

POST-COLONIAL FEMINIST ISSUES IN QAISRA SHAHRAZ'S THE HOLY WOMAN: A CRITIQUE OF PATRIARCHAL CHALLENGES

Dr. Saba Hassan^{*1}, Dr. Abdul Hamid Khan², Sayyed Rashid Ali Shah³

^{*1}Lecturer, Department of Natural Sciences and Humanities, University of Science & Technology Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

²Associate Professor, Department of English, Qurtaba University of Science & Information Technology, Peshawar, KP, Pakistan

³Faculty Member, Center for Preparatory Studies, Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, Oman

^{*1}sabahassan1011@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a postcolonial feminist critique of The Holy Woman, by Qaisra Shahraz, analyzing aspects of repression and female agency. The story revolves around the storyline of Zari Bano as a young woman who undergoes the forced Quranic Marriage and struggles to live in the socially and culturally subjugated society. Through an intersectional lens, inspired by Mohanty's theoretical framework, the research highlights the dual marginalization of women, shaped by both gender and class. It emphasizes Zari Bano's struggle to assert her identity, resist patriarchal forces, and claim her autonomy in a society that attempts to suppress her. This focuses on the journey that Zari Bano has to make to establish her own identity and stand up against Patriarchy that tries to swallow her. This examination reveals how gender and culture oppression and the process of the female protagonist's emancipation and the appropriation of agency occur in a postcolonial setting.

Keywords: *The Holy Woman, Qaisra Shahraz, patriarchy, resistance, Postcolonial feminism, intersectional, Mohanty, gender oppression*

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Woman by Qaisra Shahraz explores the life of Zari Bano – a young woman from rural Sindh; Pakistan to become an object of desire, family's pride, and property in a patriarchal society. Zari Bano is a young woman from wealthy, landowning family, beautiful and privileged, having a sexual relationship with a man, a businessman Sikandar. But her life changes suddenly one day; her father forces her to marry the Quran so that she would remain a virgin and uphold the family's honour and by extension, remain on the land forcibly granted to her by the colonial masters. Thus, it can be concluded that the story retold by Shahraz proves the existence of sexism in the cultural gender roles and discusses the

possibilities of Female Rebellion within these frameworks.

In this paper, it is reviewed that The Holy Woman by applying post-colonial feminism which was a critical approach used to assess how women living in post-colonial countries encounter gender, race, class and colonial history. Zari Bano's forced marriage also means giving up something more than the personal; in fact, she loses her autonomy like thousands of other women are stripped of their decision-making ability by the patriarchal society. It gives the reader insight into how women in post-colonial societies endure these oppressive norms and dominant culture, post-colonial societies and post-colonial nations and their women folk; it gives

a clue that even when trapped within such structures, women characters can subvert domination in effecting transformative ways.

The rural Sindhi situation is inseparable from the narrative because it represents the struggle over property and purity that resonates with both tradition and empire. By situating the story within this cultural landscape, Shahraz provides a more nuanced view of how patriarchy functions multifariously — as the regulation of personal decisions on the marital bed, interpersonal relations throughout the household and as the law of inheritance. This paper focuses on how The Holy Woman subverts these practices to show that female resistance and self-assertion are not always straightforward.

Entering into a forced marriage, Zari Bano was initially submissive but when she found it right to do so she rebelled. Despite the fact she succumbs to her father's wishes and agrees to become a holy woman she regains the power at the very factors of her predicament asserting herself as strong, and an agent enshrouded deeply in the imposed sacred role. Shahraz's portrayal also demonstrates that compliance is not the only type of response; the opposite may be hidden even more: In the study of power relations, the subtle kinds of response are of particular importance — the people can redefine roles and take back personal dignity. From this perspective, the novel is also a postcolonial critique of patriarchal power relations and structure but it is also a vision of the transformation of power relations in postcolonial societies.

To this end, this study seeks to fill the following deficiency in the current discourse of feminism: Whereas some dominant western feminism may erase culturally particular forms of female subordination, The Holy Woman puts at the center women constructed by their particular socio-cultural and historical locations. In particular, this research questions seek to establish; to what extent Shahraz narrative resonate with the post-colonial feminist theory analyzing such aspects as forced marriage, gendered inheritance and class and gender interplay.

In this way this paper aims to reveal how Shahraz's characters elicit the post-colonial feminist theory of resistance and enter the world on their own terms while preserving the cultural make-up of women of

the east and why Islam is a trial. What the analysis reveals is that though patriarchy is an enduring theme and practice, women's agency is possible through acts of assertion individual redefinition of roles as well as cultural re-imagination. By examining the culturally saturated stories of marginalized subjects, this work adds to the post-colonial feminist analysis by revealing how cultural narratives can offer envisioning of other ways of operating in oppressive conditions.

1. Literature Review

Feminism as a social phenomenon has therefore developed with the intention of relating to the current suffering of women in different societies. More specifically, feminism's main goal is to stipulate equality for women and to work against such policies as sexism or patriarchal preconceptions. Leading scholars of the feminist agenda, especially regarding the 20th Century embraced philosophy agreed with Simone de Beauvoir who reiterated that sex and gender are different, and society gives women certain roles as expected by the culture (Fallaize, 1998). Judith Butler took such thoughts further and went further ahead to explain gender as per formative, averring that gender roles are a construct of the culture and not genetic (Butler, 2013). However, mainstream feminism especially the first wave failed to address the dynamic social experience of women in the post-colonial context (Mohanty, 1986).

As a branch of the third-wave feminism, postcolonial feminism criticized Western feminism in terms of gender and race and class and cultural difference. Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak criticized western feminism for erasing the differences and representing mulled women as passive victimized beings in need of the help of the whites, while ignoring their agency (Mohanty 1986). Instead of the post-modern unified cultural feminine agenda, post-colonial feminism urges the consideration of women's oppression in a cultural relativistic perspective. From this point of view, it is essential to unveil the tribulations of Pakistani women characters in the context of patriarchal system in order to justify its colonial impact which was colonialism.

This paper discusses how within Pakistani gendered literary imagination, writers have

employed the creative space of fiction to speak against gendered oppression of women. Present day female writers, Qaisra Shahraz among them, have their protagonists deal with and assert themselves against the culture of patriarchy. Thus, such narratives capture the intricate nature of oppression of women, while the female characters embrace the subordination, as well as resist it (Rodes, 2012).

Double marginalization is an important concept post-colonial feminism as it the various modes of exclusion faced women in the third world. The agencies in this framework condemn the female oppression by both the colonial forces outside and patriarchal forces within. Mohanty's analysis of the problem of the universalism of western feminism is based on her argument of how women resist these combined oppressions. In 'The Holy Woman' Zari Bano rebels against the norm in agreeing for forced marriage which acts as a subtle form of rebellion against her family and society.

Thus, Intersectionality has developed from the post-colonial feminism pays special attention to multiple dimensions of the identity that form the basis of women's existence. In Pakistan culture and literacy, characters are mostly represented in a multilayered manner that involves class gender, and cultural difference. In *The Holy Woman*, Shahraz works an important analysis of how Zari Bano resists patriarchal constraints though she was from landowning class, as well as females. This is in agreement with Mohanty's plea for the multifaceted approach to women, acknowledgment of the fact that women are different worldwide due to their contextual differences (Mohanty, 1986).

In sum, the synthesis of literature used in the paper suggests that post-colonial feminist theory is relevant in the analysis of woman in *The Holy Woman*. Thus, by locating Shahraz's novel into this paradigm, the review illustrates the ways whereby female character such as Zari Bano transgresses patriarchal culture alongside the issues of ethnicity, gender and Class. This paper offers preliminary attempt to consider the meaning of resistance and agency in post-colonial literature, underlining the importance of understanding the manifold forms women's opposition.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, explanatory and interpretive method of data analysis to investigate *The Holy Woman* with reference to postcolonial feminism. The strategy of using Qualitative research is appropriate for this analysis since it is concerned with understanding and making a sense of the meanings and signification, including gender issues involved in the text which are set within a social context. This type of method enables the researcher to present critical analysis of the characters, themes and power relations in a novel. Similar to other cultural mediations and literary representations, the study adopts what Catherine Belsey called textual analysis (Ashcroft, 2007). Characteristic for this model is the understanding that meanings are in fact constructed and not innate. Hence, the analysis recognizes the novel as a multi-layered cultural product that intertwines questions of gender and class, as well as colonial heritage.

The textual analysis is conducted with the concepts of double marginalization, intersectionality, resistance, hybridity, and agency to provide excerpts from *The Holy Woman*. They were chosen based on the ideological content of the passages, and to draw attention to the suppression of women in postcolonial patriarchal societies. Through a close examination of these quotes, the study provides gendered power dynamics to show how characters perform agency while dealing with social oppressions.

This approach corresponds to Mohanty's claims about postcolonial feminism (1986) and dealing with intersectionality instead of the stereotype of the Western feminism way. The research focuses on minority oppression of women with regard to particular cultural and social settings and highlights women's compliance with or defiance of cultural prescriptions. Also, drawing from Edward Said's postcolonialism (1978), the analysis of gender roles reveals an ongoing colonial influence; such, Homi Bhabha's hybridity expands on the characters' performances of identity.

In doing so, this research seeks to identify how *The Holy Woman* reflects or violates postcolonial feminism's core concepts of oppression and how women of colour can lead a revolution.

4. Analysis of the Novel *The Holy Woman*

This section focuses on the analysis of the selected text from the novel *The Holy Woman* in the light of the theoretical considerations of Mohanty (1986). Various excerpts of the novel ideologically loaded with gender issues have been selected for the purpose of analysis.

4.1 Double Marginalization

Mohanty (1986) has given emphasis on the concept of double marginalization, which describes the discrimination that women in the Global South she opposes that Western feminism often oversees the exact challenges faced by these women, instead placing the experiences of white, middle-class women. By bringing consideration to double marginalization, Mohanty aims to review the homogenizing nature of Western feminism and underline the importance of an intersectional analysis that recognizes the diverse forms of oppression. The following text shows examples of double marginalization.

"Over in the far corner of the courtyard, Firdaus was sitting with Ruby, but Khawar was standing behind her, bending over her shoulder, whispering something in her ear. Firdaus had looked up at Khawar and laughed" (*The Holy Woman*, p. 53)

Through the analysis of the text the author underlines the issues of gender, race and class in post-colonial context and shows how heroines such as Firdaus and Ruby are oppressed within the patriarchal cultures. When Firdaus is amused at how Khawar treats Ruby, this shows 'compliance to the prejudice put in place by Khawar which is propaganda of patriarchy. The oppression dynamics are depicted in Khawar's physically overbearing personality which represents woman's suppression of her voice. A separation of space ensues which only add to Firdaus's exclusion. These interactions depict complex subjections that postcolonial societies still endure due to colonial influences by encoding gendered power relations, therefore subordinating women and stifling their agency.

"Tell our Zarri Bano that she mustn't converse with strange men,' he ordered sharply, 'especially in this gathering, with all and sundry eavesdropping and waiting around for a titbit of gossip. It is not good

for my daughter's reputation" (*The Holy Woman*, p. 54)

This selected text demonstrates the restrictions and controls placed on women's relationships and mobility, which might further exacerbate their marginalization within societal standards. In the statement, Zarri Bano is portrayed as being subjected to male dominance. The directive to refrain from conversing with "strange men" is a reflection of the approval of restrictions on the communications and portability of women. This restriction attempts to direct and limit the agency and independence of women by making a statement of man-centric ideals. The suggestion to stop speaking to men reflects the cultural presumption that women should limit their social interactions to close friends and family or well-known colleagues. As a result, women are marginalized and segregated, preventing them from openly engaging with a larger society and limiting their ability to develop their own voices and points of view (Sultana, 2010). The male's concern about Zarri Bano's reputation suggests the value placed on a woman's social status in the community. Ladies are expected to follow suggested guidelines and behave in a way that preserves their perceived honor and notoriety. Due of the constant scrutiny and judgment of other people on the connections and activities of women, this cultural judgment adds still another layer of control and marginalization. One can observe how control, restrictions, cultural judgment, and the possibility of incorporated mistreatment contribute to the marginalization of women like Zarri Bano by dissecting the given remark from the standpoint of double marginalization inside a post-colonial women's activist point of view. The analysis also acknowledges the convergences of gender with social and formal factors, deepening our understanding of how double marginalization operates in the context of the original.

"What is to become of us and our inheritance?' An iron fist of fear clutched around Shahzada's heart." (*The Holy Woman*, p. 58)

The statement from *The Holy Woman* by Qaisra Shehraz brings up the shortcoming and marginalization experienced by women when their status and future prospects are dependent upon inheritance and property opportunities compelled

by men (Spivak, 1999). This total examination will review the assertion from a post-colonial feministic view, zeroing in regarding the matters of double marginalization, property opportunities, and the power dynamics that add to women's shortcoming. The assertion reflects the sensation of shortcoming and fear experienced by Shahzada due to weakness concerning her and her family's future as indicated by their inheritance. This shortcoming rises up out of the temperamental position women every now and again end up in when their status and security are connected to property honors obliged by men. It includes the potential for women to be limited and attacked inside systems where property ownership is in a general sense assembled in male hands. Double marginalization is clear as women face misjudgment on account of their gender as well as considering the way that their conceivable outcomes and success are joined to heritage and property opportunities obliged by men. This marginalization features the various layers of mistreatment and limited agency peered by women inside male driven system. From a postcolonial feministic' dissident perspective, considering the effect of commonplace legacies on the subject of minimization inside the statement is huge. Colonialism has often maintained and buildup gendered power plans and property opportunities structures that limit women.

“It is not good to keep dismissing them. You and your daughter will gain a bad reputation. They will think that she is too grand, proud, and opinionated when in fact, she’s just been unable to make her choice.” (The Holly Woman, p. 17)

According to the advice, excluding admirers will result in a bad reputation for both the storyteller and her girl. The term also implies that the young child is struggling to make a choice rather than purposefully acting amazing, happy, or defiant. Double marginalization refers, from the perspective of post-frontier woman's rights, to the convergent forms of abuse suffered by those who experience both gender-based and post-colonial or racial underestimating. This analysis looks at the unique challenges faced by women in post-frontier environments.

The notion of excusing admirers and the concern over standing in the given statement highlight the cultural tension and expectations placed on women

to conform to traditional gender roles. These presumptions usually originate from male-centric standards that are influenced by both pioneer and native power structures in post-frontier settings. It is implied by the advice not to pardon admirers that the person's worth or notoriety are closely linked to marriage. This reflects the man-centric view that women should prioritize marriage as their primary goal and suggests the anticipated consequences of deviating from this ideal. Furthermore, the justification that the girl's behavior can come out as fantastic, joyful, or stubborn highlights the challenge faced by women in expressing their agency and independence in a culture that prioritizes men. It cautions that women may face negative judgment and have their actions misinterpreted when they express their opinions or demonstrate their freedom. This analysis reflects the issue of double underestimates by highlighting the complexities observed by women in post-frontier social structures. It demonstrates the point at which gender-based marginalization crosses over with the weight of cultural presumptions engendered by frontier and man-centric power structures.

4.2 Intersectionality

Intersectional feminism, which recognizes that people are oppressed on the basis of their race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and nationality, among other intersecting characteristics, has a significant influence on Mohanty's work. The importance of understanding how these axes of power interact and affect the experiences of women is stressed by the author. With the help of Mohanty's intersectional approach, it is possible to conduct a more in-depth analysis of power relations and see the numerous ways that women navigate and combat oppression (Mohanty, 1896) "I'll only let her marry a man of the highest pedigree from a land-owning family at that, with a good name and social standing." (The Holly Woman, p. 17)

This statement highlights the interconnectedness of class and gender and the male-centric preconceptions imposed on Zarri Bano as a prerequisite of marrying someone from a particular socioeconomic base. In the statement, Habib—likely a character from the book—expresses his

presumptions over Zarri Bano's potential union. He states that he will only allow her to marry a man from a specific social background, highlighting the significance of a prominent family, a family that has land, a good reputation, and social status. This assertion highlights the interplay of class and gender as well as the man-centric presumptions imposed on Zarri Bano. Intersectionality sees humans as constantly being subjected to multiple forms of persecution, such as racial or post-frontier marginalization, gender-based underestimation, and post-provincial women's freedom (Crenshaw, 1991). This investigation focuses on the unique struggles experienced by women in post-colonial settings and highlights how various facets of their identities interact to determine their experiences. The statement focuses on the societal norms and male-centric standards that influence women's marriage decisions. The claim made by Habib reveals his commitment to traditional gender norms as well as the value he places on societal standing and ancestry. As Zarri Bano's worth and potential admirers are assessed in light of their social standing and financial privilege, it indicates the intersections of class and gender. This quotation highlights the ways in which class requirements and man-centric power structures combine to limit women's agency and uphold socially regulated progressions. The requirement of belonging to a specific social layer limits Zarri Bano's ability to choose a partner, reinforcing the idea that her value is correlated with her capacity for marriage and the level of financial security she can provide for her family. Additionally, the declaration emphasizes the influence of provincial legacies and the spread of social orders inside post-frontier social orders. The emphasis on family and property ownership reflects the enduring impact of the class distinctions and colonial land residency frameworks established during colonial administration.

"She bade them Salam. Sikander heard her and still didn't bother to look up. The voice was pleasing, he noted. It matched her looks." (The Holly Woman, p. 18)

This text explains the character attempt to speak up for herself and ask for help, challenging traditional gender dynamics that dictate that women should be subdued and wait for men to confirm them. The

protagonist introduced herself to everybody in the area, including Sikander, by saying, "Salam." Nevertheless, Sikander didn't even try to look up after hearing her voice. Despite his lack of response, Sikander observed that the hero's voice was pleasing and that it complemented her appearance. This quote challenges traditional gender dynamics that dictate that women should be passive and wait for men to confirm them by demonstrating the hero's attempt to stand up for herself and ask for attention. From the perspective of post-colonial women's liberation, intersectionality sees people as being subjected to multiple forms of oppression at once, such as post-provincial or racial marginalization and gender-based underestimation (Connell, 2012). The analysis focuses on the conflicts experienced by women in post-pioneer contexts and explores how various facets of their personalities interact to influence these conflicts. The text emphasizes the protagonist's autonomy and her determination not to conform to the traditional gender roles that dictate women should maintain their distance and wait for men's validation. The character opposes the power dynamics that center on men's evaluation and approval of their actions while dismissing women's agency by effectively extending a warm welcome to others and making her presence known through her voice. Additionally, the hero's effort to advocate for herself and ask for consideration questions the gendered power dynamics in a post-provincial society. It demonstrates her desire for recognition and challenges the notion that women should be seen but not heard or that their value is solely based on their appearance.

Sikander's interpretation of the hero's satisfying voice and how it pairs with her attractive appearance highlights the externalization and hasty choices that women frequently make. This viewpoint emphasizes how gender, power relationships, and cultural presumptions interplay in a post-colonial society. This claim invites a deeper examination of the hero's journey to stand up for her and demand respect from a populace that might want to downplay or silence her. It also raises questions about how gender, power, and post-provincial dynamics interact and influence people's decisions and actions.

"Why should I go back to that room? I have never done so before, so why should I start now? Especially to please a man who has not even bothered to smile at me." (The Holly Woman, p. 19)

This statement highlights the protagonist's resistance to alter her behavior to appease a man or adapt to cultural norms. It demonstrates her assertion of freedom and her struggles with conventional gender roles (Hill et al., 2020). The character expresses her reluctance to conform to cultural expectations by questioning the necessity of returning to a certain room in the statement. She emphasizes that she has never finished and wonders why she should start now, particularly to appease a man who has not even attempted to smile at her. This text emphasizes the protagonist's refusal to change her behavior in order to appease a guy or adapt to cultural norms. It overstates her claim of freedom and the challenges posed by traditional gender norms. Intersectionality sees people as constantly being subjected to multiple forms of persecution, such as racial or post-pioneer marginalization, gender-based underestimation, and post-colonial women's freedom. This also focuses on the unique struggles faced by women in post-provincial settings and highlights how many aspects of their personalities interact to determine their experiences. The quotation highlights the protagonist's autonomy and her reluctance to adhere to conventional presumptions that assertive women should modify their behavior or give up their freedom in order to appease men. The protagonist announces her freedom and challenges the imposed traditional gender norms by questioning the need for modifying and disowning changing herself for not showing her fundamental male lines. The statement also questions the power relationships in post-pioneer culture that aim to limit and regulate women's independence. It includes the protagonist's admission of her own desires and rejection of socially prescribed gender roles that demand women prioritize men's needs or presumptions over their own. The emphasis on never having done something before shows how the hero is protected from conforming to conventional norms and expectations. It reflects her determination to forge her own path and make choices based on her own autonomy and

independence rather than giving in to other influences. This passage invites a deeper examination of the protagonist's journey of self-disclosure and the ways in which she questions and subverts traditional gender roles in a post-colonial context. Additionally, it raises concerns about the power relationships, societal norms, and cultural tensions that influence how women interact with one another and reach a breaking point in their agency.

4.3 Hybridity and Identity

Mohanty (1989) analyzes the concept of hybridity, which is the blending and changing of cultural practices and identities, in his consideration of this subject. She emphasizes that hybridity challenges essentialist notions of identity and challenges hegemonic power structures. Mohanty argues in favor of embracing these complex and dynamic forms of resistance and identification because she recognizes the life and innovation that come from mixed settings.

"His wife was then duty-bound to scold him. 'Don't say that, Habib Sahib. All children are precious in their parents' eyes, including those suitors. It is not good to keep dismissing them.' (The Holly Woman, p.263)

Shahzada criticizes the man-centered mentality of disregarding fans and emphasizes the need for equal regard and consideration. In the statement, Habib Sahib's wife Shahzada chastises him for tolerating admirers. She emphasizes the need of treating all people with the same respect and consideration and criticizes the man-centric worldview that devalues admirers. This analysis reflects the themes of hybridity and character as it delves into the complexities of examining traditional and contemporary features in a post-pioneer environment. Hybridity, from the perspective of post-colonial women's liberation, refers to the blending and exchanging of many social identities, traditions, and values that develop in post-pioneer social regimes. It observes the intricate interaction between diverse social, gender, and social dynamics as well as how individuals explore and shape their identities in these particular contexts (Weedon, 1997).

Shahzada's response to Habib Sahib's defense of his supporters reflects the tension between

traditional, man-centric presumptions and the need for more inclusive, popular attitudes. She opposes the male-centric assumption of devaluing admirers based on their position or other factors by reiterating that all children, even admirers, are valued in their parents' eyes. Shahzada's criticism also emphasizes the value of respecting and taking into account the worth and sentiments of others, especially admirers. She emphasizes the need for justice and mutual respect in relationships while challenging the rigid gender roles and power dynamics that commonly permeate traditional social hierarchies. This statement discusses the difficulties of organizing character and putting man-centric ideals to the test within a complex social framework in relation to post-frontier women's freedom. It makes one consider the significance of appreciating various interactions, opinions, and people's agency in determining their own life and course of action.

"It will then give me great pleasure – to turn you down!" - Zarri Bano expresses her desire to exercise her power and reject Sikander, indicating her resistance to conforming to societal expectations." (The Holly Woman, p. 19)

Zarri Bano expresses in the statement her desire to enjoy rejecting Sikander. By dismissing him, she hopes to demonstrate her desire for independence and control. Zarri Bano challenges cultural presumptions that frequently restrict women's decision-making and portray them as passive recipients of male overtures by reaffirming her power in drawing conclusions about her own life. Hybridity, from the perspective of post-colonial women's liberation, refers to the blending and discussion of various social, societal, and gender identities within post-colonial social regimes. It recognizes the challenges of examining varied social influences and having a conversation about identity in these particular contexts. In this analysis, one looks at how hybridity and identity intersect with the activist viewpoints of women and how power dynamics influence how women interact with one another (Tong 2009). Her interchange of cultural presumptions and her proclamation of personal identity within a half-breed social context are reflected in Zarri Bano's response. She opposes the male-centric norms that force women to comply and their unwavering

dedication to accept advice by expressing her joy at rejecting Sikander. Her agency in developing her own character and resisting the weight of traditional gender norms is reflected in her disobedience of societal expectations.

The text also emphasizes Zarri Bano's resistance to adjusting to cultural tensions. She rejects the notion that she should be pleased with herself or anxious to accept Sikander's approaches simply because he is interested in her. The text reveals her defense against being defined solely by male attention or conforming to cultural expectations for women's behavior. Zarri Bano demonstrates her confidence to go her own way and make judgments that are consistent with her desires and objectives by exercising her ability to dismiss Sikander. The complexity of character debate within a post-colonial setting adds to the discussion of hybridity in this example of self-strengthening and independence. The remark also suggests that Zarri Bano's decision to fire Sikander wasn't simply personal, but also part of a larger stance against the gender and power disparities present in post-pioneer social norms. It refutes the notion that women should be obedient or grateful for male attention by arguing that their worth and agency go beyond meeting conventional presumptions.

4.4. Resistance and Agency

Mohanty (1986) places a strong emphasis on the agency and strategies of resistance employed by women in the Global South. Instead of portraying people exclusively as victims, she recognizes their capacity to challenge oppressive structures and bring about societal change. Mohanty emphasizes the need of highlighting these examples of resistance and exploring the various strategies used by women to compromise with and destroy oppressive regimes.

"I am a free woman. I will decide if I want this or any other man." (The Holly Woman, p.15)

Zarri Bano emphasizes her independence and the freedom to make her own decisions while challenging societal norms and gender stereotypes. Zarri Bano expresses her agency and independence in her remark by saying, "I am a free woman. I'll choose whether I want this man or another. Zarri Bano confronts the man-centric norms and presumptions that seek to influence and drive

women's decisions, particularly when it comes to marriage and connections, through this forceful declaration. Resistance refers to the act of challenging strict rules and standards that have been spread by colonial and male-centric impacts, from the perspective of post-provincial women's rights (Charlesworth, 1994). Declaring one's own autonomy and independence while navigating power structures like colonialism, gender, and societal mores. The statement made by Zarri Bano reflects her opposition to traditional gender norms that restrict women's agency and present them as detachable objects that men can choose or control. By describing herself as a liberated person, she rules out the notion that cultural norms or external influences could influence or guide her decisions. This act of blockage is driven by confidence and vigor. Zarri Bano's claim exudes strength and confidence, underscoring her willingness to defy established norms and asserting her right to make choices that are consistent with her own aspirations and desires. Zarri Bano disrupts the power relations that have typically marginalized women and forced their agency by highlighting her independence. This resistance should be evident in a post-pioneer environment as a reclaiming of agency and a rejection of the provincial and male-centric designs that attempt to dominate women's life. Furthermore, Zarri Bano's proclamation of independence goes beyond the realm of personal relationships. It can also be understood as a broader resistance to cultural expectations placed on women, such as conforming to prescribed roles and sacrificing personal ambitions in favor of cultural or familial obligations. This declaration addresses a display of strengthening and a rethinking of women's responsibilities and potential consequences in a post-pioneer women's activist analysis. The assertion made by Zarri Bano opposes the male-centric norms that encourage women's subordination and upholds their right to self-assurance.

"Why should I go back to that room? I have never done so before, so why should I start now?" (The Holly Woman, p.19)

Zarri Bano challenges the notion that she must conform to societal expectations around gender roles and behavior while attesting to her safety from cross-cultural conflict. Zarri Bano asks why

she should conform to cultural expectations in this comment, adding, "Why should I go back to that room? Why should I begin now when I have never done so before? Her skepticism serves as a defense against the imposed gender roles and stereotypes. Obstruction, from the perspective of post-provincial women's liberation, refers to the act of challenging and dismantling strict norms and guidelines that were established by pioneer influences and male-centric designs. Zarri Bano's claim demonstrates her resistance to conform to the expectations and presumptions that are commonly held about women in her community (Morris, 1993). She expresses her protection from racial tensions by refusing to enter a space where she is expected to be distant and obedient. The confinement and obstructions placed on women in the form of prescribed roles and behavioral norms are symbolized by the chamber. Zarri Bano disputes the notion that her previous behaviors or actions should dictate her future choices by addressing why she should start modifying now. She asserts her autonomy and rejects the idea that she should alter herself to conform to cultural expectations. This resistance embodies a sense of vigor and fortification as she successfully rocks the boat and refuses to be constrained by traditional gender stereotypes.

Zarri Bano's scrutiny also reflects the connections between her character and the post-frontier rights of women. She examines the nuances of her gender, society, and tradition, seeing how frontier influences have shaped cultural presumptions. Her resistance examines the effects of colonialism on gender dynamics and the formation of identity as well as opposes male-centric standards. Additionally, Zarri Bano's analysis emphasizes the value of independence and self-assurance. She asserts her right to make her own choices and follow her own path rather than caving in to societal pressures. The general theme of empowerment and independence for women is furthered by this defense against resemblance and affirmation of agency.

4.5. Colonial Legacies and Power Dynamics

Mohanty (1986) critically examines how colonial legacies continue to have an impact on power dynamics in the contemporary world. She argues

that Western feminism frequently perpetuates the assumption that the West is superior and the Global South is inferior, supporting colonial ideologies. Her research emphasizes the need to challenge these neocolonial ties that have an impact on knowledge generation and to overthrow these power systems.

“You see, I have become a Holy Woman – and part of the equation of being a Holy Woman is that I can never marry any man. I have no wish to marry anyway. You are right – love plays no part in my life. At the moment I harbor no feelings towards the opposite sex, save those of friendship.” (The Holly Woman, p. 240)

The notion puts up the concept of a "Holy Woman" with an intriguing position and personality. The protagonist claims to have transformed into a Heavenly Lady, suggesting a sense of empowerment. This challenges traditional gender roles and presumptions and urges women to reclaim their strength and freedom. The concept of the Sacred Lady should be understood as a response to the male-centric ideologies and power dynamics prevalent throughout the pioneer period. The protagonist confronts the verifiable marginalization and servitude of women inside frontier societal orders by anticipating a significant, influential place and independence. By examining how women organize their identities and choices in post-frontier situations, the assertion reflects the viewpoint of a post-provincial women's activist. It should be clear that the hero's rejection of marriage and emphasis on chastity is a form of resistance against male-centric ideals and a declaration of liberation.

“The main affinity between us is our faith, which is supposed to unite all races, all nationalities. I am surprised at you. I know many people who have married Western women, from a totally different culture. Think of your own countryman, Imran Khan, married to Jemima Goldsmith, a Western woman from a different religious background, and they are happy. Their marriage is successful. Our union would have much to support it.” (The Holly Woman, p. 239-240)

Because of their shared confidence, the hero, Ibrahim Musa, highlights the propensity between himself and the narrative writer. He confronts the divisions and orders created by pioneer legacies,

which frequently spread concepts of social and strict predominance, by highlighting the fact that confidence is meant to unite all races and identities. Ibrahim Musa refutes the storyteller's claim by citing examples of successful alliances amongst members of varied cultures and rigid foundations. He brings up the union of Jemima Goldsmith, a Western woman from a different rigorous background, and Imran Khan, a well-known figure from their own country, Pakistan. This casts doubt on the notion that social and rigid disparities pose unrealistic barriers to meaningful partnerships. The power dynamics that control connections are called into question by Ibrahim Musa's mention of productive partnerships including cultural diversity. He makes the case that love and resemblance may transcend societal and rigid disparities by citing examples of people who have done so, challenging the entrenched power systems that dictate who one is permitted to marry and who they are not. The announcement of Imran Khan and Jemima Goldsmith's marriage highlights the possibility of social hybridity and the blending of many social and rigid foundations. It suggests that these connections can grow and pursue happiness, challenging essentialist notions of social impurity or homogeneity. Ibrahim Musa claims that their relationship will be greatly aided by their shared assurance. He suggests that their common traits and convictions can provide significant areas of strength for a to their partnership, counteracting the potential challenges given by social or public disparities by highlighting the unifying power of their faith.

5. Conclusion and Findings

Shahraz in *The Holy Woman* presents post-colonial feminism, where her protagonists engage in a struggle against the male oppression as fully as they submit to it. This story is based on a woman named Zari Bano whose life depicts the struggle between the conventional norms of Pakistani society and freedoms of women. In presenting her forced marriage to the religious as a way of protecting the family honour the novel is effectively conveying the post-colonial feminist message of opposing the culture that still endorses such cultures. The main lesson that Shahraz teaches with the narrative of Zari's defiance and

success is a cognitive picture of the women's agency and the possibility of transformation each female character is portrayed as confined to a rigid societal structure, which they-child can either contest or adhere to Zari and the possibility of transformation.

This paper unveils how the post-colonial feminism of *The Holy Woman* is complicated through the portrayal of the main female characters. Shahraz also explains that people do not have to rebellion to resist; there are other ways to resist through personal assertiveness. Zari Bano's journey – from a girl who is forced to obey male authority to a woman fighting for herself and her loved ones – makes her stand for many women in similar settings.

The novel also pays attention to the categorical identities of gender based on the other aspects which include the class or culture. The series presents complex and oppressive images of different forms of power and subordination: characters like Zari Bano have no control over their bodies or choices but are figured as active subjects, agents in a world that punishes their agency, their desires. Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticizes western feminists, mocking their approach and insisting on integrating the new women from the post-colonial societies, in which Shahraz works.

From the post-colonial feminism perspective, resolving the traditionalist idea of women in the Third World countries as mere victims of oppression is *The Holy Woman*. On the contrary the novel shows the reader how women can rebel against oppressive structures despite the culture evolving to having extreme structures. Each story from Shahraz makes the reader reconsider the patriarchal norms and patriarchy: One has to learn, have insight and, most of all, and fight for herself.

Implications for Future Research

This work demonstrates the need to understand the ways in which literature from post-colonial areas offers significant discursive intervention to sex subjugation and its contestation. Future work could build on this study by positioning *The Holy Woman* in a list of other Pakistani novels dealing with the matters mentioned above, as for example *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Muhammad Hanif or *Thinner Than Skin* by Uzma Aslam Khan. Also, a

study of how post-colonial literature works with gender, class, and religion would be important to have improved information about women.

All in all, *The Holy Woman* presents a post-colonial feminism narrative that posts a critical account on patriarchal regimen. Collectively the characters resist their cultural norms and the story's ability to convey this message that culture change is possible in today's society is a good reflection of on the theme of culture. The experience Shahraz is offering is not limited to presenting the status quo and then making people depressed about it, but she directly tells a reader: look, this situation sucks, but there is another way, you can fight it. Thus, it turns out that there is required for further open dialogues regarding gender, agency and resistance in the field and in literature.

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