is to a great extent the product of the differing social roles of husbands and wives and the unequal power relationships that these sex roles imply in Pakistani societies.

Heer's husband's brutal sexual assaults can be compared to Durrani's ex-husband Khar's sexual excesses as they are expressed in her autobiography, My Feudal Lord. Like Pir Sain, Khar is able to convert his wife into an easy victim because of the sex role differentiations and differential power relations that exist between Pakistani couples. Like Pir Sain again, Khar is not satisfied with the interpersonal control of his wife through marital rape; his concupiscence takes the shape of child molestation as he rapes Adila, Durrani's thirteen year-old sister. Later he has an affair with her for over three years, during which period he continues to sexually abuse Durrani against her will. Pain is replaced by humiliation and angst in the writer's mind, as Khar's objectionable actions make her suicidal and sick.

Because of the cultural indoctrination however, Durrani refrains for a long time from disclosing her sexual ordeals even to her family or friends.

Like Durrani, Hossain makes it a part of her feminist agenda to ensure that the Bangladeshi societies stop considering marital rape as a bedroom squabble or a “normal” phenomenon. She propounds that even an otherwise loving and caring husband can also be guilty of marital rape if his wife is compelled to have sex with another man with his consent. In her fiction, The Drowsy God, Monir, the fisherman does not rape his wife Shukhtara himself, but convinces her to have sex with the head of the slum. When this couple moves to the city in search of a living, they find a place in a slum, but have hard time coming up with money for rent and food. As Monir philosophizes over his miserable human state, and wonders how to procure some help, the head of the slum comes up with a quick solution. He suggests that Munir let his wife earn money by selling her body. Though Shukhtara immediately protests against such a degrading idea by screaming out loud, and begs her husband not to turn her into another prostitute like Jorina, eventually she relents to his requests. Quietly, though very mournfully she leaves with the head of the slum, and disappears in the darkness of the night. Shukhtara’s ultimate submission bespeaks of the legacy of culturally ascribed sex roles in Bangladesh.

In her article, “Rape and Incest: Islamic Perspective,” Uzma Mazhar quotes several verses from the Quran to prove that it considers love and affection, and not power and control to be the very basis of marital relation between a man and a woman. According to her, the Quran does not condone violence and forced sex in marital relationship. Mazhar cites Surah Baqarah from the Quran which holds:

Your wives are your tilth; go then unto your tilth as you may desire, but first provide something for your souls, and remain conscious of God, and know that you are destined to meet him. (2.223)

Mazhar wants to establish that in the Quran a spiritual relationship between a husband and wife is postulated as an indispensable part of their sexual union. She also quotes Surah al Nisa to prove that good demeanor is emphasized as part of a husband's responsibility in the Quran: “. . . and consort with your wives in a goodly manner, for if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something which God might yet make a source of abundant good” (4:19). Surah ar Rum further reiterates amity and concord to be the cement that binds a husband and wife in marriage:

And among His wonders is this: He creates for you mates out of your own kind, so that you might incline towards them, and He engenders love and tenderness between you: in this, behold, there are messages indeed for people who think! (30:21)

In another article entitled “Women's Sexuality in the Texts of the Prophet's Hadith,” Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir also points out that according to the Quran, the relationship between a husband and wife is equal. Kodir quotes from another section of Surah Baqara that states, “*Libasunlakum, wa antum libasun lahunna*” (2:187) meaning, they are your garments and you are their garments. In other words, just like a garment is meant to provide physical protection, enhance beauty, and hide faults, spouses are required to protect and compliment each other. Kodir wonders, if the Quran propagates equality between men and women in multifarious ways, then how is the subordination of women still encouraged by Islamic jurisprudence?

Kodir finds part of his answer in the way some Islamic scholars believe in maintaining sex role socialization that sees male as active/aggressive/dominant and female as passive/compliant. He summarizes Ibn Hajar al-Asqallani's views in this context as follows:

Men are not patient enough to go without sexual relations for a long period of time. Their concentration is often distracted by sexual fantasies with the female body. Because of this it is hoped that the woman will follow and help stifle the sexual aggressive behavior of the male and protect him so he does not engage in illicit sexual desires.

Kodir distrusts logic that implies that if wives are allowed to say ‘no’ to their husbands then the husbands will be forced to commit adultery. Moreover, he feels that with the above thought process, a wife is often compelled to do way more than merely help out with the husband’s sexual desires. He further holds that the labeling of females as sexually passive and males as sexually aggressive is misleading and points out that there is no empirical evidence of this. Kodir points out that “with Ibn Hajar’s logic men are also obliged to help with and engage in activities so their wives can enjoy their sexual desires too”. Nonetheless, he regrets that patriarchal doctrines do not regard sex within marriage as a means of mutual physical enjoyment, but rather as an act that demonstrates a husband’s prerogative over the wife’s body. *Hadith* or incidents relating to Hazrat Mohammad’s own times and deeds, document the solution given to Muslim wives who refused to live with husbands because they could not sexually satisfy them. The Prophet who acknowledged a wife’s right to sexual satisfaction, advised the husbands to divorce their wives, and allowed the women to marry men more sexually compatible to them. Over time however, his approach to gender justice in marriage was overshadowed by a patriarchal interpretation of the Quran and *hadith* in the area of sexual dynamics amidst Muslim couples, leading husbands to assume that they have a sexual upper hand in marriage.

Like Kodir, Asifa Qureishi also regrets the fact that most religious leaders of Islam do not clearly state man’s obligation to satisfy his wife’s desires. Though she highlights the weakness of Islamic discourse on human sexuality in this regard, Qureishi believes that Islamic legislation does recognize marital rape, even if not directly. She cannot understand why it does not use the *jirah* system of bodily compensation as one response to the crime of nonconsensual intercourse with a wife. Pointing at the law of *jirah* in Islam Qureishi remarks: “Islamic law designates

ownership rights to each part of one's body and a right to corresponding compensation for any harm done unlawfully to any of those parts" (131 –2). She adds, "harm to a sexual organ, therefore entitles the person harmed to appropriate financial compensation under classical Islamic *jirah* jurisprudence" (132). She further adds that, "each school of Islamic law has held that where a woman is harmed through sexual intercourse (some include marital intercourse), she is entitled to financial compensation for the harm" (132). Qureishi however, regrets the fact that though the law of *jirah* provides for compensation for physical harm between spouses, and supports Islamic legislation against domestic abuse, even then wives have to go without justice. According to her, this is because in the discussions of appropriate *jirah* compensation, the question of the injured party's consent is often raised. Some Islamic jurists contend that consent of a wife is presumed by virtue of her marital status, and if consent is already there, there is no case of rape. Others, however, maintain that if a wife is injured then it is an assault, and regardless of her consent, compensation can be demanded. Qureishi further maintains that modern Muslim states should apply the Islamic principle of sexual autonomy for both males and females, and declare any non-consensual sex as harmful, and dishonoring of the unwilling party's right to sexual autonomy; unfortunately, Shariat laws or Muslim Personal Laws are quiet about installing new laws in the arena of marital rape, however pertinent or lucid they may be. Qureishi's take on the issue of rape brings to mind the irony of the Hudood ordinance passed in 1979 in Pakistan during Zia-ul-Haq's regime, but repealed in 2006. According to this law, a woman raped in Pakistan had to produce four adult male witnesses of the act of penetration before she could receive any kind of justice. In other words, in a rape case the responsibility of proving herself innocent was donned upon a woman rather than her rapist. Under this



jurisprudence, the possibility of a raped woman getting monetary compensation was far-fetched. If that woman was a wife, then her chances of getting any kind of compensatory fine were totally utopian.

The Penal Code system of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh similarly does not have any provisions for effectively tackling the problem of marital rape. In his article, Aurangzeb Haneef cites the case of Pakistan stating,

Marital rape is not a crime in Pakistan. A woman has no legal recourse if she is raped by her husband. Not only does marital rape not exist as a crime in our legislation, it does not even exist as one in our imagination. People have the most misleading and trivialized view of this crime.

Indeed, the Indian Penal Code has two provisions for marital rape. According to Chapter xvi Section 375, it is rape if the wife is under fifteen years of age, regardless of consent. Also, according to Section 376 A, if a husband has forced sexual intercourse with his wife who is living separately from him under a court decree of separation or custom, then he is liable for the offense of rape, and can be legally punished by fine or imprisonment. Yet, there are no provisions for legal justice for an adult wife who is raped by her live-in-husband. In an article entitled "Marital Rape," S. V. Joga Rao exclaims,

To the question whether husband will be criminally liable for performing sexual intercourse with his wife (who is above fifteen years of age and who is not separately living from him) without regard to her consent or will, the answer will be negative. (96)

From the limited provisions for marital rape in the Indian Penal Code it may be assumed that a wife enjoying the benefits of shelter, food and other means of sustenance in her husband's household, is seen as already compensated for any kind of sexual wrong done unto her, and hence expected to automatically forfeit any right to complaint.

In Rethinking Sexuality, Dianne Richardson holds that in countries where marital rape is not considered a crime, under the cloak of marriage, a husband enjoys state-sanctioned rights to access his wife's body on the grounds of his right to sexual fulfillment within marriage. In Richardson's words, "In many countries the law decrees that rape in marriage is not a crime -- under such laws, he has the right to take by force that which the law defines as rightfully his: sex within marriage . . ."

(104). Though it is utterly shameful that even today in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh a husband enjoys immunity from the offense of rape, there is hardly any acknowledgement that sexual abuse of a wife by her husband does occur. Even the phrase 'marital rape,' and the suggestion that it should be made an offense under the Personal Laws as well as the Penal Code, evokes a strong negative response from many quarters in these countries. Indeed, in an effort to improve the social status of women, the government of Bangladesh has promulgated the *Nari-o-Shihu Nirjatan Daman Ain*, 2000 (Law on the Suppression of Violence Against Women and Children, 2000). Although under this law the definition of rape has been considerably modified, and even sexual harassment has been made a punishable offense, it has stopped short of acknowledging marital rape as a crime.

As can be seen from the fiction of Durrani and Hossain, once a woman gets married, she is believed to be her husband's property, and their marriage contract serves as an entitlement for her husband to have sex with her whenever and wherever he wishes. Since a husband enjoys ownership of his wife, he often nonchalantly rapes her to reinforce his power, and establish his dominance over her. In Blasphemy, Heer is sexually violated and ruthlessly punished several times by Pir Sain, her overtly possessive husband who demonstrates his authoritative control over her in this way. For instance, when Pir Sain suspects that Heer has found out about his participation in

Kaali's gang rape, he uses more sexual brutality to silence her. Kaali was a servant girl in the Pir's household who had developed a close friendship with Heer. When Kali suddenly disappears and rumors of her pregnancy and mysterious death spread, Heer tries to insinuate her wrong doers. This brings upon her husband's most heinous wrath. Not only does he savagely shave off her head and eyebrows, he also thrusts himself upon her full term pregnant belly. Heer describes the gruesomely traumatic experience thus:

Flat on my back. My stomach protruded. Inside it, my baby kicked. Over it, the father descended. . . . My child pushed against his thrusts. Neither of them tired. He was still inside and the baby was coming out. . . . Pain swallowed me and I swallowed it. Stretching and clawing and clutching the hands of my enemies, the maids, I thrust the baby out of my battered body. (71)

Heer's baby dies as a result of her husband's maniacal violation of her pregnant body. Her mother arrives at the scene when it is obvious that she is in extremely critical health. Heer is plunged into battered woman's syndrome, but because of the unspoken belief that a wife is her husband's property, neither her mother nor anyone else in the family dares to question the Pir about his inhuman actions. It is interesting to note that while Pir Sain could have punished his wife in a number of ways, he decides to rape her. That Pir Sain's means of giving pleasure and inflicting pain are both via his penis is indicative of the gender biased social discourse of male virility.

Pir Sain punishes his wife on another occasion by using sex as the tool of violence. Though it is he who brings a pink and white skinned boy to make love to his wife for a whole week, once he suspects that they are developing feelings for each other, he arranges for the boy to be mercilessly whipped and castrated. Heer's punishment is cruder. As the poor boy's heartrending shrieks reach Heer's ears, her sadist husband rapes her. The victim's torments fuel Pir Sain's desire, and he

sarcastically questions his wife if she is enjoying it as well. Here too, Pir Sain uses sex as a form of control to keep his wife in place.

Like Pir Sain, Durrani's husband, Khar uses sex both for extracting pleasure and for reprimanding his wife. When Durrani visits her husband in a Pakistani jail while she is still recovering from a gynecological surgery, he sadistically rapes her under the plea that it is his birthday. She is physically and psychologically ravaged by the wounds he inflicts upon her despite her pleadings to spare her on that occasion. She writes about the horrific experience in these words:

Mustafa wanted to make love. This was hardly the place or the time. There was complete lack of privacy. I could hear the family outside chatting. Besides my health was poor. I had been advised by my doctor to wait for my stitches to heal. I felt very frightened. Tried to tell him that I was not well and would not be for at least six weeks. He did not give a damn. I told him that his family was outside, the police were outside. It was too undignified. "It is not the sort of thing to do at our age. I have to go out and face them afterwards. I can't". He would not listen. "Mustafa . . . I swear on God, I swear on the Prophet, if you dare touch me despite the fact that I have a health problem, I will never come back to see you. I will leave you. I will take a divorce". (290)

Durrani leaves the scene utterly disgusted, hurt and determined to divorce her obstinately "sick" husband. Khar is bold in his action because he knows that even if his family or the police hear Durrani's protestations inside the jail room, they will not intrude since they all acknowledge that it is a husband's prerogative to have sex with his wife, specially if he is in a condition like Khar's, behind the bars, and unable to have sex as often as he wishes. Besides, Khar's persistence for sex can further be explained with the help of the kind of psycho-sexual analysis that Marielouise Janssen-Jurreit provides of German men. According to her,

In our culture the man must appear as sexual conqueror. The more the woman refuses, the greater his fantasy. The man, who feels himself to be the leader and seducer, cannot imagine that the woman doesn't want to be seduced. To take her resistance seriously would be a grievous

blow to his ego; this is why many rapists do not realize that they have committed a rape... (237)

Khar's shares German males' mentality in assuming that Durrani's refusal to have sex with him cannot be in earnest. He is so accustomed to his central position in public and private life, that he takes for granted that women feel naturally drawn towards him. Hence when Durrani tries to resist his approaches, he becomes more determined to prove his sexual valor. Khar's forced coitus can be further explained by referring back to Janssen-Jurreit's contention that "a successful act of sexual intercourse is regarded by men in our culture as a sacred remedy for female discontent" (237). Khar knew that his wife had been courting the idea of divorce for a while, and also contemplating a political career for her self. In his head however, such thoughts of "emancipation" and "unusual behavior," are nothing more than his wife's desire for good sex (237). Therefore he takes upon himself the responsibility of rescuing his wife's "psychic problems" by thrusting himself upon her. For Khar, the fact that it is his birthday adds to his expectations of getting his male ego stroked through sex.

Khar's disregard for privacy and his craze for sex are not the only issues that frustrate Durrani. She is more aghast by the sheer disdain that her husband shows towards her health despite knowing that she had been recently operated twice for problems in her uterus. She cannot believe that neither fear of God, nor threats of divorce have any effect on her husband's determination to gratify his sexual needs. She finally concludes that because he is indoctrinated to believe that wives are husbands' property, and bound to sexually appease them under all circumstances, Khar behaves the way he does with her on that particular day.

In this context it is pertinent to analyze Mazhar's views on the issue of wife as husband's possession in Islam. In her words,

It is important to not confuse the issue of mutual rights that a couple has on each other with the misguided, distorted and misogynist assumption that women become a husband's property. Islam does not allow for or tolerate ownership of human beings. Human dignity does not allow that any one person has the right to own mind/body/soul of another human being . . . and Islam demands that all human beings respect the humanity of everyone.

Mazhar attempts to clarify the most common accusation against Islam that it encourages to consider a wife as a personal property of her husband. From her arguments supporting the egalitarian Islamic ideology regarding all human beings, it can be inferred that Islam is not the type of religion to support marital rape. Yet it is unfortunate to note that many Muslim states do not incorporate the Islamic spirit of equality and justice into their marital laws, or husbands implement them in their conjugal lives. Hina Jilani and Eman M.Ahmed regret the condition of Pakistani laws in this regard. According to the critics,

The existing law, reflecting the mindset wherein women are considered the property of their husbands, does not recognize sexual abuse or rape of a wife by her husband as an offense. Even the provision contained in earlier law whereby a man was guilty of rape if he had sexual intercourse with a wife under 13 years of age, has been omitted under the current law. (172)

Similarly, in the patriarchal Muslim society of Bangladesh, and India, because of emphasis in the Quran on a husband's leadership in the family, and his right to chastise an adulterous wife, laws are biased towards the husband even if he sexually molests his wife, and treats her like his material possession.

In her article, "Furor Over Marital Rape: It Should be Seen as a Criminal Offence," Prema Devaraj provides the shocking information that even in a progressive Islamic State like Malaysia a wife is arbitrarily treated and considered her husband's property. Devaraj first quotes Sir Matthew Hale, Chief Justice in 17<sup>th</sup> Century England who believed that a husband has an irrevocable right to have sexual

intercourse with his wife since she is his bought property. In *History of the Pleas of Crown*, Hale writes,

The husband cannot be guilty of rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract, the wife hath given herself in kind unto the husband which she cannot retract.

Devaraj compares Hale's verdict to that of Perak Mufti Dr Harussani Zakaria, in order to depict how over centuries human thinking in certain areas have remained regrettably the same. Like Hale, Dr. Harussani Zakaria believes that a husband forcing his wife to have sex with him cannot be constituted as rape in Islam. Devaraj quotes Zakaria as saying,

A husband has the right to be intimate with his wife and the wife must obey. If the wife refuses, the rule of nusus (recalcitrant) can be applied and the husband will no longer be responsible for his wife.

Zakaria's verdict reduces marriage to a sort of legal prostitution where a wife gets paid in kind in exchange for her sexual favors. Like Devaraj, Richardson highlights the case of America in order to point out that here too "men have historically been granted rights of access to their wives, defined as their property within marriage" (113). She further contends that because of this mind set, during the colonial era, white men often assumed sexual rights over their black women slaves as well, whom they considered to be their property. If those women resisted their white masters' non-consensual sex, they were at risk of being tortured and punished.

There are scores of wives in Sub-Continental Muslim societies who even today live literally the life of slaves under their husbands' rule. These wives fall victim to the horrendous crime of marital rape, and yet live with the husbands without raising serious alarm. Since stereotypes such as a husband is a wife's lord on earth, or that the part of the body a husband beats, goes to heaven continue to be reinforced in these cultures, wives usually internalize the husbands' right over their bodies. As part

of their duty to God, they submit themselves to every whim of their husbands' and accept them as their lord and master on earth. Regarding the misconception that it is a wife's religious duty to succumb when her husband hails her for sex, the Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association's (BNWLA) 2001's report remarks:

People are obsessed with the general notion that it's the sacred duty of a wife to meet up the sexual demands of her husband any time. This has also been influenced by religious misinterpretation. However, women are compelled to accept sexual intercourse with their husbands against their will. (29)

Like most Bangladeshi wives, Durrani's protagonist Heer is conditioned to believe that her own religious duty is predicated on satisfying her husband sexually. Her docile acceptance of her husband's extremely selfish and callous demands for sex on *Shab-e-Qadar*'s night is proof of a Sub-Continental wife's complete bodily subordination at the alter of marriage. Heer narrates the ordeal of having to divide her body and soul amongst the devil and God on an auspicious night thus:

On the twenty-sixth night of Ramadan, the loudspeakers at the mosque relayed naats and chanted prayers throughout the day. Everyone's hearts and minds filled with surrender to the Almighty. That night I was leaving for Amma Sain's room when Pir Sain walked in and asked me sarcastically, 'Do you think you are going for Haj?' I reminded him of the special night of prayer. 'Every day is the same for Allah. You can pray to Him tomorrow. He will hear you even then,' he declared. Allah remained silent as the holy night converted into a drunken orgy. I had secret thoughts of prayer. . . . My body prostrated before Pir Sain. My soul bowed to the Almighty. (170-1)

Heer's violation by a man who is a *Pir*, or religious authority himself, endorses Mazhar's comments on the way religion is distorted by people who are supposed to be its protectors, to fit patriarchy's needs. The very fact that Pir Sain is not an ordinary man, but one well versed in the doctrines of the Quran and *Hadith*, makes his offense doubly serious. Both the Quran and *Hadith* provide innumerable instructions and incidents where love, amity and tranquility between spouses have been underpinned. From Prophet Mohammad's life itself, which is well documented in history,



numerous examples of kindness and amicability towards a wife can be discerned.

Prophet is often quoted to have said to his followers that the best of you are those who treat your wives with kindness. Instead of helping people learn about the contribution of Islam and its Prophet in liberating the women of Jahilia from a cursed, inhuman life into a life of dignity and familial and social rights, the Pir distorts and manipulates its basic tenants to his own advantage as a man and a husband. In "Rape and Incest: Islamic Perspective," Mazhar complains about the harmful teachings of charlatan's like Pir Sain,

An often misquoted and abused hadith that is used to tyrannize women is that women cannot and should not say no to their husband when he approaches them. Women are advised not to turn away from their husbands except when they have their period or any other reasonable excuse. So much so that she is to break her voluntary fast if her husband approaches her. And if they do not angels will curse them. However, this hadith is not quoted with the complimentary one that advises men of the same consideration. In the same manner men are advised that meeting the needs of their wives takes precedence over voluntary worship.

A wife is exempted the duty of rendering sexual services while menstruating because her body is considered impure during that time, and hence harmful for the husband, but not out of any consideration for the wife herself. This type of insensitivity towards women, coupled with circulation of popular *hadith* promising men *hoores* or beautiful virgins in heaven as reward for their good deeds on earth, bespeak of men's selfishness and self-centered bloated sexual fantasies.

The fact that many people do not even know if there is a specific term for marital rape in Bangla, Urdu or Hindi is indicative of the cultural silence surrounding the issue in the Sub-Continent. People in this region are also misinformed about the practice of dower or *meher* in Islam that a husband gives his wife before marriage. Although it was originally intended as a practice to acknowledge the commitment a woman makes in marriage, it is often assumed to be a payment made in order to gain

unquestionable and permanent right for legally using a wife's body. Illiterate people who do not have first hand access to the language of the Quran and Hadith, or who cannot even read these scriptures in any other translated languages, believe what the *mullahs* or religious leaders tell them about their marital rights. Every Friday in thousands of mosques these self-professed guardians of Islam, render *khutas* brainwashing men into believing that women are created only to gratify men's sexual needs and to multiply their progeny. To the chagrin of the well informed few, they pick out of context quotes from the Quran and stretch its symbols and metaphors to serve their own carnal ends. From the following extract it becomes evident that even educated women like Heer fall victim to the kind of gibberish that fake religious leaders devise by dint of their society sponsored status. Heer acknowledges her own shortcomings as she is unable to decline her husband's degenerate sexual demands for sleeping with other men because of her internalization of the implied power relationship in marriage. She recalls,

That night I was turned out of the room and stood shivering in the veranda. An hour passed. I did not know how to avoid the danger that had loomed over me for two and a half years. The same old subject and the same perverse demand to sleep with other men. At the beginning, fearing that he might be testing me for signs of adultery, I had doubted my husband's intention and dared not agree. I dared not refuse anymore. Both were risks. So many times I said to him, 'Allah will not forgive me, Sain.' But never was I able to say 'no'. That never came to mind. (156-7)

Though hesitantly, Heer relents to her husband's command, and wonders what kind of strange men she will have to entertain. To understand Heer's jeopardized perplexity one has to keep in mind the kind of Godly stature a husband is given by the patriarchal discourse that is instilled in women from childhood.

Like Heer, Durrani also finds herself at her husband's sexual disposal because of the prevalence of a discourse that tries to congeal male superiority under all

circumstances. It is her husband who always initiates the possibility of having sex with her; she merely reciprocates like most Pakistani wives who believe that only shameless women make the first move in sex. Such conviction may be attributed to the fact that the Quran often addresses men as its chief addressees while dealing with matter associated with sex, women's bodies and conduct in intimate relationships. Though these Quranic texts presuppose male agency and female passivity with regard to matters of sex, they by no means endorse customs supporting aggression. In fact, in these verses access to female bodies is controlled by divine regulation. Aneela Riaz-ud-Din is of the opinion that, "once a woman says no, all unwanted sexual activity is aggression, irrespective of whether the perpetrator is the husband or a stranger." Kodir similarly argues that, according to some contemporary views of *fiqh*, a woman has the right to reject her husband's sexual advances, if she believes that he is going to hurt her; sexual subordination of women is not total. There are circumstances in which a wife can withdraw her consent, and establish her right to physical safety. In the words of Kodir,

There is space where women according to religion (classical *fiqh* thinking) do have the right to reject invitation of intimacy from their husbands. Meaning, a wife's total obedience to her husband, is not valid. Hadith that emphasizes that a wife must be totally obedient to her husband, must be criticized and their meanings revised.

Kodir, however, regrets the narrow interpretations of religious texts that have often been used to justify a wife's complete docility with regards to sex despite the fact that Islam does not condone it. He points at the crudity of the fact that if a wife wants to obtain the right to basic necessities she must at all times be prepared to be enjoyed by her husband. Moreover, he resents the belief that if a wife is not physically available because she is too young, or imprisoned for long term, or if she rejects her husband's invitation for sexual relations, the husband is no longer obliged to support his wife.

Such notions that convert marriage into a means of survival for woman in exchange for sex have no basis in the Quran, but are the reflection of male desire to be the locus of power.

Like Kodir, Devaraj also points out that in Islam, if *jima* or sexual intercourse is a religious duty for the wife, then it is also mandatory for the husband to perform *jima* with *adab* or courtesy. In fact, the importance of foreplay before intercourse is mentioned in the Quran. Surah 2, verse 223, says, “do some good act for your souls before.” Prophet Mohammad is said to have interpreted this verse as God’s command to sufficiently arouse one’s wife with kisses and caresses before penetration, but the husbands we encounter in Durrani’s writings act like beasts when it comes to demanding their sexual rights from their wives. Because of their carelessly lecherous sexual aggression, they not only violate their wives’ bodies, and injure their souls, but also destroy their trust in the institution of marriage. Their wives are thrust into isolation, and they suffer because of falling victim in the hands of their own husbands’ uncontrollable libidinal urges. Despite sharing their lives and children with their husbands, they cannot turn to them for comfort or protection; rather, their husbands’ company and home, both become unsafe for them.

Because of her personal experience as a wife imprisoned and estranged in her own marital home, Durrani is compassionate towards wives in similar situation. In her fiction Blasphemy, Heer’s story is based on the real life of a Pakistani wife like Durrani who is trapped in her marriage and has no rights to control her sexual rights. Sexual acts are accomplished against Heer’s will, sometimes by physical force and sometimes by threats. She lives in such a climate of constant fear and violence that she performs many degrading acts to hold onto her position as the Pir’s wife. For instance, she is decked in flimsy Western style clothes imported from the city, and has

to parade in front of her husband and her maid, who is dressed in equally skimpy oddly fitting clothes. Her humiliation at this fanciful desire of her husband gets expressed in these words drenched in irony:

I had lost my shape. My tummy bulged out of a tight red skin that ended far above my knees. My bosom plunged out of sheer black blouse and wobbled like my knees as I paraded up and down the room for him. Subjugation was complete. The five times I bowed before Allah was a mere ritual. Why I faced the Qibla, I did not know, I should have turned towards my husband instead. (138-9)

Heer realizes the profanity of her acts, but is afraid to protest. Besides dressing her and her maid in provocative clothes, her husband makes blue films of their orchestrated bodies, and yet she acts like a puppet in his hands. Heer is further exposed to hard core pornography through ex-rated videos that she is forced to watch with the orphan girls her husband violates in her presence. She feels utterly ashamed and helpless in front of the nudity on the screen, but dare not express her contempt under her husband's greedy, ogling gaze. She expresses her bewildered experience in these words: "Our *purdah* had broken . . . That four women from this prison watched naked men all night and fell on their prayer mats at dawn did not confuse my husband at all (146). It is evident from Heer's astonishment at Pir Sain's sexual carnival that *purdah* is nothing more than a hoax for him. In the real sense of the term, *purdah* is not just a piece of garment to cover a woman in order to make sure that no man can have a glimpse of her body. *Purdah* mainly connotes *haya*, that is shame and decency, both of which are primarily demonstrated by disciplining one's gaze. In this sense *purdah* is recommended in the Quran not just for women but for men too. Pir Sain reinforces *purdah* only for the women in his family, and that also to make sure that no unwanted outsider sees them, but in personal life he does not bother to inculcate its essence. He is least concerned about the incongruity and immorality of mixing debauchery and devoutness not only in his own life, but in the lives of the

women he abuses as well. Pir Sain's sins however, are absolved in his eyes only because of the special power dynamics that he enjoys in the patriarchal lineage of Pirs.

Indeed, the Quran stresses individual accountability and reward without any reference to gender, yet because of the man engineered matrix of power, husbands like Pir Sain rape their wives on a regular basis without paying any heed to the long lasting physical and psychological injuries it inflicts upon them. Trapped in the marriage cage like a helpless creature, Heer reflects upon her pitiable situation thus: "creating as well as sustaining his interest drove me from one catastrophe to another" (138). Yet, her husband's heart never stirs for her the way it stirs for Yathimri, her adolescent maid. It is lack of love in conjugal life that ails her most as she is unable to simultaneously love her husband and be subservient like a slave. Heer relays the impact of a loveless life on her body thus,

He had spent me without replenishing anything. My eyes had become like stagnant swamps sunk in on themselves. My mouth had lost its words. My body felt senseless. It seemed like debris had collected in a dirt dump. The flesh would soon shift from my bones, then the skin would shift from the flesh, and yet the master required eternal youth. In the mirror, youth was speeding away. (148)

Heer's husband however, completely ignores her physical deterioration, and often taunts her for having aged when her sexual performance slackens because of fear of God. Moreover, he tries to make her see herself as an inert object rather than a person in her own right. His attempts to debase her by training her to accept a demeaning self-view makes Heer observe, "The option that my husband had forced upon me soon became a noose around my neck. He abhorred my weak character and took to calling me a bad-blooded whore. A black mark on my father's name" (160). Heer's husband also tries to kill her real identity and give her the persona of a prostitute when he renames her as 'Piyari' and instructs her to pleasure his friends. She has to master the

art of seducing strangers though her soul squirms at some of the vulgar moves she is instructed to make. She tells herself that nothing has happened, yet like Lady Macbeth she hallucinates and laments her deeds. When Heer cries, “Hero number one’s odour mixed with the heavy smells of other men and sank deep into the marrow of my bones as I fell in and out of unknown arms only to please the master,” her sufferings belie the widespread notion that marital rape, is an oxymoron (160). In fact, it proves that a woman raped by her husband can suffer prolonged trauma and alienation just because of the violated bond of love and loyalty that is expected from a husband.

Though Heer is emotionally shattered, she does not openly resist her abuser. She is aware that: “The deeper I plunged into my husband’s hell, the greater were my chances of survival” (127). Therefore, she overdoses on toxins night after night and tries to block out reality, but that makes her head spin and the rest of her body toss and turn in pain without respite. Her mental torture is even greater than her physical ailment once she regains conscience from her drunken stupor and realizes what a deep plunge she has taken into abyss in order to satisfy her husband’s lust. In her words, “Every night my soul descended into hell, every morning it rose with Chote Sain’s voice chanting a message from the Quran” (136). Her automaton-like reaction to constant shock in the hands of her husband confirms the findings in the article titled, “Marital Rape,” in Hidden Hurt: Domestic Abuse Information which explains,

What has to be remembered is that when you are living with your abuser, you are often very finely tuned to him, employing numerous coping mechanisms to limit the damage to yourself: you may realise either consciously or subconsciously that if you struggle, he is likely to get violent or take his anger out on you in other ways.

As the above excerpt highlights, Heer gradually becomes accustomed to her husband’s sexual mania, and begins to cooperate. Because she was physically beaten

and verbally abused in the past for not surrendering to her husband's sexual advances, as she grows older, Heer tries to minimize the harm to her self by resisting as little as possible. Her easy submission to sexual aggression however, does not mitigate her husband's criminality.

Heer's docile reconciliation with fate makes her life somewhat bearable, but it makes it doubly hard in the future to prove her innocence. When Ranjha, her love from before marriage recognizes her at the Jaigirdar's residence despite her disguise as Piyari, she is scared and confused: "Corruption was proven. But how was I to ever explain the vulgarity when there was no evident sign of fear or coercion?" (167) Heer's perplexity is shared by many wives who fear to complain about marital rape just because they cannot easily provide proof. This is an issue that Riaz-ud-Din comments on in his article thus,

Sometimes there is no real proof of the rape because force is not always used. Women can also be forced by verbal coercion, the use of menacing verbal pressure or misuse of authority. With no bruises or proof of violence, rapes are difficult to prove.

After Pir Sain's death, because of lack of solid proof Heer has great difficulty in convincing even her son of the brutality inflicted upon her by his father for years together. Her husband was missing from the video tapes he made of her and the maid servants, and there was no permanent damage of limbs to bring serious charges against the man who had violated her in her own bedroom and within the four walls of private chambers.

Durrani's own fate is as cursed as her character Heer's since she also has a viciously insensitive husband who gradually crushes her sensuality and tries to turn her into a mute sex slave, but whose criminality becomes difficult to prove. Like Heer, she dreads the consequences of refusing his orders and gives in without much protestation. Once however, after overhearing her husband's telephone conversation



with her sister and confirming their affair, she decides to call her mother to complain. This provokes her husband to ferociously hit her with his double-barreled gun. He wants her to call her mother and tell her that whatever she has learnt about his affair is false. When Durrani refuses to lie, more physical battery, along with sexual abuse ensues. Durrani expresses the ordeals of a helpless wife's sexual molestation thus:

He started hitting me again. "Stand up you bitch". I barely managed to. "Take off your clothes. Every stich. Take them off". I trembled. He turned my arm around like a screw driver. He sat there watching as I took off my clothes. I was now stark naked. Standing there, bleeding in the center of the living room. . . . He looked me up and down. He was invading my mind by exposing my body. (75)

Converted into a "private spectacle," on display for her crazy husband's sexual perversity, Durrani feels extremely humiliated, melancholic and desperate. The knowledge that as she is getting sexually violated by her husband, her children and the maid are standing right outside the door, also crushes Durrani's sense of privacy and self-respect. Khar, however, picks up the phone himself to call his mother-in-law, and declares that Durrani has lost her mind. Raising echoes of Foucauldian discussions on the discourse of madness in Madness and Civilization, he develops his own category of insanity, and declares Durrani to be insane. Again, like the moral hypocrisy of exponents of modern psychiatry that Foucauld takes issue with, he not only labels her mad, he also keeps her expelled from the 'normal' world, and uses the excuse of caring for her as an opportunity for control. The discourse of madness gets such a grip over Durrani, that like King Lear whom Foucauld uses as an example to delineate the impact of discursive labeling, she feels trapped within her own delirious discourse and within the structures designed to confine her. Durrani's perplexity at her own easy surrender at the hands of her husband's authority is well expressed when she says: "I must fear and obey without any real reason" (76).

Despite the fact that Durrani shares her most intimate secrets and fears with her husband, and would like to believe that he will not intentionally hurt her, she is repeatedly betrayed by him. “Marital Rape” aptly reflects upon the effects of spousal rape, and helps understand the complex catastrophe housewives like Durrani have to face. According to this article,

Marital rape is so destructive because it betrays the fundamental basis of the marital relationship, because it questions every understanding you have not only of your partner and the marriage, but of yourself. You end up feeling betrayed, humiliated and, above all, very confused.

Durrani feels much like a wife described above, embittered towards her husband, but angry with herself as well for not being able to resist his approaches. The fear of being blamed or considered a liar grips her too, adding to her confusion, self-pity and perils.

Most wives as depicted by Durrani and Hossain react to marital rape either by completely giving in to the situation, or by trying to escape it. Very few however, try to deal with it in their own terms while still living with their husbands. Shukhtara is one such wife in Hossain’s fiction, The Drowsy God, who avenges her husband by willingly turning into a prostitute herself once her husband forces her to sleep with a stranger. Shukhtara entrusts her life with her husband, but during the time of a crisis in life he hands her over to a stranger in exchange for money and puts her in a situation where she is physically assaulted. Though Hossain does not concentrate on the gory details of Shukhtara’s rape in the hands of the slum leader, she gives a clear picture of the psychological and physical effects of her sexual exploitation by her husband Monir. Monir thinks that once they return to their village, he will be able to wash off all filth from his wife’s body with scented soaps, and cuddle up with her again, but after returning home with a considerable amount of money from the body business her husband thrusts her into, sleep dodges Shukhtara. No amount of

scrubbing rid her of a sense of dirtiness and impurity that penetrates her body and soul. Dark patches appear under her eyes as she tosses and turns in bed next to her soundly sleeping husband. The narrator regrets that not even a thousand fond kisses from this man can wipe off the shadow of gloom surrounding her eyes. Though Shukhtara tries her best to separate her body from her soul, she carries around the heavy load of a resentful secret that she cannot share with anyone in the world. As the worst consequence of her situation, she starts visualizing herself as a prostitute, selling her body to whoever can pay. One act of sexual violation triggered by her husband opens the floodgates of moral reservations in Shukhtara. With a vengeance on her husband and the society that wronged her, she adopts prostitution as a means of income for her family. Shukhtara's frustrating situation is in a way better than Heer's or Durrani's for her husband does not rape her himself on a regular basis, and is basically in love with her. This is however, not to suggest that indirect rape or rape that is underplayed and non-violent is not harmful for wives. All cases of marital rape should be considered serious crimes and should not be allowed to go unnoticed. As Louise McOrmond Plummer points out regretfully in "Aphrodite Wounded,"

Rape by somebody you have been sexually intimate with is often not seen as "real" rape. Society takes the dangerously limited view that "real" rape happens in alleyways or parks, the rapist is a lunatic stranger and the victim must be a virgin of impeccable reputation. Such attitudes are based on the premise that having given initial consent a woman is not free to withdraw it. This makes wives and girlfriends unrapeable and also permits sexual violence against them to continue.

According to Plummer, the concept of spousal rape should be publicized more, and the taboo around it should be broken; however, the preset attitude in many Sub-Continental minds holding that the relationship between a man and his wife is a private issue, is also responsible for underestimating the serious negative impact of marital rape on a wife's mind and body. Currently in many countries, Family or Personal law rather than

criminal law addresses the issue, thereby giving the impression that marital rape is not a matter of general public concern. For instance, in Malaysia, the Women, Family and Community Development Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil regards marital rape as a matter of private redress. Prema Devaraj quotes the minister as saying, “marital rape is a family issue and as Muslims we have to look at the matter this way”. The Minister refuses to deal with marital rape according to western prescriptions, but makes no qualms about the fact that despite having a separate Domestic Violence Act that covers marital rape, Malaysian legislation fails to prosecute its criminals. In fact, under Malaysian Penal Code section 375, the man is protected from being charged with raping his wife due to an exemption clause. Devaraj explains this dichotomy in law:

One might argue that marital rape could come under the purview of the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) 1994 which also includes in the definitions of domestic violence: “compelling the victim by force or threat to engage in any conduct or act, sexual or otherwise, from which the victim has a right to abstain”. The problem with the DVA is that in order to prosecute a person, it has to be a crime under one of the provisions of the Penal Code. Because marital rape is not recognized in the Penal code, forced sexual relations with a husband becomes an act from which a wife has no right to abstain.

It is evident that even though under pressure from the feminist groups the Malaysian government has incorporated rape in its Domestic Violence Act, very tactfully it has avoided any provision for marital rape in its Penal Code, thereby letting Muslim Personal Laws deal with it in ways it deems appropriate. Devaraj however, insists that violence within the family cannot be dealt as a private matter to be left under inadequate and antiquated Personal Laws. She demands altered and specific laws that recognize that when a wife is assaulted within the privacy of her bedroom, and the perpetrator is her husband, it is no less a crime than stranger rape.

Like Devaraj, many South Asian feminist activists are lobbying for stricter regulation of the issue of marital rape under the Civil Code, and not under the Personal or Family laws. Durrani and Hossain are similarly aware that Islamic legislation alone will not make the problem of marital rape disappear in Pakistan and Bangladesh; yet, they believe that specific laws will help validate the emotions and needs of a marital rape victim. They also believe that it will help its victims give a name or label to their victimization and to their pain which will help facilitate their healing process. They push for legislation against marital rape because they further contend that it will send a strong message to the community that marital rape is a real crime to be taken seriously.

Richardson, however, is still not very hopeful about the benefits that modern laws on marital rape are offering in some countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Mexico. According to her,

Even in those countries and states where rape in marriage is recognized as a crime, it is often the case that the prosecution of offenders and the success of these prosecutions are greatly reduced in comparison with stranger rape, because socially it is not fully accepted as a crime. (104)

From Richardson's observations it is obvious that many countries that claim to be more progressive than others also have to grapple with their androcentrism in addressing the issue of marital rape. To Richardson's doubts about the implementation of new marital rape laws in these countries, one may add Plummer's reservations as well. According to Plummer, "it is true that most Western countries make rape in relationships a crime, but because of underlying attitude about what is real rape, they are often ineffective." It is shocking to note that many Americans are not aware that rape can exist within the context of marriage, and even today in America marital rape cases are hard to win because of the issue of a wife's consent which is clouded by societal beliefs and misconceptions about marriage. American

laws in most States still have exemption clauses that protect a husband if he is his wife's rapist. In England too, even as late as twentieth century marital rape was not legally considered a criminal offense. In an article written in 1982, Tina Hill writes that in the English society, "it (marital rape) is not recognized within the law and therefore never shown in any official statistics, but it is likely to be the most widespread of all forms of rape as it is both legally and socially sanctioned" (47). Hill believes that both in interpersonal level, as well as the class/caste level, rape is a power trip more than a sexual passion, and is set within the context of male aggression and control of women. Like Hossain and Durrani, Hill blames the social discourses that propagate the dichotomy between active/aggressive male sexuality and passive female sexuality for the tolerance and perpetuation of marital rape.

Though it seems that marital rape is a universal problem, it is still important to closely study the social context in which it occurs since violence and sexual behavior are partly learnt processes. Besides, social definitions of masculine and feminine also vary from culture to culture. Where women are historically devalued and men exalted, societal norms and expectations of male/female relationships are different than cultures which treat both sexes equally. Unfortunately, it is evident from the writings of Hossain and Durrani that because of well rooted patriarchal social structures of their societies, both in personal and social levels male interest is served by keeping women in their designated space. Most husbands in their cultures not only feel that they have the right to expect their wives to obey them, but they are also expected by the society to make sure that they do. Majority of wives in turn, are not given the right to control their own bodies with regard to making decisions about sex, or birth control. Dominant male commentarial tradition of the Quranic texts further contribute to the existing gender differentiation by arguing that even God approves of

hierarchical forms of social and familial institutions. As Kecia Ali points out, these “commentator’s own assumptions about female inferiority and male supremacy have led to seriously flawed exegeses of particular verses” (132). Indeed, as Ali claims, the Quran does not reject patriarchy outright. Equality between the sexes is also not necessary for justice in the Quranic order which propounds equity, yet mutuality and reciprocity in intimate relationships clearly exist in the Quran. In their interest in male familial domination and control, most Muslim husbands however, choose to highlight their authority more than their obligations towards wives.

Eager to dismantle the existing power relationship between husbands and wives, Durrani and Hossain speak against polygamy, and break the silence around marital rape. They hope that instead of tolerating and condoning these social practices directly or indirectly, their respective countries will bring them under close scrutiny and outlaw them in order to provide greater justice to the wives. No doubt, the dream of a uniform civil code for the Sub-Continental people seems like a far cry today. Yet, despite the rise of fundamentalism in Islam in the different Muslim societies of the Sub-Continent, and despite growing resistance to changes in the Personal Laws, like my writers, I am hopeful that a uniform civil code, based on the best provisions for wives in various religions, will be able to eradicate the negative impacts of patriarchy and its misinterpretations of religious decrees that promote polygamy and overlook serious crimes such as marital rape.

## CHAPTER V

## A WIFE'S AGENCY

Why does a cane stand on one leg? Because if it lifted this leg also, it would fall.  
 Why does the burden of marriage fall only on woman? Because if she did not bear  
 the burden, the institution of marriage would break down.

--Kamla Bahsin, "The Riddle of Marriage"

Owing to the socio-religious customs and Muslim Personal laws pertaining to marriage, there are various kinds of mental and physical oppressions that Sub-Continental Muslim wives often have to endure. In the first four chapters, I have analyzed some of those customs and practices that have a negative impact on these wives as depicted in the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani. In this chapter, I concentrate on the agency of such wives despite several types of trials and tribulations. According to the editors of Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies, the term agency in contemporary theory refers to "the ability to act or perform an action" (8). The book further defines agency as something that in contemporary theory, "hinges on the question of whether individuals can freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether the things they do are in some sense determined by the ways in which their identity has been constructed" (8). In this chapter, I argue that despite the different kinds of ordeals that most Sub-Continental Muslim wives in the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani, have to undergo, they have considerable ability to improve their own lot, and occasionally challenge the fixed trope of identity that is attached to them as wives. The number of wives who know how to negotiate the mandates of wifhood and counter the deeply ingrained, pervasive social expectations of marriage, is admittedly still very small, but by analyzing the subversive agency invested in these fictional wives, I hope to further the writers' efforts in exposing the



alternative modes of empowerment that are available, though not necessarily known to many Sub-Continental wives.

Marriage, as depicted by Ismat Chughtai, Selina Hossain and Tehmina Durrani, is indeed not often an association of equal individuals. In the patriarchal societies of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh that these writers present, marriage is often more of a sexual contract than a social contract. A dismal picture of wives as oppressed victims of social and religious practices is what generally emerges from the pages of their texts because of the married women's subordinate status and lack of agency. The husbands, on the other hand, are often involved in battery, extra-marital affairs, polygamous, or incestuous activities that tend to negate the very essence of marriage. Moreover, most of them dexterously control almost every existential condition of their wives' minds and bodies, and stifle their germinal efforts of self-definition. Sohela Nazneen's contention about Bangladeshi wives can be held true for majority of the Sub-Continental wives that are portrayed by Hossain, Chughtai and Durrani. In the words of Nazneen:

Most of the available development research analyzing intra-household bargaining between men and women (Kabeer, 1998; Schuler and Hasemi, 1996) points out those gender relations between husband and wife are characterized by asymmetrical interdependence. The economic (material loss) and social (loss of protection) risk environment faced by the partner are not the same.

In the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani however, wives are not simply portrayed as repressed, passive, demure and obedient individuals. Their subordination is not projected as monolithic since they do at times show the ability to manipulate their environment and demand recognition of their individuality and self-respect. The identity they embody is also not entirely imposed on them, since many wives refuse to be satisfied with mere survival without personal fulfillment within the seemingly stable structure of marriage. In fact, these wives often evaluate and

selectively discard outmoded marital traditions, while embracing new ideas about women's survival and self-empowerment in patriarchal family contexts. Although Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani acknowledge the vulnerability of wives' within the context of objectification and violence, they also see their minds and bodies as central to their liberation, and as the locus of their agency. These writers try to elucidate the power of some wives to recuperate from marital stress, and emphasize their ability to retaliate against their marginalization. They try to establish that not all wives are uniformly silenced receptacles of tradition, but some have the courage to change tradition too. They prove that despite being subject to discipline and docility, some wives can muster enough integrity and subjectivity to set a new trend in the socio-cultural history of Sub-Continental Muslim wives.

In this chapter, I locate and examine the different kinds of strategies or measures that Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani conceptualize as wives' agency, employed to fight familial and socially enforced taboos and restrictions in their lives in an everyday context and within structures of marital domination. I divide the different kinds of acts or indicators of wives' autonomy in these authors' writings into the following four categories Domestic Agency, Sexual Agency, "Micro Mechanisms of Power," and Legal Agency. In my discussion of Domestic Agency, I discuss a wife's decision-making power within the family, and her bargaining skills used to gain economic benefits in exchange for the domestic labor she provides. In this section, I also incorporate the agency a wife acquires through networking with kin and friends. The fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani can be regarded as a template for the psycho-sexual change that occurs in the life of 20<sup>th</sup> century Sub-Continental wives. Sexual Agency, or the ability to use or control one's sexuality and fertility, is another type of wifely agency that I analyze in this chapter. Next, I highlight what

Harris Colette terms, “Micro Mechanisms of Power” (268). Under this category I include gossip and indifference as powerful tools for wives to retaliate against oppressive conditions in marriage. Finally, under Legal Agency, I discuss how the right to choose a marriage partner and also the right to divorce, constitutes of strong subversive potential of wives to resist and contest hegemonic hierarchies within marriage. The wives in the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani use these different strategies to reframe the patriarchal values and practices of their husbands, and to refute the assumptions facilitating their subordination. Through the agency of performing differently, they not only challenge the sites of contestation, they also redeem their marginality to some extent, and gain noteworthy autonomy and empowerment in the process.

#### *Domestic Agency*

In her personal life, Chughtai married Shaheed Latif, a film director, and a man four years her junior against the wishes of her family. Though she collaborated in many movies with him, she also had her own social and moral agendas about which she was extremely passionate, and did not tolerate even her husband if he tried to criticize them unjustly. Chughtai’s non-traditional view of marriage, formed from a very young age is well reflected in her autobiography, Caravan Dust. In this piece of writing she expresses her love for freedom of expression as an individual, and her open repulsion of the subservience that marriage often entails for women. Chughtai tells her sister in simple words, “following the orders of another human being I don’t think I’ll be able to tolerate that, Ala Bi. I have spent my life protesting against the tyranny of elders. I want to make my own way in life. The very idea of becoming an eastern, virtuous wife fills me with loathing” (Ismat 76). Chughtai realizes the importance of education for women; hence, in her personal life she avoids the topic of

marriage as long as possible. She fears that a husband might stifle her effervescence and prove to be nothing more than a huge obstacle to her development as an individual. She cannot imagine herself as a wife of a Nawab or elite man in particular, since she feels that this type of man will expect her to see him as her God on earth, and force her to give in to every one of his whims. Prior to her marriage with Shahid Latif, she warns him: "All my life I have broken and cast off the chains which have restrained me; I can't change now. It won't suit me to try and be an obedient and sacrificing wife" (*Ismat* 260). Even after her marriage she sets her husband's mind at ease by saying that there is no compulsion for staying together, and he can feel free to divorce her if they cannot get along for any reason. Throughout her married life Chughtai demonstrates a headstrong nature. Inwardly she believes that even if her husband ever divorces her, people will think that it was she who left him because of her uncompromising, independent nature. Her friend and literary contemporary, Saadat Hasan Manto comments on her independence in these words:

Ismat is thoroughly stubborn. She is by nature rigid, just like a child. She begins with not accepting any rule in life, any natural law. At first she refused to marry. When she was persuaded to it, she refused to be a wife. She gradually reconciled herself to becoming a wife but she did not want to become a mother. She goes through a lot of suffering but she persists in her stubbornness. I believe that this too, is her way through which, by confronting the reality of life, or in fact by colliding against it, she tries to understand it. . . This peculiar stubbornness or refusal to accept is also generally evident in Ismat's male and female characters. (*Ismat* 163)

Chughtai's bold and dynamic ideology is reflected in her personal life as well as in the lives of the wife characters in her fiction. Drawing from her own experiences with women in her family or in her community, Chughtai portrays wives as feisty and resilient when faced with familial and social norms. In "Progressive Literature and I," she writes: "I projected a female character in my stories who refused to live by old values, that is, false ideas of shame and honour, one who was not prepared to sacrifice

her life for the sake of a mere show of so-called respectability of her family or 'khandan'" (Ismat 129-30). In keeping with the writer's own view of her characters, in her Introduction Shukrita Paul Kumar writes about the women in Chughtai's fiction in these words:

Questioning gender inequalities throughout her life, she accords the women of her stories either the same posture of defiance or she lays bare the oppressive hypocrisy and pretensions of her society in its treatment of women. Her stories expose manipulations and strategies employed by women for power in a family or they show how women may oppose other women. Or else, they showcase women who boldly decide to become rebels. (Ismat 13)

Kumar relates the way Chughtai conveys lived experiences and stories, particularly of the wives, in order to uncover a world hidden behind the veil. This world was totally silent in the Urdu literature written by her male predecessors. Her intense desire to salvage the dignity of the wives as human beings shocked the conservative people of the North Indian Muslim society in the 40s and 50s. Yet, with a crusader's indomitable zeal, Chughtai's pen produces story after story that stages wives of different potentials and abilities to the center, and grants her the covetable position of one of the pioneering feminists of the Sub-Continent. Wazir Agha's comments on Chughtai's women further reiterate the fact that she was deliberately projecting strong wife characters. According to Agha,

Somewhere in the constitutional make-up of each of Ismat Chughtai's female characters, exists a woman who is not merely a nameless adjunct of the household machinery, but who, while asserting her independence, shakes to the core, if not demolishes, time-honored values and customs. (Ismat 194)

The list of authoritative, enterprising and individualistic wives who are the sole decision makers in their family is long in Chughtai's fiction. In her novella, The Wild One, Mataji provides instance of those types of Indian wives who hold the power of decision making in their children's matrimonial alliances, and their husband's day to day affairs. Raja Sahib, her husband, may be the official head of the family, but it is

his wife who has the ultimate say in matters of her son's romance and matrimony. When she discovers that her son, Puran, has fallen in love with Asha, their maid's grand daughter, and is bent on marrying her, she summons an emergency family meeting and makes it clear to everyone that this marriage cannot take place. In the words of the narrator: "The whole family assembled. Mataji was in the judge's seat and Raja Sahib, assuming the role of a puppet, was also brought in" (121). Neither her son, nor her husband is able to change her mind about her son's marriage. She decides to transport Asha secretly to another abode hundreds of miles away, and eventually declare her dead as a result of a plague. Indeed, in her rejection of Asha as her daughter-in-law, Mataji comes across as a classist, but as a mother and wife concerned for the well being of her children, and her family's honor, her decision making powers deserve consideration.

Several reasons can be detected behind Mataji's agency for decision making. Her usurpation of the role of the family head as the decision maker is, as Harris Colettes suggests in the case of some Tajikistani Muslim wives, facilitated by the fact that she had more responsibility at home at an earlier age than her brothers. This sense of responsibility helps her control the younger generation of children in her family more dexterously than her husband who had a more carefree and irresponsible life than hers as a child. Like the Tajikistani Muslim wives whom Colette calls, the "hegemonic women," Mataji's position within the family has been secured also by dint of the fact that she has mothered sons. Although son preference is detrimental for wives, as a mother of son(s) who are family heirs with a greater claim on their father's property, and a source of dowry, women like Mataji feel more entrenched in their marital household, and enjoy greater agency than a mother of daughters. The *begumati zuban* or the distinctive idiom of the upper class women that Mataji uses

provides her yet another power base. With its sharp, idiomatic and witty style, its pithiness of expression or euphemism, and curse words, this idiom that the courtesans of Mataji's times also used, was fit to prick the conscience of her men. Mataji uses this special dialect to occasionally deflate her husband's male chauvinistic activities. Indeed, there is no overt conceptualization of Mataji as head of family, yet there is a tacit acceptance of her place as the final decision maker of the family by all its members.

More examples can be cited from the fiction of Chughtai of wives who enjoy decision making powers in their marital homes. In her short story, "Poison," Chughtai depicts Mrs. Nu'maan as another upper class Indian Muslim wife who uses the sharp and witty *begumati zaban* with its smart repartees as a weapon to pull out the deeply buried secrets and past love affairs in her husband's life. Mrs. Nu'maan repudiates her primary role as a homemaker and mother, and decides to devote most of her time and energy to public service. She is interested in human rights issues and gives lectures on ways of alleviating poverty and spreading women's education. Besides her interest in politics, she also paints and plays tennis; occupations that were considered strictly male oriented in her times. Her husband contends with her long absences without complaint since she is a source of financial security for him: her father had given him his job, and provided a handsome dowry. Though her extreme disinterest in domestic responsibilities, and her hatred of children present Mrs. Nu'maan as a rather comic and idiosyncratic character at times, she is indeed one of Chughtai's fictional wife characters who are trend-setters in many ways. A rebel against matrimonial orders in many ways, Mrs Nu'maan brings to mind Wazir Agha's evaluation of Chughtai's female characters in general: "The importance of Ismat Chughtai's female characters lies in the fact that they demonstrate the moving away

from the category of stereotypes and in doing so inspire the readers to realize themselves” (Ismat 200). Agha holds that in Chughtai’s times, for women to eschew typically feminine roles, mannerisms and vocations and to adopt typically masculine occupations and dress codes such as, getting a paid job outside the house, riding horses, playing outdoor games and wearing shirts and pants was quite shocking and considered as rebellious. Although today these acts are not necessarily deemed as radical or subversive, in a 40s India they surely were. Chughtai was aware of the implications of crossing gender lines, particularly for Muslim women, yet just like her own life, she wanted the lives of her female characters and also her female students to be free of all artificially imposed gender restrictions. In her personal life, she wrote fiction, directed and acted in movies, played tennis in bloomers, and smoked cigarettes - all of which were still considered to be primarily masculine preoccupations. A very feisty wife herself, Chughtai portrays most of her favorite wife characters as aggressive go-getters. Krishan Chander sees their zest, force and rebellion aptly reflected in Chughtai’s narrative style, about which he comments:

One aspect of her stories that strikes the reader is the overpowering speed of the narrative structure, that is, its movement, pace and vibrations . . . this extraordinary speed is a clarion call: Awake, arise, get into action . . . the Hindustani woman has finally woken up, refreshed and invigorated. All set to eliminate the suffering of her past, she plans to launch upon a more spirited and active existence! The swift pace of her narrative then, is almost a projection of the new life that she visualizes for women. (Ismat 175)

Chughtai’s deep friendship with Progressive writers like Chandar, Mantoo and Ali Sardar Jafri and her close association with famous Indian directors and actors of her time influenced her writing as did the fact that during her era India had just attained independence. In the 30s Chughtai came to Bombay and worked with Shahed Latif, her future husband, for Bombay Talkie, a film industry. Later the couple launched their own film company, “Filmina.” Together they directed and produced several



movies many of which were transcribed from Chughtai's own stories such as, "The Wild One" and "The Wedding Shroud". The desire in women to break free from rigid social and familial conventions is the theme of many of these films. Although Chughtai largely adopted the point of view of the Progressive writers, she was by no means limited by their rigid communism and decision to write only about the peasants and laborers. Lower and Middle class housewives who strive to escape from the social tether and find unique voice deck her fiction more commonly. In her fiction, one can also find the budding participation of young women in India's independence movement. As she was charged by so many dynamic inspirations in her life, Chughtai felt compelled to instill some of that motivation into the lives of the downtrodden women she saw around her through the lucid language, quick pace and surprising turns in her fiction.

Like Chughtai, Durrani also applauds wives who aspire to acquire the power to analyze their situation and examine their options, instead of hesitating to articulate their problems, or to question authority. Like her Indian counterpart again, through her autobiography as well as her fiction, she tries to inspire Pakistani wives to regain their voice inside their marital homes. Although her writings are quoted primarily as examples of Muslim wives' subjugation and oppression, they also depict wifely agency in terms of decision making power, and handling of domestic confrontations. In her autobiography, The Feudal Lord, once Durrani realizes that Khar deserted his previous wives because they have been weak and submissive, she tries to be less affected by her husband's cruel treatments, and challenges him in open battle. Eventually learning to maneuver their fights onto his territory she writes,

The change in me was slow but sure. I had evolved. I was no longer the timid, docile, self-effacing little girl that he married. I was becoming a woman. I felt that I had to be heard in order for him to realise when he was wrong. I obeyed whatever he would impose on

me but there was now a difference. It seemed that I performed under duress. I had developed a look which conveyed defiance and disagreement. Mustafa was caught on the wrong foot. He had to reassess his strategy and evolve new tactics to cope with my diffidence. (Feudal 79)

Durrani gradually musters the courage to make decisions about her own life, and make them known to her husband. She even engages in physical skirmishes with her husband. She narrates a couple of incidents when she surprises her husband by being as aggressive as he in her behavior. Once when he pulls her by the hair and swings her around, using his favorite threat to break every bone in her body, she retaliates by flinging at him the utensil full of steaming food that she had been tending over the stove. He is shocked, and burnt, but the moment he raises his hand again she pushes him back and threatens to kill him with a knife. In her words, “There was power and conviction in my tone. The days of appeasement were over. I had declared war” (90). Indeed, Durrani’s decision to stand against her husband’s battery was not formed overnight; for many years she had to suffer unspeakable humiliation in the hands of her husband who tortured her unmindful of the presence of servants, and irrespective of the opinion of her friends and relatives. Among other things, her education in English Medium schools, and her experience of living in London contribute towards her eventual transformation as a decision maker in life.

When Durrani narrates the incident of chopping off her long beautiful tresses in her autobiography, her own decision-making power as a wife is clearly expressed once again. Khar was fascinated with Durrani’s straight long hair, and told her never to cut or even trim it. Once he wrongs Durrani with his extra-marital affair, she decides to chop off her locks out of vengeance, and also out of a strong need to stop her objectification in the hands of her husband. She describes her compulsion in these words: “I woke up one morning with a strange need to get rid of this object of his

desire” (26). Durrani loved her hair as well, and considered it to be “the jewel of (her) crown”; however, in order to control matters of her own body at least, she gets her hair cut to shoulder length (27). The act of cutting her hair relieves her of a huge psychological and moral burden of giving in to each of her husband’s whims and desires. She expresses her sense of relief and mitigation in these words: “. . . as the scissors snipped away I felt Mustafa’s heavy pressure recede. It was as if the exorcism was working. I was no longer possessed by this evil spirit” (26-7). For her husband, this subversive act holds instant repercussions. He realizes that his wife is serious, and he makes instant dramatic efforts to win back her confidence. In order to keep up her husband’s public image as a Muslim political leader, Durrani had started wearing mostly white cotton dresses and silver jewelry instead of gold. For the same reason she had also started putting her *dupatta* on her head but gradually she renounced these dress codes in order to free herself from imposed artificiality. Her brief career in modeling and her picture on the cover of *Marbella* magazine after divorcing her husband bespeak of her independent decision-making powers.

Durrani shows her power of decision-making not only in her day to day life, but also during emergencies. Despite the fact that Khar vehemently opposes her going to Karachi for a cyst removal, Durrani leaves her home in Lahore and goes to Karachi in the hope of better medical treatment. Her husband lodges complaints with his brothers about her disobedience, and even before her stitches are taken off he sends orders for her to get back to Multan. Durrani, who used to give in to her husband’s every whim, finally starts sticking to her own ideas and opinions. She lets Khar’s informer know without any hesitation that she will return when she deems fit, and her husband need not send unreasonable orders through his subordinates. Durrani feels disgusted by the fact that her husband is not bothered about her health, but only

concerned about his own inconveniences. Because of his selfishness and possessiveness, her own freedom - both physical and spiritual becomes of utmost importance to her. She makes a secret determination during her hospitalization never to allow Khar to degenerate her to the level of his personal slave. Though Khar tries in various ways to entice her to wear symbolic chains, Durrani never forgets that she was born free. She decides to write about her oppression in her autobiography and break the tradition of silence maintained by Pakistani wives in general. Because of narrating her private life as Khar's wife in public, Durrani has been negatively criticized by her country people, but that has not deterred her from projecting her own views as a modern Pakistani wife who is not scared of false notions of shame and honor.

Durrani's autobiography also presents her own mother as a wife who holds immense decision making power in her marital home. Once it is disclosed that her father has a serious heart condition from early on in life, and his doctor recommends strict disciplining with regards to his eating, sleeping and working habits, Durrani's mother's sets up a life of relentless routines and restrictions for him. By taking command of her husband's medical health and his career, this strong wife tries to save him from all kinds of untimely and untoward calamity; unfortunately, she tries too hard, and alienates her husband from her. He accuses her of cramping his life, and forcing him to become what he is not. He eventually has an affair with his secretary, and marries her. Indeed, at times Durrani's mother comes across like an autocrat, trying to have complete control of her husband's life, while she projects her husband as the boss of the house in front of the children and the servants. After her husband remarries, her children understand the real reason behind her extra cautions with regard to their father, and side with her. Though her husband misunderstands her, the

dedication and skill with which she conducts her household and boosts her husband's career from that of an ordinary soldier in the army to the governor general of the State Bank of Pakistan deserves applaud. The decision making power that women like Durrani and her mother display is not a common phenomenon amongst Pakistani wives, but it definitely helps project them as agential entities rather than totally domesticated and docile household puppets.

Hossain similarly believes that wives should muster autonomy in the decision making process of their household, and in her fiction recasts roles set for Sub-Continental Muslim wives. Married twice in her personal life, she makes no secret of the fact that she too had to strive hard to establish her position as an individual within each marital relationship. In a personal interview, she narrates how, during the early days of her second marriage, she had been negotiating for the sake of her own peace and happiness by turning over her entire income into the hands of her second husband, who accepted her with two daughters from her first marriage. Eventually she is able to redefine her habitual ways of relating to her self, and escape essential categories of 'wife' in her second marriage; however, Hossain is aware of the fact that since a whole structure of material and psychological control is set up to support male dominance within the institution of marriage, it is often very difficult for wives to break out of the structural constraints and create a new way of living.

In "Motijan's Daughters," Hossain presents a strong and persistent housewife in Motijan who has to struggle hard to achieve the power of decision-making. At regular intervals Gulnur, Motijan's mother-in-law, and her husband, Abul ostracize Motijan for the dowry that her father had promised but failed to give at the time of the wedding. On one occasion Gulnur grabs Motijan by the hair and ties a rope around her neck. She then fastens the rope to a bamboo pole and leaves Motijan there for the

whole day without any food. In the evening she drags her out near the pond and sarcastically orders her to feed on grass. Motijan feels utterly humiliated, but decides to be strong. Though Gulnur is a very dominating woman who does not want to give up her own authority, Motijan soon learns how to defy her submissive role, and bargain for her space within the confines of her marital home. When the next time her brother comes to visit, and assures her that her father and him are trying their best to get the watch and the cycle that was promised to her husband, Motijan forbids him to bother about those things. Since her father has already become a liar and a cheat in the eyes of her husband and mother-in-law, and since she is treated like an animal in this household, she does not see any reason for them to raise money for those items. Motijan's decision to release her natal family from the burden of having to pay her dowry is an innovative and courageous step for a Bangladeshi village wife, and deserves applaud. Motijan is quick to assert her decision-making agency also through the birth of her two daughters whom she has out of wedlock. By deciding to raise her daughters from Lokman, her lover, as her future economic supports, instead of waiting for her philanderer husband to impregnate her, Motijan makes a radical move towards her own liberation and happiness. Motijan's decision to openly acknowledge the illegitimacy of her children, and claim her right over them defies not only her husband's and mother-in-law's authority, but also questions the morality of the institution of marriage itself.

Motijan asserts her self-worth and makes independent decisions in life because of the domestic labor she provides by cooking, cleaning, making fuel for fire, feeding the cows, and doing many other chores around the house. Despite Motijan's contributions and skills as a housewife, Gulnur neglects her daughter-in-law's worth, and stereotypically characterizes her household labor as trivial, dispensable and

valueless. Since Motijan's labor in the house cannot be strictly defined in economic terms, Gulnur does not consider it to be 'real work,' or value it. This omission by Gulnur can be understood better in light of Nilufar Parveen's observations: "Women's household work remains unrecognized, unquantified and invisible. National Labour Force Survey also reflects this bias. Non-recognition of household work shows almost half the population as unemployed and inactive" (113). Parveen regrets the fact that in many "third world" countries including Bangladesh, women's household work is not only considered "non-economic," but also "inferior" or "low-status" work (114). Because of lack of national-level recognition of a wife's domestic labor, wives like Motijan are neglected not only by men but also by women themselves.

Bangladeshi wives, however, fast learn multiple strategies to obtain due household benefits in lieu of their domestic care and labor.

It does not take Motijan long to gather the courage to demand the value of the household chores and services that she renders for her mother-in-law and her husband despite their injustices towards her. When after spending an entire afternoon cleaning the cowshed and making cow dung cakes without any word, Motijan is forced to eat grass by Gulnur because she wants to punish her daughter-in-law for her 'bad behavior,' Motijan protests vehemently: "I am a servant in this house. I work for my food. I don't ask it for free. You have to give me food. Don't people give food to their servants?" (109). She then makes a dexterous move by bypassing Gulnur and entering the kitchen to look for some food. She soon discovers a plate full of it hidden in a hanging tripod. The moment she reaches out for it, Gulnur threatens her to stay away from it since she has been saving it for her son, Abul. Motijan breaks out in laughter in an "uncanny way," and retorts that Rasui, her son's mistress must have cooked for him, and she need not worry for that. Gulnur is flabbergasted by her

daughter-in-law's audacity; however, Motijan does not pay any heed. Holding the plate close to her chest, she quickly starts gobbling down the food. She knows that if she puts down the plate, her mother-in-law will snatch it away. So she keeps standing and eating in such a way that if Gulnur makes any move towards her, she can throw the plate right at her face. Gulnur stands transfixed throughout the time Motijan wolfs down the food. She does not dare step forward or say another word. "This defeat of the tough woman was unexpected," exclaims the narrator. As for Motijan, the narrator comments: "A deep sense of satisfaction flowed like a Mahananda inside her, springing from misty depths" (110). A smile of victory spreads over her face. The narrator discloses the secret or source of Motijan's power of decision making in these words: "The large piece of fish that had been cooked for Abul was now her share. What an irony of fate, or was it her right? This was what Beli Apa had meant when she said that you have to grab your rights" (110). Motijan faces many obstacles in her way to self-fulfillment, but she fights relentlessly for her rights as a wife who provides domestic labor to her husband's family. The reasons behind her success are similar to the ones that Colette Harris provides for Tajikistani Muslim wives' success in obtaining domestic agency. According to Harris:

After leaving their parent's home on marriage, they are placed in an alien environment, very often with little or no emotional support either from in-laws or husband, and are thus forced to develop inner resources, both for their own sakes and later for the sake of their children. Men, on the other hand, remain with their own parents and thus psychologically as well as materially dependent on them. The result is women are likely to develop agency more strongly and earlier than their husbands. (244)

Bangladeshi wives like Motijan are similar to the wives described by Harris since during childhood they often have to fight against gender discrimination by their parents and siblings. Their endeavor to make sure that justice is meted out towards them in their natal home helps them inculcate a sense of self-awareness in marriage as



well. Once they find themselves in a hostile marital situation, their early training in self-defense assists these wives in devising tactics of survival. When Motijan discovers that she is trapped in a marriage where her husband, Abul is a total dependent on his mother, and is never going to defend her against the injustices meted out towards her by her mother-in-law, she decides to voice her own protestations. Her husband's lack of interest in the household, and his extra-marital affair with Rasoi gives Motijan further reasons to worry about her own future, and build up her own resources. One of Motijan's tactics of survival is having children, and the other one is to claim returns for domestic labor. Although Hossain does not recommend the way Motijan had her daughters, she endorses the housewife's attempts at demanding compensation for her contributions to the household.

In her fiction, The Atomic Darkness, Hossain once again projects a wife's domestic labor as agential; earning them respect, credit and benefits that are due to them. In this fiction she portrays Proshanti as a modern middle-class wife who is a journalist, but her wage earning capabilities are not necessarily upheld over her contributions to the household as a supervisor and a mother. If her career as a journalist provides her material benefits, then the services she provides for her autistic son at home are indispensable as a source of emotional benefits for her self, and care labor for her son. Although like the proponents of Dual Earner/Dual Career ideology, such as, Janet C. Gornic and Marcia K. Meyers, at times Proshanti visualizes a world where both husband and wife are the care givers and wage earners, it is only she who tries to balance both the roles. Hossain's narrative succinctly criticizes her husband's gender bias for which he is content to be just a wage earner, and relegates domestic labor as a woman's responsibility. Challenging the macro as well as micro-level

division of labor that favors men over women, Hossain politicizes the role of the housewife by considering it as a potential source of domestic agency.

Like Hossain, Chughtai believes in according housewives compulsory and adequate compensation for their domestic labor. In her fiction, The Crooked Line, the character Husain Bi demonstrates ample agency by demanding the worth of her own domestic labor despite her status as a dejected housewife. She tells Shamman, her husband's lover, about the methods she uses to extract money from her miserly husband who hardly provides enough for her to run the household. In her words: "Actually I wrested them out of him. I made every minute so miserable for him he had to cough up the sum eventually" (244). Husain Bi also confides in Shamman how she knits for her children with wool used from sweaters made by her husband's lovers, thereby proving her household acumen in generating resources, and indirectly making a case for herself and her children as people deserving help. Since Husain Bi knows that Shamman is her husband's latest heartthrob, she uses this as a means of extracting monetary favor from the latter to provide for her children, and run her household efficiently. Though Husain Bi comes to Shamman's door equipped with a bundle of her love letters to her husband, instead of charging Shamman about her affair, or blackmailing her with the letters, she makes a different kind of subversive moves by giving her a quick picture of the poverty and helplessness into which her husband, Iftekhar has thrust her and her children. Husain Bi then blames educated girls like Shamman for not been able to see through frauds like her husband. Husain Bi asks, "What did you find in that worm eaten kebab? I have been in despair because of him since I was fourteen. . . . I never see him. There are three children. I've stayed with relatives, suffered at the hands of nephews and sister-in-law . . . I lost, but you, all educated flies by God's grace, you still tolerate him" (242). Hosain

Bi also makes Shamman aware of the fact that she is not the only one who is trapped by her husband; there are many other women with whom he has special liaison, and who are praying for him all the time. She further informs Shamman of the fact that her husband has been cheating the government as well. Her intention is to win over the latter's sympathy for herself more than to make her husband's lover feel like a fool. Husain Bi tactfully confides in Shamman about how much she was relieved to hear that her husband was dying of tuberculosis. She wants her husband's lover to get an idea about the kind of poverty he has thrust her into. In her words: "I was happy that at least now he's dying and I'll be a widow and be entitled to receive charity and have something with which to raise my children" (244). Finally she divulges the information she has about Shamman's benevolences towards her husband in the shape of money lent, food cooked, and sweaters knit for him, and quickly comes to her point: "By the God's grace you helped the father for so long, now may be you can do something for the children. You have the right to say 'no.' I'm just happy. I met you, happy to find out that you're respectable and you won't abandon your honor" (244). Husain Bi tries to win over her opponent's sympathy by exposing her own helplessness and by buttressing the latter's sense of honor. Shamman starts feeling numb at the way Husain Bi starts sobbing and also puncturing her pride. She offers her a pair of gold earrings and bangles, and hands her over her checkbook for filling the amount she needs. When Husain Bi sees that Shamman actually has no savings, and looks like an innocent girl being duped herself, she feels bad for her. She refuses to take any of the gold jewelry, but asks for whatever cash with which Shamman can part. Shamman has only hundred and forty rupees to spare, which Husain Bi takes happily and leaves. Because of the way she tries to extract help from Shamman, Husain Bi might come out looking like a highly manipulative woman, but since her

efforts are generated from her sense of domestic duties towards her children and her marital home, they can also be seen in a positive light; as an effective means of establishing her right to earn remuneration in lieu of the domestic labor she renders as a wife, a mother, and daughter-in-law. The fact that Shamman is easily won over by Husain Bi reflects upon Chughtai's contention that even if Indian husbands like Iftekhar try to devalue and overlook their wives' domestic labor, Indian wives like Husain Bi know how to negotiate the conditions of their domestic work and bargain for their basic sustenance. Chughtai encourages wives to acquire various kinds of skills to contribute to their households so that they can lift some of the burden off their husbands' shoulders, and also gain the agency to expect love and care in return.

"Homemaker" is yet another of Chughtai's short stories that finds a housewife's domestic agency embedded in her ability to bargain for her domestic labor. In this story, Lajo is a maidservant who is an expert in the tasks of housewifery such as cooking, cleaning, maintaining household finances, etc. The great care with which Lajo prepares meals for Mirza, her master, arranges his *hookah*, keeps his house tidy, mends his clothes and shines his pots and pans makes him nostalgic for his late mother. Lajo also demonstrates business acumen when she sits at Mirza's grocery store and helps him sell things much faster than he does. She bargains with the vendors and quarrels with the milkman to ensure that every penny Mirza spends is worth its while. "For Lajo it was love at first sight. She was in love – not with Mirza but with the house," informs the narrator. In recognition of Lajo's contributions to his household, Mirza decides to ignore his family honor and marry the maid. Because of her good house-keeping he also entrusts her with sufficient funds for day-to-day expenditure, buys her gold bangles, and even offers to keep a maid for her. Lajo, however, prefers to do all her household work by her self, and does not wish to have

any intruders in the privacy of her kitchen space. She does not make a big deal about sharing her husband with prostitutes, but she absolutely refuses to share the credit for running her household efficiently with another woman, even if that woman is a maid. “Never before in her life had she got the opportunity to become the mistress of a household,” confides the narrator, and Lajo feels as empowered as a queen within the four walls of Mirza’s household (94). The narrator’s comments also bring to mind what Sohela Nazneen wrote with regard to Bangladeshi wives’ agency:

the quality of the relationship between the husband and the wife determines the level of wife’s agency and voice . . . . The relationship may be co-operative (this does not mean total absence of conflict) because the husband is less controlling and more caring and respects the wife’s management skills and intelligence. In these cases the wife has more agency.

With Mirza, Lajo has the freedom to spend on household requirements, and set up her new home the way she pleases because he appreciates the services she provides for him and his household. For Lajo domestic labor is not a source of oppression; it is rather, a source of her agency through which she entrenches her position in her marital home. In the line of the Marxist feminists, Chughtai portrays wives who are burdened with domestic and reproductive chores with sympathy, yet she does not hold that marriage necessarily means domestic slavery for the wife.

In the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani, a wife’s domestic agency can also be detected in the spheres of her natal ties, as well as in the network of friends/wives that she maintains. To get parental support in the form of property or gifts, or even to have one’s natal family by their side during a feud or sickness can enhance a wife’s sense of security, and empower her. In Durrani’s autobiography, My Feudal Lord, and also in her fiction, Blasphemy, one can find instances of domestic agency in networking. In her autobiography, Durrani narrates how she mustered the courage to protest her husband’s beatings since they were initiated upon

her in her father's house. Durrani's parents had let the couple use their house in England when they left for the Middle East for a couple of weeks. One day during their stay in that house, her husband Mustafa Khar lashes out at her and kicks her down a flight of stairs. When he continues his savage behavior even after that, Durrani remonstrates for the first time: "This is my father's house and I do not think that you should dare to lift your hand on me here" (55). During this incident, Durrani makes another point: she lets Khar know that she is not his chattel, but has other ties with people, and those ties are stronger than the ones that bind her to him. She hopes that as a feudal he would realize the importance of her blood ties with her own family, but Khar persists on shutting down all avenues of her connection with it. He does not like his wife visiting her mother's house in his absence, or even consulting with her father during a crisis. He puts restrictions on her phone calls to her brother, and discourages Durrani when she expresses her desire to meet Matloob, her brother-in-law in person. Defying her husband's overtly possessive mindset, Durrani maintains her ties with her natal family because of the agency it provides her in terms of establishing her identity and connecting to her roots.

The importance of a wife's parents' home as a site of agential power is reemphasized by Durrani's mother. When Durrani returns to her parents' home after Mustafa's affair with her younger sister is not a secret anymore, he comes to pick her up from her father's house. It is then that Durrani's mother tells her daughter:

I want him to realise . . . that you are leaving from your parents' house this time. He must never forget this. He must know that he has not picked you up from the street like before. You're not a stray. You have a home to come back to. (107)

Although Durrani's mother is selfish at times, and consider family honor over her daughter's happiness, she provides her support. Durrani's brother, sisters, and maternal grandmother provide legal and emotional support to her when she asks for

divorce from her second husband. In fact, her brother insists that she divorce Khar for the sake of her own mental peace and her children's wellbeing. When Durrani is hospitalized for a surgery, her sister Zarmina calls her regularly on the phone, and her grandmother helps her recuperate. Indeed, Durrani is betrayed by her younger sister, Adila, who has an affair with her husband, yet the rest of the family stands by her side through emergencies in her life, providing sufficient agency to fight back an autocratic husband in a highly patriarchal society.

In Durrani's fiction, Blasphemy, Heer is a housewife like Durrani herself who finds ample agency in the support her natal family provides to subvert an oppressive system. Throughout the time that Pir Sain was alive, Heer's mother, brother and sisters could visit her only occasionally. They brought her small personal gifts, but could not intervene in her marital life despite their knowledge of the injustices she faced. Pir Sain restricted Heer's communications with her family. Heer is forbidden to appear before male cousins even if they are much younger than her. After Pir Sain's death, when her son continues to torture her like his father, Heer's natal family comes to her rescue. They take her back with them and keep her to heal. They sever all ties with her husband's family and tell them to consider her dead. With the help of her natal family, Heer gains a new life and a new identity. Jeffery Patricia points out the importance of wives' links with their kin in circumventing or avoiding constraints and problems in marriage. She writes,

Crucially, it is appropriate for a married woman to maintain contacts with her natal kin, and they do, in general, offer her the best ways to ameliorate her position in relation to her in-laws, or to enhance her position in some spheres of her life. Thus, resistance based on such ties can usually be more readily legitimated than actions that are more openly defiant. . . . This provides a relative secret space for building on the social and economic resources that her parents can provide. (162)

Patricia is aware that most husbands fear the agency their wives can marshal for their resistance and hence feel the need to control their contacts with their natal kin; however, she encourages wives to maintain contacts with their natal family. For the sake of self-empowerment wives like Durrani network not only with their family but also with friends. About the positive effects of maintaining friendships with Sabiha and Andrew when she was in the midst of marital crisis, Durrani maintains that not only did they help her fill the void, they became her pillar of strength and invigorated her sedated brain. They helped her analyze her situation and examine the options available. Because of her friends' encouragement Durrani began to paint again, and found a voice which had been stifled by society. Her journalist friend Nuscie also helped Durrani change her life after the divorce, and look at alternative reality. By approaching her for what she was rather than who she was, her friend helped her shed the enforced and artificial trappings of a Muslim elite's wife, and acquire a more true-to-self personality in life. Durrani's personal success in networking made her aware of its importance in the lives of Pakistani women. In her fiction, Blasphemy, she portrays Heer as a wife who has a very restricted life within the four walls of her household, yet she is able to disregard her husband's objections and builds up a small network of women friends like Kali, Tara and Cheel. These friends help her recuperate in her confinement and annihilate the pain caused by her husband. While Kali makes Heer aware of the injustice around her, and befriends her, Cheel becomes the main instrument of her vengeance on her husband. It is Cheel who kills the sleeping Pir by suffocating him in his bedroom. Tara helps Heer with her decision to unveil the reality of her husband who was masquerading as a saint, but was a fraud. Networking with friends proves tremendously agential for Heer. By deploying this strategy she is able to procure not only her personal freedom, but also



that of the naïve people of her community who had been duped by false saints for generations.

*Sexual Agency*

Though in most cases husbands control their wives' sexuality and lay down the unspoken condition that they are not supposed to enjoy sex, wives of all classes in Chughtai and Durrani's fiction demonstrate a considerable amount of sexual agency. Sexual satisfaction or the lack thereof, affects every aspect of the wives' lives. Just as they are made aware of their own responsibility to be sexually available for their husbands, they want their husbands to recognize the importance of the fusion of love and sex in forging and maintaining solid marital bonds. In the absence of a healthy and honest sexual relationship with their husbands, they still conduct themselves as active sexual agents, claiming sexual autonomy to attract or denounce other men. In Chughtai's novella, The Wild One, for instance, Shanta is an upper class wife who recasts culturally prescribed sexual norms and asserts her own sexual rights. Since her husband, Puran, was forced to marry her he pays no attention to her. His sickness also gives him a good excuse to avoid her. She goes to her mother's house and stays there for months, but he shows no interest in getting her back. About his silent, "Mahatma Gandhi-ish punishment that no one had the gall to reprimand," the narrator makes the following ironic remark:

He was not a philanderer, he wasn't absent from home at night, he didn't hit her, didn't sell her jewellery in order to buy alcohol, didn't have eyes for other women, so what spiritual anguish was he causing her? Why did she go about looking like the very soul of suffering?  
(139)

After two years of marriage when having used all the womanly weapons at her disposal, Shanta still fails to win her husband's love and affection, she finally realizes that she is no more than a burden for him. She mourns the lack of love and passion in

marital life for awhile; however, she is not one to accept her destiny and weep forever. When Mahesh offers her love, she hesitates initially, but soon dreams of creating a new life by eloping with this man although he is already married and a father of two kids. One fine morning she leaves behind a small note for her indifferent husband just saying that she is leaving since she means nothing to him. Shanta's natural and spontaneous desires cannot be thwarted any longer as she takes control of them by challenging the encoded meanings of wifehood inscribed upon her by patriarchal discourses. Though Puran remains nonchalant at his wife's departure, and is in fact happy to have revenged his family for forcing him to marry her, the effect of the daughter-in-law's rejection looms large on the rest of his family members who are overtly concerned about their honor. Through Shanta, Chughtai protests what Muhafiz Haider calls "the principles which do not take into account a woman's natural instincts but judge her according to norms and codes of behaviour laid down by men" (*Ismat* 218). Chughtai delineates sexual impulses in women not with the intention to titillate her readers but in order to express her genuine concern for women in her society who were blinded by sexual inhibitions. Many of her stories deal with women, both married and unmarried who do not care about the consequences of their extra marital relations, and have the courage to face the society without any feeling of shame for their actions.

Sexual 'deviants' have received center stage in many of Chughtai's short stories. Her highly controversial story, "Lihaf," presents Begum Jan, another sexually frustrated upper-class housewife who finds a way to tackle her loneliness, and emotional as well as sexual insecurities. When Begum Jan finds out that her husband, the Nawab, is gay, and is more content in the company of young men than with her, she feels compelled to find an alternative to satisfy her own sexual desires as well.

Her housemaid, Rabbo rescues her from sexual repression when they get involved in a lesbian relationship. Written from the point of view of a little girl who comes to visit Begum Jan for a couple of days, the story was published in 1942 when Chughtai and Shahid Latif, her future husband, were contemplating marriage. In a chapter in her autobiography, titled, "In the Name of those Married Women," she writes about the fact that Shahid did not like the story and they had many fights over it. Chughtai still went ahead and published it. On charges of obscenity the British court filed a suit against "Lihaf" in 1944, and Chughtai was summoned to appear before the Lahore High Court. Her in-laws were upset and her husband was so furious that he threatened to divorce her. Many of her literary friends advised Chughtai to tender her apologies so that the case might be dropped, but she refused to take such a step. Eventually Chughtai won the case, but she had to face negative criticism from many quarters for writing a story that was considered to be "detrimental to morality" (Ismat 57). In her autobiography she shares her regrets over the fact that after publishing "Lihaf," many people put her down as "a purveyor of sex" (65), and her story became "the proverbial stick to beat me with and whatever I wrote afterwards got crushed under its weight" (66). Though "Lihaf" made Chughtai's life difficult, she continued to write with a vengeance about the need for women's sexual autonomy. She felt rewarded when several years after the court case on "Lihaf" she visited Aligarh and, at a party, met the Begum on whose real life her story was based. The Begum, who knew by then that she was the protagonist of Chughtai's "Lihaf," took the author aside and thanked her for her story that eventually motivated her to have a beautiful son. Chughtai, who was very apprehensive about their meeting, was invited to a fabulous dinner party at Begum's the next day. She felt elated once she saw the Begum's little boy. Later she wrote about him in her autobiography: "I felt he was

mine as well – a part of my mind, a living product of my brain, an offspring of my pen” (66). Although Chughtai does not clearly mention how the Begum conceived the child, or who the father was, from the following lines it becomes clear that her objective behind writing the story was fulfilled. She writes, “How I wanted that some brave fellow should release her from Rabbu’s clutches, encircle her within his strong arms and slake her life’s thirst. It’s a virtuous act to provide water to a thirsty creature” (67). Chughtai’s prescription for Begum’s cure, and Begum’s own resolution to have a child by way of fulfilling her life, may not be well received amongst the radical feminists of today who consider neither a man as the sole source of sexual fulfillment for a woman, nor a biological child the only way of satisfying the desire for motherhood. There is yet no doubt that by emphasizing the importance of a wife’s sexual autonomy in the backdrop of Indian Muslim society of the 40’s, both women have proved themselves to be very progressive women of their times.

In Chughtai’s fiction not only upper class women like Begum Jan dare to challenge the status quo, but women from the lower strata also break many sexual taboos, and find agency in their sexual potentials. In “The Homemaker,” for instance, Lajo is a woman from the lower class, who finds herself a home not only by dint of her domestic agency, but also by her sex appeal and aggressiveness. Lajo, however, is not interested in marriage. A carefree person by nature, she prefers to remain single, yet permanently employed in Mirza’s household. For that she deliberately seduces Mirza and manages to get what she wants. Later when she learns from Ramu, Mirza’s teenaged help, that Mirza has been frequenting courtesans, Lajo takes it as a personal insult. Her anguish is expressed by the narrator thus:

Those courtesans were witches. For Mirza, it was a waste of money. After all, what was she for? Till now, wherever employed, she gave full satisfaction to her masters in every way. But here, a full chaste

week had passed! Nowhere had she felt so slighted before. She had a very large hearted concept of the man-woman relationship. (82)

Mirza cannot resist Lajo's sexual invitations for too long, and is aware of the power of her exuberant sex appeal on other men as well. He becomes anxious to domesticate her through marriage; yet, once married, he tries to impose dress and behavior codes on Lajo, even neglecting her lest his friends call him a henpecked husband. He often stays out at night with friends and talks only in monosyllables with her for weeks together. He is eager to rush to work, and once home, he hardly seems to have the time to sit and relax with his wife before he goes to bed. Lajo is flabbergasted once she realizes that just like a typical husband Mirza is taking her for granted. The effects of his negligence are soon reflected in her reactions that are meant to give a jolt to her husband. The narrator reports:

That day Lajo's eyes went up the terrace once again. She saw that Mithwa's eyes were piercing her wet body like spears. The lad's kite snapped, and the broken cord brushed against Lajo's bare back. She gasped, and either unconsciously or deliberately, ran for the house without wrapping the towel around her. It was as though a lightning flashed and thunder fell on Mirza's house. (90)

Mithwa is a young lad who is smitten by Lajo's physical charms. His favorite occupation is to sneak a peek at Lajo's naked body while she is busy bathing. Lajo had been chiding the boy for his reprehensive acts until one day she feels really angry with her husband for leaving her alone all night and celebrating a religious festival without her. From then on she decides to bestow her love on Mithwa. Whenever Lajo needs someone to run an errand for her, she finds Mithwa loitering around her house. She gives him the meals that Mirza skips, and makes sure that he is there to catch a glimpse of her body while she is bathing. Chughtai uses a pinch of humor to relay Lajo's sexual maneuverings thus: "If he forgot to appear on the terrace while she was taking her bath, she would rattle the bucket loud enough to wake up corpses in

their graves” (91). One day Mirza catches his wife with Mithwa inside his house. While Mithwa manages to run away, Lajo is beaten by her husband till she is almost unconscious. Eventually she is divorced. Instead of feeling remorseful, Lajo is relieved to be able to get out of the shackles of marriage. She regains her flirtatious gait, and enjoys her freedom, but misses the agency she enjoyed at Mirza’s house as the sole mistress of the household. She tries again to get her old job as a maid at Mirza’s. She knows that Mirza needs help with cooking and household maintenance, and she also believes that her expertise in these areas will regain her old position. Mirza is hesitant at first, but gives in after considering the mess his house has turned into in the absence of a good housekeeper. As soon as Lajo gets the clearance she sneaks back into Mirza’s kitchen, tucks up her *lehnga*, and begins to work. She cooks and cleans and makes the house spotless. When Mirza comes home he is so enthralled by the incense-filled air, the well-scrubbed bowls, and the new water pitcher that for a moment he feels that his dead mother is back! Lajo manipulates Mirza’s typical male inertia towards household labor, and plays upon his Oedipal weakness for her. When he sits down to eat his meal of stewed meat and hot rotis, Lajo tactfully sits besides him and fans him. The narrator concludes the story by emphasizing Lajo’s domestic as well sexual agencies in these words: “A nagging feeling that he did not value her worth overwhelmed him. . . . He got up from his bed abruptly and gathered the homemaker in his arms” (*Lifting* 94). The reader is left wondering whether Lajo and Mirza will be able to maintain a strictly hierarchal servant master relationship, or whether Lajo’s sexual appeal will break all hegemonies again and soon bring Mirza back to the position of a lover. In either case, Lajo gets what she desires - a home to rule over as its mistress - because not only is she an expert in homemaking, but also because she has indomitable sexual appeal. Indeed,

Chughtai attacks sexual objectification of women in her fiction, but by projecting Lajo as a woman who is aware of her own sexual powers, and utilizes it in order to find a means of sustenance, she groups with sex-positive feminists such as, Gayle Rubin, Naomi Wolf and Betty Dudson who emphasize sexual liberation and redemptive value of female sexuality.

Chughtai's oeuvre is replete with instances of sexual agency, particularly of lower class wives. In "Do Hath," Gori, who is the daughter-in-law of an old sweepress, has the power to entice men with her sex appeal despite the fact that she is not particularly attractive. Gori is young and full of vivacity; when her husband leaves to fight a war at the border for over three years, the wives of the area start hating her for the potential threat she carries in the magic of her swinging hips and her brash, youthful laughter. Because she is unable to respect social restrictions expected of married women, and moves around flirtatiously in provocative attire, the women call a meeting, and demand that her mother-in-law send her back to her natal home. The decree passed by the community women is unacceptable to Gori's mother-in-law, who defends her in these words: "a daughter-in-law not only warms a son's bed, she also does the work of four people," thereby acknowledging the sexual as well as domestic agency that Gori commands (166). Soon Gori has an illegitimate affair with Ram Rati, her husband's cousin who comes to live with them, and produces a son. This time the men of the area want her evicted for her repudiation of moral ethics. Everyone hopes that once her husband is back from the war and finds out about his wife's illicit relationship, and the bastard child, she will definitely be taken to task; however, her mother-in-law and husband both assume attitudes of total nonchalance towards Gori's affair. In fact, when Ram Autar comes back home, he brings clothes for the baby, and is happy to find a demure and submissive wife by his side. At the

arrival of her husband, Gori instantly puts on the act of a docile and domesticated housewife, ready to bestow her body and labor at the alter of marriage. She pretends to be so happy to see her husband, and traces of regret at her lover's departure from the scene are wiped out. With the following actions as described by the narrator, she proves her dexterity in convincing her husband of future of marital bliss: "Her head-covering drawn about her closely like a new bride's, she came forward meekly with a brass container filled with water, sat down at Ram Autar's feet, took off his smelly boots, washed his feet, and then sipped a few drops of the water" (Quilt 174). Like his mother, Ram Autar is inwardly grateful about not having to spend money after another "well built stalwart" wife, and also about the added pair of helping hands that his wife has produced (Quilt 167). By using a mock-heroic style for narrating the story, especially the section where a court is set up for judging Gori's 'immoral' ways even before she had the affair with Ram Autar, Chughtai undercuts her society's fear concerning young and unguarded wives who are separated from their husband for a considerable time for any reason. Although eventually Gori does have an extra-marital affair, Chughtai interprets her need for love and sex as a natural phenomenon in the long absence of her husband, and is hesitant to censure her body's need as abnormal or immoral. Indeed, Chughtai's fiction supports Sudhir Kakar's view that majority of Indian wives are sexually deprived and unsatisfied, yet by focusing on the changing sexual attitudes and behavior of wives like Gori and Lajo, it effectively dispel myths about their sexual conservatism, passivity and dutifulness.

That Chughtai was ahead of her time in her understanding of Indian wife's sexuality, is also reflected in her feminist depiction of the rebellious and reckless love of the legendary Radha, for Krishna. Despite social taboo, in a letter to Ram Lall, an established Urdu writer, Chughtai projects in a positive light, the unconventional



passion of Radha, who was married, for her lover, Krishna. Referring to husbands like Mirza, in “The Homemaker,” who feel free to have extra-marital affairs, but expect their wives to remain devoted to them, Chughtai holds: “They have forgotten that if the man is free while the woman is enslaved, their union can only be fraudulent” (*Ismat* 137). Chughtai’s radical ideas about wives’ sexuality have drawn the notice of many Indian male writers. Varis Alavi, for instance contends: “Ismat reacted to the negation of the very life that accords strength, as also to the humiliation of the body, and its natural demands. Ismat’s revolt against such an existence was total, fundamental and uncompromising” (*Ismat* 210). Comparing Chughtai’s treatment of sex with that of her contemporary male writer, Sadat Hasan Manto’s, Alavi contends that both were trying to wipe away the notion of a woman as a sex object, and bestow upon her a human personality. Because of contesting notions of sexual respectability, and depicting sexual transgressions in wife many of Chughtai’s critics find her to be distastefully obsessed with sex. Disregarding their views, Chughtai aims at peeling off the artificial layers of sexual identity hung on wives so that their inner human self can emerge.

Like Chughtai’s, Hossain’s fiction is also filled with examples of wives who are capable of making subversive sexual moves in order to break out of dominant sets of ideologies that their society tries to thrust upon them in the name of marriage. In her short story, “Parul Becomes a Mother,” Parul is a housewife who uses her sexuality as a tool of rebellion against her insipid husband, as well as their callous society. When Abbas Ali deserts Parul without even a word, and later marries another woman without a word to her, she feels humiliated and dejected. One question keeps nagging at the corner of her mind: when does a husband stop needing his wife? Her conscience replies, “when she cannot give him her body” (162). Her entire being

shrieks out, “but I could give him all” (162). Parul is confident about her sexual powers: she believes, “Never did the gush of erotic desire feel disrupted within the rainbow washed compounds of her body” (162). She is perplexed about what caused her husband to abscond, and feels insulted when she realizes that her husband has rejected her womanhood without any apparent reason. Parul had also accepted her lot as a poor day-laborer’s wife. In fact, she had put her energy towards working house-to-house, and scrounging whatever rice and vegetable she could manage for both. Despite her contributions towards her marriage and household, when her husband betrays her, Parul decides not to wait for that man to return just because he has social recognition in her life as her husband. She hurls out a string of abuses towards her husband’s impudence, and resists his action with the resolve that “a happy go lucky, carefree, society’s ass kicking type life is the only life worth living” (163). Thus Parul begins to entertain men who can fulfill the hunger of her body, but she does not completely commit to any one of them in particular. She indulges her body only for the sake of sheer pleasure and does not demand any monetary remuneration. “I have whosoever I wish and whenever I wish,” she brags, challenging male privilege in Muslim societies with regards to multiple sexual relationships. Soon she is pregnant out of wedlock, which she takes as an opportunity to avenge her lot, and to repudiate social norms that allow motherhood only within the parameters of marriage. Like Motijan, in Hossain’s short story, “Motijan’s Daughters,” she proclaims that the mother’s womb that holds a baby is the ultimate identity component for it irrespective of the father, or any cultural or institutional sanction. The women who had been dejected by their husbands, despite having children, secretly congratulate her. As further revenge on patriarchal society, when the men she has slept with become anxious to know the paternity of her child, she decides to keep the identity of her

child's father a secret. By depicting a strong wife and independent single mother in Parul, Hossain propagates the belief that sexual agency is an essential component of a woman's right and freedom.

In "Motijan's Daughter" Hossain shows another Bangladeshi lower class housewife in Motijan who like Parul, has sexual agency that not only helps her satisfy her physical needs that her husband thwarts, but also provides her the status of motherhood. Motijan's husband Abul leaves Motijan with his bossy mother, and stays in the arms of his mistress in the city for months. He is also not interested in having children. Motijan finds a way of taking revenge on her ganja-addict womanizer of a husband when she meets Lokman. During her husband's prolonged absence she makes this man her physical and emotional companion and lets him know about her resolve to escape the life of an underdog. Hossain subtly paints the picture of Motijan's sexual urges in these words: "When the smell of ganja hardened the inside of her chest, it was as if she felt the tall and lanky figure of Lokman was standing close to her. She reached out for him and bundled his body into her palms" (26-27). Motijan has two daughters from Lokman, for whom she feels grateful. Abul shows no interest in them; her mother-in-law however, throws a fit about her not being able to produce sons. Motijan defends her daughters, and lets her mother-in-law know that if she depended on her son, she would not have these girls even. As her mother-in-law stands dumbfounded at her audacity to insinuate sex outside of marriage, Motijan boldly pulls her daughters closer to her chest and ignores everything else. In the end the reader is left guessing whether Motijan is divorced by her husband after the paternity of the daughters is made public, or whether she leaves the household with her daughters on her own accord. Hossain seems to deliberately avoid pronouncing Motijan's predicament. It is possible that Motijan stays back in

her marital home despite her mother-in-law's hostility and her husband's indifference towards her since both parties can foresee the absurdity of trying to change their situation. Although Abul's second marriage has prospects for a fresh flow of dowry, he is too involved with his mistress to bother about that, and for Motijan there is no guarantee that once married, Lokman will not turn out to be another Abu – unwilling to make any emotional investment or economic commitment, both of which are crucial determinants of a wife's marital quality. In the light of this stagnantly hopeless situation in her life, the defiant move that Motijan makes to claim her own bodily rights by having two daughters out of wedlock, can be appreciated for the sexual/maternal agency that it provides to a lower class woman like her.

In Hossain's fiction the middle class wives who are deprived of marital stability because of lack of normative commitment on the part of their husbands, also eventually acquire sexual agency. In Atomic Darkness for instance, Hossain's middle class housewife Proshanti is unfortunate like Parul and Motijan because she too has a husband who is addicted to other women; however, like the other two wives in Hossain's short stories, "Parul Becomes a Mother" and "Motijan's Daughters," Proshanti is also sexually empowered. When her husband's negligence and womanizing turn too unbearable, she starts feeling an urge to satisfy her body and soul through a strong and meaningful relationship with someone else. Proshanti gains that opportunity in life when she meets Tatian in Bali. Tatian assuages her body's hunger and her yearning for friendship and love. She carries memories of this experience with her as she leaves the island. Unlike her husband, Anupom, she does not make it a habit to indulge in sexual pleasure outside of marriage; rather, she controls her sexuality, and finds her spaces for survival in many other things outside of the body. A wooden statue of Buddah, her job as a journalist and her autistic child

are amongst those things which provide her with the alternative spaces to breathe and to conquer her carnal desires. Indeed, it may be argued that Proshanti's decision to abstain from extra-marital sex is not sufficiently counter-hegemonic since it means depriving herself from natural instincts, or that Parul's decision to follow the footsteps of the womanizing patriarchy is not liberating enough since it implicates her in the same web that she is trying to tear. Nonetheless, it can also be argued that how a woman would avenge sexual injustice is a matter of personal choice, and depends on the individual woman's familial/social upbringing and her ideological outlook. Both strategies are valid since the ultimate aim is to prove that it is the woman who is in control of her body. For Proshanti, it is enough to let her husband know that her body does not lose its value just because he does not deem it worthy of love and care. If Proshanti wants to have sex with other men she can indulge in it any time, but she decides to refrain from such an act, particularly if it does not involve love. Parul, on the other hand, deems it more appropriate to use the same strategy to avenge her oppressors that they use against her. Her social status as a lower class childless woman who lives by herself facilitates the mode of revenge she chooses; sex outside marriage for bodily pleasure. Both women regulate their bodies according to what befits their existential and spiritual needs, and that constitutes their agential empowerment. As the characters of Proshanti and Parul depict, Hossain delineates a wife's sexual agency not only through her strength to repudiate sex, but also through her power to initiate it. It is evident from her writings that woman's sexuality is, as Carole Vance concedes, "simultaneously a domain of restriction, repression, and danger as well as a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency" (327). According to Vance, to focus only on sexual exploitation and violence is to obliterate women's experiences of sexual agency, gratification and choice. Because of globalization and

the spread of internet culture, Sub-Continental Muslim societies are forced to change their attitude towards female sexuality. Many fiction, plays, soaps, package dramas and films now depict sexually empowered wives who do not necessarily have to pay heavily for gratifying their physical or maternal needs outside of marriage by committing suicide or facing humiliation. Despite the difficulties of living in a society that does not openly recognize the discourse of women as subjects of sexuality, wives in Chughtai and Hossain fiction establish themselves as subjects of sexuality, thereby creating a pressure for egalitarian and compassionate marriage. It is not very uncommon for married women in their writings to demand separation or divorce on account of sexual incompatibility even if their husbands are established, wealthy, pious, kind, from an honorable family, or father of their children.

*“Micro Mechanisms of Power”*

Gossip, rumor and slander are often dismissed as unimportant forms of daily conversation among women. Such modes of action may not be radical, yet they have considerable potential for building moral surveillance in society, and working as a source of agency. According to Harris Collette, gossip is a “micro mechanism of power” that can help regulate moral action in a society (268). Spreading of gossip or scandal mongering, especially in small and tight communities, can work as moral policing, preventing the person concerned from perpetuating the act for which s(he) is criticized. Durrani’s autobiography and fiction deploy gossip and scandal as important grounds on which to work out certain strategies of subversive action. In Blasphemy, her protagonist, Heer uses gossip as a strategy to avenge the wrongs perpetrated upon her by her husband. Although her husband is acclaimed as a descendent of a great line of ‘pirs’, or religious leaders, he abuses his wife by compelling her to perform sexual acts with men of his choosing. Personified as

Piyari, a prostitute from the city, and under cover of her *burqa* or veil she is taken out of the *haveli* or mansion to spend nights in the arms of strange men by none other than her own husband. His perverted mindset compels him to videotape his wife's sexual acts with other men for private pleasure. He also sexually abuses the young maids of the house, and forces his wife to participate in his orgies with them. Once Heer realizes the consequences of going against her husband's wishes, she strives hard to masquerade, and maintain an outward show of conformity to her husband's ideals. During his lifetime she quietly plays along as a sexually perverted person since she knows that no call for help could be heard from a trapped woman rendered faceless and nameless behind the veil. Though outwardly Heer seems to have adjusted to her imposed identity, she never fully internalizes the traits of subordination, or forgets the insults, humiliation and pain her husband causes her owing to her servility. After her husband's death, she resolves to expose her exploiter, and also the evil that he kept concealed in his shrine under the garb of divinity. For this she has to first pull off her own mask, and expose her true identity. Such open retaliation becomes a risky matter, and requires tremendous courage since speaking against the Pir's shrine is considered to be blasphemy, punishable by death. Nonetheless, as the following excerpt shows, Heer contemplates using the devices of gossip and slander despite all odds:

O Allah, my morality serves nothing. My person means nothing. Allow me a transgression. Allow me to use myself to expose the evil this Shrine conceals behind your name. Allow me to take a course that will condemn me but expose the distortion of your message at the hands of your enemies. (197)

First she decides to announce over the mosque's loudspeaker that Piyari, the prostitute was none else than herself, the Pir's wife. After contemplating the risk involved in such a blatant act of rebellion, however, she plans another course of action. With the

help of Tara, whom she employs as her tailor, she gets back into skin tight, chest bulging attire and high heels. Since Tara was also sexually abused by the pir, Heer uses her as an accomplice, and both the women join hands in the mission of avenging the injustice done unto them by the Pir. Through the back gate and the bathroom door, one by one Tara sneaks in “the heroes” whom Heer was forced to sleep with by her husband. Heer then pulls off her mask, exposing her real identity as the Pir’s wife, and Rajaji’s mother. Next she forces the baffled men to lose their faith in their false religious leader by highlighting the ways they were duped by him. At the dead of night, Heer slips back into Piyari’s tight clothes again, applies her makeup and under the guise of *burqa*, secretly leaves the *haveli* with Tara. They knock at the doors where Heer had been sexually exploited with due permission of her husband, and divulge the secret in the hope of spreading the gory reality of her life by word of mouth. Heer justifies this act of hers thus:

Exposing my self as a whore exposed him as a pimp. The only way to establish this was to pull him out of the garb embroidered with the ninety-nine names of Allah. The only way for that was to throw off my own clothes. After every desecration, I stood over my husband’s grave and spat on it. (198)

During the mission of shattering the myth behind her husband’s greatness by spreading gossip, Heer faces many hurdles. When she decides to visit her “heroes” as simply Heer and not as Piyari, some of them do not recognize her right away. When, having sprinkled her husband’s musk over her body she reaches the *jagirdar*’s residence and tries to ensure that he also partakes of the gossip, the fat man stands transfixed in disbelief. He refuses to believe that she is his Pir’s wife. Heer challenges him to bring any one of his maids to confirm her identity. As her husband’s crony goes inside his house to bring an old maid, Heer throws off her *burqa*, flicks a cigarette in one hand and holds a glass of whisky in the other. When



the maid enters the room and sees Heer, her eyes pop out in shock, but she falls at her feet and shows respect to her Pir's wife whom she had seen in the *haveli* on many occasions, albeit in a different role. Finally the *jagirdar* is convinced of Heer's story, but terrified of the consequences of his past act. Having accomplished her business of sowing the seeds of gossip and slander involving her husband, Heer leaves, but soon seeks out other ways of circulating gossip and slander about the Pir. In the dead of night she runs across the cornfields and hides herself there in order to sell copies of Pir Sain's video films to a Pathan who sells smuggled fabric, hashish and heroin. She hopes that "they would spread the truth like germs spread a virus" (201). Indeed, her strategy works out faster than she had expected. "Gossip of two vampires on the prowl reached Rajaji even before his father's first death anniversary" reports Heer (203). Though many people like Sakhi bibi disapprove of her action, Heer is convinced that she has done the right thing by exposing her body to reveal the truth. In her words: "To me, burying the evil and preserving my reputation meant preserving the evil. No exposure meant maintaining the status quo. That meant no change. I knew I had done the wrong thing for the right reason. The truth was already simmering. It would rise like lava from the graves of mad men" (208-9). Though Heer has to relinquish her life as the mistress of the *haveli* after Heer's son and her brother-in-laws find out about her role in denigrating their shrine with the spread of gossip, she does not repent at all. Rather, with the help of her own family she is able to attain another chance to become "someone else," and live a life with a new identity (222). Heer's agential power is confirmed when one year later she hears an unknown woman pray on her grave: "O Allah, bless this soul for exposing the decadence of Shrine-worship. Bless her for bringing us closer to you" (229). Heer is able to help some of the blind followers of Pir into recognizing the blunder they had been

committing by following an imposter and exploiter of God's name. Heer's own position as a woman messiah is also solidified by the unknown woman's prayers for her at her grave. Indeed, Heer's underhanded subversions do not create the same sort of immediate transformation in her social situation as overt resistance might have, yet it proves to be an enduring strategy. While critically analyzing the lives of Tajikistani Muslim wives, Harris Colette argues that though these wives may have indirect agency, it is definite agency. In Colette's words: "The strategies used by the subordinated may not always produce significant or fast transformation of the conditions of oppression but more often tend rather slowly and secretly to undermine them" (247). Harris uses Foucault's theory to argue that since power is always opposed by people upon whom it is thrust, and since power relations are bound to change with resistance, Muslim wives eventually find a way to oppose their suppression, no matter how feebly. Though Heer's resistance through the "Micro Mechanisms" of gossip and slander is indirect, and slow, it eventually allows her to challenge the hegemonic system, and pave the way for change in the status quo.

Like her protagonist Heer, Durrani strives to harness public opinion through scandalous exposure and gossip in order to counter her husband's violence and extra-marital affair. In her autobiography, *My Feudal Lord*, she narrates the incidence when she exposed Mustafa in front of guests as a chronic wife abuser. One day while waiting in the car to start on a journey, Mustafa gets very irritated by Durrani's delay. He wants her to drop everything she is doing and report immediately. When Durrani tries to tell him to calm down, he hits her hard with the back of his hand, and gives her an instant black eye. Their little excursion has to be called off. In the evening they have a party at home. In order to avoid gossip and scandal Mustafa orders Durrani to put on a pair of dark glasses to hide the bruise. Not ashamed to expose her

condition to the world, what Durrani does instead is coolly remove her dark glasses as she sits down with the guests. Her desire not to acquit her husband of the heinous act gets expressed thus: “For a change I wanted Mustafa to be humiliated. I wanted this not to be my humiliation. I had suffered long enough behind closed doors. It was time this closet wife-beater was exposed” (100). Mustafa confronts Durrani later, and calls her “undignified” and “exhibitionist” (101). Durrani, however, is happy to be able to cause him public shame. She also hopes that the gossip that her act entails will prevent future torture on her. Mustafa realizes that no more will his wife be averse to lifting the veil on his sadistic acts, thereby damaging his political career, yet he cannot stop battering her. Not only that, he starts having affair with Adila, Durrani’s younger sister. As a wife of a highly controversial political leader, Durrani already had easy access to the media. She decides to advertise her physical and emotional bruises publicly since she knows that it will create a stir, thereby controlling her husband’s behavior, and exposing her own reality as the wronged wife. About her strategy of using the media to germinate gossip she writes:

I called a press conference, for the first time in 13 years. I endorsed the veracity of what had been a rumour. I nailed the truth. . . . Mustafa and Adila were the reason for my divorce. I had denied it earlier for the sake of my sister’s home and my family. I also let it be known that Mustafa Khar had not only committed incest and thereby violated the injunctions of the Koran, he was also guilty of statutory rape. He had started the relationship with Adila 13 years ago when she was still a child. (363)

Durrani hopes that her narratives, in the form of gossip, rumors and scandal will seek to probe what goes on in her everyday marital life, and provide her moral justice. As the spreader of gossip, Durrani’s course of action is not received positively by many conservative groups of people which think that she should have been more dignified. Nonetheless, she believes that “silence is a greater crime. It condones injustice. It breeds in us subservience and fosters a malignant hypocrisy. Mustafa Khar and other

feudals thrive on our silence” (360). Durrani does not want to feel like those rape victims who swallow the crime simply because they are ashamed of getting exposed. According to her, “the villain must not be allowed to use society’s queasiness as his cover. Women must learn to speak out or be damned” (363). Durrani dedicates her autobiography to the ex-wives of Khar, who suffered like her. In the Foreword to My Feudal Lord, Asma Jahangir applauds Durrani’s efforts for breaking her silence in multiple ways. Jahangir, who is Durrani’s lawyer believes that like her client, many women in today’s world have realized the importance of making themselves heard by society if they are under duress on any account. She succinctly notes:

For centuries women have held their peace. Patience is apparently a virtue to be practiced exclusively by them. . . . Gradually, however, women are breaking through this oppressive silence. No longer it appears, are they prepared to accept the ‘virtuous’ role thrust upon them by society. Because they are more vulnerable and sensitive than men, they must speak out. (iii)

Durrani demonstrates patience in marriage for fifteen years before finally divorcing her husband. Throughout this time Durrani was compelled to separate from her husband four times on account of his torture and break of commitment. Although there were many proves of her husband’s breach of contract with her, it was Durrani who was taken to task by critics not only for exposing her husband’s dirty laundry in public, but also for throwing muck on the entire nation, particularly its religious as well as political leaders, and its landed gentry. It is often difficult to argue Durrani’s case as an important and influential writer in front of people who believe in putting up a false charade of respectability, and have blind faith in the contrived discourses of family, religion and nationhood. Despite various kinds of opposition from her own people, Durrani has not changed her strategy of using her pen and the media to propel what Seemanthini Niranjana has termed as “the circuit of information,” and gather

support (98). According to Niranjana, in spite of its “quasi–underground nature,” gossip,

succeeds in effectively policing the spaces inhabited by people. Another central feature of gossip tends to talk about morality, especially deriving from context like the alleged sexual affairs of people, any transgression of moral behavioral codes or deviations from accepted norms. (95)

Niranjana’s findings on gossip as an agential strategy, despite its status as a marginal or peripheral discourse, explain Heer’s and Durrani’s achievements in using it as a positive subversive device. Durrani similarly believes that through doubt and probing, gossip situations tend to create and enforce moral rules governing human thought and behavior. Durrani uses the newspapers and media of Pakistan to attract attention to the incident for Fakra Yunus when her husband, Bilal Khar, who is also Durrani’s step son, mutilated her face with acid. As the response of donors, physicians, beauticians and lawyers show, Durrani has been successful in using gossip and scandal as what Roushan Jahan calls, a “shaming mechanism,” and “effective instruments of intervention” (Hidden 144). She gathered massive financial, technical and moral support for the young woman’s treatment from Pakistani as well as Italian organizations. She has also been successful in bringing legal action against Khar’s son despite the fact that like his father, Bilal is very influential in Pakistan. Indeed, Durrani’s strategies, like her protagonist, Heer’s strategies of using the devices of gossip and scandal as an agency, have been slow and prolonged, yet in the end they turn out to be effective.

Durrani further applies indifference and detachment as agential tools or “micro mechanisms of power” for fighting marital injustice. She uses indifference in her personal life to silently protest her husband’s injustice and torture. In My Feudal Lord, she writes:

My indifference tortured him. I wouldn't sulk, I wouldn't want him to apologise. I was completely detached. My composure upset him. He noticed that my crying had stopped . . . He stopped beating me . . . I was discovering the levers of power that were previously his . . . In the past, my tears, my arguments, my pleadings had been like applause to his great acts of misplaced masculinity. My silence destroyed him.  
(91-2)

Indifference works as an agential trope because it reflects mature behavior, and is a better choice than throwing tantrums or sulking; both of which expose a childish mentality and give a husband the opportunity to show off his authority by having the last word in an argument, physically abusing his wife, or even by pardoning her so-called mistakes. Durrani learns fast enough in life that real agency lies in showing a cold shoulder to a husband who prefers attention. Her immunity, apathy and alienation alarm her husband more than her open revolts since he cannot fathom what is going on in her mind, and fears her transformation into an enigmatic, mysterious woman he is not used to dealing with. As a result of her prolonged indifference Khar falls on his knees and begs his wife's forgiveness. He also requests friends and family to intervene and make her relent. At times Durrani would fall for his pleadings and quit aloofness, but Khar would soon revert to his old bullying self, forcing Durrani to revert to her stance of indifference. The immediate change of mood and attention that Durrani receives from her husband the moment she decides to use the tactics of indifference and dispassion further points at the efficiency of these methods as agential tools of subversion.

In Chughtai's short story, "Aunt Bichu," Aunt Bichu's way of avenging her husband's betrayal can be cited as another instance of indifference as one of the "micro mechanisms of power" commonly used by Indian wives. The day Aunt Bichu gets an inkling of her husband's affair with her cleaning woman, she declares herself a widow and never reconciles with him again. Like a widow in mourning she starts

wearing all white, and smashes all the bangles on her wrist with a stone. She further bars his sexual approaches, and refers to him as her “late” or “dead” husband (Quilt 178). “She refused to allow hands and feet that had known the touch of a cleaning woman’s body to come into contact with hers,” informs the narrator (Quilt 178). Thus symbolically as well as physically she protests against the injustice done towards her by her husband while maintaining indifference. Since this unfortunate incident took place when she was a young bride, Aunt Bichu remains estranged from her husband for most of her married life. Her decision to practice indifference as a means of teaching her husband a lesson deprives her of the pleasures of a conjugal/sexual life as well, but as a woman of strong principle and sense of self-respect, she makes no compromise when it comes to sharing her husband with another woman. Her mode of action is also effective in exposing the nature of her husband’s injustice in front of the family, and bringing shame upon him without having to lose all her own marital comforts and privileges.

Like Durrani and Chughtai, Hossain similarly believes in indifference as an effective device for wives seeking agency. Proshanti, the middle class Bangladeshi housewife in Hossain’s fiction Atomic Darkness, uses indifference towards her husband as a means of paying him back for his negligence. Since Anupom is a philanderer, incapable of showing the kind of loyalty that is required of a husband, over time Proshanti learns to ignore him. She used to eagerly await his return, but gradually she does not bother with such things. Her emotions are no longer stirred by anything he says or does. Her miseries in a hollow marriage teach her to find mental refuge in special healing spaces that she creates exclusively for herself. One such space is located within a wooden statue of Buddha that she hides inside a drawer. When desolation hits her, she takes the Buddha out and confides her pain and

frustration in it, yet she does not seek consolation in her husband's company. Another healing space for Proshanti is her job as a journalist. When she is engrossed in collecting news or transcribing data, pain caused by her husband cannot touch her, and she discovers a whole new world where she is significant. Her complacency and composure unsettles her husband's sense of authority, and he frets about her nonchalant attitude. For instance, once when she leaves for Bali on vacation, and prefers to be left alone, he calls her up to remind her of her marital responsibilities towards him. She is amused by the fact that a man who does not care for his own duties towards his wife should reprimand her for not fulfilling hers. In her indifferent manner she lets her husband know that though the bond of marriage ties them together, he relinquished his right to rule over her heart long ago. Her victory over her callous husband is complete when later in the same unconcerned fashion she acknowledges her own brief affair with Tatian, an Indonesian rebel poet in Bali. Anupom eventually regrets losing his wife's affection owing to his own injustices towards her, and openly acknowledges that she is a woman of tremendous patience, strength of mind and compassion. Proshanti receives this high accolade from her husband because instead of begging for his love and mercy, she maintains a tough and indifferent exterior. Proshanti's indirect protestations through indifference may not seem tremendously agential; yet, in so far as they bring about a change in her husband and provide a certain degree of power to make life better for herself, they are effective. Indifference, as opposed to direct confrontation or divorce, proves more fruitful as an agency in marital relationship also because it leaves space for couples to live side by side instead of feeling totally antagonistic.

Like Proshanti, most Bangladeshi women believe in the commitments they make in marriage, and do not want to completely jeopardize their relationship, hence



they keep their protest at a low key by using backstage and surreptitious techniques such as gossip and indifference. Sohela Nazneen reports on Bangladeshi housewives' undramatic yet stable agency in these words: "Bangladeshi housewives whether they belong to a joint family or a nuclear one, do not aim at head on collision, but resist their husband's control in 'clandestine ways.'" According to Nazneen, since wives have limited entitlements and restrictive movements, they decide to avoid overt conflict, and assert their agency through negotiation with their husbands. They realize that acting autonomously and independently may mean loss of money and social support. Indeed, for a Bangladeshi wife total emancipation from patriarchal power is not easy to attain, and she is not entirely free to make decisions about her life and act upon them. Responsibilities of motherhood and care for the elderly further make her less likely to engage in crass and overt resistance. As Patricia Jeffery and Roger Jeffery contend with regards to Indian wives, in some cases even educated housewives have to ameliorate their situation through covert ways since their education is aimed primarily at inculcating manners and middle class morality that subdues them even more by teaching them newer forms of respectable behavior. The critics further point out: "for the most part, woman's struggles are more likely to be individualistic attempts to ameliorate their situation within their system, rather than confrontational insubordination that challenges the very basis of the system" (162). With very few battered wives shelters, foster homes and hot line agencies to support women who are victims of domestic violence, there is no chance for majority of wives in the Sub-Continent to expect prolonged organized assistance from their communities. Abused wives often do not get moral and material support from families as well who prefer to stay out of the privacy of marital life. This is one of the major reasons why the everyday forms of resistance that wives like Heer in

Blasphemy, and Proshanti in The Atomic Darkness deploy, avoid direct challenge to the dominant system, and are not corporate and confrontational forms of struggle, but “micro mechanisms of power” such as gossip and indifference. Of course, in the oeuvre of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani there are a few of those wives as well who do not consider gossip and indifference to be capable of damage limitation. These wives also do not expect NGOs, or government, or family intervention to rescue them from their abusive homes. Disregarding the fear of social and familial retaliation, they dare to declare open war, and take the drastic step of divorcing their husbands when they cannot take domestic oppression any more.

#### *Legal Agency*

Despite very limited divorce rights granted to Muslim women, and the colossal social stigma attached to it, Hossain and Durrani depict wives who divorce their husbands in order to fight for their human rights. Before the passing of the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act 1939 (“Khula Bill”), a Muslim wife had to go through apostasy from Islam in order to divorce. In her novella, The Heart Breaks Free, and her short story, “The Veil,” Chughtai delineates the impediments of getting a divorce for an Indian wife before the “Khula Bill” because of family honor and public humiliation. In these stories wives are compelled to consider suicide, symbolic widowhood, lifetime slavery and deceit, but are not allowed to get a divorce easily. In The Heart Breaks Free, Aunt Qudsia is one such wife who is forced to elope with her lover because during her times the Khula Bill was not effective and no one in her natal family approved of a second marriage for a woman whose husband was alive. Her husband takes the dowry money from their wedding to go abroad and earn higher education, but once his degree is in hand, he comes back to his motherland with a second wife. He never divorces Aunt Qudsia, or even bothers to consider her as his

first wife. Aunt Qudsia is left at her father's house at age twenty six to grow old and forget about conjugal life altogether. Eventually she falls in love with her cousin brother, yet her husband stubbornly refuses to divorce her. She considers converting into Christianity, but finally elopes with her lover, and they are secretly married. In a society where divorcing a husband is impossible, and going after a second husband when the first one is still alive is considered utterly shocking, Aunt Qudsia manages to break away from these stingy social norms. Her family considers her dead for dishonoring them, and she has to choose the life of a pariah, but she finds happiness with her second husband and their daughter, Rafiah Hasan. Chughtai uses Rafiah as a mouth piece to critique the absurdity of a society that denies women their God given right to nullify a marriage that has turned oppressive, and to applaud the agency of women like Aunt Qudsia who challenge the man-made divorce laws of their society. In "The Veil" Goribi is another young wife like Aunt Qudsia whose husband deserts her for another woman, but she can never divorce him because as the narrator says, "There was no question of divorce in those days. Once married you stayed married" (Quilt 4). Goribi's entire life is wasted waiting for her obstinate and debauch husband to change his mind and come to her, but because of the lack of a divorce law for women, like Aunt Qudsia, her family does not dare to contemplate divorce for her. Goribi, however, is not as lucky as Aunt Qudsia; she does not get a second chance at love or marriage, and lives like a widow for the rest of her life. The tragic life of Goribi is a reminder of the social and legal injustice meted out towards Muslim women despite the fact that there is no such stipulation in the Quran that they cannot divorce their husbands under any circumstances. Indeed, it is stated in the Quran that divorce should be avoided if possible by both parties, but it is by no means the sole prerogative of the husband to divorce.

The Khula Bill gives Muslim wives the right to seek divorce; however, gender discrimination in case of repudiation of marriage still exists. While a Muslim husband's right to divorce is unilateral and arbitrary, a Muslim wife has to be delegated the power to divorce by her husband, and in some cases she must also prove her husband's misconducts. In a letter to the famous Indian movie star, Saira Banu, written in 1982, Chughtai expresses her concern for "khula," or the woman's right to divorce. She calls it "sheer Islamic strong-arm tactics" that divorce and four marriages are divinely ordained, but nobody mentions "khula." She regrets that though "Islam bestows woman with khula – in other words, she can either give or take divorce from someone," yet Indian Muslim patriarchy bars women from enjoying this right (Ismat 238). Chughtai's short story, "The Rock" delineates the ease with which a Muslim husband divorces his wife. In this story, Bhabi is divorced by Bhaia once he falls in love with a thinner and younger girl than his wife. He simply comes home one day and declares his desire to remarry. He is ready to give Bhabi a flat as part of her *meher* money, but does not deem it necessary to give any further explanation to her or to the family members for his divorce. He knows that the paper work for the divorce is just a formality that he has to go through, and it will not take him long to obtain official approval. Bhabi also knows that once her husband has made up his mind, nothing will deter him, yet she is so scared of a life of a divorcee that she begs her husband not to leave her, and promises to serve him as his dedicated servant for the rest of her life. Her husband's romance unfolds right under her nose, yet the idea of divorcing a heartless debauch of a husband, and getting a new life never occurs to her because of lack of socio-economic security and the stigma attached to the name of a divorcee. In "By the Grace of God" Chughtai once again deals with the difficulty of a wife divorcing a husband. In this story, Farhat is married to a sixty year-old man

who turns out to be infertile. Farhat is more than twenty years younger than her husband and does not find him attractive at all. She falls in love with Anwar, a much younger man than her husband, and becomes pregnant with his child. Her mother knows about it, but she does not want Farhat to divorce her husband. She is so terrified by the idea of getting stuck with a divorced daughter that she forces Farhat to stay married to her husband. Farhat's mother also knows that in case Farhat divorces her husband, she will have to give back to her husband the portion of the *meher* money that has been used up to help Farhat's brother and unmarried sister. Owing to all of these obstacles, Farhat's mother forces her daughter to live her life in a loveless marriage, and hide the true paternity of her child. It is not only individuals like Farhat's mother who have difficulty in accepting the idea of a wife divorcing her husband, the law concerning divorce is also gender biased towards the women. About the distinct disparity that exists between Muslim men and women in relation to the right of judicial dissolution of marriage, Faustina Pereira writes: "Although the primary characteristic of a Muslim marriage is a contract consisting of two equal parties, one of the two contracting parties, the husband, has been granted a plenary power to put an end to the contract" (22). According to Periera, a Muslim man has "unencumbered" rights to divorce his wife whenever he wishes without citing a cause. All he has to do is pronounce the word "talaq," which means divorce, three times and notify the Arbitration Council. After ninety days his request takes effect; however, a Muslim wife has not been granted this power. In a case where she has not been delegated the right to divorce, but still desires release without losing her dower, she must refer to a court of law and prove one or more of the following grounds placed in The Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939:

- (1) that the whereabouts of the husband has not been known for a period of four years;
- (2) that the husband has neglected or failed to provide for her maintenance for a period of two years;
- (3) that the husband treats her with cruelty, that is to say:
  - (a) habitually assaults her or makes her life miserable by cruelty of conduct even if such conduct does not amount to physical ill-treatment, or
  - (b) associates with women of ill-repute or leads an infamous life,
  - (c) attempts to force her to lead an immoral life, or
  - (d) if he has more wives than one, does not treat her equitably in accordance with the injunctions of the Quran. (Periera 23)

As can be seen from the above conditions, The Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act of 1939 provides a woman with a number of specific, yet narrow grounds for seeking a divorce, especially in comparison to men's right to divorce. Women's rights activists protests against the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act because it is inconvenient, time consuming, expensive and, most importantly, still considered by most South Asians to be socially humiliating for a woman and her family. Added to these encumbrances are lack of financial backup and avenues of alternative lifestyle, because of which many women avoid the idea of divorce and endure their unpleasant marriage.

Despite social, moral, economic or legal obstacles for women to divorce, Durrani and Hossain depict the potential for change in society by painting a few strong wives who divorce their husbands and are glad to have taken that step. These brave wives make no compromise with their vision of emancipation from the shackles

of an oppressive marriage. My Feudal Lord, Durrani's autobiography enumerates two divorces that she initiates in her own life. The first one occurs after she falls in love with Mustafa Khar while she is still married to his subordinate officer, Anis. The second divorce is finalized when she discovers that Khar has been continuing his affair with her younger sister, Adila, despite his promises to leave her. Durrani and her sisters were taught from childhood that marriage is a sacred institution, and its sanctity should not be broken. They were told that even if their husbands turn out to be brutes, they were to try to change their characters and always remember that "a broken marriage was a reflection of our weakness as women" (181). Though Durrani's family discourages her from divorcing her first husband, she makes up her mind to leave him on grounds of incompatibility. Durrani was less than fifteen years old when she had married for the first time, and as she grew older she realized the mistake she had made by marrying so early. Her second marriage turned out to be a greater mistake since it happened as a result of the relentless wooing of Mustafa Khar. Years later when Durrani begins to contemplate her second divorce, her father is really upset, and puts pressure on her to remain married no matter how unbearable the situation. He voices his terms and conditions to his daughter in these words: "This is your second marriage and I don't want you, for any reason at all, to leave him. You can only leave his home in a coffin. This is the point on which I take you back into the family" (48). Durrani's mother also pressures her not to divorce Khar because otherwise she fears he will not spare Adila, and will ruin the family's honor. They threaten Durrani with the possibility of disowning her if she divorces her husband. Despite knowing that she may get no support from her family, will have to lose her children, and her property as well, Durrani decides to stick with her decision to divorce Khar. Khar at first reacts with aggressiveness, but then taunts her, for he

believes that even Durrani's father will not give her shelter if she divorced him. Next he tries to persuade her into giving up ideas of divorce by telling her how patient and enduring she is, but she sees through his tricks. Though his quick-change act wins over many of her friends and family, his tears and his pleadings do not work on her anymore. Durrani turns from a young, whimpering wife to a mature woman who is aware of her marital rights and finds the courage to declare to her husband:

This is a voluntary relationship. A relationship of choice. I am not your sister or your mother. I am your wife. I am not bound to you by ties of blood. We have a contract to live together. I can tear that up whenever I feel like it. Get that into your head. Learn to respect me and appreciate my living with you. I find no necessity at all to live in this concentration camp. You correct your ways and make our lives worth living or I am going. (90)

Durrani leaves her husband four times, before finally divorcing him. She demonstrates a lot of patience and tolerance during the time her husband has his affair with her younger sister, but she refuses to be the "stabilizing factor" each time her marriage shakes from some carnal disaster her husband invites (359). She enjoys a great feeling of freedom right after she serves her divorce papers. She indulges herself by going to beauty parlors, health resorts and shopping malls. She feels thrilled to be able to live a "normal" and free life again. In her words: "I did not know what to do with my freedom . . . I bought too many clothes and shoes for myself and for the children and had a great time being good to myself" (105-6). After her divorce Durrani gets a job in a construction company where she realizes that a divorcee in her society is still a "prime target for malicious gossip" (221). The negative attitudes of her co-workers make her withdraw into a cocoon of isolation for a while, but her friend Nuscie soon helps her get out of her post-divorce depression, and reverse the rebel within. Durrani narrates her friend's contribution in these words: "She wanted me to open my mind and look at alternative reality. There was life after divorce.



Social acceptability is not reason enough to keep up a marriage that had rotted” (294). Durrani’s recent marriage is proof of the fact that not only did she find life after divorce, but she also found reason to remarry. By marrying Shahbaz Sharif, who is her ex-husband’s political opponent, ex-Chief Minister of Punjab and President of Muslim League in Pakistan, Durrani achieved several goals at one time. As the Vice President of the Muslim League Party in Pakistan, an appointment given to her by Sharif after their marriage, she is in a vital position to intervene on issues that relate to Pakistani women. Another thing that Durrani accomplished through her recent marriage was prove Khar wrong about the fact that without the support of his last name, she is nothing. Again, the fact that Shabaz Sharif, a distinguished Pakistani politician, the brother of Pakistan’s current Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif has accepted Durrani as his wife throws light on the changing mentality of Pakistani men who are beginning to reconsider women’s right to divorce and restart a fresh life.

Like Durrani, Hossain believes that there is no reason to prolong one’s ordeals in a marriage if divorce can lead the way to freedom. In her novel Atomic Darkness, Hossain depicts Aloroshshi, who divorces Shuprotem, her husband of seventeen years for making a sexual move towards her thirteen years old maid servant, Lipidia. Her friend, Proshanti congratulates her for having the courage to free herself from the shackles of an oppressive relationship, and for realizing the fact that marriage cannot provide all the pleasures in life. Aloroshshi is able to make up her mind instantly about the divorce because, among other things, she has education, a stable career, and a network of good friends who provide her social and economic security. Aloroshshi also has no false inhibitions about a divorcee, and does not hesitate to tell her mother-in-law about her decision to divorce her son the moment she is convinced that he is a lewd person. When her mother-in-law hears her story, she is reminded of her own

similar fate in the hands of her husband. She tells Alorroshshi how the humiliation of having to share her husband with maids had made her wish for death. Alorroshshi, however, is not the type of wife to sit and pray for her own death because her husband has betrayed her; rather, she wants her husband to die since he has wronged her. She is also not scared of declaring her death wish for her husband in front of her mother-in-law. She feels bad for her mother-in-law since, like her, this woman also had to suffer humiliation on account of her husband's flings with maids, but she does not spare her son. She avenges him first by evicting him from the flat that she had procured through her job, and then by serving him her divorce letter. To overcome the emotional crisis in her life, she seeks the help of her friends who offer her company and moral support. Alorroshshi is Hossain's mouth piece to spread the word that Bangladeshi middleclass wives have begun to utilize their right to divorce, and procure some justice for themselves no matter how limited those rights are at the moment. Alorroshshi's decision to divorce is also meant by the author as a warning to Bangladeshi husbands who have been unilaterally enjoying the right to opt out of marriage, to rectify their moral conduct, and consider their marriage bond more seriously.

In her short story, "The World of Love and Labor," Hossain depicts Fulbanu, a lower class Bangladeshi woman who does not hesitate to contemplate divorce once it is proven that her husband is a shrewd old man who keeps marrying in the hope of getting a son, but is in fact sterile himself. Although Fulbanu does not have the financial support that Alorroshshi does, she has the same kind of guts owing to her young age. On their nuptial night when Kasem Khan's greedy hands begin to grasp Fulbanu's body, and he declares, "I want a son. The family line must continue," Fulbanu shocks him by retorting, "A son! Will he drop from the heavens? What if

you are impotent?" (319) That very night when Khan tries to make it clear that he cannot tolerate "insolence" from women, Fulbanu is quick to remind him that she may be a poor man's daughter but is no less arrogant herself (319). Khan is dumbfounded when for the first time in his life a woman dares to answer him back. That is, of course, not the last time that his ego is punctured. Each month after her menstruation starts, Fulbanu throws doubtful glances at her husband. When he dares to call her sterile, she becomes determined to drag him to the local hospital for a physical checkup. She tells Khan that he cannot touch her till he agrees to go for a medical checkup. The narrator comments on Khan's losing battle with his wife in these words:

Kasem Khan was disconcerted. He had already lost to Fulbanu. Now, he was afraid for her determination. Because of the same determination, he did not have to give the land to Amzad Mia. . . . It was possible to scold this Fulbanu off and on, but it was difficult to match her gaze and speech. Now she was the mistress of the whole house. And Kasem Khan was forced to accept this. (319)

At the doctor's office when he is told that the reason that he cannot have children is because his sperm dies before they reach his wife's ovaries, Khan feels humiliated and angry at Fulbanu for challenging the popular belief that it is always the woman who is sterile. It bewilders him to see no trace of sadness in Fulbanu at not being able to become a mother. Fulbanu, however, feels elated at finally being able to defeat her husband with the modern discourse on fertility. Soon she starts contemplating a way out of this man's life, and into the arms of a man who would give her life some meaning. Fulbanu's decision to free herself from the shackles of an oppressive marriage is encouraging for lower class wives who are more pressured by their conservative surrounding and lack of alternative outlet than the middle or upper class women. Though commitment to married life means a lot to wives like Fulbanu, they are not willing to remain embroiled in conditions that belittle their sense of self. Their

criteria of desirable husbands demand someone compassionate and accommodating of their needs. Their requirements of a mutually egalitarian marriage also incorporate friendship and respect. By expecting someone in whom they can confide, and with whom they can share a communicative relationship, they critically redefine the contours of a blissful and stable marriage. If they fail to achieve these important binding components from marriage, they opt out from it by exercising their right to divorce, thereby altering the power relationship within the institution. The number of women who have the courage to break the taboo surrounding divorce and dissolve their marriage is still limited in the Sub-Continent, but by supporting their decision to free themselves from an unsatisfactory or abusive marriage through divorce, Durrani and Hossain make room for the kind of agency that allows wives to envision an alternative space for survival outside of marriage.

By problematizing Muslim wives' right to marry a non-Muslim, Chughtai provides yet another type of agency to them to confront gender discrimination in the institution of Muslim marriage. Islam restricts Muslim women from marrying non-Muslim men, particularly idolaters, although the Quran is silent about their rights to marry Christians or Jews. Muslim men are also discouraged to marry idol-worshippers unless they convert into Islam, but in case of women who are also believers in one of the major religions, such as Judaism or Christianity, they have no such restrictions. It is assumed by Muslims in general that the woman will convert into her husband's religion, and hence the permission is given to the men only to marry out-side of the religion, but women are not granted that privilege. Marriage, Inheritance and Family Laws in Bangladesh: Towards a Common Family Code, states: "Muslim men can marry non-Muslim women and Kitabiyas (believer in the religious books). Women cannot marry non-Muslim or Kitabias. In either case,

children bear father's religion and citizenship" (48). The wives in Chughtai's fiction break such patriarchal laws. In her novel, The Crooked Line, Shamman's marriage to an Irish Christian journalist named Ronnie Taylor without the knowledge of her family can be seen as an instance of a Muslim wife's assertion of agency as she challenges this gender discrimination in Islamic marriage laws. Shamman falls in love with Taylor, and they quietly have a Civil Marriage without letting friends or family know. In "The Sacred Duty," Chughtai depicts Samina, another Muslim girl who like Shamman, challenges the gender discrimination embedded in Muslim marriage laws by marrying Tashar, a Hindu boy. Samina elopes with Tashar and marries him according to Hindu rites without her parents' consent. Once Samina's parents find out about this, they are devastated, and she is forced to go through a Muslim ceremony as well. In the end, however, the couple decides to repudiate both parental sides and have a civil marriage. From Shamman's and Samina's repudiation of restriction on marrying non-Muslim men it can be deducted that Sub-Continental Muslim women are not completely passive although the general social ethos of Sub-Continental marital life that is reflected in Chughtai's writings projects marriage as a hegemonic discourse where only men have the freedom to chose their partner.

As societies and cultures in the Sub-Continent are evolving, a typically social institution like marriage and the discourse around it are also undergoing drastic changes. People are no longer getting married for the traditional rationale of following religious decree, or strengthening family ties, or for financial benefits, or for procreation alone. With the rise of individualism amongst the Sub-Continental Muslim women, wives are giving high priority to mental as well as sexual compatibility in marriage, and claiming private space to nurture self within the parameters of marriage. Acknowledgement of gay and lesbian marriages around the

world, and the facilities of adoption are also having their impact on the discourse of heterosexual marriages in the Sub-Continent by shifting their emphasis from hierarchal relationships to partnership and egalitarianism. In this atmosphere of socio-marital changes, Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani help locate the evolving forms of wifely agency in different areas of their lives. Harris contends that in order to eschew the essentialist and universalistic concepts of earlier writing, in postmodernist feminist writing it is the trend now to emphasize the different strategies subjugated women employ in order to resist dominant discourses and orders. Read in this light, the works of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani can be considered postmodern. In these works women are not only victims; rather, they are empowered with overt and covert strategies to resist dominant marital discourses. Despite their awareness of power differentials within marriage, Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani find wives' agency in many expected and unexpected avenues of their lives such as domestic agency comprises of household skills in the kitchen, haggling power in the marketplace, or in their communicative net-working amongst family and friends. These writers also find wives' empowerment embedded in their sexual agency, and in many "micro mechanisms of power" that they employ in the form of gossip, indifference and even prayers. Finally, these writers chart wives' legal agency in their right to end an unwanted marriage through divorce, and choose one's marriage partner. In their fiction they attempt to expose the rising reality in the lives of Sub-Continental wives by depicting the alternative options that are open for them within and outside of marriage. In the absence of any sort of union or fixed platform for making the demands of wives heard, Chughtai, Durrani and Hossain dexterously grapple with the question of their agency in their writing, and try to identify elements or necessary conditions for wives' empowerment. They promote the autonomy of wives by

challenging derogation of wife's rights and status in the name of Islam, and by reconfiguring patriarchal family traditions that hinder self-empowerment. Their ultimate aim is to enhance the capacity of wives to influence the institution of marriage, and infuse changes in marital life as well as in self perception. If their stories provide extraordinary insight into the vulnerable position of wives caught in the complex web of Muslim families, they also project these wives as inverting the social and familial constraints to emerge as new women; demanding the status of free and equal agents, and having control over their situation.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

In the face of traditionally patriarchal thought processes that either completely identify a wife with her material body, or totally deny her physical existence, Ismat Chughtai, Selina Hossain and Tehmina Durrani undertake the challenge to free her from the multifarious disempowering images that impact her identity construction. In the Sub-Continental psyche, certain popular male classics have had a considerable impact, turning a wife's body into a contested site of cultural construction. In Ihyaulum-id- Din (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), written in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, author Imam Al-Ghazali refers to women as an "awrah" (shame, female genital). Bag-i-Muattar (The Perfumed Garden), written by Shaykh Muhammad Nefzawi in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, defines a woman's body as "al-farj" (a slit or penetrable opening or passage). Maksudul Momeneen (Objectives of the Faithful) written by Maulana Gholam Rahman in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a text which can be cited for its virulent misogyny, suggesting a wife's incompleteness, inferiority, inertia, fickleness and vulnerability in no uncertain terms. Because of the narrow outlook and derogatory views of these Persian, Arabic and Bengali jurists, theologians, and *ulemas* within the Islamic paradigm, a wife's body is considered by many Sub-Continental as primarily a physical/biological/sexual entity. Supplementing these misogynist representations of women, mainstream male authors of Sub-Continental literature such as Ranibdranath Tagore, Sharatchandra, and Nazrul Islam often monumentalize wives as ideals of order, beauty and harmony. In "No Noras in Popular Bangla Literature," Ahmed Ahsanuzzaman regrets the absence of "the real woman" in the fiction of these Sub-Continental literary giants. According to Ahsanuzzaman, in the



fiction and poetry of the above authors, wives are depicted as “an angel in the home,” or as the “living epitome of self-sacrifice,” and are not human beings in their own rights. In their fiction, Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani often visualize a wife as a character with a powerful mind and independent spirit with which she endeavors to preserve her bodily rights. For these writers, inscribing the wife’s body into their texts as a source of reason and agency instead of only in terms of fecundity and allurements has been a subversive and self-empowering act. In my dissertation, I have delved into the fictional as well as autobiographical writings of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani in order to provide a cross cultural perspective of their more balanced treatment of a Muslim wives’ body. In the writings of these authors, a wife’s body often rises beyond the cultural mandates of wifehood, and threatens to disrupt the discourse of dedication, renunciation, resignation and contentment that generally surrounds a wife in Sub-Continental male theology and literature. My aim has been to prove that although these writers predominantly depict a wife’s body as victim of male- dominated discursive conflicts, they do not project it only as a locus of desire, domination and control, but also as a site of self-expression and subversion.

In the first four chapters of my dissertation, I have explored issues of early marriage, dowry, honor killing, polygamy and marital rape from sociological, religious and legal perspectives as they affect a wife’s life in the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani. These writers map the politics of representation surrounding a wife’s body not only from the point of view of family, society, state and religion, but also from the woman’s own angle. My primary focus in these chapters is to underpin who or what controls the wife’s body, and how it reacts to its disenfranchisement. In Chapter 2: “The Child Bride’s Body,” I have critically analyzed the reasons and consequences of the continuity of the age old practice of early/child marriage and the

gender based violence that ensues from it upon Sub-Continental girls. While I cite tradition, economy and religion as reasons behind the popularity of child marriage in the Sub-Continent, I focus on hazards of teen pregnancy, lack of education and job opportunities, and marital incompatibility amongst some of the negative results of this practice. In this chapter I implicate parents for their participation in gender discrimination, and husbands for disciplining young women through the regulation of dress codes, of mannerisms, movement and speech in the name of protection and family honor.

Dowry related oppression is one of the major sources of wife abuse in Sub-Continental societies. Although none of the stories by Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani that I discuss deal with the common method of murdering wives for dowry by drenching them with kerosene and passing it off as a 'kitchen accident, it is a fact well documented by various Women Studies journals and newspapers in the sub-Continent that dowry-related abuse and deaths are unnervingly on the rise. In Chapter 3: "Dowry and Honor Killing," I have analyzed the representation of dowry practice by Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani as a culturally specific form of violence that turns daughters into liabilities and young wives into victims of abuse. In this chapter, I provide the socio-economic as well as psychological reasons behind the survival of dowry practice despite the fact that it is outlawed in the Sub-Continent by legislation. In this chapter, I discuss the suffering of married as well unmarried women for whom the practice of dowry proves to be vulnerable. Chapter 3 further deals with the practice of honor killing and its impact upon Sub-Continental wives/mothers in the fiction of Hossain and Durrani.

In Chapter 4 on Polygamy and Marital Rape, I have delineated the problems that surface for Muslim wives in the absence of sufficiently adequate and specific

laws on polygamy and marital rape in the Sub-Continent. The laws that govern incidents of wife abuse do not provide desired justice to wives opposed to bigamy, or wives who are raped by their husbands. From the cases of wives in the fiction of Hossain, Chughtai and Durrani, who are either involved in polygamous relationships or are victims of marital rape, I have argued that even if religious deterrents or other legal solutions are present in some form or other, wives are unable to make use of them because of family pressure, lack of economical solvency and knowledge about the law. In this chapter, I have highlighted the fact that because of the patriarchal interpretation of the Quranic injunctions and social misgivings, husbands often exceed the prescribed religious sanctions on polygamy, while emphasizing sexual control over wives' bodies.

This Conclusion places the institutions of marriage, family, state and law under the critical lenses of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani to further scrutinize the negative impact of such issues as objectification of wives, wife battery, son preference and the trope of motherhood for the wife characters in their fiction. Although these issues have been briefly broached in chapters 2, 3 and 4, I elaborate on them here in order to highlight their role in the dissonance created in a wife's life, and to emphasize the potential for future scholarly research on these subjects. In the Sub-Continental marriages that these writers depict, although the wives expect an egalitarian relationship, because of the general acceptance of their marginalized position, a sense of possession or ownership is born among most husbands. In Security of the Marginalized Women: the Bangladesh Context, Hossain contends that though the institution called marriage is generally seen as a woman's safe guard, often it proves to be just the opposite because of the pressure it creates for the woman to adjust herself and give in to the ways of her new home. In the words of Hossain:

Marriage is a heavy burden in a woman's life. She has to leave her father's home. She is placed under a man to whom she is "allocated" by marriage. She is not only under the control of her husband, but under his entire family. If she finds a conducive environment there, she is lucky. If not, she is pitched into an endless well of darkness. (27)

From Hossain's definition of marriage one can imagine the marginalized condition of most wives in Bangladesh who are treated like their husbands' personal property. In her fiction, Warp and Woof, Hossain presents the character of Abu Hashem, who like his grandfather compares a wife's body to land, and considers both to be objects of his use and possession. Javed Ali is yet another male character in this fiction who thinks of a wife's body in terms of land and property ownership. As the Marital Rape section in Chapter 4 mentions, despite the fact that the sexual act is described as a unilateral act in Verse 223 of Surah 2 in the Quran, this surah has been generally interpreted as giving a husband the ultimate right to treat his wife's body as a piece of his landed property. Since the verse states "Your wives are your tilth, go then unto your tilth as you may desire, but first provide something for your souls, and remain conscious of God, and know that you are destined to meet him," men like Javed Ali refuse to see that the land analogy in the Quran also suggests proper cultivation and care for the best yield, as embedded in the lines about providing sustenance for the souls. Their patriarchal interpretation of the text highlights male authority and female passivity, encouraging the husbands to assume that through marriage they have acquired the ultimate right of possession over their wives' bodies. By portraying men like Abul Hashem and Javed Ali, Hossain criticizes husbands of Bangladeshi villages who still consider their wives to be equal to their landed property, acquired through marriage.

Durrani's autobiography, My Feudal Lord, and her fiction, Blasphemy, similarly portray her reservations about the Pakistani institution of marriage wherein

husbands treat their wives as their private landed property. In her autobiography, her ex-husband, Khar, also compares her to land and treats her like his property. Like most feudal men, Khar thinks his wife, like land, exists to bring him power, prestige, and property. He keeps her enclosed and protected like his land, and thinks that he has the right to do whatever he wants with her. Durrani's alarm at Khar's desperate need to bring her under his absolute sway is expressed when she holds: "possession was nine points of the law. As a feudal he recognized it. He could not share me. He had to own me" (216). Durrani's own life may be compared to that of her protagonist Heer's, in the sense that both wives have husbands who are obsessed with the idea of owning their wives' bodies as personal property. Heer's husband, Pir Sain holds a tight grip on her, and behaves as if she were a commodity he has bought through marriage for utilization and consumption however he pleases. Durrani touches on the Pakistani practice of a husband's sense of ownership and possession once again when she elaborates upon the practice of piercing a bride's nose in Pakistan in Blasphemy. As a symbolic gesture of her husband's official ownership over her body, Heer's nose is pierced by her sister-in-law with a needle and a piece of thread right before the marriage ceremony.

Chughtai's fiction provides a similar critique of the institution of marriage because of the subordinate position of a wife in it that converts her into a toy in the hands of her husband. Her short story, "The Veil," for instance, depicts how North Indian Muslim young men like Kale Mian are taught by their guardians to wield ultimate control over their wives' minds and bodies. When Kale Mian refuses to marry a girl who is exceedingly beautiful because he fears he will not be able to control her, his guardians try to reassure him of his powers as a husband. The narrator comments:

A concerted effort was made to explain to him that once she was his wife, Goribi would become his possession, and comply with his every wish. She would say 'day' if he wanted her to, 'night' if he wished it thus; she would sit wherever he made her sit, and stand up if he ordered her to do so,

demonstrating the kind of absolute authority a husband garners in the Sub-Continental psyche (2). "The Quilt," by Chughtai, also paints the picture of a possessive Nawab who does not allow his wife "to venture outside the home," but himself remains engrossed in the company of young boys for his sexual satisfaction (9). In the absence of any outlet in her confined life, she builds a sexual relationship with her maid, Rabbo. Mirza, in Chughtai's short story, "The Home Maker," is another extremely possessive husband who controls his wife's movements, and imposes dress codes on her. She is not allowed to come to the market to deliver lunch for her husband since he is scared that other men might find her attractive, and flirt with her. He also demands that she give up wearing her *lehenga* or loose skirt, and start putting on *churidar shalwar* or tight pants with her kameez, or shirt. Lajo abides by Mirza's wishes despite the fact that she hates the kind of contraption she feels inside tube tight long pants because she has willingly entered the institution of marriage that demands that wife remains subordinated. The way Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir defines Islamic marriage in his article, "Women's Sexuality in the Texts of the Prophet's Hadit," explains why husbands like the ones described by Hossain, Durrani and Chughtai use their wives' bodies as commodified objects that merely change hands between one master to another. In the words of Kodir:

In Islamic fiqh there are two definitions concerning the rite of marriage. First is that marriage is a contract or covenant of ownership/possession ('aqd at-tamlik), and the second, that marriage is a contract or covenant of authority ('aqd al-ibaha). Both, in the first and in the second definition, the position of women is seen as an object for male enjoyment.

According to Kodir, within Islamic jurisprudence, and in the light of many *hadiths*, marriage is only a manifestation of the right of a man over a subordinate woman's body, and in it this body is placed in a subordinate position. Gender hierarchy and a sense a possession in the Sub-Continental Muslim marital dynamics can be considered an outcome of the theological assumption common to Jews and Christians as well, that God's primary creation is man, and Eve or Hawaa is created out of Adam's crooked rib. Riffat Hassan, however, deconstructs the socio-religious myth, and points out that in contrast to the Torah or the Bible, in the Quran the story of Creation does not mention Hawa (Eve) as created out of Adam's rib. She contends that this myth has infiltrated Islamic tradition largely through Hadith literature in the early centuries of Islam, but has no basis in the Quran which intends to liberate women from the status of chattel or inferior creatures. In the words of Hassan:

While this myth is obviously rooted in the Yahwehists account of creation in Genesis 2:18-24, it has no basis whatsoever in the Quran which describes the creation of humanity in completely egalitarian terms. In the 30 or so passages pertaining to the subject of human creation, the Quran uses generic terms for humanity and there is no mention of Eve. The word "Adam" occurs 25 times in the Quran, but it is used 21 times as a symbol for self-conscious humanity. Here it is important to point out that "Adam" is a Hebrew word (from "adamah," meaning "the soil") and it functions generally as a collective noun referring to "the human" rather than to a male person. In the Quran, the word "Adam" mostly does not refer to a particular human being but to human beings in a particular way.

Hassan reflects upon the etymology of words in the Quran to demonstrate that they can be both feminine and masculine, and repeatedly describes the creation of humanity from a single and undifferentiated source. She further points out that, despite a woman's biological difference from a man, her spiritual makeup is much the same, and the Quran mentions that they both have the ability to reason, articulate themselves and exercise freewill. The Quran also emphasizes the fact that men and women are equal in the eyes of God as far as their responsibilities towards Him in

terms of mandatory prayers and His rewards towards them are concerned. Although permission is there for a husband to chastise an ‘unruly’ wife, wife-abuse is not condoned anywhere in the Quran. Moreover, the Quran provides injunctions that require a Muslim man to be financially and morally responsible for his wife. Despite many equal and equitable practices ordained in the Quran, many Muslim husbands as depicted in the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani, not only consider their wives their subordinates, but also try to legitimize physical abuse as an acceptable behavior. Although husbands who are extreme sex-abusers like the Pir Sain in Durrani’s Blasphemy are rare, there are many husbands like Mirza in Chughtai’s short story, “The Home Maker,” or Kasem Ali in Hossain’s short story, “The World of Love and Labor,” and Khar, in Durrani’s autobiography, My Feudal Lord, who physically batter their wives. As Hossain’s short stories, “Kundola’s Darkness” and “Honor” depict, a husband can even murder his wife for an alleged affair, or for insufficient dowry. According to Hossain, these husbands are least concerned about providing any kind of emotional support to their wives, and feel entitled to apply force to subjugate them because they believe that women are Hawaa’s (Eve) progeny, and hence not deserving of equal rights and respect with the men.

In Sub-Continental Muslim society, a husband’s authority over his wife’s body stems not only from patriarchal misinterpretation of religious texts, but also from the socio-cultural attitude in the Sub-Continent that regards a wife as subordinate to her husband. The reasons that Nusrat Ameen provides for the commonality of wife beating amongst Bangladeshi husbands, are applicable not only in the case of most of the abusive Bangladeshi husbands who appear in the writings of Hossain, but also in the case of those Indian and Pakistani husbands who embody the fiction of Chughtai and Durrani. Ameen contends, “According to culture and



tradition, in the village, a man who does not beat his wife is a weak person” (28). Ameen holds that because of Bengali people’s psychological make-up, their attitudes, and their acceptance of behavior patterns of men and women in society, a husband is generally expected to be violent towards his wife. In the Pakistani and Indian societies that Durrani and Chughtai delineate, a husband is similarly expected to show aggression as a means of expressing his authority and gaining control. Like the wives in the Bangladeshi cultures depicted by Hossain, the wives in the societies drawn by Chughtai and Durrani are expected to be dependent on their husbands. Their passivity and emotionality is appreciated by their own family, while their husbands are berated even by the female members of their families for exposing the softer/ feminine side of their personality. Since there is tacit social pressure for men to act in a masculine way, many of them interpret it as their right to batter their wives, thereby turning marriage into a source of oppression for women.

Amongst other reasons that can be cited for a Muslim wife’s disenfranchisement in the institution of marriage, one may add their financial insecurity. The wives in the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani are not only encouraged to be emotionally and psychologically dependent on their spouses, but their financial dependency on their husbands is taken for granted. Although I mention in the Dowry section of Chapter 3 that Muslim wives are privileged in areas of *mahr* (a fixed amount of wealth both in terms of cash and kind, promised in writing and given fully or partial to the wife at the time of marriage), maintenance and inheritance rights, the picture of wives that emerges from the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani shows that in fact, Muslim wives have these privileges only in theory and on paper, but not in practice. Because their labor at home does not produce a cash wage, the wives’ contributions to their families are not valued as much as the husbands’ are

valued. Without her own income, the wives feel compelled to demonstrate caring and nurturing activities, as well as a willingness to bend to another's will. Because of the common practice of gender segregation and the sexual division of labor in traditional Muslim marriages, husbands are usually more privileged than their wives in the public sector as well as at home. They have more education, mobility, and economic power than their wives to compete in the job market, and as the sole bread winner in the family, they are also the primary decision-makers at home. Such advantageous social and familial positioning often provides the husbands with authoritarian powers that they tend to misuse by relegating their wives to a perpetually inferior position. Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani are critical of the fact that because of her sex a wife is expected to play a marginal role in family, give away all her life chances and thereby expose herself to the risk of poverty and abuse. The writers expose the disadvantages of a set role for stay-at-home wives who find themselves in a vulnerable position because of the lack of their own source of income. The writers are more critical of husbands who cannot foresee that in their wives' financial emancipation lies their own future strength. They explain the Sub-Continental wife's staggering steps on the route to emancipation as an outcome of her partner's lack of progressiveness.

The burden of motherhood is often added to the trope of the abused and financially bereaved wife in the fiction of Hossain and Durrani. Although there is nothing in the Quran that says that women must stay home to raise their children, there is an overwhelming constraint on wives' and mothers' behavior which society imposes and to which women themselves consent. As mothers, most of them feel compelled to devote most of their time and energy towards their children even if they have a job outside home. As Hossain's wife character, Proshanti, Atomic Darkness depicts, even when wives have a full-time job outside home, they are expected to tend

to the children and manage everyday affairs of household with the same dexterity and dedication that they would offer if they did not have any other occupation. No matter how much Proshanti contributes towards her responsibilities as the mother of an autistic son and a daughter sick with leukemia, she always feels that her endeavors are denigrated by her husband, Anupom because she also she is a professional journalist outside home. Despite his education, Anupom blames Proshanti for her body's alleged inability to produce a 'normal' child, when her medical condition is something beyond her control. Although for the sake of their children, Bangladeshi mothers like Proshanti often refrain from divorcing their promiscuous husbands, they rarely receive any credit for their consideration in a society that assumes that motherhood means unconditional, one-sided sacrifices.

The institution of marriage proves detrimental for the mothers in the fiction of Hossain as well because of the practice of son-preference. In Chapter 2, I demonstrate the plight of child-brides who are forced to endure the ordeal of multiple pregnancies in the hope of birthing a son(s). In this Conclusion, I emphasize the fate of older wives who are punished for producing only daughters. In Mohini's Marriage, for instance, Hossain portrays a mother whose daughter is snatched away from her bosom right after her birth by her husband and traded for a prostitute's son in order to have an heir, and to avoid drainage of his funds in the shape of dowry for a daughter's wedding. In "Motijan's Daughters," Hossain once again depicts the prevalence of the discriminatory social practice of son preference amongst rural Bangladeshi families that proves oppressive for many wives/mothers. The mother-in-law in this story is so worried about the continuity of her son's lineage that she threatens her daughter-in-law by saying that she better not produce anything but sons. She expresses her displeasure at the news of the birth of her first granddaughter, and refuses to even

look at the face of her second granddaughter. After her daughter-in-law produces two daughters in a row, the mother-in-law announces that she will “send away the daughter-in-law who only gives birth to female children,” and wants her son to divorce a wife who is capable of producing only daughters (12). Roushan Jahan’s disapproval of the practice of son preference in Bangladesh, especially among the rural people, echoes Hossain’s concern for wives who are unjustly punished for producing daughters. In the words of the critic:

Son preference, while not as acutely manifested as in some other Asian societies, is an obvious cultural trait, in the rural areas. Even at the time, when the government of Bangladesh is pushing family planning Program with all its might, and media is full of the slogan, ‘There is no difference between boys and girls, a two child family is the ideal one’, in rural families, the birth of a daughter is not a very joyful occasion. (“Right” 63)

Because of an over-emphasis on marriage as the ultimate and only goal for women, the continuation of dowry practice, the lack of parental awareness of the benefits of a daughter’s education, and the inability of the women themselves to believe in the goodness of daughters, a gender-biased practice such as son preference remains prevalent in Bangladeshi societies. The government uses the media to reach poor populations in the villages, in an attempt to raise awareness about the benefits of a small family irrespective of the sex of the children, but it is not easy to change the mindset of people who have believed in the superiority of the male sex for centuries. Hossain depicts mothers who are punished for producing only daughters in short stories such as “The World of Love and Labor,” “Mohini’s Marriage,” and “The Stream.” Taking advantage of the fact that according to Muslim Personal laws, mothers are not considered to be full guardians of their children, but mere custodians, the husbands in these stories do not recognize any of their wives’ rights as a mother. They secretly marry off their daughters, sell or trade them, or even kill them without

the knowledge of their mothers since they also consider daughters to be a liability and a source of dishonor.

It is obvious from Chughtai's fiction as well that son preference has been a common source of ailment for wives in India for generations. In "Caravan Dust," Chughtai relates the ordeal of an Indian woman who cannot produce sons in the story of Mangu, a childhood friend who had given birth to three daughters. She writes,

Her mother-in-law was planning to bring in another daughter-in-law who would give birth to a son. Mangu's parents were wailing, trembling at the thought of having to take on the burden of Mangu and her three daughters. Mangu's wailing daughters were an open advertisement of the insignificance of womanhood. I was angered at the injustice of God who had made me a girl, and I whimpered and prayed for the boon of somehow becoming a boy. (*Ismat* 27)

From this excerpt the negative impact of son preference can be detected along with the fear of having daughters not only among Mangu's in-laws, but also amongst her natal family. Chughtai's wishful thinking as a child that she should magically go through a sex change in order to avoid rejection by her family members, reinforces the vulnerability that females face in Sub-Continental societies owing to the practice of son-preference. Mahmuda Islam's following complaint against the Bangladeshis for ignoring the issue of son preference in the light of its effect on a wife's body, can be lodged against the Indians and Pakistanis as well. In her book, Whither Women's Studies in Bangladesh?, Islam argues:

It is true that women are getting education and entering job market, but is son preference modified by these developments? Hardly any critical analysis has been made on the viability of the son preference syndrome, its present status and its effect on future development of women's situation (36).

As daughters are excelling in the field of education and job market, gradual change is occurring in the Sub-Continental mindset regarding son reference; however, the necessity to produce dowry and continuation of family name are still considered to be

important issues in all classes, and these do not allow son preference to disappear from the social fabric. Durrani criticizes the practice of son preference amongst Pakistani elite families of Sindh in her fiction Blasphemy, just as Hossain criticizes the practice amongst the lower classes in Bangladesh.

Mothers in Durrani and Chughtai's fiction, suffer for their lack of knowledge of law, and also the dearth of legal opportunities for them to claim their rights as mothers. When Heer's husband demands that she abort her baby so that he can have regular sex again after the abstinence he had to practice during the month of Ramadan, Heer is unable to pose a strong objection because there is no legal help available. Even her mother-in-law advises that she give in to her husband's sexual needs instead of her own maternal ones. In order to satisfy her husband, Heer goes through a life-threatening abortion, and just as the mother in her is crushed, the doors of justice also remain shut. When Heer's husband begins molesting their eldest teen daughter, the trope of motherhood proves ironic once again for Pakistani women since it does not equip mothers like Heer with the knowledge or legal resource to challenge an immoral husband or father. Out of her desperation to save her daughters from the clutches of their incestuous father, Heer prefers an early marriage for them to their debauched cousins. The trope of motherhood proves ironical for Heer yet again when her grown up son accuses her of being a disgrace to the name of motherhood, and punishes her by declaring her dead for sexual transgressions she committed under his father's orders.

Like Durrani, Chughtai challenges the overrated concept of motherhood in Indian Muslim societies not only for the practice of son preference, but also for other areas of contention. In the short story, "The Rock," Bhabi feels powerless on account of the fact that once she becomes a mother and puts on extra pounds, her husband

starts having an extra-marital affair. Like Heer in Durrani's fiction, Bhabi feels pressured to become a mother, and yet remain physically attractive in the eyes of her husband. Her inability to check her obsession with food and her bloating waist line on the one hand, and her husband's amorous moves towards a thinner woman on the other, dips her further into depression. She is eventually ousted by her rival when her husband divorces her and marries the slimmer, younger looking woman. Ironically, until they become mothers of sons to show ample proof of their settling in to a secure position in the marriage, wives like Heer or Bhabi are not given much importance by their husbands; yet once they become mothers, their husbands neglect them and have physical relationship with younger women. Clothes, makeup, exercise or diet -- nothing provides much help to Sub-Continental mothers who are forced to go through emotional, physical and financial crises on account of motherhood.

Neither innumerable sacrifices nor silence guarantees improvement in the lives of wives whose fates are frequently sealed by symbolic objectification, physical abuse, humiliation in the name of motherhood, divorce and even death after stepping into their husbands' families. In many of their stories Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani depict not only the husband, but also his immediate family as the central agents in the oppression of wives within the institution of marriage. As Hossain's short story, "Motijan's Mother," Chughtai's short stories, "A Pair of Hands," "The Eternal Vine," and Durrani's fiction Blasphemy demonstrate, a husband's mother or sisters help ostracize the wife by forcing her into a subordinate role simply on the basis of her sex. In Chughtai's story, "A Pair of Hands," and in Hossain's story, "Motijan's Daughters," mothers-in-law beat their daughters-in-law and punish them ruthlessly for not paying due homage to their normative family traditions and values. In the context

of Bangladesh, Nusrat Ameen holds that women in power abuse women below them in family status. According to Ameen,

it is not always easy to draw a sharp line between male and female family members, representing men as solely the exploiters and women as only the exploited. Often women play the role of tyrants or agents of tyrants vis-a vis other women. (28)

Sub-Continental societies, however, generally tend to deny the phenomenon of domestic violence whether it is perpetrated by the husband or by other members of his family because they still glorify the family as an institution. Any assault on the family's integrity is avoided, and wife abuse is often considered a taboo subject by a wife's maternal relatives as well.

Like Ameen, Faustina Pereira, Roushan Jahan and Taslima Mansoor are among other Bangladeshi feminist writers who regret the fact that because of its immunity to outside influence, a family often turns into an abusive institution, and domestic violence remains the most under-reported crime in Bangladesh. According to Mansoor, the reason behind the tendency in many wives "to assert freedom of sexual life and to break through the bonds of marriage," can be detected in their desire to escape from the shackles of family that binds them in sexual politics (10). Indian feminists like Patricia Uberoi, Bina Agarwal and Madhu Kishwar also believe that family should be recognized as a political institution of primary importance despite the fact that it is governed predominantly by personal ties and emotions. These feminists concede that because of patriarchy's influence, the public/private dichotomy has been playing a vital role in obscuring the nature of wife abuse in a family, and rendering it as an insignificant social issue. These feminists fight for an individual's right to privacy, yet they warn against the oppression within family that is rendered invisible by the strict binary that has been maintained between the private and public spheres of the Muslim Sub-Continent. They agree that the family is primarily a place



of compassion and nurturance, but they also underscore the fact that it is situated within the larger political, social and economic milieu, and hence demand a re-appraisal, or breakdown of the sharp distinction between the public and the private realm. In her article, "Feminism and the Public-Private Distinction," Uberoi holds that though some people feel that "a family is governed by a code of conduct that is (and must necessarily be) distinct from that of the public domain," the exclusiveness of a family should be interrogated (207). Uberoi believes that in order to ensure economic and social equality between men and women, our assumptions about key social institutions such as the family have to be reexamined. Though South-Asian feminists are in general very cautious in their critique of the family, they emphasize changing gender roles within the family, and advocate for restructuring of relations within families in ways that can redistribute power and property control. The need for families to adapt to women's needs is considered to be one of the leading agendas for women's rights in the Sub-Continent.

A drastic change is required not only within the family paradigm but also within the jurisdiction of the state. The states in the Sub-Continent should more actively intervene in the institution of family because by refraining from the private affairs of its citizens, they are unwittingly buttressing the immunity of the family, and perpetuating the inferior and unjust position of women. Although the Bangladeshi government has introduced a new law, called "Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Ain, 2000," wherein a husband who is found guilty of domestic violence cannot request bail, the legal institution has innumerable shortcomings that add to a Sub-Continental wife's miseries. Many legal professionals consider wife abuse to be a matter to be dealt within the confines of the family, and do not give the problem due attention. Police, lawyers and judges delay judgment if the perpetrator is a husband, but crimes

committed by strangers are considered more seriously and promptly. Psychological or emotional oppression of a wife is least likely to be considered in a legal environment where physical abuse by a husband is indirectly condoned by the society. Prosecuting a husband on account of emotional distress is quite an uncommon phenomenon, and lawyers, doctors, counselors and even her own parents often encourage a woman to reconcile, compromise or seek mediation, rather than knock at the doors of the court for justice. As can be seen from Hossain's story, "Honor," a husband can escape trial even after murdering his wife because police are reluctant to provide justice to the wife. Although in Bangladesh there are several special laws that deal with specific types of violence against women such as acid burn, rape, trafficking or murder, there is no specific law on wife abuse except for serious dowry offense. From Fakhra Yunus' acid-burn case that Durrani deals within Pakistan, the difficulty of enforcing and obtaining injunctions against a husband, particularly if he is a powerful man in society, becomes obvious. In a legal system committed to a patriarchal ideology, Bilal Khar, who is Yunus' ex-husband and Durrani's step son, is enjoying an easy bail, and will probably receive a lenient sentence on account of being the son of renowned political leader, Mustafa Khar. This case proves that family and state both play their part in stunting the individual development of Sub-Continental Muslim wives.

In my dissertation, I have highlighted the fact that patriarchy is the chief underlying cause of the multifarious marital and familial oppressions that Sub-Continental women experience. Patriarchal authority is also invested in modern Sub-Continental states that do not flinch before subjugating their women citizens. Because of their identity based patriarchal politics, and self-centered ideas of nationalism, the states systematically discriminate against women in the public and

private spheres of their lives by denying them the right to choose. Though women were used as part of the decolonizing process, after the British left, the states started espousing an ideology that safeguarded the base of those who had power, and in most cases it was not the women. Despite taking part in the struggle for independence, not many women found protection and accommodation within governmental infrastructures. Because of the rise in all forms of religious and sectarian intolerance, armed conflicts, civil wars and militarization the Sub-Continental states started increasing women's vulnerability to violence.

A brief overview of the historical advances and pockets of resistance opened up by the Sub-Continental women's social and literary movements during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century depicts that though they joined the nationalist movement to drive the British away, they were more interested in an internal dynamism of change and self-reform. The significant features and motivation of the feminist activism during the pre-Independence period were geared towards consolidating their own achievements in education, employment and legal status. As I have mentioned in the Introduction, widow remarriage, purdah or the seclusion of women, child marriage, and sati or widow burning were issues around which much awareness-raising had already started by male social reformers like Ishwar Chandra Biddashagar, Ram Mohon Roy, A. K. Fazlul Haq, and Sir Syed Ahmed, to name a few Hindu as well as Muslim leaders, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Women like Rokeya Begum, Nurjahan Begum, Sufia Kamal, and Nileema Ibrahim joined their group and campaigned for women's emancipation during the pre-Partition era. During this period, there was not much focus on institution-building, leadership or policy change, yet critical analysis of patriarchal attitude and behavior towards women and critique of the family, community and nation went side by side.

A quick review of the landmarks of Sub-Continental history and some parallel literary representations help understand the patriarchal nature of the institutions of nationalism, communalism and family that the women have been trying to oppose for several decades now. The colonial policy of divide and rule eventually bifurcated the Sub-Continent into two mutually hostile states of India and Pakistan. Independence for India and Pakistan in 1947 came hand in hand with the ordeals of Partition that divided the Sub-Continent on the basis of religion. As millions of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs try to locate homeland either in the Hindu dominated state of India, or the Muslim state of Pakistan, the largest mass-migration in human history occurred, accompanied by violence against all the communities involved. Although the brunt of such a massive displacement had an adverse impact on both men as well as women, an environment of horror was created in which the women were pushed to play the special role as the bearer of the identity of the community. The women in Northern India and East and West Pakistan tried to cope with the social dislocation of Partition, described by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin as “a gendered narrative of displacement and dispossession of large-scale and widespread communal violence, and of the realignment of family, community and national identities,” in their book, Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition (9). The understanding of the role and position of women within the family and community during the Partition demands an understanding of the patriarchal roots of gender violence and patriarchal nature of the power relations everywhere in society.

A substantial body of literature exists on Partition that furnishes a gruesome and traumatic picture of one of the most violent histories of nation formation. Most of the Progressive writers such as Sa’adat Hasan Manto, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Krishan Chnader, Ali Sardar Jafri, Khawaja Ahmed Abbas, Prem Dhawan, Jaan Nisar

Akhtar, Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi, Sahir Ludhianvi, Khushwant Singh, Ismat Chughtai, Qurratul Ain Haider, Hajira Masroor, Mumtaz Shirin, and later generation writers like Anita Desai, Sara Suleri, Meghna Guhathakurta Ritu Menon, Ranjit Kaur and Salman Rushdie are a few of the Sub-Continental authors who problematize the history of Partition and nation formation during that time. A bulk of Partition literature constructed in the early days of freedom in India has a secular hero who is a suffering citizen in the new nation, and who is struggling to patch the tattered souls on both sides with the thread of love. Khushwant Singh's novel Train to Pakistan (1956), for instance, articulates his middle class hero's ambivalence towards communalism, and preference for a syncretic village community. While the novel draws a vivid picture of the large scale loss on both sides of the divide on account of vindicating the idea of nationhood, a secular, inter-ethnic love story unfolds that transcends the dominant discourses of communal, national and religious belonging. This popular theme of inter-ethnic romantic love as a strong, all-transcending force in the face of ethnic violence reappears in Deepa Mehta's 1998 film Earth, which was based on Pakistani writer Bapsi Sidhwa's novel Cracking India (1991). Kavita Daiya, however points at the difficulty this kind of inter-personal alliance through marriage in the face of racial, ethnic or religious pressure. In her article, "Postcolonial Masculinity: 1947, Partition Violence and Nationalism in the Indian Public Sphere," she holds:

That such narrations of inter-ethnic love usually end in tragic ways suggests that the problem of imagining a way of living with ethnic difference in the intimacy of domesticity, (thus destabilizing the family purity upon which ethnic communities are built), perhaps foreclosed the realization of this love.

Kavita Daiya's comments on the difficulty of inter-racial love or marriage to overcome the barrier created by Partition, brings to mind Chughtai's portrayal of ambivalence in inter-racial love in The Crooked Line (1944). In this novel, the Indian

school teacher Shamman, and the Irish government officer Taylor break under the pressure of challenges thrown by their respective nations and races as they try to nurture their love and marriage at the back drop of a politically agitated India right before Partition. The story, told from an invisible narrator's point of view, gives a close picture of the multiple pulls of nationalism, religion and culture that destroys its woman protagonist's attempts at turning India into a secular ground for nurturing her love.

In their book, Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition (1998), Ritu Menon and Kamila Bhasin attempt at relaying the Partition history and its underlying sectarian problems from the women's own point of view. The book presents interviews of women survivors in India and Pakistan who were abducted, tortured, widowed and rehabilitated because of the massive migration. The stories in this book from the women's own mouths counteract the official history and expose the multiple patriarchies of nations, families and communities that showed women the dreams of independence, but did not necessarily allow them a share in the fruits of liberation. The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India (1998) by Urvashi Butalia, the director and co-founder of Kali for Women, also undertakes the task of interviewing the survivors of Partition. The feminist and postcolonial critique of nationalist discourse that these activists provide through the oral history by women themselves depicts how women's bodies were forced to bear the burden of signifying the nation, culture and tradition. Their work also points at yet another low point of the patriarchal nationalist ideology which valorized women who committed suicide in the face of ethnic sexual violence in order to preserve national, communal, familial and male sense of honor. In 2004, Ritu Menon edited No Woman's Land: Women from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh Write on the Partition of India. This collection,

which is a first attempt to bring together women writers from all three Sub-Continental countries on the topic of Partition, includes, Ismat Chughtai, Sara Suleri, Begum Anis Kidwai, Ranjit Kaur, Phulrenu Guha, Meghna Guhathakurta, Shehla Shibli and Kamlaben Patel among others. Through their essays, memoirs and interviews these writers reflect upon betrayal in their patriarchal societies, and also in literature, most importantly wonder whether the women have the same notion of home / country / nation as the men do? In her essay, "Communal Violence and Literature," Chughtai criticizes the male writers on both sides of the border for their overtly reactionary and one-sided emphasis on accountability of the 'other', rather than self-criticism. Chughtai, however, contends that though a lot of literature that was produced in the throes of the violence following Partition is time-specific and not necessarily great literature stylistically, it is still valuable since it speaks of the seeds of factionalism sown during Partition that will keep sprouting in later times. In Midnight's Children, Rushdie reiterates Chughtai's notion when he revokes the violent territorial splitting of 1947, and comments on its historical continuity and repetition in national life through the birth of Bangladesh.

In 1971, only twenty four years after the Partition, the Sub-Continent witnessed another major historical truncation in the shape of the Liberation War in East Pakistan that led to the creation of Bangladesh. Bangladeshi nationalism, born out of linguistic differences, and ethnic discrimination was the main instigation behind the 1971 war. In the nine month long open genocide perpetrated by the Pakistani army, over three million people died, and over 200, 000 women were abducted, raped, and left with war-babies. During this time, while a civil war was fought between West and East Pakistan, another international war was fought between West Pakistan and India, as the later decided to assist Bangladesh. The Indian army

was invited by the nationalist Bengalis of East Pakistan, known as the Mukti Bahini (Freedom Fighters), and together they defeated the Pakistani army.

The official history of the Liberation War focuses primarily on the conflict between the armies of the three regions, and its impact upon the ethnic groups of Bengalis, Biharis and Pakistanis. Although the rampant violence against women in this war is highlighted, there is tendency to silence the women's voices, and to overlook their role and contribution as war heroes. The state recognizes the *birangonas*, or women who were victims of rape, however, the general tendency to think of war only in terms of physical fighting and exchange of gunshots, women who supported the valiant freedom fighters with food, shelter, funds, or those who nursed the wounded and hid weapons at the risk of own lives, or those who willingly gave their sons to war and lost their loved ones are not given their due status. Indeed, there were women who took active part in the war, but there were also those who were sustainers of families and households. For those women the war was a fierce struggle for survival, for keeping families going, raising children and passing on the spirit of resistance to them. Thus for them, war was fought on several levels – personal, social and national, and did not end with the official surrender of the Pakistani army. Those women who went through forced abortion for the sake of their families, or were abandoned by their own families and states, or whose rehabilitation was ignored, and later forced by the states, the war still continues. Bangladeshi women writers on 1971 liberation war such as Nileema Ibrahim, Selina Hossain, Rabiya Khatun, compel their nation to rethink communal and state violence in postcolonial Sub-Continent, and arrive at a clearer understanding of the legacies of gender violence in both, the Partitions of 1947 and the Liberation War of 1971. In her fiction, The Shark, the River, and the Grenades (1976), and also in her short story, “The Story of Amina and



Madina,” Hossain writes a feminist history that demands a new excavation of postcolonial violence on the Bangladeshi women by Pakistani as well as Bangladeshi men.

In her essay, “History on the Line: Beyond the Archives of Silence: Narratives of Violence of the 1971 Liberation War of Bangladesh,” Yasmin Saikia tries to understand the “ethico-political” thinking that validated the 1971 killing, raping and brutalizing of women in the name of postcolonial nationalism. She considers the oral history, memoirs, fieldwork and archival research on the Liberation War for this essay, and contends that although Bangladeshi government tries to label the Pakistani soldiers as the sole perpetrators of insane violence, perpetrators in fact, came in many forms and guises. According to Saikia, sectarian violence was perpetrated by Bengali nationalists against the women of the minority Bihari community (Muslim Urdu speakers and migrants to East Pakistan from India after the Partition in 1947) just as mindlessly as it was by the Pakistani army. Questioning the treatment of Bangladeshi as well as Indian soldiers, wartime security guards, doctors and male guardians towards the women in Bangladesh during that time, she holds that there is no clear-cut demarcation between them and the Pakistani men labeled as ‘other’ by their governments. As Bangladeshi men confess that they joined the army not to save women but their country, and expose their struggle to reconcile with their troubled souls because of their lack of concern or active violation of Bihari women, Saikia concludes, “From these accounts, it was easy to read that both action and ideology were carefully planned and upheld by the elite state actors who glorified gruesome violence as acts of valor and national pride” (284). While like Saikia, one may sympathize with men who were turned into pawns of war strategy, like her it is also natural to wonder at the power of the state ideology of masculinity and nationalism

that easily unleashes itself upon unsuspecting people, compelling them to brutalize those whom they once considered to be their own 'self'. A neutral history of the '71 war depicts that men from all three countries violated each others' women, whether it was a result of a temporary failure of control of individual passion, or a result of carefully cultivated and systematically orchestrated patriarchal institutional strategy to aggrandize power.

To counteract the negative impression about Pakistani men created by this war, poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, journalist Mazhar Ali Khan, and trade unionist Tahera Mazhar among others, recommended a negotiation with the elected representatives of the people of Bangladesh soon after the war. Then 25 years later, in 1996, in an attempt at solidarity and dialogue between the two sides, Pakistani women in the Women's Action Forum (WAF) publicly apologized for war crimes in 1971. In 2008, Professor Niaz Zaman from Bangladesh and Asif Farrukhi from Pakistan have jointly edited Fault Lines: Stories of 1971, a collection of short stories that portrays the diverse and complicated experience of 1971 from both countries. Some of the stories in this collection were originally written in English, others have been translated from Bangla, Urdu, Punjabi and Sindhi. According to a review of this collection presented by Masrufa Ayesha Nusrat, the Bangladeshi male authors in this collection, like Akhteruzzaman Elias, Humayun Ahmed, Syed Manzoorul Islam, Kazi Fazlur Rahman and Manju Shaker narrate heroic tales of freedom fighters during the nine month long bloody war. They also illustrate Pakistani army's savagery, and depict 1971 as an extension and repercussion of the 1947 Partition, entailing loss of language and land. While Pakistani male writers like Masood Ashar, Golam Mohammad, Masud Mufti, comment on how war can blind all truth, in this collection Pakistani woman writer, Umme Umara's story, "The Sin of Innocence," is written in the light of the traumas of

dislocation upon a woman's psyche and body. Nusrat highlights the fact that in her editorial, Niaz Zaman, who is originally from Pakistan, but now settled in Bangladesh, repeatedly questions the Father of the Nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's contribution to the independence movement although she wholeheartedly accepted the war of Liberation. The Bangladeshi women writers such as Selina Hossain, in her story, "Double War", and Riaz Rahman in "What Price Honor," raise the issue of the unrecognized war heroines of Bangladesh. These stories also deal with the fate of these women after liberation when promises made by the nation were broken.

Despite a highly praised micro-credit programme in Bangladesh, only one fourth of the total female population is economically active, and they are mostly engaged in the informal sector, where they are unprotected. In the 1990s many women left the country as migrant labor for the Gulf States where they worked as domestic help. Soon however, issues of women's labor migration merged with horrors of trafficking and sex slavery and the government decided to show its protective patriarchal image. A hoard of women, except for nurses, was stopped from leaving the country under the category of labor migration. Women-headed households in Bangladesh are on the rise also because men are abandoning homes, or migrating to foreign lands for jobs. This is forcing the poor women to search for jobs. The rising cost of living and the need to supplement family income are putting pressure on many middle class women as well, to go out to work. Unfortunately, most of these women lack skills and options. The areas of employment that are open to them are often exploitative as far as wage discrimination is considered, and in many instances reaffirm their subordinate and 'domestic' role.

Micro-credit programmes, income generating development schemes and self-help programmes created by the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) are helpful,

but they are mostly focused on economic growth rate, and do not take into account the totality of impact on the affected women populace. Gender-relations within the context of family and marriage are not taken into consideration by most NGOs. In fact, throughout the Sub-Continent there is doubt about the efficacy and end results of many NGO programs aimed at eradicating poverty in the region since these do not consider how women's vulnerability to domestic violence at times increases due to her enhanced income-earning capacity. There is also reluctance among the NGOs to address issues of women's unpaid labor at home, and family laws governing marriage, divorce, maintenance, custody of children and inheritance. Like the mainstream human rights community in general, despite the affirmation that women's rights are human rights, issues such as abortion, incest, sexual harassment, criminalization of prostitution, and trafficking are often not perceived as top priority by the NGOs.

The problems of Bangladeshi working class women are not always confined to unfair wages meted out by the government, or unwillingness on the part of the local NGOs to improve the domestic front. As Firdous Azim points out in "Feminist Struggles in Bangladesh," a Bangladeshi women's economic hurdles are often caused by the decisions of international organization like the Free Trade Zones as well. Azim holds that it was not the conservative groups inside the country that raised the first opposition against the women working in the garment factories, but the liberal forces in the West who thought that Bangladesh was exploiting child labor in these factories, that threatened to curtail the country's quota, increasing women workers' fear of lack of job security and economic stability.

To the shock of activists, in 2004 the Bangladesh Government quietly changed the National Policy for Advancement of Women (NPAW), negating some of its equality principles, including equal inheritance and property rights, legislative rights,

and planning privileges. The original policy was formulated in 1997, following the United Nation's Beijing Women's Conference, and was in tune with CEDAW. The 1997 policy expressed concern about the state or police insolence and community edicts subjecting women to public lashing, stoning and burning to death. The 2004 policy does away with all of this while contradicting with the governments' millennium development goals. Although Bangladesh has 10 to 15 percent reserved quota in government employment, women are very poorly represented at the decision making levels. The new policy drops the principle of placing women as ambassadors and in big posts in the planning commission and the judiciary. Although the leaders of the ruling and opposition party both had been women not too long ago, their policies and agendas did not reflect the interest of the majority of the women in the country. As Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina both sit behind the bars at the moment, on charges of corruption, the Bangladeshi women are demanding changes in the new policy.

After the Independence in 1947, the Pakistani government tried to apply democratic principle of non-discrimination and equality by reserving quotas for its marginalized and disadvantaged groups, including the women. Their endeavors towards affirmative actions, however, have not been very successful for the religious, linguistic, regional, cultural and ethnic differences that cling tightly to the people of the Sub-Continent, forcing social fragmentation. Again, in Pakistan, the Islamic principles on which the State was founded in 1947 have been re-enforced in more conservative ways since the beginning of the rule of president Zia-ul-Huq in 1977. Although in 1975, a National Commission on Women was appointed, which carried out a broad survey on the situation of Pakistani women, during Zia's regime which lasted till 1988, demands for women's rights were ruthlessly curbed in the name of

Islamization of the country. Women's legal rights, educational facilities, career opportunities as well as simple right for freedom of movement and protection were threatened when the government decided to convert certain so-called Islamic principles into law, and passed the Hudood Ordinance and the Law of Evidence in 1979. As a result of the implementation of these laws which provided a new basis for terrorization of wives by their husbands, or male relatives, and also hindered women's education, career, legal rights and even physical movement, a women's group like Women's Action Forum (WAF) was formed in 1983. WAF actively and publicly mobilized women to resist discriminatory laws that held a wife legally accountable to her husband and to State for charges of *zina* or fornication against her husband, and also desired that she produce four male witnesses to prove that she is raped. Public demonstration organized by WAF against the proposed Law of Evidence in Lahore led to a brutal police attack on the demonstrators and made headline news around the world. The decade of the 1980s in Pakistan saw a number of women's organizations come together in their struggle against the policies of General Zia's dictatorial regime. Hina Jilani, an advocate of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on human Rights Defenders, had already founded the first women's law firm in Pakistan in 1980. In 1986 she founded Pakistan's first legal aid center to help women fight for their rights to liberty and equality before law. The Democratic Women's Association, the Sindhiani Tehrik and the Women's Front, as well as the All Pakistan Association (APWA) are amongst some of the other women's organizations that are trying to make an impact on Pakistan's socio-political scene.

As a tool of literary resistance against unjust policies such as the Hudood Ordinance, and social repression, in 1991, the anthology, We Sinful Women:

Contemporary Urdu feminist poetry was published. In this anthology which is edited by Rukhsana Ahmed, a group of Pakistani women poets react to the way in which female experiences and choices are policed and controlled by the state. In 1995, Rukhsana Ahmed translated and edited yet another collection of poems titled: Beyond Belief: Contemporary Feminist Urdu Poetry, which reveals that feminist praxis can be a unifying force when the social fabric of a nation is under siege.

Indeed, there have been positive moments of social mobilization with the ascendance of Benazir Bhutto as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. Her demise has triggered a huge set-back again in the field of political participation of Pakistani women. With the recent promotion of Dr. Fahmida Mirza as the speaker of the National Assembly, however, and under the leadership of feminist scholars like Asma Jahangir, and feminist poets like Kishwar Naheed and Parveen Shakir, Pakistani women dare challenge the oppression couched in the traditional discourses of personal law and patriarchal nationalism. Over the years, women have forged the link between domestic issues like women's poverty and social disparity with promotion of sectarianism and communalism. Several women's groups which are members of the Joint Action Committee (JAC), campaign against discrimination of minorities, including Christians in the country. These women are more focused on peaceful negotiations within the conflicting factions across the border as well. Evolution of an Indo-Pak People's Forum for Peace has active participation of Pakistani women who are involved in mitigating the impact of nuclear threats and Kashmir resolution on either side of the national divide.

Parallel to the internal politics of the region, the history of Partition continues to haunt contemporary life in the Sub-Continent, where communal riots between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs or between the Punjabis and Bengalis or Sindhis

is a common phenomenon. Social mobilization based on ethnicity, race and religion often result in massacres and bloodbaths in all three countries of the Sub-Continent. The Sikh riots in India following Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, the communal riots between Hindus and Muslims following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, the Sikh massacre in Kashmir in 2000 constantly evokes the ghost of Partition history, checkmating major efforts towards cultural healing and political coalition in the region. Since the 90s the Sub-Continental states have begun withdrawing from the economic arena also due to the pressure of globalization. Instead of emphasizing the development of national industries and investments, they are now allowing an 'open economy' system which is espoused by global financial institutions and donor countries. In response to this loss of autonomy in the field of economic decision making, the states are increasingly abrogating their responsibilities towards their people, and their structure of governance is growing more anti-democratic, authoritarian, and repressive. Their process of political restructuring is churning out heavily communal, militarized and religiously fundamentalist states whose violence against women and members of minority communities are rapidly increasing. Whether it is heightened anti-imperialism, or ethnic consciousness or religious conservatism, threat of violence within the community forces the women to take the burden of the bearer of the community's honor, identity and culture. Many women have to face the dilemma of being caught between the demands of their community and their personal interest as individual women. The frustration of the majority of the women with the states' ruling mechanism and safeguarding policies is expressed through their constant struggle to access the opportunity spaces reserved for men. A proliferation of women's organizations and groups in the Sub-Continent is



noticeable over the past decade, and they now cover a wide range of activities and activism.

Women's groups and organizations that came to the fore in the region in the 1970 and 1980s have enabled the development of wide-ranging alliances and coalition across the divides of class, race, language and ethnicity. Despite the problems with regard to maintaining a gender-specific analysis of issues in hand, some of the older women's organizations in the region such as Saheli in India, Nari Pokkho in Bangladesh and Awaaz in Pakistan can be seen as a part of a spectrum that focused on changing social perceptions about women and transforming traditional and cultural practices that discriminate against women. As part of various state and non-state processes aimed at influencing policy and decision-making with regard to women, in the 90s these groups pick up the slogan: "personal is political," and strove to break down the divisions between the private and the public worlds. The wide range of discussions, debates and activism focusing on various aspects of marriage and the family can be seen as a manifestation of this trend.

By joining a range of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working for advancement of women, these women's organizations and movements have gathered force to become a global phenomenon. Although difference in approach and analysis exists between these groups, the women succeed in building networks and drawing public attention at international level to their demands. The appointment of the Sri Lankan Lawyer, Radhika Coomaraswamy as the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women in 1994, can be seen as an extremely critical outcome of consolidated advocacy at the international level by South Asian women's groups and human rights groups. By highlighting the use of culture and tradition to justify violence against women in any conflict situation, in her reports on issues that are crucial to South

Asian women, Coomaraswamy has created a space for these gender-specific issues to be raised at the national and international levels.

In assessing the journey and impact of the women's movement in Sub-Continent, the activism generated around the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 can be mentioned as a landmark. In India, the post Beijing era witnessed the emergence of the National Association of Women's Organization (NAWO) as the largest national women's network. In Bangladesh, a National Conference of Women's Organizations was organized by Naripokkhkho in 1995. In 1996, with the collaboration of women from this group, the government of Bangladesh initiated a multi-sectoral programme to deal with violence against women.

Although Bangladesh and Pakistan have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) pact, on religious grounds both states have imposed reservations on articles of the convention that address the issue of equality and nondiscrimination against women. The involvement of the national women's groups in the global level with the United Nations' mechanisms and activism for gender mainstreaming has familiarized them with the structures of power at the national and global levels. These groups are now actively involved in monitoring the implementation of the states' commitments to the advancement of women. The interaction of members of the women's movement in the Sub-Continent with members of women's movements at the international level has further created a space for a cross-cultural discussion of the severity of the women's situation as victims of all forms of discrimination and violence. The most significant advancement made by such global campaigning is the linking of women's rights with human rights, which has opened doors for advocacy in many areas. The

emphasis on human rights which has emerged within the women's movement as well as within the United Nations' system as a whole, has made the human rights groups more gender-sensitive in their work, and allowed room for rights based legal reform that has been mainly focused on violence-related gender issues in the Sub-Continent.

Various legal battles with particular emphasis on laws governing family life have been enacted in order to eliminate discrimination against women in the 'private' arena. The 1986 Shah Bano case in India led to the legal reforms regarding marriage, divorce and maintenance for Muslim women in India, and had repercussions throughout the Sub-Continent. By making the connection between politically motivated violence, and violence against women by the family and community, the case has covered considerable grounds towards the understanding of the patriarchal nature of oppression against women in the Sub-Continent in the guise of religion and politics. By following the various formulations of 'violence against women as a development issue' and of 'poverty as an abuse of human rights,' the women's groups in the Sub-Continent try to make it clear that the issues of discrimination and subjugation of women are not isolated phenomena effecting only women.

The relentless efforts of different women's groups towards economic self-dependence has made it possible to see more women now than ever before become part of the public workforce, fight for the rights to skilled training, equal remuneration for equal work, paid maternity leave and benefits, and participate in trade union activity on equal terms with men. The contribution of these Sub-Continental women to their national economies may still be meager, but in personal level they have earned enhanced mobility, access to public space and a degree of economic independence that provides them considerable autonomy. In 1997, when The National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM) was formed in India to bring

together groups campaigning on issues of globalization, food security, traditional eco-friendly organic farming, indigenous healing methods and deforestation among other things, many Indian women joined NAPM and demanded that a multinational company such as World Trade Organization (WTO) exempt agriculture from its negotiations. Pakistani women's groups have also resented the encroachment of WTO in the field of agriculture and lobbied for debt cancellation. Women's groups in NAPM have taken up issues that have special impact on women, such as employment in export processing zones, property and inheritance rights, provisions for basic and reproductive healthcare. The Joint Women's Front in India has carried out Anti Price Rise movement several times. At present the sectors that different women's groups are forging linkages with include: trafficking, prostitution, migrant women workers, refugees and internally displaced people, gays and lesbians, people living with HIV/AIDS and new reproductive technologies. These women's groups have also been actively involved in movements for peace, democracy and respect for the dalits of India, or the indigenous tribals of Bangladesh, or religious and ethnic minorities of India and Pakistan.

Mahasweta Devi's activism as well as literary crusade to stop the age long exploitation of the tribals and the landless peasants of Eastern India deserves mention here since it is one of the most scathing postcolonial feminist criticisms of nation state that has been launched so far from the region. Devi has many literary pieces to her credit such as Bioskoper Baksho (1984), about the suffering of women in traditional middle-class families, and Swaha (1977), that deals with bride burning, Daulati (1984), on bonded-labor movement, Brick Upon Brick (1987), that shows the exploitation of women working at the brick fields can be sited as just few examples of her innumerable fictional and non-fictional writings that depict her concern for

women's exploitation in her society. Devi is, however, a grassroots level activist who founded Palamau (Bihar) Zilla Bandhua Samiti, India's first bonded-labor organization in 1980, and the Kheria-Sabar Welfare Society in 1985, in order to defend the rights of the poor tribals of India.

National governments in the Sub-Continent are consequently creating franchises to promote the advancement of women, and opening up institutions such as women's ministries and bureaus. Legislative actions and activism by women have created space for women's political participation. The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments in India demands that one-third of the representatives elected to village, block and district panchayats should be women. The 81<sup>st</sup> amendment to the Indian constitution, made in 2000, mandates that one-third of members of parliament should be female. Though women's participation in the male dominated areas of political governance in India is still not sufficient, it has enhanced the visibility of women.

Despite the inscription of many patriarchal cultural codes of power relations upon their bodies, wives in the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani generally demonstrate agency in various ways because they share a common legacy with the myriad of women activists and writers of the Sub-Continent who have succeeded in bringing about changes in legal, economic and political arenas. In Chapter 5: "Wifely Agency," I enumerate different sources of wifely empowerment such as domestic agency, sexual agency and legal agency that the Sub-Continental wives' in the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani muster. Under the rubric of "Micro Mechanisms of Power," I analyze strategies of subversion such as, shaming mechanisms like gossip, indifference, and writing used by wives in order to repudiate the belief that Sub-Continental Muslim wives are 'naturally' subordinate to their husbands. Under the section entitled Legal Agency, I further problematize divorce as a site of subversion

for contemporary Sub-Continental wives. Although in most cases in the fiction, a wife's standard of living plummets after her divorce, it can be argued that there is a rise of wife-initiated divorce in the Sub-Continent because of increased self-awareness, and decline in intention to keep up false appearances of happiness among the women. The courage to challenge the sublimated concept of marriage as an 'eternal' and 'sacred' bond, and step out of an incompatible marriage knowing pretty well the social consequences of the action, is symptomatic of the increasing understanding of self-worth, education, and economic strength of contemporary Sub-Continental wives. It is on the basis of these agential tools that a Sub-Continental wife is able to reject choicelessness and take responsibility for herself.

Although in Chapter 5 of my dissertation, I do not elaborate upon the wives' agency to hold an outside job and control one's earnings, many Sub-Continental wives like Proshanti and Alorrosshi in Hossain's Atomic Darkness aspire for financial independence, freedom of movement, affiliation and access to information by participating in modern wage-earning sectors. These wives maintain a fairly decent standard of living from their own earnings, and also possess the ability to recognize and promote the interests of those who depend on them. For instance, Proshanti demonstrates her transformative agency when she helps her teenage maid servant, Lipideya, to educate and place herself in a better position to make decisions about her marriage. Hossain foregrounds emancipatory possibilities of wives like Alorroschi also who because of her job security survives with dignity after divorcing her husband, and is able to provide an alternative lifestyle for the young maidservant whom her husband sexually molests in her bedroom. Proshanti and Alorroschi are examples of wives whose feelings, emotions and bodies play a vital role in their empowerment. Indeed, there are very few women like Bithi in Hossain's short story,

“In Retrospect,” who shun marriage and actively participate in public protests and political rallies for the sake of their nationalism; yet as Fulbanu in Hossain’s short story “The World of Love and Labor” demonstrates, wives in the Sub-Continent are speaking up for themselves and questioning the status quo not only in the privacy of their bedroom, but also in public.

Women in the Sub-Continent have made considerable achievements in terms of encountering gender-related oppressions and establishing mechanisms for gender equality, but they still have many obstacles on their way to eliminating discrimination against women, and freeing them from negative stereotypes, and gender-biased violence. The most important challenge is to attack the forces of chauvinism and extremism that are gathering strength in the Sub-Continent, and bring about a more democratic and plural system of government based on concepts of the inherent dignity, rights and integrity of every person. For this they first have to build up a stronger net-work and coalition among themselves by overcoming differences of age, class, language, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and location. Then they have to forge stronger links with other social-justice movements run by the governments, and settle their priorities and agendas. Although the governments often publicly demonstrate solidarity with the women’s groups on broad economic, social and political issues, women’s concerns are rarely an integrated part of their long-term agendas. The women’s groups need to constantly negotiate with their respective state agencies for further opportunities to participate in political and economic policy making. They also have to make sure that both civil and criminal laws are considered for effective implementation of women’s rights demands. Most crucially, they have to inform the different struggles for social justice with a gender-conscious perspective. With the help of mixed civil society organizations women’s movements

need to devote more time and energy to develop strategies that deal with issues of institutional subservience, exploitation and violation of women.

While questioning the impact of religious fundamentalism and national chauvinism or communal sectarianism on the social role and status of women, the Sub-Continental women's groups have to carry on an ongoing critique of their own activism. They also have to evolve new modes of analysis that respond to the rapid transformations taking place in their societies because of modernity and globalization. These feminist activists, the women writers as well as scholars have to remember that as they highlight incidences of dowry death or acid throwing, or women being stoned to death, not only does the western representation of eastern or 'Islamic societies as backwards seem to be vindicated, they also stand the risk of being branded as Western and complicit within their own societies. It is women's responsibility to help people shed the prejudice against them as westernized, or alienated from the indigenous culture, and bent on destroying traditionally family values. In the contemporary world of mass communication and media, contemporary Sub-Continental women's movements also have to consider information as a resource, and try to obtain and share information on the problems and advances made in women's rights in their own countries and other countries as well. By following international conferences, participating in transnational politics and discovering creative ways of disseminating the information, the Sub-Continental women can make considerable contribution towards the national data collecting processes and databases by making them more gender specific and gender sensitive.

Despite the noticeable rise in gender awareness in the Sub-Continent, women still do not enjoy sufficient support and shelters for battered and displaced wives like their Western counterparts do. More shelters for battered women, more day-care



centers for children, homes for elderly and widows can tremendously help redress the injustices of power dynamics currently faced by the wives. Although my dissertation does not elaborate upon the condition and status of Muslim widows in the fiction of Chughtai, Hossain and Durrani, it is a topic that I consider worth researching in the future. As is evident from the fiction of these writers, widows generally do not receive due support from their sons as part of religious and social expectation. They are marginalized on account of economic insecurity, and there is a general stigma attached to widowhood. In some cases these Muslim widows fair a better chance of survival than their Hindu counterparts who are more severely ostracized by their socio-religious customs. A comparative study of Muslim as well as Hindu widows' status and position in Sub-Continental fiction can map out new trajectories in the field of Sub-Continental feminist studies on family and marriage.

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