KUVEMPU UNIVERSITY

Articulating Violence in Contemporary Women's Writings from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh

Thesis submitted to Kuvempu University for the Award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

ENGLISH

By

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DECLARATION

I, **Gaana M. N.** hereby declare that this thesis titled **Articulating Violence from Contemporary Women's writings from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh** is my original work and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any diploma, degree, fellowship or other similar title. This was done under the supervision and guidance of **Dr S. Siraj Ahmed**, Professor & Head, Department of English, Sahyadri Arts College, Kuvempu University, Shivamogga, Karnataka State. I further declare that results presented in the thesis or any part thereof has not been submitted elsewhere for any other degree or diploma of a similar title of any other University.

Date: **16th June 2022**

Place: **Shankarghatta**

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This is to certify that this thesis entitled **Articulating Violence in Contemporary Women's Writing from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh** submitted to Kuvempu University for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English by **Smt. Gaana M. N.** is the result of bonafide research work carried out by her under the supervision of **Dr S. Siraj Ahmed,** Professor & Head, Department of English, Sahyadri Arts College, Kuvempu University, Shivamogga, Karnataka.

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Acknowledgements

It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to express my gratitude to everyone who contributed to the successful accomplishment of my PhD thesis.

First and foremost, with the most profound gratitude and great humility, I extend my gratefulness to my research supervisor, Dr. S. Siraj Ahmed, Professor and Head, Department of Post Graduate Studies in English, Sahyadri Arts College, Kuvempu University, Shivamogga, for having guided me in this work and for being a source of inspiration by proving scholarly suggestions and invaluable inputs throughout my research work.

I am incredibly obliged to Dr. Nagya Naik, Chairperson, Department of Post Graduate Studies and Research in English, Kuvempu University, for his warmth, support and concern towards me.

I am sincerely thankful to Dr. Rachel Bari, Dr. Namratha, Dr. Ramprasad, Dr. Dattatreya and Dr. Meti Mallikarjun for showing genuine interest in the progress of my research work.

A special appreciation to my research batchmates, Dr. Sindhu N. S and Mr Naveena V, for their help and support.

My sincere gratitude goes to my colleagues Smt. Shobha B R, Department of English, Dr. Roopa G, Department of Kannada and Dr. Rajeshwari A, Department of Sociology, and all the faculty members of Maharani Women's Arts, Commerce and Management College, Bengaluru for their constant support and encouragement in completing the work.

I want to thank Mr. Sheshadri and Mr. Prasad, owners of Nagashree Book House, Bengaluru, for providing me with hard copies of the relevant books for my research topic. I extend my thanks to Mr Shreekumar Nair, Librarian, Christ University for helping me complete my work.

My deepest gratitude goes to my father, Shri. Nagaraju V, who has unconditionally accompanied me to Kuvemup University several times despite his age. My most profound regard to my mother Smt. Gayathri B. G for her love and care towards my children in my absence. I also thank my lovely sister Ms. Sangeetha M. N., for her help and support. I am equally thankful to my in-laws, Sri Eswarachar A and Smt. Basamma, for their support in completing my thesis.

I am greatly indebted to my husband, Dr Mahesh E, for his on-time help, technical assistance and encouragement in completing the thesis. If not for his support, this work would have remained a dream. I fondly remember my twin daughters, Aaira and Aarna, for their love for me.

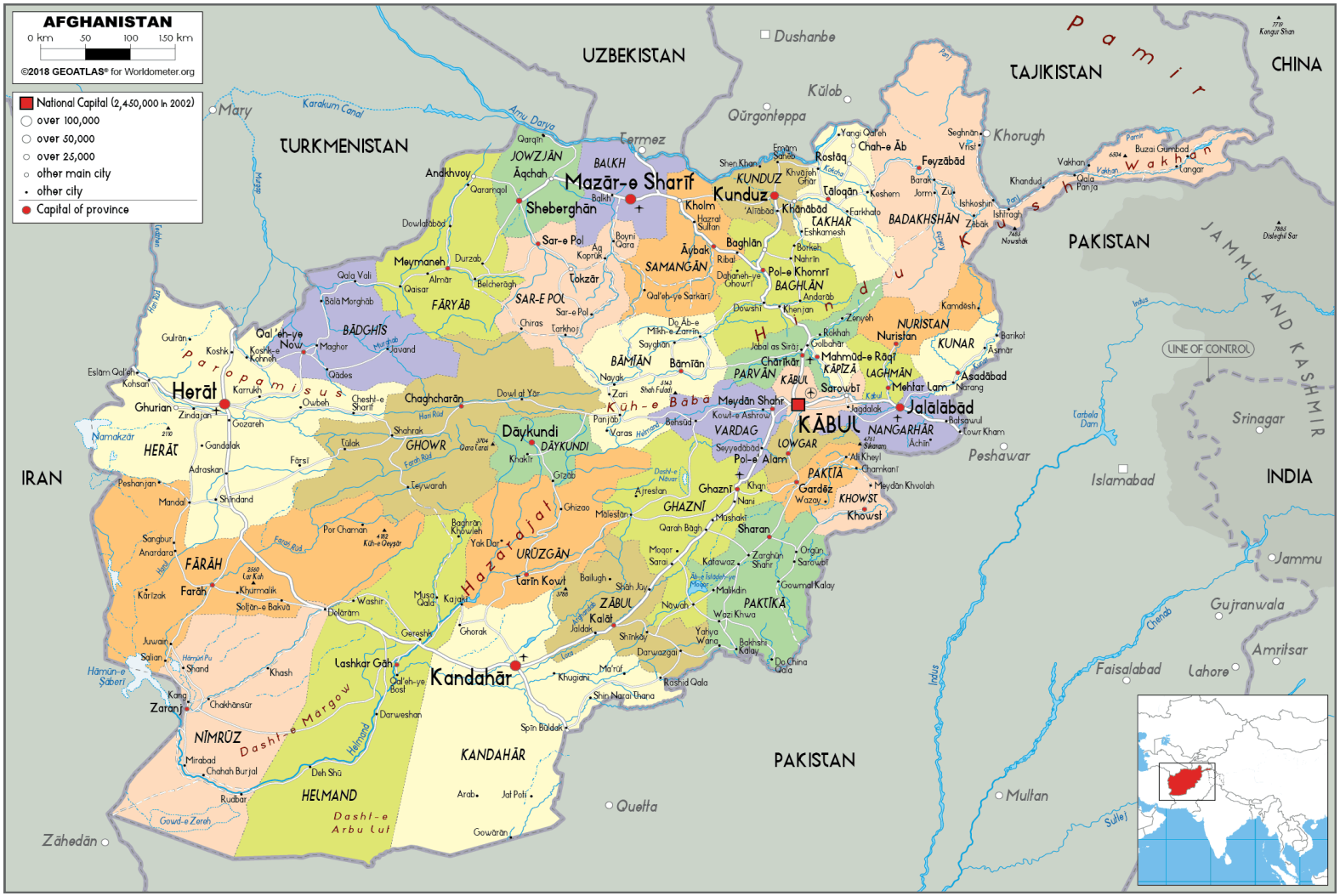
I take this opportunity to thank the non-teaching staff of the Department of PG Studies and Research in English and the Library staff of Kuvempu University for their timely help.

Lastly, I cannot possibly name all those who have helped me in the completion of this work. But I will be failing in duty if I do not express my gratitude to those noble souls who have directly or indirectly helped me.

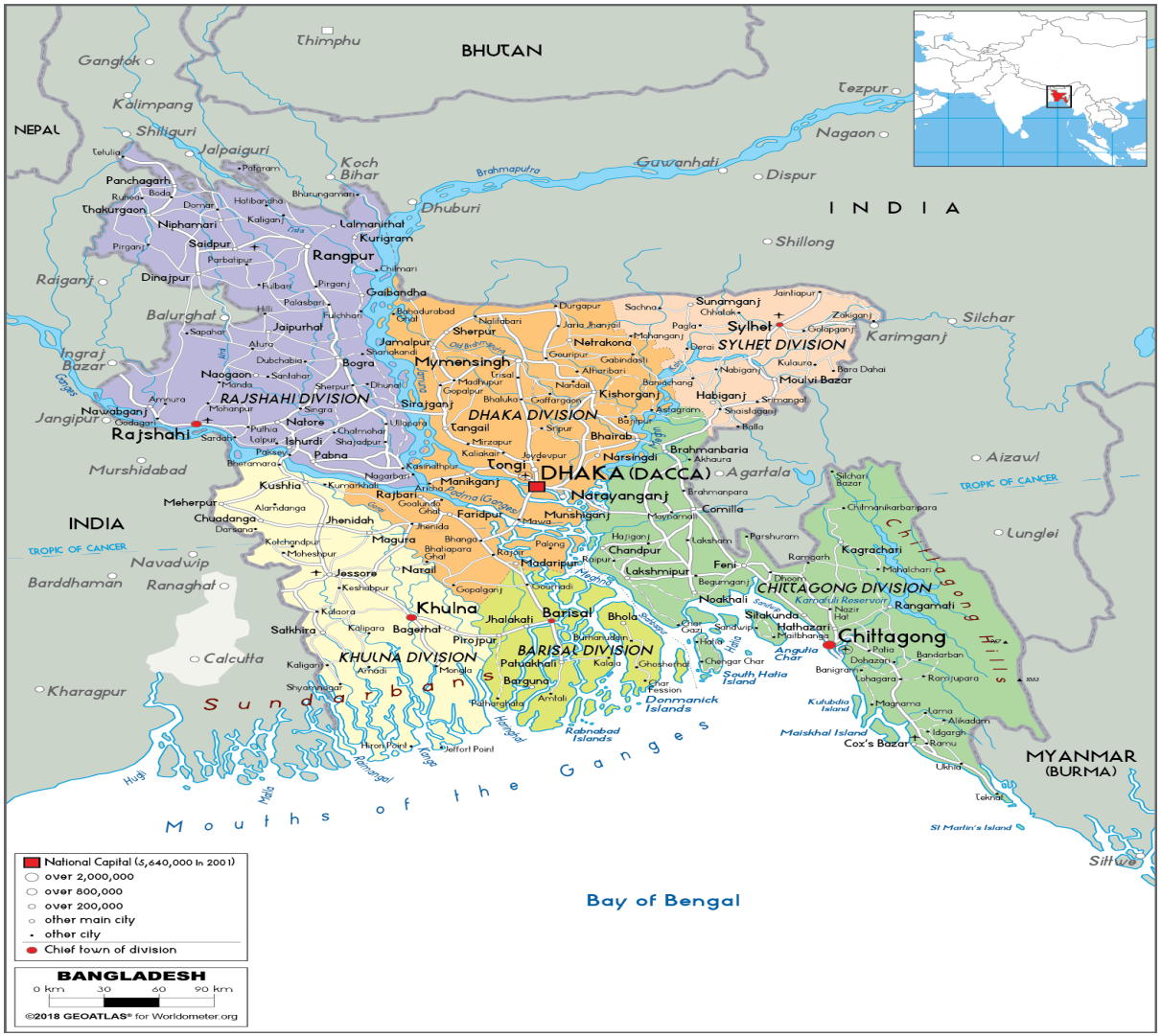
Gaana M. N.

Physical Map of Pakistan

Physical Map of Afghanistan



Physical Map of Bangladesh



CONTENTS

Chapter I

Introduction

The South Asian subcontinent is home to over a billion people and has a long history of conflict. It is a diverse collection of languages and religions with a long and complicated history. Expounding on the cliché of the region's unity in variety is a standard in South Asian history. It might be more accurate to describe South Asia and its peoples as presenting a picture of diversity in peace, or even enormous variety within a broad contour of harmony. The subcontinent is separated from the rest of the world by topographical borders established by the world's largest mountain ranges and surrounding oceans and seas. Nonetheless, there is a wide range of natural features within these bounds, including majestic hills and mountains, lush green river plains, parched deserts, and brown plateaus. People who live in such a clearly defined yet diverse territory have developed a shared cultural atmosphere while yet being passionately connected to cultural ideas and practises that are distinct. South Asians speak at least twenty important languages, with the number rising to over two hundred if the more important dialects are included. The subcontinent is home to adherents of every major world religion. The majority of India's population is Hindu, yet they are divided by language and caste. Each of South Asia's three most populous countries, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, contains over a hundred million Muslims. The other countries included in the canopy of South Asia include Srilanka, Burma, Nepal, Maldives, Myanmar and Afghanistan.

In recent years, there has been a significant shift in how the world understands South Asia, from politics to discourse, economies to identities, materialism to culture, and class to community.

This transition has been accompanied by a propensity to emphasise the indigenous authenticity of South Asian religions and cultures in stark contrast to the universalist claims of European reason, science, modernity, and development. The terms Commonwealth, Post-Colonial or Partition focus on aspects of Imperialism, Colonization, assimilation, appropriation, abrogation, hybridity, language debate, psychological impact and many more related terms that are understood from Anglocentrism. Nonetheless it is time for us to focus on area-specific studies and away from the Eurocentric. Thus, the domain of Area studies is gaining popularity to reflect the Culture, Ethos, Religion, Nativism, traditions, Tensions etc., of an area. It is difficult to retain one's identity in globalisation, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism, and everything around looks fragile and fluid. Contrarily, this has also led to extreme fundamentalism and false fanaticism, a threat to humankind. The religious extremism has made life intolerable for a set of underprivileged and the downtrodden. Thus, there is a necessity to unravel the hidden agendas and suppressed desires to know more about the human psyche.

South Asian Literature

Literature emerging from the countries of South Asia and its diaspora is considered South Asian Literature. These writings are much older than all other literatures in the world. It's worth was recognised only recently. South Asian Studies has been a recent trend in the departments of English Studies in India and abroad. Several writings from South Asia have emerged on the global scene since the end of the colonial period, offering a substantial contribution to world literature. Writing either from the subcontinent or abroad, many writers significantly impact first-world countries where they have won prizes and earned recognition. Until recently, from the yardstick of the British canonical writings,

these were simply ‘exotic’ and ‘different’ and not essential or lasting literature that had to be included in the curriculum. But when we deeply dwell on this, we get to know that these writings are highly original. The stories being told have not been told before in English language narratives, and many of them are formally innovative and mature.

These texts depict key historical events such as India's and Pakistan's independence, partition violence, the Indo-Pak war of 1971, the foundation of Bangladesh, tensions between neighbouring countries, the assassination of Malala Yousafzai, and others. At least in the social sciences, the events of 9/11 have taken some of the sting out of the criticisms levelled against area studies. The events of September 11, 2001, have highlighted for many the value of country and region-specific information, as observed by Wibbels in *No Method to the Comparative Politics Madness.* The most radical requests to abolish area studies have faded away. Terror acts in the United States and other parts of the world, as well as the phenomena of radical Islam in general, have increased not only public demand for regional expertise that is historically and culturally anchored while also focusing on contemporary political situations. This assurance provides a grasp on the future of area studies, bringing people from all over the world to do research and develop plans to maintain the territory under control.

Most of these writers are diasporas, migrating themselves from the subcontinent; some of them focus pretty specifically on what life is like for South Asians in London, the US or elsewhere. Several of them also deals extensively with the question of women and their experience in South Asia to criticise the violence against women in these societies while refusing to condemn that society. Many famous writers have emerged from the sub-continent; ironically, there is no equal representation of authors in South Asian literature's

broad canopy. It is concentrated only on the Indian Writers, thus marginalising the other writers from South Asia and the women writers. Though we celebrate unity and diversity in the region, it is primary to understand the specificity of a particular culture. There is simply less or no representation of women writers here. For them, it is a triple struggle against whites, their men and the self. Their condition can be crudely compared to that of the African women writers with the same colonial past. These women writers desire to be liberated against all odds, which is commendable. Linking the idea of protest, resistance and non-conformity with the notion of boundaries, they started to write and convey how they could overcome the 'threshold crossing' in South Asia. Contrary to the western perception of eastern women as being passive, eternal victims and paralysed by a sense of helplessness, these writers have consistently and movingly written about negotiating and resisting in a rigid and harsh society.

The majority of contemporary South Asian women's literature reflects the writers' and women's importance of home; their writings frequently include detailed descriptions of the inner spaces of home, the compromise of roles and hierarchies, and the emotional lives played out against the backdrop of the bedroom and the kitchen. As Marangoly George points out, in "The Politics of Home, Post-Colonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction", "the domestic is read as a site where massive negotiations between often competing for ideological pressures are undertaken..." (16). These 'massive negotiations' are a constant and ever-present process in the arena of the home, where political undercurrents run, in the fiction of South Asian women writers, and the article explores the extent to which the negotiation process feeds into and informs the process of self-definition on the part of South Asian women.

The image of the domestic house has unquestionably evolved over time. And home, as a descriptive term in social, scientific, humanistic, and architectural literature, can be used to describe a place of regular residency for the ritual of return, demonstrating how women's status in the social structure of their families and communities is twinned as well as informed by their position in the physical form of their houses and homes. This is a gendered living area, and she stares out the window at the world around her. Women's writers from South Asia frequently depict women's comparatively vulnerable positionality within their society and groups. Many feminist writers, such as Simone de Beauvoir, believe that 'She' is defined and distinguished in relation to man, but not in relation to him; 'She' is the incidental, the inessential. The Subject is 'He,' the Absolute is 'He,' and the 'Other' is 'She.'

South Asian History

The importance of social groupings in anti-colonial struggle has been extensively underlined by Subaltern Theorists in the sphere of South Asian history. Asian peasants, the labour community, women and children, as well as class, caste, community, and gender, are among the subalterns. Merchants and the services industry were two other significant groups in focus, both of which downplayed the ideals of hierarchy and tradition. By connecting economic regions in South Asia to broader capitalist systems, new insights into refashioning social structures and relations were achieved. Analyses of the connection between the national, communal, and regional levels and arenas of politics based on a methodology that did not isolate the study of communitarian narratives from state formation increased our knowledge of decolonisation in South Asia.

Here, we must consider how the independence of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh cannot be understood without recognising the Hindu-Muslim division, Partition, and wars that utterly obliterated women's and children's contributions and sufferings in nation-building.

Several anthropological and cultural studies research projects were completed and highly regarded in the west prior to the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. The Muslims were branded as ‘evil’, and the ‘Orient’ was branded as the region of the irrational, the unscientific, and the inferior. They failed to recognise heterogeneity and diversity, resulting in a false dichotomy centred on the 'Otherness'. This resulted in a distorted vision of the east, including favoured understandings of the region and culture, oral sources of indigenous wisdoms, the production and replication of discourse, its reception, and the relationship between power and knowledge. These works also re-equip and re-orientated with cultural representation rather than political activity, paving the way for the concept of insurmountable cultural distinctions between Europe and Asia. It was precisely here that the post-structural and post-colonial historical study of Subaltern Studies was brought to light by post-modern and post-orientalist historical anthropology, and the entire domain was problematized. With greater insights and sensitivity to historical intricacy and generality, a new notion was evolved. Subaltern studies influenced literary and cultural criticism. A return to South Asian history, where the fight between union and partition, centripetal and centrifugal impulses, is dramatised, may provide for a much-needed decentered balance in our current, disoriented, scholarly situation.

South Asian Women Writers

South Asian women of diverse regions, cultures, and religions have long been depicted in literature as being "owned" or "possessed" by their families and menfolk to differing degrees. It's worth noting that South Asian women have shared the same mindset for a long time. Many people are proud of their possession, while others are irritated and even enraged by it, but the fact remains that they own it. As a result, it's not surprising that a South Asian woman's domestic position, roles within her family and household, and the geography of her living quarters all play a role in creating her self-perception, self-esteem, identity, and individuality. Interestingly, these women are completely aware of the link between domestic space and identity, and they frequently seek to influence the latter by changing the former.

The study focuses on analysing the women's language in these works, which acts as a barometer of the women's degrees of security, status, and comfort, as well as how South Asian women strive to affect these home improvements within the limits of a small but highly politicised arena. This is a system in which, while the traditional position assigned to women is submissive to men, it is not a position without some power; influence over other women, power over younger family members, authority over servants, and so on. Women in the joint family structure of South Asia may aspire to be more than their responsibilities. The roles of a second or more wives within the traditional family system will also be examined extensively in relation to Tehmina Durrani, who becomes her husband's sixth wife. Because South Asian women regard their identities as being dependent on their homes and families, there is also a situation in which no place is assigned to them within their houses. Women are displaced in society and life as a result

of their lack of position and rights within the house. As Marston points out in her examination of the reconfiguration of domestic space politics, the house can be reconceived not only as a private place but also as a distinct sort of public space.

South Asian women have had to navigate their way linguistically and culturally as English authors. Their characters are frequently depicted as manipulating their home households in order to obtain positionality, power, and influence within their families and societies. Because the borders are unseen, their tactics must be circuitous. "'At every stage, the woman writer has to negotiate patriarchy in complex and often circuitous ways" (Choudhiri, 308). As a result, the portrayal of women in their domestic worlds is crucial because the articulation through her writings reflects the wresting of a voice, a negotiation process with patriarchy, and a struggle for self-redefinition within physical and literary limits.

Muslim Identity

South Asian Muslim women are at a crossroads where their Muslim identities and distinct cultures shape their place in their society, enmeshed in a tangle of multiple cultural and socio-political discourses. While their identities and cultures are integrated, they find themselves in a position of cultural relativism while interacting with non-Muslim South Asian women and Muslim women from other parts of the world. This distinction further distinguishes them from Third World women living in other regions of the world.

Keeping in mind Mary Eagleton's idea of the "geography of literary feminism" (7), Muslim South Asia, here, emerges as "a strategic location or situation of the category 'women' vis-à-vis the context of analysis" that challenges the "uncritical way 'proof' of universality and cross-cultural validity are provided". It is imperative to present how these

women rise out of generalisations that are predicated on the assumptions of the “subordination” of South Asian women, which, according to Mohanty, leave them with “few if any . . . ‘choices or the freedom to act” (Mohanty 196-206).

These restrictions are known among South Asian Muslim women writers. They, however, refuse to remain mired in the silence that Spivak claims has embalmed their voice, and they attempt to negotiate with those very cultural and political circumstances in order to gain agency and agent. While it is hard to reduce South Asian Muslim women to a single monolithic category, their politico-cultural positioning encourages a "context-specific differentiated analysis" (Mohanty 209) that establishes what kinds of alternative conceptions of agency are demonstrated by this group of women.

Muslim women's rights in South Asian countries have been violated in the past. Women are caught in an unavoidable conflict with the conventional man as a result of the oppressive atmosphere around them. The innumerable woes the writer records through sarcasm and irony or in the non-conformist style might be organised to produce a discourse in which the writer stems from her body's captivity to introduce her senses and presence in history. The various restraints she is under to leave patterns or effects on her psyche, and so on her literary manifestations.

The writers from the three Muslim countries demonstrate the tense relationship that exists between the dominant religious-cultural policies and secularists. Any sort of resistance to women's social justice has sparked outrage from a variety of platforms that use the dual legal structure, leaving women exposed to exploitation by a coalition of religious and secular interests. Women's plight is given less attention in overcrowded countries plagued by many problems. In order to understand Muslim female writers, it is

necessary to first grasp the impact of reactionary Islam and how it contributes to female uneasiness in South Asia. The authors are situated within the male-dominated culture they are attempting to change. The South Asian female writer creates an unmistakable veneer of her literary individuality while battling the consummation of her body by a Muslim collective that is constantly divided into "progressives" and "fundamentalists" (Rajan 561).

In her thesis “The Horizon: South Asian Muslim Women on Faith, Living, and Attitude” Samin Sababa Parin states that patriarchy has resulted in enormous quantities of tragedy, as women continue to be drowned in the masculine outpouring of energy, his phallus. 'He' continues to play a key role in 'her' discourse. In "The Laugh of the Medusa" Hélène Cixous, Keith, and Paula Cohen argue that the “woman is a vital component of all liberations as a belligerent, therefore she must be farsighted and not confined to a thorough interaction” (9). The feminist vision of social revolution and change that the South Asian Muslim writer has is solely limited to her concern with masculine teachings that surround her body and physical attractiveness. However, their cumulative complaints indicate what Mohanty refers to as the political repercussions of being a woman. The radical aspects for women cut across class and other boundaries in a South Asian society with a political arm that does not allow women to deviate from the tight rules that fulfil patriarchal society's requirements.

In her deconstruction of clichés surrounding 'the weaker sex,' French philosopher Simone De Beauvoir highlights the inclination to associate women with selflessness, which grants males absolute rights in her devotion and places a categorical imperative on her (De Beauvoir, 284). Various religious traditions emphasise generosity toward the creator and his created. Women are still made to be the mules of coerced selflessness in a twisted

culture that promotes and perpetuates the myth of women because of their historically oppressed condition. Women can be penalised, disqualified, and pushed beyond society's safety if they depart from this state, which Beauvoir refers to as immanence.

Muslim women are the result of the abuse they have received as well as the severity of their sins. This ongoing danger of violence deprives Muslim women of ownership of their faith; if not successfully avoided, it takes control of key areas of their daily life. “In such situation, women are advised to write with their bodies so their bodies can be heard and act as gateways to the immense resources of the unconscious” (Cixous, K. Cohen and P. Cohen 7). The 'fallen' or 'wrong woman' symbols have been employed by writers who have felt the load and experienced the wrath of society as a subaltern or someone labelled as blasphemous to depict the bold blows their minds have received. It is a gratifying term, a satirical expression, sheer sorrow, and a mark of injustice suffered at the hands of Muslim society's bigotry. Understanding the real-life actions of these writers will help you better appreciate their literature. Outside of the myth of patriarchal destiny, the fallen and banished live. As a result, she must bear the responsibility of reflecting on all of society's evils through her body and the so-called sin.

In her book, *Women Claim Islam*, Miriam Cooke, writes that “there has always been an active force separating men’s Islam from women’s” (7). The hegemonic forces' extremes, in which women are shown a religion separate from men, turn them away completely. Awareness the varied uses of the 'fallen' or 'rusticated' woman in Muslim women's writing in South Asia requires an understanding of the significance of the body in feminine expression and freedom in literature. “Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal

woman has a ... divine composure, hasn't accused herself of being a monster?" (Cixous, K. Cohen and Cohen, 3). In most situations, these women reflect the readily enforced position on those who choose to transcend their artificial limitations due to the burdening of the soul. In most cases, they have exposed the motives underlying their plight before seizing ownership of their polluted domains.

> "She didn't haggle. It was wondering if it was a cash down proposition; if not, it was sex on credit. If someone could not pay even on credit, it was sex on charity" (Chughtai 45).

There are numerous weaknesses available to the female body that can be exploited. According to Cixous, "a female without a body is dumb, blind, and incapable of becoming an effective combatant. Female bodies have been invaded, disguised, punished, and conditioned to be silent in Muslim societies. Women see their existence in creatures they have learned to love and can attach their identities to, in stark contrast to fundamentalists simplistic efforts to limit their reach" (78). Miriam Cooke claims that sanctioned fixation with female bodies harms women's ability to make their own decisions while discussing women's struggle to accept the authority of their Islam in the Middle East. South Asian texts express the horrors of threats and scars caused by male incursion into women's physical and mental space. Their autonomous spaces are transferred through natural, common symbols that embody and provide an entity to a constrained being's aspirations.

Furthermore, Foucault defines 'critical attitude' as a virtue, and claims that "the core of critique is a bundle of intertwined relationships: power, truth, and the subject" (32). Despite their subaltern position, women writers in South Asia have been compelled for millennia by diverse struggles and have analysed the phases of politics by depicting them.

They write mostly as eyewitnesses to wars, the horrors of Partition, which segregated men and women in the region based on religion, and political events that eventually devoured the states. Women have written to convey their patriotic philosophy, feeling that their rights can only be realised in a democratic society. Fundamentalism and fanaticism are themes of debate and criticism, respectively. To advocate a system closer to humanism, some have interpreted scriptures, invoked religious writings, or dislodged origins. According to Foucault, in the context of 'politics of truth,' “this art of voluntary insubordination would effectively assure the subject's desubjugation” (32).

Writing Self

To vent their anguish, south Asian women writers have experimented with various forms of literary expressions, such as fiction, autobiographical fiction, poetry, autobiography, etc. However, the autobiographical mode of expression has been extensively used by women in South Asia to voice their opinion on "South Asian womanhood within both minority and majority cultures", and their "creative output" documents this struggle” (Hussain 53-54). Perhaps, the most important reasons for its usage are that autobiography, as a reflective act, allows women writers to exercise autonomy in re-looking at themselves and re-inventing their lives and personalities in the light of self-knowledge gained through the process of writing. Such self-introspection and self-understanding are impossible if one chooses fiction or any medium other than an autobiographical mode of expression.

Misch has drawn attention to the fact that autobiography as a mode of expression for both women and men “springs from the most natural source, the joy in self-communication and in enlisting the sympathetic understanding of others; or the need of

self-assertion… It abounds in new initiatives, drawn from actual life.” (Misch 4). If we look at the list of writers for study here, one can conclude most of their writings are autobiographical. Therefore, this study will examine autobiographical elements in the works of South Asian women writers to assess how far they succeed in re-inventing their lives. Homi K. Bhabha rightly opines in this regard that "it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history - subjugation, domination displacement - that we can learn our most enduring lesson for living and thinking. There is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality transforms our critical strategies" (172). The practice of writing life narratives initiated by marginalised women had not been observed earlier in writings by South Asian women who mainly belonged to privileged sections of society.

In contemporary times, reading and analysing the writings of these South Asian women can contribute to understanding the issues which lead to their marginalisation and can redefine feminism in the South Asian context. One notable feature of recent writings by women from South Asia is that they re-present South Asian women not as mute 'objects' but as "sexually transgressive, politically astute and determined to claim educational and employment rights" (Hussain 54). These writers have attempted to "transcend barriers of nationality and culture by focusing on the awareness and awakening" experience in writing (Hussain 53).

Struggle to Survive

Understandably, the issues involved in women's struggle for survival in this part of the world are different from those of women belonging to other subcontinents. In this region, women are victims of multiple forms of oppression which have their basis in gender, caste, religion, class, and politics. Out of these factors, caste and religion significantly impact women's lives in South Asian countries. Therefore, the feministic concerns of women in South Asia are different from those of women in the West. Naturally enough, this difference also has a bearing on the literature of the South Asian region. Hence, through an analysis of the chosen texts by South Asian women writers belonging to Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, this study will examine the various deliberating factors which intersect the lives of South Asian women in these countries and also their response to the issues inherent in the quest for selfhood through the medium of their writings.

In Pakistan, the very first autobiography written by a woman was Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* (1989), followed by a sequel, *Boys Will Be Boys: A Daughter's Elegy* (2003). Benazir Bhutto's autobiography *Daughter of the East* (1989) explores the liberating possibilities available to Pakistani women and the successful proclamation of her ability to lead the Pakistani nation. In Bangladesh, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain wrote an allegory *Sultana's Dream,* in 1905, when women were content to follow the traditional roles. In this exceptional work written a hundred years ago, she condemned male domination and dreamt of a world where women would be emancipated. Taslima Nasreen's autobiographies are yet another instance of a woman trying to break free of the traditional roles assigned to her and reclaim her sexuality. Thus, one observes that the feminist concerns of South Asian

women have experienced a considerable change, and that they have expressed a growing awareness of patriarchy and its demands on women and the desire to move from tradition to modernity.

Many women writers have used varied autobiographical forms of expression to engage with hitherto unexplored questions of 'sexuality' and 'selfhood' relevant to women in present times. And at the same time, the tone of the writings of South Asian women has changed from mild self-castigating introspective to the more overt and strident denouncement of the oppressive hegemonic tactics to subdue women. This change has helped them emerge as progressive and enlightened thinkers, writers, and feminists. Hence, it can be argued that South Asian women are constantly pushing the boundaries of autobiographical narration. These women challenge the limitations imposed on them by social structures through their writings. However, this study is more enjoyable and challenging because it is not confined to the study of autobiography as a written account of a person's life written by that person. It would also examine other autobiographical forms, such as testimonials and memoirs, closely associated with autobiography but assume varied forms. Although all autobiographical works are, by nature, subjective, there are subtle differences between the three forms of expression mentioned above.

Testimonio is an autobiographical account in which the narrator speaks about their life which is inextricably bound with the life of their community. Thus, the individual story merges into the levels of the society, thereby emphasising the collective aspect of narration.

A memoir is a form of expression woven around a particular incident or memory. It does not concern itself with the whole life of a person or the chronology of narration. On the other hand, autobiography focuses on the entire life of the writer and events are described in chronological order. Since the three forms of expression are different from each other, this study will examine how each of these forms functions as an apt medium of expression for the women writers who have employed them and how it allows them to reinvent "the language as well as the content of the creative expression" (Lai xxii).

This study will focus on how the emergence of the writers' selfhood takes place through the processes of self-introspection, which awaken their analytical faculties, self-understanding, which gives them the strength to accept themselves as they are and self-empowerment, which happens as a result of their engagement with social work which enables them to look beyond their marginalised position. Most importantly, this study aims at finding out how the act of writing allows these women from diverse backgrounds to make a journey towards creating a measure of order and personal space in their lives.

In today's era, south Asian women's literature brings factors such as caste, class, and gender that have an oppressive bearing on women's lives. It would be pertinent to use the cocoon metaphor for the restrictive hold of these factors that women experience in their day- to- day lives. A cocoon is a hard-protective coating that encloses the pupa of a butterfly. Once the pupa matures into a butterfly, it pierces the cocoon by using the two sharp claws placed on the thick joints at the base of the fore wings to make their way out. Having emerged from its shell, the butterfly will usually sit on the empty surface to expand and harden its wings. Similarly, patriarchal ideology has functioned as a shell for women.

Various beliefs, notions, rites, and traditions have been devised to keep women within the clutches of patriarchy. Women are often discouraged from expressing their thoughts and exploring their sexuality. Hence, using this metaphor, one might assert that recent women writers are beginning to pierce this restrictive patriarchal ideology through the weapon of the pen, making it possible for them to grow tender wings of freedom and self-dependence. They no longer want to blindly follow their male counterparts' ideology and code of conduct. The patriarchal ideological dictates and restrictions have forced women to rip open the constricting and so-called protective encasing supposedly designed to shelter them from the harsh world outside. Now, these women writers are redefining their lives according to their sensibilities. There is yet another self-imposed restraint that functions as a restriction and hampers the growth of oneself as a writer and autobiographer.

Many South Asian women writers, and autobiographers, according to Brinda Bose, recognise that self-censorship is the most challenging frontier to cross in their journeys toward self-expression and self-realisation. These "censorships - not merely of the state, the society, the family, the spouse, but the self - remain at the forefront of anxieties and impediments that burden most South Asian women writers in their creative work processes" (17-18). Self-censorship has a debilitating effect on the autobiographer and prevents her from being candid and honest. However, in present times women are making a bold effort to break the shackles of self-censorship, particularly in autobiographical writings, to experiment with new themes and styles of writing and re-inventing their 'selves'.

If one looks at works by South Asian women writers in the past years, their creative output foregrounds their quest for self-discovery and self-realisation. The interests of women writers and their attitude towards themselves and life, in general, have changed with the change in South Asian society. This change in the mood and perception of South Asian women writers arose when a consciousness developed about their democratic rights and their sense of fulfilment as persons with individual identities and their roles as wives and mothers. Earlier, in South Asian literature, women were stereotyped as wives, mothers and daughters. They were portrayed as self-effacing and self-sacrificing women in literature, which were the traditional image of women.

However, South Asian women writers gradually started rejecting this secondary portrayal of women in literature. In this context, Hussain forcefully argues that women writers have expressed dissatisfaction with the cultural and sexual roles assigned to women through the issues raised in their writings. The predicaments and hardships that these characters face is "a rite of passage" which they have to go through to become strong and symbolise "transformations from weakness to strength and from restriction to freedom" (56). Similarly, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1931), a Bengali writer of pre-partition India, wrote an allegory *Sultana's Dream,* in 1905 when women were content to follow the traditional roles assigned to them. In this exceptional work written a hundred years ago, she dreamt of a world where women would be the rulers and men would follow their orders. This change in the trend shows that seeds of rebellion were present inside the women, but it found an expression in women’s writings over time.

Memory Writings

In transcribing life into a book, memory is only a mirror-like agent for portraying the past, but the writer aims at much more than a mere portrayal of the history. The author's life must be made attractive in language, acceptable in notions, aesthetic in vision and appreciable in self-image. From a psychological point, "no one can know so well as the autobiographer himself what motives prompted him at decisive moments, what his secret hopes and ambitions were and how far his career fulfilled his real aspirations" (Prasad 174).

To begin with, writing an autobiography is a way of re-looking at oneself, unearthing oneself, of relying on oneself again. A writer writes both to recapitulate what they know about what they know already and discover what they do not know yet, hoping to come into a new sense of their life and invent fresh beginnings even later. Emphasising the necessity of such writings, Helene Cixous stresses, "Woman must write herself, must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies, for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal" (347).

The authors showed psychological insight into the issues affecting their lives which led to a contemplative self-analysis and self-understanding. Another important motive is that by writing the self, the concerned women writers could challenge accepted notions of femininity and considerably alter and redefine feminism within the South Asian context. Besides being individually unique, these women's narratives are crucial because they have tremendous historical significance. Antoinette Burton authenticates this point when she writes that "women's writings and memoirs of domestic spaces all over the world constitute legitimate and valuable historical archives" (59). These women who attempt to write about

themselves are engaged in the re-creation of their story, the story that already exists. Their act of writing inevitably turns out to be a way towards their self-introspection and self-assertion, thereby replacing their agonies with multi-faceted awareness and suppressed observations with free expressions.

Women Diaspora Writers

South Asian women writers have made a substantial contribution to the corpus of South Asian literature. The creative output of Diasporic writers like Moniza Alvi, Sara Suleri, Kamila Shamsie, Bapsi Sidhwa, Qaisra Shahraz etc., of Pakistani origin, Ketaki Kushari Dyson, Dilara Hashem of Bangladeshi origin etc. has created a niche for South Asian Women's Writing, within the diasporic context. They have explored their quest for identity in a new, unknown country and the bitter-sweet experience of living in a multicultural society. Some have also dealt with taboo issues like incest, same-sex love, etc. One can assert that in their works, the ethos of their native place is constantly made and re-making.

Exploring the 'self,' either through the medium of fiction or autobiographical writings, is a significant theme in their works. These writers have portrayed women as caught in the mutability of tradition and modernity, bearing the burden of the past and future aspirations. There is a search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self. These women writers have grappled with complex issues such as sexuality, servility, subjugation and the place of women in society and have shown their protagonists as evolving into mature, confident and strong women. They have also communicated their respective cultural ethos through the medium of a global language. One of the relevant issues to be examined within this study is the emergence of the writer's self and the

possibility of achieving self-awareness and self-representation in one's life, primarily through literary representations.

One may opine that the consciousness of self as a distinct entity manifests itself in an individual since childhood. If this consciousness is fostered in a healthy environment, it will make the child grow into a mentally strong and responsible adult. However, suppose this consciousness is damaged or wiped out due to subjugation, domination and humiliation. In that case, the self-awareness of self gradually decreases, and the individual becomes a non-thinking entity women’s memory plays a vital role in their writings. The memorial presence of the past takes many forms. It serves many purposes, ranging from conscious recollection to unreflect, reemergence, from misty longing for what is lost to the controversial use of the past to reshape the present, making writing a challenge. Georges Gusdorf notes that the writer "gives himself the job of narrating his history; what he sets out to do is re-assemble the scattered elements of his individual life and re-group them in a comprehensive sketch" (Varma 55). In such a task of re-assembling the scattered elements, the memory becomes an agent for recollection of the events from the author's life which is evident in the writings of Masuda Sultana and Malalai Joy, both writers from Afghanistan.

Defining Diaspora

The term 'Diaspora' refers to any population that is considered 'deterritorialised' or 'transnational,' that has social, economic, and political networks that cross the borders of nation states or, indeed, span the world, and such populations are increasing in prevalence, number, and self-awareness. Several are emerging as key participants in the development of national accounts, regional alliances, and global political economies. Intellectuals and

activists from these populations have recently begun to use the term "diaspora" to define themselves as as, James Clifford notes, of “Diasporic language which appears to be replacing, or at least supplementing, minority discourse” (311).

Nonetheless, the term 'diaspora' has become a loose reference mixing categories such as immigrants, guest workers, ethnic and 'racial' minorities, refugees, expatriates, and travellers - endangering the term's descriptive utility. In modern literature, the term "diaspora" has taken on three different meanings. These definitions, it is suggested, have a distinct character for defining developments among members of South Asian religions living outside of the subcontinent. In the reconstruction and replication of identities and socio-cultural institutions among communities outside of their place of origin, diasporic texts argue for recognising the combined workings of structural, conscious, and non-conscious forces.

The concept of diaspora has at least three real consequences, according to current definitions of the term in several academic disciplines and recent writing on the issue. These definitions generally refer to social forms, different varieties of awareness, and different ways of cultural production. It is also proposed that these various meanings are particularly useful for comprehending, conceptualising, interpreting, and theorising processes and events that are bringing South Asian religions outside of the region.

Diaspora as a Social Form

The most frequent definition, inherited from contemporary literature, is a word referring almost entirely to Jewish experiences, conjuring their terrible exile from an old and historic homeland and dispersion over numerous regions and locations. If the Jewish

experience is used to define dispersion, then the connotation is unavoidably negative. The word "diaspora" conjures up images of forced migration, victimisation, isolation, and loss.

Martin Baumann distinguishes three referential points in the Jewish experience:

a) the process of becoming dispersed or scattered,

b) the community living in distant places, and

c) the geographic location in which the dispersed groups, or community, reside.

Her sociological version of 'diaspora' emphasises an identifiable group defined by their link despite their dispersion. Other common characteristics include:

1. Distinct types of social connections shown by historical and geographical specialisations. They see diasporas as
    a) As a result of forced or voluntary migration or relocation from one homeland to at least two other countries,
    b) intentionally retaining collective identity, which is frequently sustained by a sense of belonging to a "ethnic myth" or "imagined community" with shared origins, history, experience, and territory.
    c) acclimatizing with new modes of communication and network to transgress geographical boundaries and to create organisations where they settle down.
    d) trying to have connections and ties with the native or homeland. This can be established in explicit and implicit ways.
    e) keeping a peaceful relationship with other ethnic groups in different settlement areas,
    f) inability or refusal to be completely accepted by the 'host society' - generating emotions of alienation, rejection, superiority, or being different,

2. There is a sense of political tension that stems from diasporic people's orientations, which are often characterised by estranged attachments to homelands and host countries. Individual immigrants may be prominent actors, or cooperative associations may be powerful pressure groups in their host countries' domestic politics, and their international political perspective is motivated by their interest in a country of origin's political challenge. This is particularly evident in sports.
3. New strategies of transnational or diaspora groups offer a major source and resource diversification in global investments, according to the economic scenario.

Finally, in all of these domains, particularly in the present age, which is marked by relative ease of transportation and communication, 'diaspora' as a social form is marked by a 'triadic relationship' between the diaspora and the host country.

a) globally-dispersed yet cooperatively self-identified cultural and racial groups,
b) the territorial states and contexts where such groups exist,
c) the homeland states and contexts where they or their lineages originated.

Nearly all of the works relating to South Asian communities, including specifically religious groups outside of South Asia, concentrate, on ‘diaspora’ as a social form, particularly by way of the kinds of social relationships. The diaspora, from the South Asian regions is evolving and intensifying rapidly all over the globe.

Arjun Appadurai in *Disjunction* suggests that deterritorialisation among diaspora groups develops “exaggerated and intensified senses of criticism or attachment to politics in the home-state” (54). This is a significant reason why the diasporic writers studied here are intensely interested in politics and the current scenario in their home town or country.

Diaspora as Type of Consciousness

Another contemporary approach to Diaspora focuses on expressing distinct experiences, a state of mind, and a feeling of identity. According to Clifford's paper "Diasporas," diaspora is a sort of consciousness generated across transnational communities. It is distinguished by a dual or contradictory point of view. It is understood negatively through discernment and exclusion, and favourably by identification with a historical heritage or contemporary international cultural or political force such as 'Islam.' In a related way, Clifford suggests that “Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension” (312). The awareness of a decentered attachment of thinking at home and away poses a double consciousness among these people. Similarly, Clifford proposes that “The empowering paradox of diaspora is that dwelling here assumes solidarity and connection there. It is the connection (elsewhere) that makes a difference (here)” (322).

A consciousness of more than one location necessitates the desire to conceptually connect with others, both 'here' and 'there,' who share the same 'routes' and 'roots.' As a result, diaspora, according to Stuart Hall's 'Cultural identity,' consists of ever-changing representations that give a 'imaginary coherence' for a group of fluid identities. Robin Cohen expands on Hall's notion, stating that "transnational no longer has to be reinforced by migration or exclusive territorial claims”. According to Cohen in *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, a diaspora can be held together or recreated to some extent in cyberspace

through the mind, cultural artefacts, and a common imagination. In this approach, Cohen emphasises how an individual's identity with a diaspora helps to bridge the local and global divide.

Some writers have characterised diaspora consciousness through different mental functions, in addition to awareness of multi-locality and imaginative linkages. Collective memories and 'new maps' do not always assist to cement identities; instead, they conclude that diaspora groups have recollections with fragmented or split archaeology. This communal memory play has multiple paths and fissures that sometimes correspond to generational politics. Even among well-established diaspora groups, the macro-politics of imitation is translated into the micro-politics of remembering among friends and family over decades.

The broken or divided memories of diaspora consciousness provide an assortment of 'groups,' histories, and the self, heightened by the awareness of multi-locality. Nonetheless, rather than being viewed as a source of weakness, diasporic people are redefining their diversity as a source of adaptive strength. Diasporas draw on and establish fluid and multifarious identities stuck between their society of origin and host societies through their complex network of community links. While some migrants identify more with one culture than another, the majority maintain various identities that allow them to be assimilate into more than one country at the same time. Transmigrants can demonstrate their opposition to the global political and economic realities that overwhelm them by holding several racial, national, and ethnic identities, even as they adapt to living conditions typified by vulnerability and insecurity. Diaspora consciousness is also seen as a source of conflict due to its involvement with, and consequent prominence in, the public realm.

Here, Cohen comments that “Awareness of their precarious situation may also propel members of diasporas to advance legal and civic causes and be active in human rights and social justice issues” (Cohen 13). This is mainly witnessed today in the more effective and organised expressions of group concerns. We can point to a different diaspora consciousness specific to religious groups. This occurs through a particular type of self-awareness and questioning that are stimulated by conditions of diaspora attached with religious diversity.

Clifford Geertz examines the transition from the question of what to how, when it comes to religion in *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*, which is symbolic of such a transformation in religious self-consciousness and enlightenment. Furthermore, this change has distinguished between religious convictions being held by "religiousness" and "religious mindedness." Furthermore, the believer may now be able to rationalise and justify certain aspects of their beliefs and practice to people of different faiths. In this way, 'religious diaspora consciousness' must be understood. The number of pilgrimages still taking place among diaspora groups returning to the subcontinent to visit shrines and other holy sites exemplifies the multi-locality of South Asian religious followers.

Demands for public resources for 'community' associations, recognition of group-specific beliefs and practises – including legal protection – and concessions in the education and social service systems have been among these. The diversity of life realities among various groups, particularly the Muslim community, have been challenged, negotiated, and reviewed in the course of appealing public space processes that improve,

in an evolutionary way, the programmes and identities with which ethnic minorities engage the state, particularly after the 9/11 incident. It is also clear that ethnic diversity demonstrates cultural awareness.

Many young Muslim women in South Asia are conceptualising a clear boundary between 'religion' and 'culture,' which for their parents were practically indistinguishable domains. Furthermore, they reject their parents' adherence to ethnic traditions associated with religiosity, such as the clothing code, while fully embracing a Muslim identity in and of itself. As evidenced by modern women writers, self-conscious examination of religion that was not significant to the first-generation diaspora is now necessary among these young women.

Diaspora as a form of Cultural Production

The idea that 'diaspora' is commonly understood with terms like ‘globalisation’ and ‘cosmopolitanism’ has been attributed to this collection of meanings by many writers. In this sense, globalisation is investigated as the worldwide flow of cultural objects, images, and meanings that results in the process of creolisation, back-and-forth conversions, mutual influences, new contestations, negotiations, and constant transformations, as articulated by Appadurai in *Disjunctions.* In this sense, the term "diaspora" refers to the process of creating and replicating transnational social and cultural phenomena. This is also linked to international activity that involves both material and human beings. Such hybrid cultures and new ethnicities are especially prevalent among diaspora youth, whose socialisation has occurred through the amalgamation of several cultural domains. Aspects of culture and identity are frequently self-consciously selected, synthesised, and elaborated from more than one inheritance among such young people. Global media and communications are

becoming an increasingly important channel for the transmission of cultural phenomena and the alteration of diasporic identity. They further comment that “Complex transnational flows of media images and messages perhaps create the greatest disjuncture for diasporic populations, since in the electronic media, the politics of desire and imagination are always in the contest with the politics of heritage and nostalgia” (Appadurai & Breckenridge iii).

In “Who Claims Alterity?” Gayatri Spivak highlights “the discourse of cultural specificity and difference, packaged for transnational consumption’ through global technologies, mainly through ‘microelectronic transnationalism’ represented by electronic bulletin boards and the Internet” (276). Most anthropological and Neo Marxist studies concerning South Asian religions outside South Asia have largely taken up subjects of cultural production and reproduction, particularly surrounding religious aspects of family and kinship, caste, and ritual practice. Some of the significant leanings specifically regarding religious ritual include homogenisation, detraditionalisation, and complexification and visible consumption of both religion and culture of the South Asian Muslims. To interpret their lives, one must look at these beliefs' cultural production and reproduction.

Context and Relevance of the Study

In South Asia, the world is taking violence against women very seriously and sometimes; it is also considered to be in vogue to study violence against women. More than half-a-billion Muslim women live in the world, and the majority of them live as minorities in western developed countries. And the rest of them are in Muslim majority countries in the underdeveloped or developing countries of the east. Many socio-scientific studies have been undertaken on dimensions of women’s lives in these regions, highlighting their

position in a patriarchal structure, child marriage, inaccessible health care and education, poverty, home and displacement, etc. These researchers have come up with two significant polarities, one to show these women as helpless and hopeless. The other is to glorify the west for its emancipatory development agenda.

Several academic programmes on women's movements from first-world nations have failed to recognise the importance of indigenous women in nation-building and their economic contribution in recent years. They've all been placed into different baskets to be chosen and picked for case studies by professionals. On the one hand, this exclusive image of women is dehumanising, and on the other, it is demoralising. Monolithic caricatures of Muslim women have long thrived in the West, misrepresenting huge interregional, intraregional, and class variances in their conditions and status. So, in order to grasp the true meaning of being a woman, one must explore for hidden meanings in literature. As a result, through their representational writings, this study will illustrate how violence in women's lives is understood in home, political, and religious circumstances.

The Western perception of Muslim women is still heavily impacted by information from a specific place. Muslim women from South Asian countries are frequently overlooked. Most present academics reject the notion that the Muslim religion is the fundamental predictor of their women's status and conditions. Because of the great variation in Muslim women's groups and conditions, many people tend to give more causal weight to deciding factors that differ between nations and regions. Very blatantly, the research scholars attribute problems faced by women to the economic standard of the region and country; they fail to understand the deep-rooted causes for it. If one has to understand religion, the Holy book has to be interpreted; unfortunately, its meanings are

once again patriarchal and unreachable for women, though some say this holy book gives equal or more rights to women. Many cultural traditions linked to Islam that have been criticised as oppressive to women have been misidentified. Female circumcision, polygamy, early marriage, and honour killings are examples of controversial traditions and societal problems that are not confined to Muslim populations. Such strategies are either geographically unique or otherwise not ubiquitous among Muslims. However, it is made to appear like the South Asian Subcontinent is the only place where such social ills exist.

Another major generalised issue is the access to the legal system for Muslim Women. The legal systems in Muslim countries are mostly twofold. On the one hand, they are divided into civil law, which is based on Western legal systems, and family or personal status law, which is mostly based on Sharia, Islamic religious law. Many Muslim states' civil law and constitution guarantee equal rights for men and women. Islamic family law, on the other hand, as it is practised in numerous Muslim countries, creates barriers to women's equality and justice. Marriage, *Talaak*, child custody, and inheritance are all covered under Islamic family law, which has been waiting for change for a long time. Many state elites have pushed for family law reform to benefit the state by removing barriers to women's participation and contribution in the workforce and politics.

Islamist movements have occasionally succeeded in reversing women-friendly reforms, sometimes through outright state takeover. Family law reforms are still underway, with many organisations and Muslim activists focused on women's rights. The subject of family law, as well as how it is applied in different Muslim countries, varies greatly. Women are able to utilise laws and loopholes in the law to get around discriminatory provisions, and are sometimes encouraged to do so. Women can, for example, include

language in marriage contracts making taking another wife grounds for divorce and dividing marital assets after the divorce.

At the moment, a burgeoning form of feminist activity attempts to educate women about such techniques and loopholes. Whatever barriers to equality Muslim legal systems may erect for women, Muslim women in all regions have achieved remarkable progress in recent decades in a number of statistically measurable areas, including education and health. In these domains, Muslim countries have greatly reduced gender disparities and previously considerable inequalities in average attainment between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. With this background, the study tries to look at how in the present times, with rampant religious fundamentalism worldwide, which has labelled specific communities, sects and regions as terrorising, one has to look at the misrepresentation from a microscopic view. All the factors raised in the study will see how women have transgressed their position through writing.

Objectives of the Study

The study would look at issues pertinent to Muslim Women Writers from South Asia writing in English as diaspora writers from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. As these women are from a traditionally patriarchal society, the dichotomy created for her by the institutions such as the self and the other, subservience and negotiations at home and outside, her fluid position at the centre and the periphery, and notions of agency, have created a boundary for her and misrepresented her all over. Through her writings, they have carved out space for themselves on the literary scene and slaked an intellectual, academic and emotional territory of their own for opinion formation, understanding conflicts defining identity in terms of Nation, Gender, Religion and re-representation. Thus, the

study will examine how these women's writings redefine Western aesthetics and value systems to transform, reinvent, and be inclusive as a literary canon.

Physical violence against women is seen in the writings. But one must keenly understand the forms of violence, be it 'structured' violence perpetrated by the state, depriving them of education, health care, and legal options that make them vulnerable to harsh situations. When the knowledge that men create is itself violent towards her, it becomes difficult to resist. In Spivak's terms, 'epistemic' violence is far more devastating and long-lasting when compared to other forms of violence. The study will also examine how a lopsided epistemology is constructed to make women mute spectators, thus snatching away her voice. The women's writings from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh cannot be homogenised; the study will, on the one hand, look at how each region's writing is different from the other and, at the same time, look at how violence against them is a universal phenomenon.

Another pertinent question is the authenticity of the writers who are termed diasporas. One should understand that they are the voices of the voiceless or the less privileged ones; they represent the community's experience of a radical change in socio-political and sexual issues. The study should also consider the trauma they face in non-native states during political and religious turmoil. This experience is the major one for the diaspora writers. The study takes into account all the issues of diaspora writers.

In the same way, one has to look into the articulations of violence from Women Writers from three Muslim Nations, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, that are intertwined and entangled in the very institutions that have to support the existence of women. Thus, the study will look into the scope, issues and challenges of Women's

Writings from South Asia, Muslim Women Diasporic Writers, and their recurrent themes and ethos.

The next chapter "Understanding Violence: Looking Through the Glass" will focus entirely on violence and its forms, physical, structural and other essential type of Epistemic violence. The chapter will also look at gendered violence against Muslim Women in South Asian Countries stressing religion, politics and culture. Feminist understanding of third world women, Subaltern Theory about South Asia, Incidents like 9/11, the Attack on Malala, and Taliban Overthrowal, will also be looked at by diasporic writers.

The third chapter "Writing from Pakistan: From Resistance to Resilience" will look at how writers from Pakistan, have seen writing as a tool to vent out frustration about the violence faced by women in their society. The works of Tehmina Durrani's *My Feudal Lord* (1994), and *Blasphemy* (1998), and Kamila Shamsie's *In the City by the Sea* (1998), *Kartography* (2001), *Broken Verses* (2005) and *Burnt Shadows* (2009) will be analysed in depth.

The fourth chapter" Writings from Afghanistan: Breaking the Shackles of Time" will analyse three writers and their works, namely Masuda Sultan's *My War at Home* (2006), Malalai Joya's *A Women among Warlords* (2009) and Fariba Nawa's *Opium Nation* (2011).

The fifth chapter "Writings from Bangladesh: Empowered by Empathy" will look at Tehmima Anam's trilogy, *A Golden Age* (2008*), The Good Muslim* (2011) and *The Bones of Grace* (2016).

The "Conclusion" chapter will see how the women writers have crossed the threshold under all odds to re-represent themselves and their identity and existence.

Review of Literature

Many writers and scholars have worked in depth on the theme of violence. Sociological, Psychological, and International Relations have tried to understand the nature and causes of violence. But understanding it from a literary perspective has been undertaken here—the study confines only quantitative analysis through qualitative and quantitative research reports and articles. The following are the secondary texts, essays, and dissertations keenly studied for analysis.

Sudhir Kakar in *The Colours of Violence* (1995) is a psychoanalytic exploration of religious conflict. The writer expounds on the complex phenomenon involving the interaction of political, economic, cultural and psychological forces resulting in violence. The notion of the group aspect of identity, which is constituted of a person's feelings and attitudes towards the self as a member of an ethnic/religious/cultural collectivity, is exposed here. This self-image is transmitted from one generation to the next through the group's mythology, history, ideals and values and shared cultural symbols. The group identity is an extended part of individual self-experience and varies individuals and with time. The writer has analysed the fantasies, social representation, and modes of moral reasoning about the 'other group' or 'them' that motivate and rationalise violence with evidence from interviews. One of the chapters also discusses modernisation and globalisation in fostering fundamentals and revivalists group identity. Though the work focuses on the Hindu- the Muslim riot in Hyderabad in 1991, there are relevant and appropriate arguments for violence in general.

The Other Side of Silence (1998) by Urvashi Butalia discusses history's enormous human upheavals. This report is the result of a decade of interviews and study into what partition was supposed to achieve and how it actually worked in people's lives. The book is jam-packed with stories and testimonies from women and children who have never had their voices heard before. Records, reports, diaries, and memoirs are supplemented by documents, reports, diaries, and memoirs that chronicle violence that puts people ahead of politics. The part on 'women' is pertinent to this research.

Kamla Bhasin and Nighat Said Khan's *Feminism and its Relevance in South Asia* (2004) discusses the patriarchal system and ideology, gendered roles, domestic violence, irrelevance of western notions of feminism, its connections with Marxist ideology, and the need to develop a theory to constitute regional feminism to cater to the sufferings and oppression of the women from South Asia.

Gender, Politics, and Islam (2005), edited by Saliba, Allen, and Howard, broadens the definition of feminism to include Muslim women. The essays in this collection challenge Orientalist assumptions about Muslim women as victims of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism, focusing instead on the complex power dynamics that shape women's struggles for identity, authority, and agency as they participate in religious, cultural, and nationalist movements. It also examines how women manage indigenous identities and seek political, economic, and legal rights in the South Asian Diaspora. Many feminists continue to consider religion in general, and fundamentalism in particular, as a problematic instrument of oppression used against women, rather than as a viable form of feminist agency that creates paradoxical results for women involvement, as revealed by this collection of writings.

Shahnaz Rouse's *Shifting Body Politics- Gender, Nation, State in Pakistan* (2004) is a collection of three essays that explores the changing parameters of struggles over gender in Pakistan. The author has attempted to theoretically traverse the boundaries between public and private domains, the state and civil society. The individual and the collective identities are also looked at from the feministic perspective. The book also looks at topics like sovereignty and citizenship and the growing tensions between militarism, masculinism and fundamentalism. She also regrets the shrinking democratic spaces in Pakistan, which make the environment more suffocating.

Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh (2011) by Yasmin Saikia examines nationalist liberation histories as accounts of heroic struggle and victory. Through the people's narrative of 1971, the author attempts to discover the relationship between nationalism and violence. The author explores the different experiences of Bangladeshi women throughout the 1971 conflict, strangely referred to as the War of Liberation, based on oral histories. Women discuss widespread rape and torture, loss of status and citizenship, and 'war babies' born after 1971. The 1947 unfinished partition reappeared here. The book also looks at their post-war efforts to restore a sense of humanity, to reconcile and heal unsolved wounds, as well as their wartime ruthlessness. By interrogating the construction of a new country and simultaneously providing a challenge to historiography in Bangladesh, this book sheds fresh light on the link between nation, history, and gender in postcolonial South Asia, revealing the various gaps in official and unofficial histories.

Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy (2006) by Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal is a brief overview of modern South Asian history, focusing on developments in economy, culture, and politics from 1700 to the present day in the South Asian Subcontinent, notably India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Throughout the book, the topics of regional and religious identities, as well as the complex interaction between religion and politics, are examined, revealing how the evolving parameters of South Asian historiography coincided with decolonisation processes. The work's principal focus is on colonialism and the post-colonial period, positing colonialism as a historical change agent situated in a social context and analysed in relation to culture and resistance politics.

The authors mainly rely on Edward Said's Orientalist theories, demonstrating how much of the historiography surrounding South Asia is muddied by inaccurate information. According to them, the West's incapacity to comprehend the East is a key factor in the formation of contradictory conceptions of the Indian subcontinent, many of which this book aims to dispel. Here, too, the dual dialectics of centralism-regionalism and nationalism-communitarianism are crucial.

The Fear That Stalks, Gender-based Violence in Public Spaces (2012) is a book edited by Sara Pilot and Lora Prabhu. The book explores how women’s body is used as a battleground to settle scores and assert power. The rape and atrocities committed by armed forces in conflict zones, instances of honour killing, moral policing, parading women naked, tonsuring, witch hunting and acid throwing are all seen types of violence against women. The book tries to provide a framework for understanding the nature and dimensions of gender-based violence in public spaces. It contributes to an informed debate on strategies to tackle the issue.

Aimee Raza's thesis titled *Resonant Silences Literary Radicalism in Contemporary Afghan Women Writings* was submitted to the Department of English, the University of Lucknow, in 2017. This work begins with a brief introduction to the political turmoil in Afghanistan and how women are affected by this. The thesis has highlighted four significant results of Afghan women writers, Meena, and her efforts in forming the RAWA, an organisation to help the oppressed women. The following chapters focus on memoirs by Latifa and Zoya titled My forbidden Face and Zoya's Story, respectively. These stories highlight the plight of women in the war struck and religious fundamentalist regime of the Taliban. The fundamental rights of the citizens were at stake. The last chapter is about Malalai Zoya, a brave woman who fought for women's rights in the parliament. Her work A Women Among the Warlords is discussed here. This work of Zoya is essential for the study as the present thesis also focuses on this as one of the primary texts. The significant themes highlighted here are women's oppression and how their writings have revolutionised the country of Afghanistan.

Sadia Hasan's thesis titled *The Novels of Kamila Shamsie: A Study in Themes and Techniques* was submitted to the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, in 2013. The thesis traces the history of women's writings in Pakistan and how the diaspora women writers have contributed and adopted techniques and styles to suit the necessities of the genre of a novel. The work has in detail looked at five stories. Though the summary of the books is essential here, not much has spoken about the extrinsic factors contributing to the making of the novels. Religion, politics and women are mentioned just in passing. But for the present study, the themes have contributed much.

Bleeding Afghanistan: Washington, Warlords, and the Propaganda of Silence (2006) by Sonali Kolhatkar and James Ingalls provides a comprehensive, in-depth study on the injustices caused by US policies in Afghanistan following 9/11. Bleeding Afghanistan investigates the links between US training and arming of Mujahideen commanders and the current undermining of Afghan democracy using available official documents and interviews. Bleeding Afghanistan aggressively criticises both conservative and liberal use of Afghan women to justify war, as well as unquestioning media coverage of US policy. It investigates how the United States benefits from its presence in Afghanistan. This book has greatly aided the research team's understanding of the predicament of women in Afghanistan.

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Chapter II

Understanding Violence: Looking Through the Glass

Various forms of violence have characterised and been remembered throughout the twentieth century. It leaves us with a legacy of mass destruction; brutality on a scale never previously seen or possible in human history. However, this legacy is the result of new technology used to promote hate ideas. Individual pain is a gift that is less obvious and even more universal. It is the suffering of children who are abused by those who are supposed to protect them, women who are battered or humiliated by violent partners, elderly people who are mistreated by their caregivers, youths who are bullied by other youths, and people of all ages who commit acts of violence against themselves. This pain is a legacy that is passed down the years as new generations learn from previous generations' violence, as victims learn from perpetrators, and as the social conditions that foster violence are permitted to persist.

There is no country, city, or community that is immune to violence. It is also true that in cultures where the authorities approve of the use of violence through their actions, various forms of violence are more widespread. Violence is so prevalent in many organisations that it impasses economic and social development efforts. Many people who live with violence on a daily basis believe it is an unavoidable part of life. However, this is not the case. Violence can be made illegal. Cultures that are violent can be changed. Governments, communities, and individuals all have the ability to make a significant difference. It illuminates the many faces of violence, from the unseen pain of society's most vulnerable people to the all-too-visible agony of conflict-torn organisations.

It broadens our understanding of the variables that contribute to violence and the potential responses of various sectors of society. And in doing so, it reminds us that safety and security are the consequence of communal agreement and public investment. While violence has traditionally been the realm of the criminal justice system, the community's strong will is required to attain a life free of fear and violence. Only then will we be able to proclaim what we have learned from history, lamented Nelson Mandela in his foreword to the WHO Report on Violence and Health.

> "I come from a country which was created at midnight. When I almost died, it was just after midday. One year ago, I left my home for school and never returned. I was shot by a Taliban bullet and was flown out of Pakistan unconscious. Some people say I will never return home, but I believe firmly that I will. Being torn from the country you love is not something to wish on anyone" (Malala, prologue).

The above quotation from Malala's autobiography, *I am Malala,* published in 2013, reveals the pathetic state of young girls who fight for their right to education. As society is technologically advancing, violence on the helpless is increasing manifolds.

In this context, this present chapter will look at the nature of gendered violence in South Asia, Definitions of different types of violence, namely Physical, Structural and Epistemic. Further, the study will look at how the Muslim countries have experienced the trauma and pain inflicted on women; The selected writings from women writers are also used to illustrate the point. The study will also look at Islam and Feminism and their present relevance.

Gendered Violence in South Asia

The most fundamental social divide is based on sex and gender. Most prominent institutions, including the home, the workforce, politics, and religion, have it as their organisational foundation. Women's gendered roles are viewed as subordinate to men over the world. Women's roles in reproduction and support activities are enforced by the gender divide, which limits their autonomy, participation in decision-making, and highly-paid roles, putting them at danger. The process is aided by social, cultural, and psychological forces. Gender-based violence is a worldwide epidemic that affects the daily lives of women and girls, yet it is the most overlooked and normalised kind of abuse. Women consider violence against them as 'normal' due to their social surroundings and cultural training. 'At least one woman in every three has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused around the world,' according to estimates. “Most often, the abuser is a member of her family” (Bhatla 238).

Within South Asia, this takes in a variety of violent forms, ranging from domestic violence to region-specific types of honour killing and acid throwing. Gender inequality and power imbalances between the sexes are at the root of all violence against women. Women suffer silently, whether in public or in private. Violence against women is viewed as one of the major factors impeding women's and children's human rights around the world. It is thought to be rooted in historical imbalances between men and women and recognised as a barrier to equality, development, and peace. The United Nations define it as:

> "Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (The United Nations, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women Article 1, 1993).

The declaration further outlines the possibility of private space and public space to include violence in the family/home, violence in the community/society, and violence perpetrated or overlooked by the state, wherever it occurs. Typically, the forms of violence have been categorised into the following three,

1. Violence in the family: such as Domestic Violence; battering; marital rape; incest; forced prostitution by the family; violence against domestic workers and the girl child - non-spousal violence, violence related to exploitation; sex-selection, abortion and infanticide; traditional practices such as female genital mutation; dowry-related violence; and religious/ customary laws.
2. Violence in the community: such as rape and sexual assault; sexual harassment; violence within institutions; trafficking and forced prostitution; violence against women migrant workers; and pornography.
3. Violence perpetrated or condoned by the state: gender-based violence during armed conflict; custodial violence; violence against refugees and internally displaced persons. (Bhatla 241)

The fusion of many religious traditions has formed women's personalities and dictated their social status in South Asian countries. The pervasive reports of violence against women and children are the outcome of rigid cultures and patriarchal views that

devalue women's roles. The family structure allows violence to occur within the four walls because the male is the unquestionable monarch of the household and actions in the household or family are considered as private. Wife abuse and sexual assault, dowry crimes such as bride burning, kidnapping for prostitution, and honour killings leave her with no place to hide. The majority of the time, these violent acts are not reported to the authorities.

Even though she has every legal right to access, the severe conventions here prevent any woman from seeking justice. Traditional attitudes faced by women in obtaining the rights granted to them by local legislation validate a problem of unfairness, oppression, and helplessness in South Asian countries.

Agriculture-based economy, the tribal, feudal system, and patriarchal norms that place women in a subordinate role are all historical aspects of Asian countries. Women in rural are still treated as bonded labourers. Another trait is the prevalence of polygamy, which further degrades women's position. Although polygamy is permitted in Islam, women are treated equally. Men are allowed four marriages, but women's freedom to remarry is frowned upon by society. Today's culture in Muslim-majority countries in South Asia is diametrically opposed to Islamic religious precepts. As a means of discipline and punishment, violence is justified. Because rape and sexual abuse are considered sexual actions, victims are made to feel uncomfortable, and they are rarely willing to speak up, let alone pursue their offenders. Individual norms and standards regarding violence, gender, and sexual relationships are not the sole manifestations of cultural norms and standards. They are, however, reinforced or not by family, community, and the broader social milieu, which includes the media. In order to comprehend violence, historical and theological attributions are required.

Islam and Violence

In Asia, Islam is believed to be a relatively new religion. In the 12th century A.D., it crossed the Khyber Pass on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border into the Sindh province of modern-day Pakistan. In "Violence against Women in South Asian Countries," Niaz states that the standing of women in Islam was significantly higher than that afforded by Hinduism and Buddhism, and that Islam allowed women the legal right to possess property, marry, and divorce. Her social standing in the community was similar to that of a man, and it was determined by her actions. However, over time, and as a result of its basic precepts of open-mindedness and reverence for other religions, Islam grew eclectic to local cultures in India, and its perspective of women's role shifted to reflect the host country's culture. Women excelled in literature, medicine, and battle throughout early Islam, she claims.

As a result, throughout the Mughal Era, which lasted more than 600 years in the Indian Subcontinent, there were numerous female kings, great intellectuals, poets, philosophers, and writers, as well as a fine blend of Muslim and Hindu culture. During British control, education was widely available; nevertheless, due to the widespread closure of elementary schools, women's education, particularly among the poor, experienced a substantial setback. Women's skill training was likewise phased out. While most men shifted to more lucrative careers outside the home, women maintained to keep the crafts alive at home.

The patriarchal beliefs that encourage female inferiority in Hindu culture were absorbed by Islam. These male-dominated habits and rituals were passed down the generations, culminating in familial violence and the expectation that women would always be his subordinate and dependent. It became a norm for women to depend on father,

husband or her son in different stages of her life. In his book *The Colours of Violence*, Sudhir Kakar argues that women freely admit their ignorance of Islamic tenets and traditions. None of them knows what is strictly contained in the Quran. Although a few youngsters have been taught to recite it, they do not know the meaning. Their faith consists of following a simple moral code which makes them pious: cleanliness of body and purity of mind, respect for the aged, remembering Allah often, saying namaz when the call comes from the mosque, and keeping fast of the Rozas. Women's rights and religious beliefs will contribute to her imprisonment in 'false consciousness'. (156).

Hence, in most nations today, Islam is the male interpretation of ignorant or semi-educated Maulanas, Ulema, and priests. This interpretation encompasses all of the negative consequences, such as gender inequality and subjection, denying women's inheritance rights, divorce and marriage, remarriage, and so on. Today, the prevailing culture in South Asian Muslim countries is diametrically opposed to Islamic religious beliefs. Women in Afghanistan, for example, were denied the right to education, job, health care, legal remedies, and recreation under Taliban control. Another discussion of violence is required to grasp the essence of the study.

Theories about violence against women

Though not a concrete idea or thought regarding the nature of violence is lacking in academic jargon, one has to go by the disciplinary approach here. Violence is made to look at as the cause-and-effect relationship and nothing concrete about the act itself, making the topic of study difficult and scope for further research in the field. Many traditional social attitudes towards women continue amongst the people across these countries. Even to this day, with easy access to knowledge and information it is difficult to

erase or change the prejudiced notions about women. One such idea is that a girl child from birth has to live a life as the shadow of the male member. She is considered a property who has to go to another home after marriage. That is the reason why she has no rights and is regarded as a liability and unwanted in her household, thus denying her the opportunity for education and health.

The tragedy does not end there because a woman has no place outside the home of her father, guardian, husband, and son. Her only job is as a mute housekeeper and child bearer at her husband's house. If this ritual is broken, societal traditions call for honour killings or other forms of punishment. An eleven-year-old kid was seen travelling with a girl of a higher caste in a tragic incident in a rural community in Pakistan. As a punishment, four older village men were forced to gang-rape his eighteen-year-old sister. Some hypotheses, according to Niaz, explain the prevalence and occurrence of violence against women in South Asian societies.

The first is the stereotype of men as macho beings. Aggression is an important part of macho characteristics. Men believe they are strong and demonstrate this by being aggressive toward women. The second idea is male chauvinism, which explains why males are regarded indispensable in South Asian civilization. Without men, women feel insecure, incomplete, ineffective, and inefficient. According to this belief, the male member is dominant in society, while female members are required to be submissive. Men can take advantage of women's frailty. The third concept is one of loss of control, which is more psychological than physical. When a male member of a family discovers that his wife or another member of the community or society is becoming stronger due to her intellectual

talents, he attempts to control her through acts of violence until she surrenders to him. This heinous conduct is intended to stifle women's personal growth and advancement.

Finally, there is the concept of effect displacement. Afghanistan's 20-year-long war, unemployment, and inflation have resulted in societal discontent, powerlessness, and hostility, which requires an outlet. Domestic violence against women and children, which is obviously less dangerous for them, provides an easy outlet for men.

As a result, committing violent crimes against weak and dependent women fits his objective of displaying the dominating and powerful male's hostility without placing himself in danger. Although various ideas exist regarding the origins of domestic violence, the structure of the family permits it to occur. The family structure validates sentiments or occurrences that have been recognised as causes of domestic violence. Family arrangements that place men as the unquestioned head of the family and maintain that what happens in the family is personal and private allow for domestic abuse.

Occurrence of various types of violence

Many western researchers are interested in multicultural anthropological and ethnographic studies of violence against women. One such study, Levinson's *Family Violence in Cross-Cultural Perspective and the Review of 14 Cultures* by Counts, identifies the role of social and cultural mores, including those around gender relations, in the acceptance and promotion of violence against women. It is discovered that the presence and severity of wife-beating ranged from very frequent to almost nonexistent, despite physical punishment. They discovered that the presence of "sanctuaries" for women experiencing violence, such as the family and community intervention in marital problems and divorce, was related with lower levels of violence, and vice versa. “Higher levels of

violence were tolerated in cultures with a "macho" concept of masculinity based on being powerful, domineering, and tough" (Campbell,115).

Cultural norms regarding violence, gender, and sexual relationships are not only developed at the individual level, but they are also reinforced by the family, community, and the larger social milieu, including the media. Campbell has also stated that traditionally, cultural ideas have sanctioned husbands' dominance over wives, including the use of violence. Globalization and the urbanisation of emerging countries, however, may be contributing to the elimination of some of these protective variables, according to Finkler in *Gender, Domestic Violence, and Sickness*. They have reduced community punishments and contributed to the separation of women from their extended relatives. One of the topics considered in the framework of international studies is the cross-cultural applicability of terminology. Anthropologists and women's health advocates have emphasised the difficulty in developing worldwide classifications, as well as the fact that views of what constitutes violence against women differ greatly among cultures. Because universal classification methods cannot fully account for cultural differences, WHO recommends using them with caution in the 1996 "Violence Against Women Report".

Violence is allowed or fostered by societal norms and conventions in all communities. Whether socially acceptable or not, these behaviours and their consequences for women's health and life must be documented. Addressing solely culturally unacceptable types of violence does not address the whole range of women's needs. According to recent World Health Organization (WHO) statistics, 20 percent to 50 percent of women report physical violence by their male partners. This is a global sample research conducted in 24 nations.

Physical Violence

Gender-based violence, which is frequently directed at women of various ages, is a pervasive social problem in modern nations. It is incongruous to witness the rising rate of violence against women and children in Muslim countries, which has continually contributed to the negative perception that Islam condemns all forms of violence. This broadening sparked a global debate over Islamic feminism.

In *Theorizing the Politics of Islam Feminism*, Mojab writes, "from the outset, the debate was centred on the compatibility of the idea of women's independence with the values of Islam" (127). The overall concept of Islamic feminism, while clearly intended to present an Islamic alternative to the modern feminism discourse, focuses more on women's independence, freedom, and empowerment. This reflects a strong assumption that women are oppressed in Islam and are treated as second-class citizens, if not subhumans, by the state. This idea has been misrepresented in the mainstream media as reflecting the genuine nature of Islam, as the West believes. The practical realities of most Muslim communities cannot refute such arguments; thus, the prevalence of Islamic feminist groups. While some feminists feel that misogyny is to blame for the increased threat of violence against women, violence against women is limited to strangers and the increasing rate of violence by intimate partners. This has been felt in various Muslim countries, necessitating deliberate attempts to return to the Qur'an, Islam's fundamental source, and Sunnah in order to reinvent the wheel and apply Islamic precepts to modern cultures.

Aside from the recognised violence against women, there are innumerable others that are either unrecorded or underrecorded. This is a common difficulty for experts when detailing situations of abuse against women. In many situations, unreported occurrences

fall far short of ideals. On a worldwide scale, statistics show that rates of violence against women mirror particular cultural, religious, and racial traditions. In recent years, there has been an increase in the occurrence of 'honour killings' in Muslim countries around the world. South Asian countries are known for 'honour killing,' a sort of honor-based violence.

The most visible manifestation of male chauvinism is the anguish caused by aggression against women's bodies, such as assault, rape, and murder. Physical violence against women may be considered the most serious concern among the numerous sorts of violence covered here since it eventually threatens the very survival of the persons against whom it is perpetrated. However, the visible nature of physical violence should not lead one to believe that violence against women is a conceptually or historically sanctioned uncomplicated phenomena.

The analysis of types and forms of violence faced by girls and women is organised approximately by life stage and in the Ecological Framework.

Life-Cycle Approach

The life-cycle framework includes the period before birth when sex-selective abortion is reported to occur on occasion in the region. Sex-selective abortion is an essential manifestation of the persistence of a preference for sons and low value generally assigned to girls, particularly in South Asia, notes Arnold, Kishor, and Roy in their article “Sex-Selection, Abortions in India”. (759). The role of son preference is manifested by excess female child mortality from birth to age five. A girl child is considered a liability in these areas. In South Asian countries, this preference for boy children is not new. For convenience, the study will look at the writings from Pakistan here. In Tehmina Durrani’s *Blasphemy,* the protagonist Heena is subjugated to physical torture after giving birth to a

daughter. Pir Sain, her husband, is happy only when she delivers a boy child. The delivery assures the legal heir to the throne of his son. Even in *My Feudal lord*, the situation is not different.

Infertility is also an issue that must be addressed because it lowers the status of women in these civilizations. In many circumstances, this is cited as a reason to choose taalak or divorce. Girls face female infanticide and child abuse in addition to newborn and child mortality. All of these forms are defined as violence against women by the United Nations since they directly contribute to the psychological, physical, or sexual injury or suffering of women and girls. Decisions to prioritise the health and nourishment of male newborns and children above female infants and children, for example, are regarded as acts of violence and neglect in this context. In many instances, the psychological harm done to the women is not accounted for. In one incident in Durrani's autobiography, after surgery, she goes to the prison to meet Kha; her wound is still wet; Khar forces Durrani for sexual advances, resulting in bleeding from the injury. The trauma one undergoes here should be emphasised here. She becomes an agency for men to vent their frustrated emotions, and her bold self is sacrificed.

The following stage is adolescence, which lasts until a person achieves the age of majority, which usually occurs during the teen years or just before. The age of majority is almost universally recognised as 18 years, as 192 countries are state stakeholders to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, the majority is attained earlier" (UNOHCHR 1990). Although most research on violence against women and girls and reproductive health uses the term "adolescence" to refer to

people aged 10 to 19, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have used the term "adolescent" to refer to people aged 10 to 19. (WHO 2004; UNICEF 2011). Girls begin their shift from childhood to adulthood when they reach adolescence. Because adolescence coincides with the start of girls' reproductive years, adolescence is universally associated with the start of female sexuality. Adolescence is one of the few times in life when biological and marital life stages collide. The problem of incest is also seen here. In *Blasphemy*, Pir Sain becomes a real villain for both mother and daughter, as he insists on having sex with his daughter for Heen; this is a double burden to rescue her daughter and make alternative arrangements for her husband.

From Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva to Gayle Rubin and Judith Butler, some of the most exciting thinking of the last quarter of the 20th century has been on the subject of sexuality. In the post-Foucauldian era, the connotations of the term sexuality have extended much beyond the original sense of a natural, biological desire. Foucault's path-breaking inquiry on the discursive edifice of sexuality in the nineteenth century in *The History of Sexuality* has transformed our understanding of the term. In this monumental work, he extends his long-term concern with how power is manipulated to produce control methods in the area of sexuality. Foucault's observation on sexuality is a "dense transfer point for relations of power" (103). He shows that sexuality is a domain saturated with power, produced through the complex interaction of multiple discursive and institutional practices. Under such theories, sexuality is no longer considered a natural occurrence but a natural consequence. We have also moved beyond sexual essentialism, which evaluates expressions of sexuality as the property of individuals, "unchanging, asocial, and transhistorical" (Gayle 288). Cameron and Kulick's definition of sexuality as "the socially

constructed expression of sexual desire" (4) does not fully explain our understanding that specific historic-cultural situations shape constructions of sexuality.

Pir Sain, a character in Durrani's work who will be described in length in the following Chapter, exhibits a wide range of violent behaviour throughout the narrative. They are also at risk of underage marriage and forced marriage if they do not take action. Given the defining role that marriage plays in South Asia, adolescent girls are equally vulnerable to physical, sexual, and emotional assault as married adult women of reproductive age and older married women once married. An intimate relationship and domestic violence, which is prevalent globally as a kind of violence against women, and dowry violence, which is peculiar to South Asia, are the two types of violence examined in depth for married women. While marriage exposes these women to the risk of abuse, their identity and status as a result of marriage can also provide some safety. Tahmima Anam's writings show how women from three generations endure from widowhood and isolation from children. Women who are no longer married—divorcees and widows—no longer have the same rights.

Widows and divorcees experience sexual, physical, and emotional violence, as well as economic and cultural violence that is peculiar to their life stages as determined by marriage. Given the early age of marriage in much of South Asia, widowhood can occur at any biological life stage. The third stage of life studied is that of older women.

Women in their forties and fifties may be married, divorced, widowed, or never married. As a result, their kids may confront a variety of forms of violence that are not limited to a specific life stage. Other forms of sexual harassment in public places include honour killing, human trafficking, and custodial abuse. The continuing centrality of

marriage as a life stage in social and cultural standards challenges the increasing prevalence and concerns of women who never marry. Violence research focuses on risk factors rather than causes of violence; a risk factor contributes to violence by raising the likelihood of its occurrence. Likewise, protective variables reduce the likelihood of violence.

Ecological Approach

As Heise in *What Works to Prevent Partner Violence? An Evidence Overview* explains: "These norms and expectations are shaped by structural factors—such as religious institutions and ideology and the distribution of economic power between men and women—that define beliefs and norms about violence and structure women's options for escaping violent relationships." (iv) Sociocultural factors themselves can be imagined to operate at two levels: (a) through those structures that impinge directly on the individual's immediate context, and (b) through the broader social norms that influence those structures. Adapted to suit the South Asian context, the writer categorises to arrive at the following definitions of each social ecology level:

- Social norms are the sociocultural values and beliefs that overlay all other layers of the social ecology and influence dynamics in these different layers of communication.
- Institutions and system factors are the formal and informal structures—for example, economic, legal, political, and so forth—that influence a person's immediate environment (that is, household, interpersonal relationship) and determine the dynamics in those settings. At this level, which can include local communities, factors "are often the byproducts of changes in the larger social milieu" (273).

- Household and relationship factors pertain to the interactions in an individual's immediate environment in which a person directly engages with others and the subjective meanings assigned to those interactions.
- Individual factors are those features of an individual's developmental experience or personality that shape their response to stressors within the domestic and in interpersonal relationships and the local community.

Structural/ Institutional Violence

The term 'Structural Violence' has been defined and understood in various contexts and disciplines since the 1960s. While Brock-Utne provides several definitions, Farmer, Galtung, Montesanti, and Thurston, as well as Winter and Leighton, present specific basic characteristics of structural violence. A complicated interplay of economic, political, and social factors entrenched in the way society is organised is one of the repeating themes. As a result, certain groups of individuals face disparities or are exploited, resulting in inadequate living opportunities. Inequality is a manifestation of unequal power dynamics inherent in society's 'structures,' as well as unequal access to income among persons from affluent and poor backgrounds. Structures are not neutral in and of themselves, but can be seen as a collective pattern of social action that has reached some degree of stability.

Structured violence is reinforced and maintained by intergenerational acceptance of customs and societal standards, as well as gender socialisation of children by their parents and relatives. The obscurity of structural violence, particularly as institutions, both public and private, normalise it, makes it impossible to collect and measure the problem. As a result, structural violence can be defined as unjust and unequal differences within large-scale social structures — differences in power, wealth, privilege, education, and

health. It can also happen in society when institutions and regulations are set up to create barriers or discriminatory access to a variety of products and services for some people but not for others. Thus, structural violence manifests itself in everyday life when certain individuals lack appropriate food, shelter, health, safe working conditions, education, economic stability, clothing, and family relationships.

Indeed, Farmer, in his book *pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights and the New War on the Poor,* asserts that structural violence is “not the result of an accident or a force majeure; [it is] the consequence, direct or indirect, of human agency” (28). Ho theorises in his book *Structural Violence as a Human Rights Violation* that human agency is bound by structures that represent an unequal allocation of power. While structural violence might result in unavoidable death, it can also result in psychological suffering, a lack of social mobility, and unequal life chances in education and health. People face acute social oppression as a result of structural violence, which erodes human dignity and its associated characteristics such as confidence, security, and total well-being.

The relationship between institutional violence and interpersonal violence is complicated, with the former being seen to underpin the latter. While both cause pain and death, Winter and Leighton argue in *Structural Violence* that the negative impact of structural violence is "slower, subtler, more common, and more difficult to remediate" (99). Various forms of structural violence have been reported globally, but with a focus on understanding structural violence and the health inequalities that ensue. However, the importance of structural violence in gender-based violence has recently gained traction. Inequities lead to exploitation, discrimination, and coerced choice, which is how systemic violence manifests itself. Structural violence refers to the multiple material harms that

women suffer as a result of insufficient and unaffordable education and health care, abusive employment conditions, pervasive poverty, and other factors that undermine women's lives without physically injuring them.

The structural violence analysis is strong because it accounts for disadvantages that shorten or degrade women's lives and links the sometimes-confusing reasons to social, political, and economic structures. Rather than accepting these conditions as a neutral element of the site, attention to structural violence gives agency, and so blame, to social, political, and economic factors that perpetuate structural conditions that hurt women.

Women in Muslim countries have been subjected to structural violence for a long time. Even today, they are struggling with primary healthcare and education, legal and religious sanctions. One has to understand Barthes here, who says “it is one of the functions of ideology to ‘naturalise’ social reality, to make it seem as innocent and unchangeable as Nature itself. Ideology seeks to convert culture into Nature, and the natural sign is one of its weapons”. Ideology, according to him, is a kind of contemporary mythology, a realm that has purged itself of ambiguity and alternative possibilities. (Eagleton, 117).

As Abu-Lughod *in Do Muslim Women need Savings? Reflections on Cultural relativism and its Others* puts it, framing the oppression of women in Afghanistan as a problem caused merely by the Taliban's severe winding of faith and culture "prevented the serious exploration of the roots and nature of human suffering in this part of the world" while "recreating an imaginative geography of West versus East, Us versus Muslims" (784). Although arguably performed by every decontextualised image of a burqa-shrouded Afghan woman, it reduced the status of women to a mere act of terrorism. If the root cause

is not defined but rather glorified for political reasons, the purpose of emancipation of women from the structures is impossible. Many reports suggest the conditions improved after the US intervention; women are far behind in accessing the needs of education and health care, a primary component of her empowerment.

To illustrate the point, one has to look at the beginning lines of Malalai Joya's memorial, which reads as follows,

> I come from a land of a tragedy called Afghanistan.
>
> My life has taken some unusual turns, but my story is the story of a generation in many ways. For the thirty years I have been alive, my country has suffered from the constant scourge of war. Most Afghans my age and younger have only known bloodshed, displacement, and occupation. When I was a baby in my mother's arms, the Soviet Union invaded my country. When I was four years old, my family and I were forced to live as refugees in Iran and Pakistan. Millions of Afghans were killed or exiled, like my family, during the battle-torn 1980s. When the Russians finally left, and their puppet regime was overthrown, we faced a vicious civil war between fundamentalist warlords, followed by the rule of the depraved and medieval Taliban. (1)

Ultimately the western discourses that associate gender oppression and violence with religious practices mask its ignorance in understanding the law of the land. The suffering of the refugee women, homelessness after the war, and deprivation of education and health care in Taliban ruled Afghanistan are all seen in the writings from Pakistan,

Afghanistan and Bangladesh. Though subtly done, this kind of violence has to be understood from a Marxist perspective when Eagleton says, “the originality of Marxist criticism lies not in its historical approach to literature, but in its revolutionary understanding of history itself” (3).

Epistemic Violence

“The image of veiled women captioned “The Face of Islam” appears in striking juxtaposition to photos of the crumbling Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. Featured in a *New York Times* Photo essay of the year 2001, these oft-repeated media images link the oppression of Muslim women to terrorist violence” (December 31, 2001) (Saliba 1). According to Saliba, the dominant rhetoric suggests that the face of Islam would be revealed by US military troops, whose victory against Taliban forces is portrayed by joyous images of Afghani women shedding their burqas. There appears to be a significant agreement that the burqa, a heavy garment covering a woman's whole body with only a tiny screen for view, has become a widespread emblem of women's oppression in Muslim nations.

Such symbolism is easy to comprehend in the context of the Taliban's stringent imposition of the required burqa on all Afghan women, where the slightest variance in dress was frequently greeted with public brutality. Oppression is not inherent in Islamic covering traditions, but is socially produced through rhetoric. Throughout history, covering has served a variety of purposes. Post-9/11 stereotypical images of subjugated burqa-clad women frequently overlook its use by Afghan feminists. As evidenced in many women's writings from Afghanistan, the burqa provided an acceptable cover for smuggling books and supplies to a network of underground schools, cameras documenting Taliban crimes,

and women fleeing persecution. Some feminists have passionately opposed the notion that these actions are "empowering" (Moghissi 42-7).

However, as in *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* remark, "to assume that the mere practice of veiling women in several Muslim countries indicates the universal oppression of women through sexual segregation not only is analytically reductive but also proves quite useless when it comes to the elaboration of oppositional political strategy" (Mohanty, 67). The ramifications of such analytical reductionism are not only theoretical; the homogenization of Muslim covering practises follows the same paternalistic logic that underpins neocolonial policies to "liberate" Afghan women according to an explicitly Western image of liberal feminism. This act illustrates that Islam's face is neither essential or homogenous, and that Muslim women are not simply passive victims of their faith and culture.

The face of Islam is a complex composite—a heterogeneous set of historically and contextually variable practises and beliefs shaped by region, ethnicity, sect, and class, as well as varying responses to local and transnational cultural and economic processes—all of which have varying effects on Muslim women's lives. The appropriation of the burqa by the United States after 9/11 is reminiscent of depictions of women in colonial territories, and colonial discourses provide useful parallels to what Spivak says in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* in a brutal critique of the authoritarian feminism that informed the British colonial ban on sati in India. The voice of women who practised sati was usually lacking from British reports of this tradition, in which a widow would burn herself on her husband's funeral fire. As Spivak remarks, "[t]he agency was always male; the woman was always the victim" (298).

According to Said in his book *Orientalism*, Western discourses revealed sexualized Orientalism with no express intent in reducing women's oppression. For the western world, these ladies were portrayed as sensual objects. French and British colonists saw veiling in particular as a universal sign of women's degradation and Islam's backwardness. Women's status as objects remains fixed under such obligations because they are denied the ability to express differences, securing their place in the existing first/third-world imperialistic order. Spivak saw Jane Eyre as an ideal for the oriental, whereas the American lady was for Afghan women. To comprehend the Epistemology of the violence perpetrated by certain Western discourses regarding Islam, women, and the burqa, three rhetorical patterns can be discerned. The demonization of the burqa, the homogenization of Islam, and the fetishization of revealing are among the floral motifs.

Spivak uses ‘Epistemic Violence’ in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” to refer to the voiceless and the marginalised groups. Thus, epistemology, a branch of philosophy, is concerned with the nature, scope, and boundaries of knowledge: any claim made within the philosophical sphere necessitates epistemological scrutiny and inquiry. Epistemology is concerned with knowledge issues such as truth, belief, and justification. We have defined knowledge as belief since Plato. Classical epistemological theories are absolutist, but later views emphasised relativity or situation dependence, constant development or evolution, and active interaction with the world and its subjects and objects. Postmodernists, on the other hand, rejected this because epistemic discourses devoid of social, cultural, and political context make no sense.

According to contemporary epistemologies, there are no time and space-bound constraints for belief acquisition. Feminist, postcolonial, and subaltern epistemologies question the foundations of absolute knowledge, advocate for the rejection of standard evidential criteria for learning, and suggest knowing as a "causal condition." These theories critically examine the production, dissemination, and subordination of information imposed on its people. The Spivakian concept of epistemic violence is situated within imperialism, which constructs an epistemic 'other' in a schematic fashion, as well as the implications of epistemic violence in postcolonial discourse in the context of Third-World Feminism.

In *Post-colonial Theory: An Introduction*, Leela Gandhi says both Post-colonial and Feminist theory has defensed the marginal ‘Other’. They rejected the binary oppositions upon which patriarchal and colonial authority constructs itself. The controversial figure of the “third-world women” inevitably elides the ‘double colonisation’ between men and the coloniser. (83). It is not only the rhetoric of the burqa that is significant in western discourses about South Asian Muslim women but also the position of the speaking subject. Especially when the western media tries to interview these victims of war or terrorism, the questions asked or the answers provided by the women can be or more likely will be distorted or accommodated to fit in the western discourse of third world women. Spivak refers to epistemic violence when she refers to narratives of sati, testimonials, and similar descriptions. Lata Mani provides an equal and deep insight in her essay “The female Subject and the Colonial gaze”.

It would be a mistake to believe that writing exclusively on the Western appropriation of the third world through representations of South Asian Muslim women

can accurately represent the actual content of "the West" or the subject position possessed by Muslim women. As Spivak urges, the imperative "is to fix the critical glance not specifically at the putative identity of the two poles in a binary opposition, but at the hidden ethnopolitical agenda that drives the differentiation between the two" (331-2).

As a result, the study's major objective is to deconstruct the agenda motivating specific representations of Muslim women; we must recognise the need for a concurrent deconstruction of our decision to select the specific poles in the dichotomy challenged by our discourse. Even Foucault challenges the traditional, ahistorical notions of knowledge that are justified and universalised. He establishes a relationship between power and knowledge in connection with subjugated knowledge., which has to be dug from beneath. Theorists like Edward Said, Spivak and others have tried to understand how schematically, knowledge of the colonised is silenced, giving rise to the subaltern. Dominant episteme envelops a monolithic body of theoretical assertions that privilege specific knowledge segments in a subjective ‘non-mutual hierarchy’ in *The Empire Writes Back* (165).

While physical, domestic, structural, and institutional violence against women will continue to be a fundamental component of feminist theory and criticism, the war on terrorism and the discourse on women, particularly Muslim women, demonstrate that Western appropriation and homogenization of third-world women's voices executes a type of epistemic violence that must be spoken about and addressed alongside material oppressions. The West's portrayals of this region's women as gendered enslaved people in need of "rescue" institute epistemic violence, the development of a violent knowledge of the third world. Another component of eliminating women as subjects in international relations is neo-colonisation.

The west has portrayed itself as a saviour by professing to protect these women from persecution by oppressors, be it the Taliban or callous governments, resulting in little relief for women but trapping them otherwise. As previously indicated, the image of the Afghan woman wearing the burqa has played a crucial role in various public debates attempting to justify US military engagement in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. This rhetorical and recurrent framing of Afghan women as objects of knowledge legitimised US military intervention under the banner of "liberation," while obscuring the core reasons of structural violence in Afghanistan. As a result, the quest of gender sensitivity must account for the different ways in which Western neocolonialism produces epistemic contexts for material impairment in third-world and oppressed women discourses. Though the boundaries between epistemic, physical, and structural violence allow for analytic clarity because these forms of violence are distinct, untangling their complicated interdependence is difficult. These women's insecurity, both discursive and material, echoes and inflects several rather long-running theoretical disputes in feminism.

Disagreements about the representation of race and class, or the lack thereof, in feminist politics have splintered various organisations and movements over the last several decades. The issue of the western appropriation of Afghan women and Muslim women symbolising the burqa reveals the theoretical differences' unsustainable nature. Material oppression of women cannot be reduced to an array of floating signifiers; however, the danger of reducing representations of material situations to the alleged essence of women is as obvious. Through rhetorical criticism of the West's representation of South Asian women, one must argue for a theoretical convergence that will provide a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of gender insecurity in the modern world.

Understanding Muslim Feminism

Feminism in Islam has become the emphasis of exaggerated academic interest and a topic of public concern in recent years. This remains the subject of confusion, contestation, and considerable ignorance, both within and beyond Muslim communities in the East and west. According to Badran in *Feminism in Islam*, the term Feminism has been assumed non-existent by most in the west, who have claimed that "feminism and Islam" is an oxymoron (1). For western thinking, the Muslim religion cannot produce a discourse called feminism. And for many Muslim women, western feminism cannot be accommodated to their culture and goes against their faith. Many in the west have used the term 'oppressed Muslim Women' to display a concern for the women to justify their arrogant superiority. These opposing forces, the one disapproving of and the other hostile to Muslim women's feminism, have persisted for a long time. It is worthy to note that the feminisms Muslim women have created are feminisms of their own. They are not 'western', and they are not derivative (2).

Secular Feminism and Islamic Feminism

Muslim women have historically generated two significant feminist paradigms: "Secular Feminism" and "Islamic Feminism." During periods of modernisation, nationalist anti-colonial struggle, dynastic decline, and independent state-building, Muslim secular feminism evolved on the soil of numerous developing nations in Asia and Africa from the 19th century to the beginning of the twentieth. In the late twentieth century, during the postcolonial era, Islamic Feminism arose in the global arena in both the east and west. The intersection of secular nationalist and Islamic modernist discourses gave rise to secular

feminism. This has been action-oriented from the start, participating in social and political militancy. Indeed, it arose as a national social movement; but it was also international (3).

Islamic feminism, on the other hand, emerged as a new discourse of Islam and gender based on independent intellectual research of the Quran and other religious scriptures. This was also secular, and it cleared the path for gender equality and social transformation in certain settings.

Gender equality has been treated differently by the two feminisms. Emergent secular feminism insisted on gender equality in the public spheres while accepting gender complementarity in the private spheres. Secular feminists used Islamic modernist views to seek equal access for women to the public sphere in secular education, labour, and political rights, as well as the capacity for women to participate in congregational prayer in mosques. This enabled them to demand adjustments to Muslim personal status codes, or family law, and to advocate for the optimization of the practise of complementary roles and obligations in the family, insisting on men honouring their responsibilities. This, however, did not allow them to move beyond a patriarchal conception of the family in advocating for substantial changes in Muslim personal status or family law based on an egalitarian paradigm. The argument in Islamic feminism was that the patriarchal model of the family does not comply to religious values of human equality and gender justice in both the public and private domains. Gender equality is also provided in religious professions and mosque ceremonies.

Secular feminism must be understood in its plural form, often known as 'movement feminism' (4), which is erupting with new gender ideas. In a nutshell, Islamic feminism offers as a model for religious and socio-cultural development. The juxtaposition of these

two feminisms exemplifies how 'religious', like 'the secular' in the worldly sense, constitutes a vertical thread in the history of Muslim feminisms, and reveals the multiple valences of the term's 'secular' and 'religious,' and how their meanings, and our grasp of them, change over time. Examining secular feminism and Islam feminism side by side reveals the convergences rather than the divergences that may be assumed. This demonstrates how Muslim women as feminists deploy numerous discourses and identities, and how these have collaborated to achieve common aims.

For some years, feminists and activists from Islamic communities and their supporters have raised the issue of violence against South Asian women, particularly as part of this broader examination of the underlying assumptions of violence. Though the government and its agencies have made some efforts to draught provisions, policy attention has primarily concentrated on specific abuse forms. Violence Against Women, a concrete theory and study, have also been rather inadequate, choosing to add on factors of ethnicity and culture rather than scrutinising existing explanatory frameworks. To synthesise theory and practise on violence against women and race, one must focus on South Asian women, centre them, and investigate the impact of male dominance and violence, in combination with other forms of oppression, on individual and collective self. There is also a connection between previous and present discourses on race,ethnicity, nation, and violence, demonstrating how these interact to influence the lives of South Asian women and their experiences with violence and abuse.

In order to challenge binaries, it is critical to emphasise the significance of connecting theory with politics, research with practise, the personal with the structural, victimisation and agency, and patriarchal societies with the many forms of violence against

women. The study lays out a fundamental framework for comprehending the concerns of violence against South Asian women based on intersectionality. To fully grasp South Asian women's personal and communal experiences, both philosophically and practically, it is critical to emphasise the edifices of control and domination, rather than just cultural distinctions. Clearly, 'culture' and 'religion' are important aspects of South Asian women's lives. Culture, on the other hand, is viewed as a dynamic and disputed force rather than an inert and static monolith. As a result, it serves as both a source of subordination and a source of support for women. In *New European Women and New Cultural Forms*, Bhachu highlights the crucial role of South Asian women as diaspora members in recreating and redefining cultural morals, ethics, and norms as "cultural entrepreneurs." Simultaneously, the hope that South Asian women will guard and perform a type of "culture" that protects the interests of the patriarchal group, even if it is contrary to their needs, has been acknowledged. South Asian women activists, according to Patel and Thiara, navigate difficult terrain by opposing patriarchal power within their communities and exposing race and gender imbalances in the national parliament. Marginality, as evidenced by these activist struggles, presents potential for resistance, change, and oppression; nevertheless, these are far from simple processes.

South Asian women's collective efforts against gendered violence are taking place against the backdrop of shifting state policies on race, gender, and ethnicity on the one hand, and the increasing annihilation and privatisation of the state on the other. Despite increased attention paid to domestic violence, the establishment of new funding regimes for welfare services endangers the lives of South Asian women and children fleeing domestic violence by closing down routes to and from safe havens. According to Wilson

in *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain*, doing so destroys the same mechanisms that make women stronger. South Asian women, in particular, face several inconsistencies as a result of their location at the crossroads of multiple domination systems. According to Wilson, one component of the increased surveillance and focus on South Asian groups since 9/11 jeopardises South Asian women's ability to confront violence and abuse in their communities.

In order to overcome the present gap in information regarding South Asian women and violence against women, a body of writing by activists and researchers involved in contemporary debates concerning gender, race/racism, ethnicity, culture, and violence must be collected. Women's literature attempts to present an understanding of violence against South Asian women, recognising how their abuse is complicated and mediated by the convergence of systems of dominance based on race, ethnicity, class, culture, and nationality.

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Chapter III

Writings from Pakistan: From Resistance to Resilience

> The society of Pakistan has been one of the most contradictory, conflict-ridden and disputed ideas in South Asia over a few decades. It has manifold adherents and a range of detractors, which arouses intense passion and indignant anger. The notion of Pakistan is subject to diverse interpretations and a range of meanings. Various social groups and classes are locked in a struggle over what constitutes Pakistan, how it was imagined, what is it now and why it has become a tangible entity. So, it is more appropriate to think of ideas of Pakistan rather than a single one. It represents different things to different people, classes, ethnicities, regions, genders, religions and sects. It is not a coherent, monolithic, homogenous idea, and therefore debates around what characterises Pakistan are still raging in academic, ideological, cultural, and political circles (Saigol 1).

If defining a region becomes this difficult, one can imagine how ideas in Literature get intricate either in their language or in English. Ever since the formation of Pakistan as an independent country in 1947, there has been a continuous tradition of Pakistanis writing creatively in English, a language acquired by South Asia or the Indian sub-continent, as a direct result of the colonial encounter. The links between European literature, Islam, and the sub-continent date back into antiquity. Travel, trade, and conquest contributed to the transmutation of tales and literary forms across cultures. The bhakti poetry of India influenced the mystical Sufi poetry of Islam (Jalal 17); the vernacular influenced poetry of Europe with its theme of courtly love combined both a romantic and a spiritual yearning for the Beloved, resonates with Islamic mystic poetry.

However, when the European Renaissance and Europe's new nation-states asserted a uniquely European, Greco-Christian culture, Euro-Arab influences were marginalised. This created a narrative that defined the European identity and fueled the imperial dream, observes Muneeza Shamsie in her book *The Development of Pakistani English Literature*. She continues further by saying, today's widespread notions of Christianity, the West vs Islam have roots in early ideas of European statehood where religion, i.e., Christianity vs Islam, Protestants vs Catholics, shaped monolithic national identities, these concepts of nationhood did not exist in the symbiotic Indo-Muslim culture of Mughal India, but by the early twentieth century, under the impact of colonisation and the struggle for modernity, language and religion became contentious issues in the fight for statehood.

The political events leading to the Partition of India in 1947 and the creation of an independent Pakistan, The Pak- Bangla war of 1970, are central to the novels of several South Asian Muslim writers, including the Pakistani novelist Kamila Shamsie and the Indian writers Attia Hosain (1913-1998) and Salman Rushdie (b. 1947).

Two prominent writers are chosen for study here. One is Tehmina Durrani, her autobiographical work *My Feudal Lord* and *Blasphemy* are for detailed research. The other author is Kamila Shamsie, daughter of Muneeza Shamsie, a famous women writer in Pakistan. Shamsie's novels *In the City by the Sea*, *Kartography*, *Broken Verses* and *Burnt Shadows* are selected for close reading. Studying these texts will provide an opportunity to understand the various kinds of violence that women face in society.

Tehmina Durrani

Tehmina Durrani is an author, artist, and women's and children's rights campaigner. Her debut book, *My Feudal Lord* (1991), is autobiographical and exposes her husband, Pakistani politician Mustafa Khar. Society was astonished when the book revealed her husband's abusive behaviour to the public. Tehmina Durrani was born and raised in Karachi, Pakistan, and is the daughter of Shahkur Ullah Durrani, former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan and Managing Director of Pakistan International Airlines. Muhammad Zaman Durrani, Tehmina Durrani's paternal grandfather, was a major. Her mother is also sprung from the political family that ruled the Patiala princely states.

At 17, she marries Anees Khan and leads a happy life; they have a daughter Tanya. Tehmina Durrani divorced Khan after falling in love with Mustafa Khar, a former Chief Minister and Governor of Punjab, to become his 6th wife. She tolerates physical, sexual and mental abuse for a long time and finally divorces Khar. Other books include *Blasphemy* (1998*), Happy Things in Sorrow Times (*2013) and *Khafir* (2017). *My Feudal Lord*'s controversial work distanced her from her family and close associates for more than a decade. She faced difficult times taking care of her children and carving a new identity for herself.

This book and her second *Blasphemy* will be seen in detail here. She became more involved in Pakistan's politics and sat on a hunger strike in 1993 against government corruption and atrocities, and the newly coined term 'accountability' came into being. After a week, she was hospitalised and broke her fast only after Prime Minister Moin Qureshi assured her of specific changes in the policymaking. Soon she realised that clean

governance and accountability could not be expected from corrupt politicians, and after that associated herself with the most celebrated humanitarian, Abdul Sattar Edi.

She became a member of their family and began working at Edhi Homes in Mithadar, Sorab Goth, and Kharadar, Karachi. She devotedly followed him and obtained his permission to write his autobiography. Tehmina Durrani's spiritual journey for truth was transformed during these few years. "While I strapped coffins to abandoned newborns, stepped over corpses, and rode with him in 'peoples' ambulances," she adds, "I recorded Pakistan's most revered famous social reformer's thoughts, inspirations, motives, observations, views, and works". The Edhi Foundation endorsed and released Mr Edhi's official narrated autobiography, *A Mirror to the Blind* (1994). Durrani married Mian Shahbaz Sharif, Punjab's thrice-elected Chief Minister, in 2003, and the couple now live in Lahore.

MY FEUDAL LORD (1991)

The autobiography genre has evolved into a suitable medium for conveying women's challenges and experiences. Women use this genre to demonstrate reverence and opposition. *My Feudal Lord* by Tehmina Durrani is an autobiography that sheds light on the institution of marriage and family as it is embedded in cultural traditions. It is a chronological autobiography that tells the story of Durrani's life and the transformation that occurs at the conclusion. According to her, social ills such as patriarchy, feudalism, and cultural norms are to blame for women's oppression. As a result, Durrani acts to discover herself when she resolves to reject life with her abusive and torturous husband. She struggles for independence despite these terrible pressures.

Durrani's autobiography not only challenges the established behavioural patterns, but also provides an outlet for her enraged feelings, suggesting that she has the agency to confess and rebel. Though few would accept the events at work, many are factual and less speculative. Women's writing has a specific relationship with the autobiography genre. Fortunately, these companies provided women with more space and freedom. This genre is being used by women to oppose and reconcile.

Women writers could take up writing in the privacy of their homes and domesticity and scribble their thoughts. The crucial concept in woman-centred writings is the truthful representation of female experience and identity. When women try to imagine excitement, society only gives them one option: romance. When they fantasise about camaraderie, the club offers them only one vision: a male sexual buddy; when women fantasise about achievement, society offers them only one vision: the ability to attract a man. When women try to picture sex, society offers them taboos on almost all of its potential forms, with the exception of those involving exciting and physically pleasing males. When women want to express their individuality, society provides them with relatively few beautiful images. The correct fulfilment of women is almost typically depicted as social, domestic, and sexual.

The women writer should go beyond their fantasy world to articulate as autobiographical writings closely correspond with the structures of society. It should at least try to mirror the ethos and mood of the period in which it is written. A very apt example here would be that of Lalitambika Anterjanam’s short story *Revenge Herself,* where Tatrikutty, the story’s heroine, questions the moral policing in society that inevitably

tries to suppress and exploit women in different ways. Kamala Das' Autobiography *My Story* also challenges the patriarchal notions of sexuality.

Because writing is a tremendously complex process, the common issue that female writers often discuss with their readers is oppression and how it impacts them in many ways. These writings have also helped women establish their identities by honouring the essence of womanhood and womanliness. This genre emphasises the genesis of experience, the singularity of expertise, and the reconstruction of one's sense of self, as well as patriarchy, which develops values and gender preoccupations. Despite their rejection of male rule, these autobiographies honour motherhood and wifehood. Women adopt parental identities and celebrate them at the same time.

Relationships are essential for the development of numerous and autonomous selves, although women may reject cohesive selfhood. We can never restore the past; we can only represent it, according to autobiography. The fact that the shape of life comes first from imagination rather than experience is an extension of fiction. As a result, the genre reimagines and reinterprets the past in the present, putting it on the verge of fiction writing. The framework of autobiography is built on the synthesis of past and the present. All autobiographies written by women focus on the development of self-esteem, which leads to a desire for empowerment. Though autobiographical writing in English in Pakistan is still a relatively new genre, more writers are resorting to it to express themselves. Durrani's autobiography, however, was not the first of its kind to garner widespread public notice. Its originality stems from sharing even her personal life, which is at odds with harsh feudal conventions.

The dedication section in the novel is addressed to several people, firstly, to The People of Pakistan, for whom Tehmina requests to know the truth behind the political motives of its leaders and decide on their credentials. Next, it is addressed to five other ex-wives of Mustafa Khar who have suffered in silence; she credits herself for holding him accountable for all the miseries she has faced as his sixth wife. Further, it is dedicated to Mustafa Khar himself to reflect on his role as a man, husband, father, friend, and leader of Pakistan's Political scenario. China's children, whom she says in a closed society like Pakistan, have to suffer the trauma once the book is published. "I want them to reject what is wrong and endorse right. I hope and pray that their values are based on true Islamic principles, rather than a distorted, self-serving interpretation" further, she says ", may my sons never oppress the weak; may my daughters learn to fight oppression". Lastly, it is to her grandmother for her understanding and support till her last breath.

The purpose of her autobiography becomes clear when she decides to dedicate it to the people of Pakistan, who have constantly trusted and supported their leaders by their votes and unfortunately the leaders were greedy for power and money. It is their mistake that majority of the people are still starving to death and there is rampant corruption in the country. Further she appeals every young man never to oppress the weak and encourages young ladies to learn to fight oppression.

Her commitment serves two functions here. One is to expose crooked politicians who betray the country and its people, and the other is to illustrate the devastating situation of women in Pakistani culture. The emphasis is on the institutions of marriage and family, which are deeply ingrained in cultural customs. Pakistan, unfortunately, is one of the countries where violence against women has always subjugated the cultural scene. The

author's discourse is intimately related to impotence in these conditions as well as the general patriarchal system that dominates both the public and private realms.

The book is divided into three parts. The first is “The Lion of Punjab”, which focuses more on Khar and his rise as a politician. The second part is “The Law of the Jungle” which deals with Durrani’s victimisation by her abusive husband. In the last part, “Lioness” brings out the changes occurring in her personality.

Durrani, who had experienced rejection from her mother for her dusky skin, felt marriage was the only solace, likewise marries Anees and is in a happy family setup. Everything is disturbed when Mustafa Khar falls for her, and they decide to get married. Durrani says, women have a fancy for men in power, and those who are exotic, tall, dark and handsome. They forget the fact that these are feudalistic men with male chauvinism and love to exercise power on the helpless women. The imagined ‘man’ disappears when she is forced to love him despite his treatment.

This paragraph sets a tone for the coming narrative, which tries to expose the patriarchal Muslim society that is far deeper rooted in feudal society than imagined; the writer refers to her husband Mustafa Khar as a feudal lord in the novel. Sherry, Khar’s fifth wife, cautions Tehmina several times of Mustafa’s violent behaviour that runs in his blood, but she doesn’t pay much attention. Mustafa Khar asks Tehmina to marry him. Subsequently, she divorces Anees leaving Tanya in his custody much against the wishes of her family members.

"A Pakistani woman will endure almost anything to hold a marriage together. In our society, marriage may be purgatory, but divorce is hell." (77). Without realising the cost, she has to pay for the act, Durrani blindly accepts Khar. Now Tehmina Durrani is the sixth wife of Mustafa Khar and starts experiencing domestic violence; she also starts hearing stories of how he misbehaved, humiliated and injured the ones he professed to love, Naubahar, his earlier wife, a dancer, had caused him that a woman would destroy him like the way he has killed her. When he discovered Safia's infidelity, he beat her without mercy and broke several of her ribs. To make things worse, he had ordered one of the maids to insert red chilli powder into the virgin of the nanny for not informing her of the affair. There is also an instance where Mustafa Khar beats his 17-year-old son to death for smoking and lying to him. Durrani laments, she realizes that she has fallen into the classic trap of Pakistani woman. Her only goal is marriage and once that is achieved, total subordination is sure to happen. She further feels she is made powerless, nameless and formless.

The violence on Tehmina became worse day by day; love turned into fear whenever he would return home, and she would be afraid to face him. "There was not a day that Mustafa did not hit me for some reasons: the food was late; his clothes were creased and so on…". (105). Like his other wives, Tehimina also stopped questioning his violent outbursts. She gives birth to Naseeba, and the author recollects an exciting metaphor used by Mustafa to refer to a woman; he says she is a man's land on which he can cultivate and enjoy. The sexual connotation and feudalistic and patriarchal notions of possessing women are seen here.

There is one more incident where Mustafa creates fear in the mind of his one-and-a-half-year daughter Naseeba forcing her to drown in the water. Mustafa Khar has an affair with Tehmina Durrani's much younger sister Adela. When Tehmina speaks this, she is asked to strip off and made to talk to her mother and clarify things that nothing happened between Mustafa and Adela. Her struggle continues further to hold on to the marriage, but finally, she decides it cannot continue any further and decides to part. Therefore, when Durrani demands a divorce from her husband Khar, he resists.

Women fear separation or divorce under such circumstances. Women attempt to attach sympathies with organisations, families, and other women; hence, Tahmina attempts to define 'self' in the beginning with her sisters and later with her husband. However, after a while, a new 'self' emerges in Durrani, which clashes with the social and political systems of the time. Durrani expresses sadness that when Mustafa claimed custody of their children and ownership of her possessions, her father declares that her daughter Durrani does not require financial help from Khar, but that he would accept the burden as a parent.

This points to the highly exploitive laws which work against women. After her social and political circle deserts her divorce, Durrani says how it was difficult to cope up with ostracizing both socially and politically. Her friends and family members who were formerly attached suddenly threw her out. It is then she realizes the horrors of divorce and why most of the women decide against it. It poses further complications as her husband was a public figure. The trauma led her to lose confidence and esteem. She was again stripped of her identity. The society and the values system promote and support patriarchal dominance, contrarily, it is the women who has to be given support, but all sympathies turn toward men. It can be determined from the above discussion that collective organisations

require individual sanction to conform to the established norms. Many characters in the novel are no different from Durrani.

However, regardless of how powerful the power structures are, resistance occurs; however, these resistances are not methodical and do not result in any discourse. They are autonomous revolutions that, while not always successful, have a good impact. Similarly, Durrani's brave decision to divorce causes her difficulty at first, but she is eventually welcomed into society.

***Blasphemy* (1999)**

> To me, my husband was my son's murderer. He was also my daughter's molester, A Parasite nibbling on the holy book, he was Lucifer, holding me by the throat and driving me to sin every night. He was bhai's destroyer, Amma Sain's tormentor. He had humbled Ma and exploited the people. He was the rapist of the orphans and the fiend that fed on the weak. But over and above all this, he was known to be the man closest to Allah, the one who could reach Him and Save us (143).

This is Tehmina Durrani's second novel based on a real story. The novel proved to be a groundbreaking work as it was written on the much-tabooed topics of feudal and Pir systems of religion, incest, prostitution and child marriage in the name of religion. Durrani's novel is a brave first step to exposing the heinous crimes being committed in the name of religion and faith in various parts of the country. The Pirs leave no bound untouched to abuse the powers conferred upon them in the name of religion. Tehmina Durrani took up the job to speak up against this oppression, specifically against women by this feudal and Pir system.

The novel was an instant hot seller and became very popular. Along with praise for the selection of such a brave topic, it was heavily critiqued and blamed for tarnishing the name of Islam. Although all major characters of Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy* reflect the oppressed conditions of the women, the novel has to be understood as a reflection of the brutalities inflicted on the underprivileged, marginalised, voiceless people.

Blasphemy revolves around women's daily lives living together in a village, especially in the harem of a local Pir, a clergyman. He also acts like a feudal lord. The location of the novel the South of Pakistan, where most of the population is uneducated and unaware of fundamental human rights. The events in the book revolve around Heer, her sufferings as the third wife of Pir Sain. The very beginning of the story opens with child marriage and marital rape. Heer is just fifteen years old when she is married to Pir Sain, twenty years older than her. Heer's mother is happy to get a proposal from a wealthy family; she feels all her problems would be solved if heer married Pir Sain. She says, "What an honour. We are not worthy of so much. Our destiny has turned. We are now among the privileged few" (24). She did not think they would be jumping from pan to fire for a second. A very innocent girl Heer is sacrificed. After her nuptial night, she comments, "He had commenced our wedding night with animal haste for food and ended it satiated. Did I sleep that night, or was it some kind of death? The preparation, the rituals, the ceremony and the slaughter. I had been sacrificed to a god on earth" (39).

The physical, verbal violence and psychological trauma run throughout the novel. Though Heer's status is elevated, she has completely lost the freedom to express or hide her emotions. She tries in vain to raise her voice or make a difference, but every time she is clutched back by the shackles of patriarchy. When Heer receives her first beating, she is reminded of her otherwise caring father, who used to beat her mother sometimes. Her mother always defended her husband by saying, "Employment frustrations, financial worries, social pressures and misunderstandings trigger his outbursts" (43). The institution of marriage in South Asia teaches women to excuse men on all occasions.

Thus, a subaltern woman is not given a voice and when she does speak, she is so conditioned that she only ends up replicating the language of patriarchy. Here the young protagonist Heer becomes a tool of her husband's oppression and keeps providing him little girls to satiate his pedophilic needs when she discovers his desire for his daughter. Now that she goes to save her daughter at any cost. He forces Heer into prostitution and homosexuality to satisfy his whimsical fetishes when he has not enough of that. Her thoughts silence her, and her daughter Guppi also tells her to do the same when she discusses the little girl Yathimri sacrificed for Pir Sain's wishes. In one instance, Guppi says, when there is no choice, it is better to do nothing. "Let it be as it is. However, it is".

This is an example of how women lose their agency. She is not just quieted by the oppressive powers but is also advised by the oppressed because they are conditioned to believe that their voice will not be heard. Heer's traumatising solitariness is broken by the character, Kaali or black. Unlike the other maidservants loyal to Pir's mother, Amma Sai, Kaali is Heer's confidant, energetic, always laughing and full of light. So, by the little comfort gathered by the combined company of Kaali and Dai, Heer can take all the pain

around her as she can secretly share it with these women through a simple exchange of smiles. Later on, she can see the older woman, Toti, who had suffered the wrath of an earlier Pir, and says that she arrives to meet the ghost of her lover, long dead. Later, Heer learns that Toti had died fifty years ago, but her ghost's company gives vigour to Heer's dying spirits, and she sees a spark of little resistance.

It is essential to notice here the local male elites brutally killed this little rebellion or resistance by women, Kaali was killed, and Toti was snatched from her lover, who was killed brutally as the Pir Sain did not favour the union. All the women characters here have sad and dark tales to tell, some are heard, and some are buried. The patriarchal machinery works in collaboration with the oppressive apparatus of local elitism. The Pir Sain, who assumes the position of a local god, has all the power.

The hegemonic setup gives an advantage over him the social structures around him. Even Amma Sain, Pir Sain's mother, has no authority over her son or the male members of the household. By the end of the novel, encouraged by the death of her husband, Heer decides to speak up against the tyrannies she has suffered in her life. She decides to leak the pornographic videos in which Pir Sain forced her to please other men. She throws off the veil of oppression and challenges the power of Pir Sain by exposing his videos. However, being a woman, it is again proved that she has no voice and is thus pushed back to where she belonged as a suppressed, silenced woman. This time, she is oppressed by her son Rajaji who assumes the position of the new Pir Sain, and although every piece of evidence is present, he abuses his mother and silences her. Heer's mother, who always acted as the sane voice, beats her chest and wails, says while your husband was alive, we hid our sorrows behind his status and suffered in silence.

In the end, Heer is liberated after going through all these trials and tribulations of womanhood and the feudal system. She is silently united with her long-lost lover Ranjha who takes her away from all the problems she faces. Here, it does seem like Durrani has ended the novel on a hopeful note as Heer has finally resisted and broken free. However, this is not the case. She has to suffer unconditionally for her resistance, and her resistance almost literally pushes her to death. Moreover, the bargain for her freedom is the exchange of her voice. She has to sacrifice her representative to obtain her cherished independence. She is pronounced dead, and in the closing scenes, she is praying at her own false grave under a veil with Ranjha. This shows that as a woman, she had to kill and bury her voice in a tomb to procure her freedom finally, and thus she cannot speak. Heer's character is based on a real-life story of a woman who suffered this ordeal. Nevertheless, it's an educated and aware elite and a pronounced feminist in Tehmina Durrani, who narrates a Subaltern woman, Heer's trial.

"Kaali and Tara and Toti. Yathimri, Cheel and me, women as daughters, wives and mothers, transformed into bubbles and burst" (222).

Durrani should be commended for having the bravery to openly expose feudals and moulvis (priests) who are hypocrites allegedly conducting religious responsibilities. Nowhere in her work does she protest about sex and gender discrimination in Islam. On the one hand, she believes that the feudal and powerful pervert religion to their advantage, but on the other hand, she believes that situations like this make women strong. Durrani believes that breaking the silence and sharing her horrific marriage life experiences with Khar has empowered her to expose the system's ills. She is also pleased with herself for standing up to truth and injustice.

Because society expects her to remain silent, writing about her personal life is equivalent to breaking her quiet. Durrani provides various examples of cultural and religious ideologies. She feels that the inevitable appropriation and intellectual invasions from other religions have corrupted Islam's fundamental character. Cultural influences have an impact on religious practises. Keeping this in mind, Durrani embarks on a quest to depict feudalists who use religion to achieve their goals. She thus reveals the clothing of strong people in order to assist her fellow folks.

Only by bringing about changes in tribal, feudal, and value systems can a shift in women's perceptions be achieved. Durrani also seeks reform through interpreting Islam correctly. She feels that true Islam values all family members equally and that both husband and wife must be responsible. Marriage has no effect on women's legal position in Islam. She has the right to negotiate, conduct business, and own property on her own. In an interview, Durrani affirms her commitment to feminism in these words, “Well, I am a woman, so I naturally write from a feminine perspective. More than that, I am interested in reform”.

Whether it's *My Feudal Lord* or *Blasphemy*, or Abdul Sattar Edhi's narrated autobiography *Mirror to the Blind*, her work is about topics that matter to her people, about shattering the silence of a segment of society that can't speak up. She is dubbed "brave" because she confronts problems that few dare to discuss, particularly one's own life; her drive for reform is tremendous. And she believes that when anything overwhelms her, she has a natural courage because you step out of the sphere of dread. According to many male writers and fundamentalists, Durrani has the agency to confess and protest; she is an example of threshold crossing. She becomes a voice for the voiceless women in Pakistan.

Hence, it can be concluded that Durrani becomes an essential agent of change who boldly declares her invincible identity in these words, “Well Mustafa, now the world will soon know you only as Tehmina Durrani’s ex-husband”.

Feminism in Muslim countries is emerging in response to the indigenous demands of the countries, which are at various stages of religious revivalism and representation. Each Muslim nation in the subcontinent has its own set of political, economic, cultural, and social intricacies, making it area and context specific. However, there are many common characteristics of the women's movement in modern Muslim countries. *My Feudal Lord* symbolises the beginning of many feminism debates. Despite the fact that it was written with the assistance of English co-writers, it does not interfere with the text's and the author's actual natural meaning of Pakistaniness. Married women confront numerous challenges in traditional Pakistani society. Domestic settings have inevitably been transformed into ideal locations for masculine violence and dominance in South Asian cultures. In general, women in South Asian countries are so bound to tradition and social custom that it stifles their advancement.

Another aspect contributing to this is women's ignorance of their rights and the laws that protect and guarantee them. It is written into the constitution of every country. Spivak implies the same thing in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" when she argues literature is important in the construction and replication of cultural representations of a specific time period. No serious reader should overlook this. Durrani, as a result, takes use of the literary genre, expresses her grievances, and employs autobiography as a means to reveal her secret life. This also highlights the fact that Pakistan is still enslaved by male-dominated feudal institutions while still attempting to restore the oppressed and subaltern's voice.

Durrani, like a local informant, believes that literature can create a rhetorical space for subaltern populations to communicate and re-articulate the suppressed history of popular struggles.

Kamila Shamsie

Kamila Shamsie is a British and Pakistani novelist best recognised for her award-winning novels. Her first novel, *In the City by the Sea* (1998), was nominated for the Mail on Sunday/John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. Her second novel, *Salt and Saffron* (2000), landed her on Orange's list of "21 Writers for the Twenty-First Century". Kamila Shamsie was awarded the Prime Minister's Award for Literature in Pakistan in 1999. *Kartography* (2004), *Broken Verses* (2005), *Burnt Shadows* (2009), an epic tale that was nominated for the 2009 Orange Prize for Fiction, and *A God in Every Stone* are her other novels (2014). *Home Fire* (2017), her sixth novel, was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, shortlisted for the Costa Novel Award, and won the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2018.

In the City by the Sea

Kamila Shamsie's debut novel, In the City by the Sea, was released in 1998 and is set during General Zia ul Haq's chaotic reign. It's a story about the high price of dissent in a country where military authority is the norm and democracy is the exception. While the author has previously written about the upheavals in her homeland, what distinguishes this novel is that it features an eleven-year-old Hasan as the protagonist, through whose eyes she sensitively depicts her homeland's dictatorship, where house arrests, the tradition of silencing dissenting voices, street protests, strikes, rallying, riots, curfew, mindless killings, loss, and fear are the norm.

As noted by Sadia Hasan in her thesis titled “The Novels of Kamila Shamsie: A Study of Themes and Technique” the country is led by a sunken-eyed General who delights in imprisoning and executing his adversaries. Hasan's uncle, Salman Haq, is a political rebel who founded the Anti-Corruption Enterprise (ACE) party. Hasan's serene, safe family life is shattered when Salman Haq is caught and charged with treason. This gorgeous, intriguing, and quietly political narrative takes place in an undisclosed Pakistani city during a political fight led by General Zia, an unknown dictator. Hasan lives a happy life with his loving parents, away from the bustle of his metropolis. This will change if Salman is sentenced to house arrest for organising a political rebel group.

Hasan finds his family's mood worsening as the situation in Pakistan intensifies in preparation for Salman's trial. Salman is Hasan's favourite uncle, and in an attempt to save him from being executed by the dictator as a child, he frequently enters a fantasy dimension. As Sir Huss, he embarks on a magical journey bordering on magic realism in a land of castles and dragons, knights and armour. Hasan is pleasantly lounging on the roof one early summer morning when he sees a small boy flying a kite fall to his death. Hasan's calm life is torn apart by guilt at his failure to save the boy.

Hasan believes the youngster was attempting to impress him by getting the kite to fly higher, so he paid no attention to where he was walking. If Hasan hadn't been there to impress, the youngster would not have tried to make the kite fly higher, would have monitored his step, and would not have fallen off the roof. Hasan is quickly filled with shame and guilt when his name is spoken, and he believes he is to blame for the boy's death. We have a General, on the other hand, who will not refrain from executing anyone who speaks out against his tyranny. On a different level, the work examines how the loss

of childhood innocence transforms adults into persons with nefarious purposes as they grow into adult clothing. The novel's principal thematic issues include the struggle for democracy under military control, rampant violence, political life under the authoritarian system - house arrests, protests, intelligence agency involvement, etc., and the realm of fantasy against reality.

Ethnic violence is pervasive throughout the country, making ordinary living risky. As Salman's trial date approaches, the tale progresses. Hasan witnesses his uncle, aunt, mother, father, neighbours, and others being powerless in the face of government oppression, "Hasan had never before known the need for Presidential approval to reschedule a lunch with one's uncle" (8).

Hasan continues in the thesis, in Zia's Pakistan, human rights violations and the use of state terror against Pakistanis in the name of Islamic penalties and law and order were commonplace. When Shehryar contemplates about the political situation, the same excesses of the regime are apparent, Hasan's intellectual growth and moral awakening are fueled by horrific, true history unfolding in front of his eyes. The narrative depicts a turbulent scene in terms of both political turmoil in the city, which gradually reveals itself as Karachi, and Hasan's emotional torment. Coming from a political background, Hasan understands the perils of defying a dictatorial regime. A youngster is exposed to political currents and elders' criticisms of the administration in this setting, The lines, "The truth was out: people die because of bullets, gravity, and rope. And because a President is alive to sign the execution orders" (183) can be directly linked to the assasination of Bhutto.

In Zia's Pakistan, human rights violations and the use of state terror against Pakistanis in the name of Islamic penalties and law and order were commonplace. When

Shehryar contemplates about the political situation, the same excesses of the regime are apparent, "The government puts someone under house arrest, and you double the height of his wall to increase that prison sensation. And all at the prisoner's expense. Ah, our glorious law enforcers!"(9). By continually pledging elections, Zia was able to appease the public's opposition to the dictatorial administration. Despite this, the elections were postponed, and he ruled the country for eleven years until his mysterious plane accident, which the author playfully refers to as "hell copter."

The country's violence had escalated to the point where citizens were forced to live with it on a daily basis. There are so many cases of persons going missing or being killed in riots that no family is spared from this tragedy, "But at the police station, the gates were locked, though men and women with sweat stains shaped like continents on their clothes stuck hands and faces through the grilles of the gate and cried, 'My son ...My husband...' And one anguished cry", "Oh God. my daughter' " (107).

Salman, the frightening regularity with which violence emerges in the country hurts. By contrasting bullets with a variety of stars, he effectively conveys the enormity of such events, "There are moments, Hasan, when I like to think that the stars are bullet holes for every bullet shot by an oppressor their springs to life a star, with so great a radiance that it can never be put out, it can never be imprisoned. But if that were true, the last three months in this city would have erased every trace of blackness from the sky" (22).

Lieven, referring to the country's dire circumstances of recurrent bloodshed, said, "the perennial discontent of the urban masses in most of Pakistan continues to express itself not in terms of political mobilisation behind new mass movements, but sporadic and pointless riots and destruction of property - including most notably the buses in which the rioters themselves have to travel every day" (29). Hasan witnessed all of the violence firsthand when he was caught up in it at his school. This violence has been proved to have ravaged the entire fabric of Pakistani society:

For one terrible moment, all Hasan saw was a mass of bodies, running, yelling, brandishing weapons and then . . . they're just students, he realised. Their uniforms were not of some terrorist organisation but from the government-run school up the road, and their weapons were twigs, stones from the roadsides and pebbles used in hopscotch games. Hasan raised his head a little. 'This is not a time for studying, this is a time for unity . . . 'Close your school. Tell your students to join our rally ' . . . Hasan blinked at the unfamiliarity of the scene. They were gone: the bustle, the almost accidents, the games of chicken between the drivers and pedestrians. They were also gone: the newspaper hawkers screaming out headlines that included Salman Mamoo's name, the beggars dragging deformed limbs towards car windows, the vendors selling smuggled goods on pavements, the fruit sellers carving guavas into roses to show off the pink flesh. Shutters were shut at: The T-shirts store where cool teenagers thumbed through hundreds of shirts which were identical except for the foreign designer’s name emblazoned across each one: the fur shops where foreigners gaped over clothing too warm for the city's clime, the cloth shops where merchants unravelled bolts upon bolts of cotton and linen to dazzle all eyes, especially the Widow's (26-28).

Fear of bombs became an integral component of subsequent generations' upbringing. All of these acts of violence have entered various elements of the nation's life and have become part of its conscience. "Before he had even reached the last row of chairs, Mrs Qureishi had ushered on the next orator with a speed she hadn't exhibited since the bomb scare two years earlier" (190).

The viewpoint of Hasan's character is what propels this drama of oppression and lawlessness ahead. Shamsie expertly discusses the political and ethnic disputes that have afflicted the city through her characters. Saira's art gallery was likewise forced to close by the authorities. Hasan is dealing with the stress of living in a housing surrounded by government guards who keep tabs on him twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. "That night in the stillness of the bedroom, Hasan felt as though he was surrounded. People in uniform watching him, listening to every breath, wondering why he was not asleep" (19).

Hasan's happy boyhood fades into the melancholy as the environment changes. As he looks for ways to save Salman, he claims that he would follow the President everywhere and mutter "murderer" in his ear until his conscience could no longer bear it. In order to obtain a nice night's sleep, he would restore democracy in a hilarious manner; the writer has developed the character of Ogle, Zebra's pet dog. General Zia and Ogle, an acronym for Our Glorious Leader, have a lot in common. They are revealed to be connected in various ways: they share a birthday, they both have a scar above their left eyebrow, and when the President became unwell, the puppy became ill as well. When the dog injures its left paw, a televised interview reveals Zia with a bandaged left hand, the analogy is made further funnier. The scratching of Zia's and Ogle's ears happens at the same time.

While sitting on his roof watching his neighbour Azeem fly a kite, Hasan gets his first brush with death. As a result of his kite launch, Azeem takes a deadly step back over the edge of his roof and crashes to his death. Hasan is traumatised, believing that Azeem did not wait for the top to stop and perished because he was preoccupied with impressing Hasan, who was eagerly watching his kite-flying. Hasan believes the youngster was attempting to impress him by making the kite fly higher, so he didn't pay attention to where he was standing. Haunted by the finality of death, he is convinced that the catastrophe did not occur, that Azee would be caught by a set of arms, and that one-day Azeem will walk up to him and say, he did it; he soared.

The way the author has played with the narrative, continually shifting from Hasan's terrible reality of a politically persecuted family, notably his uncle, to his fantasies, is the most enjoyable portion of the novel. Shamsie goes deep into the mind of young Hasan, transporting the reader from reality to the boy's own hidden fantasy world. Hasan's imaginative world contains goblins, knights, and dragons, as well as magical realism. They assist him in overcoming his difficulties, resolving his problems, and providing him with elements of pleasure and adventure in a harsh world. Sir Huss is on a mission to beat death or deflect it away from Salman as Sir Huss. During his adventure, Zehra becomes into Ms Zed, Najam transforms into Sir No-Jem, and Uncle Latif transforms as Latif, the uncle. In some fascinating discussions, the language switches to 'thou' and 'hast,' and Latif, the uncle with his monocle, tells what to do, "Look Lance little-told you once to avoid bad eyesight by eating carrots. You became a bugs bunny with the eyes of a hawk. I told you to avoid bad skin by rubbing lemon juice and salt on your skin. You stole all the lemons from my trees, and look, your skin glows like a worm" (117).

The unreal world becomes a haven for Hasan, "blue flaps of the tent slapped open, and Salman Mamoo walked in. dusk fairies swarmed in front of him in a mass of wings and stringers" (168) and "A unicorn lowered his horn in greeting as he sauntered past. From amidst the cluster of warriors around I fire someone with gleaming teeth flashed a victory sign" (169). “Sir Huss recalled that he was approaching alien soil with its own rules. He cast off his knighthood and transformed himself into Hasan, a commoner" (120) and "We're on Olympus. I'm Aphrodite - no, Artemis - and you're Hermes, and we have to decide whether to exterminate the human race or not based on this party" (59). Hasan is confident that if he can just realize what Salman's spirit desires, he will be able to release his beloved uncle, "He just wanted arms around him and voices, too, telling him 'Hey Hasan, Huss, pehlvan, son, knobbly - knees, hussy, my dear, jaan, it's okay, but it wasn't okay, it wasn't, and maybe it would never be" (192).

The narrative, like Hasan's insulated world, is infiltrated by the country's tumultuous political atmosphere and brutal military authority. The novel vividly captures the atmosphere of the struggle for democracy against a suffocating dictatorship. It perfectly encapsulates the ethos of those fighting for democracy. Democratic ambitions aid in the face of repressive stifled voices.

The young protagonist replies by playing make-believe with his imaginary buddies, which include characters from Shakespeare and Arthurian stories. His blend of fiction and reality is uplifting and life-affirming; it displays the power of imagination to change one's life and allows Hasan to see enchantment in the gloom.

Kartography (2004)

Kartography attempts to map Karachi as a violent city, demonstrating how wars and political upheavals carry the oblivious germs of changing the intricacies of relationships, and thus have a far-reaching, highly complex, and percolating effect on human aspects, far beyond just affecting the countries' borders. It's a story about personal-political entanglements, about how a country's history affects personal equations, how it changes people's lives and leaves permanent scars. It's also a story about Karachi - Karachi with all of its open maintenance holes, Karachi with its broken roads, polluted air, overly decorated buses, beggars, and crazy traffic, Karachi with its nightlife, parties, class stratification, Karachi with its breathtaking but filthy beach, ethnic differences, political unrest, Karachi the city of load shedding, the site of mushaira sessions, Karachi the city of load shedding, the site of mushaira.

The interrelationships of a group of privileged elite inhabitants of Karachi, notably Kareem and Raheen, are the focus of this warm and rich study of friendship, love, and commitment to roots. Even though they live in a safe environment away from the heinous violence that rages on the streets, they are unable to entirely isolate themselves from the large-scale unrest that is gradually escalating in the country's main port city. The plot thickens as Raheen and Karim, both thirteen at the time of the story's beginning, try to figure out why their parents - Ali and Maheen; Zafar and Yasmeen - switched partners before the wedding observes Sadia Hasan in her thesis.

Hasan continues the story underlying the financial transaction, which was presented as a personal story, has bigger consequences. It is linked to the ethnic instability of 1971, when a civil war erupted between East and West Pakistan, resulting in the formation of Bangladesh. The novel also sheds light on a long-forgotten chapter in Pakistan's history, one that had far-reaching ramifications for the country's relations with Bangladesh and India, and raised questions about the viability of religion as a unifying force, as well as the reason for Bangladesh's inclusion in Pakistan. Other divergent themes addressed in the novel include the intricacies of relationships, the volatile graph of Karim and Raheen's friendship against the backdrop of the turbulent Karachi of the 1980s, ties to one's home city, the idiosyncrasies of the rich, the state of Muhajirs, and the dire consequences of the government's wrong 68 policies, such as the quota system.

When Karim's family relocates to London to escape the city's violence, their relationship loses its intimacy. They drift even more apart after an exchange of misunderstanding letters. Raheen portrays him as a map nerd, and Karim accuses her of being careless with Karachi and speaks in a language she doesn't understand. Their friendship has deteriorated, and their differences of opinion have devolved into a conflict. They allowed a quiet barrier to form between them after a few years.

Finally, during bombings and ethnic conflict in their city, they are thrown together. Their relationship is governed by a tense friendship and a fated love. While the violence in Pakistan, the civil war in 1971, and the knowledge of their parents swapping partners were only a little part of their childhood, the seriousness of these truths and the weight of this past that has carried over into the present gradually began to hover around them, "What had we missed by finishing each other's sentences, assuming we'd always know the

direction in which thought was going? How many words had remained unspoken, misunderstood, between us at a time when we could so easily have set things right?" (143). The work brilliantly depicts the indestructible links of love and friendship strengthened by forgiveness.

In August 1947, the Indian subcontinent was partitioned, resulting in the creation of two new nations: India, a secular state, and Pakistan, an Islamic state. Pakistan, on the other hand, encompassed two physically, culturally, and linguistically distinct areas to India's east and west. West Pakistan was the popular and official name for the western zone. East Bengal was the original name for the eastern zone, which is now known as Bangladesh, and East Pakistan was the original name for what is now Pakistan. There was also a language issue to contend with.

The horrors in Bangladesh in 1971 kicked off the process. The Bengalis were enraged by the ordered killings, which led to the independence of East Pakistan later that year. The brutality unleashed by Pakistani soldiers proved to be the final straw in efforts to reach an agreement. On March 26, 1971, the war broke out as anticipated, and the army of West Pakistan was ordered to commence a military attack against East Pakistan. Many groups of people, including students, intellectuals, and others, were granted independence. The Mukti Bahini, or Liberation Army, was established by Bengali military personnel, paramilitaries, and civilians who utilised insurgent warfare methods to oppose the West Pakistan army.

The tale depicts how anti-Bengali sentiment spreads through the air like a virus, infecting even the most reasonable brains. The tale of Zafar and Maheen, Raheen and Karim's father and mother, respectively, lies at the centre of the book. One of the most

important aspects of enhancing identity consciousness is violence. It puts one's life in jeopardy due to how they are perceived by others, leaving little choice but to band together with and against them. This is why racial, religious, and other forms of violence swiftly polarise communities and individuals, leading to an obsession with defining the relevant identity in an exclusive way.

Kamila Shamsie has a strong attachment to her hometown, which is why the novel is set in Karachi. She has depicted the violent side of Karachi, going to great lengths to expose everything that is wrong with the city. While wandering the dark, death-haunted streets of Saddar, where even the street lights were turned off, one would come across the surreal glow of a flower shop not more than a thousand metres from the troubled area of Jacob's lines. A flower seller explained why his shop stayed open late at night when all others did not. “This is the season not of marriage but death. People come to buy floral wreaths for those who die in the riots” (147). Karachi, where "people are being killed every day in the poorer parts of town?" (63), has earned the most infamous title of being one of the violent cities in the world, as truthfully projected in the novel. Rashid says that the city of Karachi is another fast-burning fire that could detonate the entire country.

“Karachi is the microcosm of what is wrong with the country- the growing weakness of the state, the breakdown of the social contract, ethnic conflict, and the ever-increasing war between modernity, business liberalism, and extremism. These divisions can only get worse if the country dissolves into further lawlessness” (167-8).

The violence has become so common that it has shaken the foundations of even Karachi's secure upper-class citizens. They are generally thought to be fortunate in that they are not affected by it. Due to the escalating chaos in Karachi, Karim's parents relocated to London in the 1980s, and Zia's brother was killed by a stray bullet. Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, appears to be under constant siege: ethnic, factional, sectarian, and random acts of violence are the norm. The frequency of violent incidents increases to the point where they infiltrate Karim and Raheen's conversations and become a significant point of difference and distance, "No, until your last letter, I didn't know the exact number of people reported killed in Karachi's violence so far this year. Thank you, Mr Reuters. I'm sure the dead feel much better about being dead now" (132). Their disagreements deepen as they accuse each other of being oblivious to the wrongs in their city, "Those of us who still live here don't have the luxury of being compassionate from a distance. We go on with our lives because we like the facade of maintaining a kind of sanity. When we laugh, that's defiance. So, don't tell me about the graves you mark on that map"? (133).

The novel also touches on the restrictions placed on girls by Pakistan's orthodox Muslim society. In Pakistan, there are two basic gender perceptions: that women should be subordinate to men and that a man's honour rests with the women of the family.

Most South Asian women spend a significant portion of their lives physically within their homes and courtyards, leaving only for severe and approved reasons. Outside the home, social life revolves primarily around the activities of men. Most people in the country regard a woman and her family as shameless if there are no restrictions on her movement, "Sonia couldn't go to parties if boys were going to be there; she couldn't sit alone in a car with a boy even for a second" (80).

Broken Verses (2005)

Broken Verses, Kamila Shamsie's fourth and intriguingly multi-layered novel, is primarily about the 31-year-old protagonist named Aasmaani Hiqalab's mental mappings in her search for elusive answers about her life as she is haunted by the unresolved tragedies of her childhood, particularly the disappearance of her mother without so much as a farewell note. Her fearless activist mother, Samina Akram, and her mother's lover Nazim, known as 'The Poet' throughout the country, were the heart and soul of their generation's resistance to military dictatorship and government excesses. The Poet's outspoken opposition to the government during a regime that refused to accept any criticism led to numerous stints in prison and exile before his brutal murder and complete disfigurement at the hands of unknown assailants. After his mysterious death, the unwavering Samina finds herself completely broken down and begins to question the beliefs she had so fiercely fought for her entire life.

She has been struggling for two years in an extreme state of melancholy to find purpose in her life after the poet's death, and she has finally lost the ability to hear her sadness. Following The Poet's trial, she leaves to the seaside, never to return, and dies a strange death as well. Whether she committed suicide or drowned in the sea by accident will remain a mystery until the end. Aasmaani, who was regularly abandoned by her mother while carrying on her political activities or following The Poet in exile, is still troubled by her refusal to believe her mother and The Poet, whom she affectionately refers to as Omi, are dead fourteen years later. She talks about her dead mother in the present tense, enlivening her utterances and frantically waiting for her mother's return, desperately

holding on to every ounce of hope. This novel is a study of a daughter's longing. For her mother and the difficulty of letting go of people who make up our lives.

As Aasmaani powerfully puts it, "Every prayer of mine for the last fourteen years had been one word: Mama" (144). Then, quite unexpectedly, Shehnaz, Samina's best friend and a legendary actress poised to make her television comeback, gives Aasmaani a perplexing note written in the secret code that Samina and The Poet shared. Ed, Shehnaz's son, who recently returned from post-9/11 New York, plays the mysterious messenger. Against all logic, Aasmaani begins to believe that The Poet, and perhaps even her mother, is still alive, leading to an unrelenting search - the reading and re-reading of the received letters, the perusal of newspaper archives, meetings with The Poet's friends - the ensuing anguish, disappointment, contestations with all others, and finally, her acceptance of her mother's death.

The story depicts the plight of women under the Hudood Ordinance and gives a glimpse into Pakistan's political and social life, particularly during General Zia's administration. It weaves various issues into the narrative, including homosexuality, the intricacies of celebrity kids' behaviour, parenthood, Islamophobia, the therapeutic importance of giving loved ones' final rites, and the costs experienced by political rebels. The novel is also an insightful meditation on the fibres that characters are made of in the web of relationships that the novel projects - of Aasmaani with her mother, father, caring stepmother Beema, stepsister Rabia, with her father-like figure - the poet, with Ed; Samina's unconventional relationship with the poet; actress Shehnaz Saeed's relation with her son Ed can be read as a central theme of the novel.

These connections are intricate, nuanced, and multi-layered, and practically all of them deviate from the norm. A close reading of the work reveals a subtle indication that a religion with redeemable qualities has been ripped to bits by bigots, “'God has become the most dangerous subject of all. I don't think of Him anymore" (216).

The writer's attention has also been drawn to the other thorny problem of Pakistan being portrayed as a terrorist factory. Following the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York City on September 11, 2001, the West has viewed Pakistan as a terrorist breeding ground. Through images, news coverage, and discussions, the media amplified the fear, instilling Islamophobia in the minds of the public: relentlessly broadcast to the ears and eyes of people all over the world, it sharpened the phenomenon of Islamophobia, which was not entirely non-existent in the past and could be observed in various forms such as racial or cultural prejudice, hatred toward Muslims and Islam, and their portrayal as a terrorist organisation.

Its manifestations are alarming as they widen the gulf between the West and the Muslims, making our world a dangerous place and the fixture even more unpredictably perilous. (Heitmeyer 182).

Edward Said in *Orientalism* documented the facet of Islamophobia which sees Muslims and Islam as "static in both time and place, and incapable of defining themselves as compared to the West which is considered to be 'dynamic, innovative and expanding culture" (56).

Islamophobia, according to Heitmeyer and Zick, is a posture of group-oriented animosity and a broad attitude of rejection toward Islam: The media's misrepresentation of Muslims and Islam has stoked fear of Muslims in the West and tarnished the West's image in the Muslim world. In the same way that Muslims are portrayed as savage, illogical, and intolerant in the West and Europe, the media in the Muslim world portrays the West as bigoted and anti-Muslim. One believes that these two tendencies, namely, Islamophobia and anti-Americanism, which are rising at roughly the same rate, may lead to a new Cold War era. (97).

Terrorist attacks in New York, Madrid, London, and other cities traumatised Europeans as well as others. They had previously viewed Muslims as a culturally disruptive but controllable presence; today they have a pathological fear of them. The work captures the current anxiety felt by Muslims around the world in the aftermath of the plane crash into the twin buildings in Washington on September 11, 2001. Ed, who lived in New York at the time, says: “God, I loved it. Really, truly. I had the best life there; I had my jobs, friends, rent-controlled apartment, local gym, a place around the comer for Sunday brunch, which made eggs Scandinavia you would not believe” “And then?” “And then the towers fell.” “And you stopped being an individual and became an entire religion." (45).

Fear of Muslims has led to increased surveillance of Muslims, a better network of informers, strong anti-terrorism laws, detaining people on suspicion, monitoring mosques, banning religious leaders from entering the country, better supervision of their training and sermons, requiring Muslim leaders to accept greater responsibility for the behaviour of their fellow religionists, denying dual nationality, and imposing strict coercion (Parekh 106). Following the 9/11 attacks, counter-terrorism measures were implemented, with

Muslims being subjected to routine searches and arrests based purely on their religion. "The FBI knock on your door at two a.m. to ask about the flying lessons you took five years ago, and that illusion shatters in an instant" (149). The incident of 9/11 caused the US to unleash the 'War on Terror' on any country that captured its imagination, "And anyway Americans like it these days if you piss them off You piss them off, they bomb you" (73).

Burnt Shadows (2009)

Burnt Shadows is an attempt to depict today's divided and tumultuous world - how historical events, rather just upsetting political calm, create permanent cracks in people's lives, uprooting them and eternally branding them with disaster. It moves from one historical disaster to the next, demonstrating how the current fractured world owes its current state to global events - how hatred is borne out of world politics, and how callous, insensitive, selfish decisions by great powers have bred violence, given birth to further hatred, and dangerously fragmented the world. The novel condenses much of the world's most infamous history into its pages during the last 65 years.

It's a multi-generational, multi-cultural story about the turmoil of a century in which large groups of people were forced to flee their homes and where events from the distant past cast a long shadow over the present—tracing the shared history of two culturally different families with members of various nationalities - a German, a British, a Japanese, and an Indian. Konrad-Weiss and Tanaka-Ashraf from the bombing of Nagasaki, India on the brink of Partition, Pakistan in the early 1980s, New York post 9/11, Afghanistan in the wake of the US 'War on Terror' campaign and the horrifying images of Guantanamo Bay is a disturbing reflection on the conflict of attitudes and cultural divides that span

everything from the loyalty of taste buds to the sharp vision of marriages even to the dangerous level where it breeds fear and scepticism so deep in the mind of young American Kim that she hands over an Afghani to the FBI just because of an unfounded fear against all 'with beards', poignantly hinting at Islamophobia - another tributary of perilous disintegration of the world.

A fable about Prophet Mohammad being shielded by a spider that weaves a web across the opening of the cave he is hiding in, leading his pursuers to assume that no one could be inside the cave, runs beneath the main story of this work. This 'spider sign,' which depicts friends and families assisting one another in finding purpose in their lives, is what binds the characters together across generations. Shamsie demonstrates how terrible historical events create fault lines that run down through the years, breaking the fundamental social systems that humans rely on. The tale explains how Raza Ashraf, a gifted linguist and the son of two very different people who suffered at the hands of history, ended up in Guantanamo Bay.

The work also tries to show how respect for different cultures, particularly in terms of languages, can be used as a solid foundation for building a truly global world free of destruction and violence.

The narrative swings from Hiroko to Lidia right before Partition, to Pakistan during the period of massive Soviet immigration in the region, and then to Afghanistan in all its fundamentalist fury through his son, and finally to 9/11 New York through his son. Throughout the journey, it addresses a number of subjects, including the profound impact of historical events on individual lives, superpower insensitivity, multiculturalism, and racism.

It examines the reasons for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, arguing that it is an attempt to critically evaluate the status of Pakistanis and Muslims in the post-September 11 world order, particularly within contemporary discourses on terrorism and capitalism, and that it is a direct result of the west's obsession with power, nuclear warfare, and the fatal race for armaments. The story's other varied themes are the anguish of displacement, the way certain relationships are formed despite and in the middle of war's damage, and the necessity for a peaceful society. The novel starts with the image of a man holding a prisoner in the disreputable Guantanamo Bay who wonders, "How did he come to this?" (1).

The narrative takes us to Nagasaki on August 9, 1947, where Hiroko Tanaka, a Japanese polyglot living in the shadow of WWII, is in love with Konrad Weiss, a German, in order to find the solution. On August 9, 1945, the fateful day in the history of Japan, the contentious destiny of a multicultural family begins; World War II is in full disaster mode before taking its most despised turn in history.

The conditions are ripe for another nuclear explosion, with mass damage and a war situation that has been in place long enough for people to be concerned about personal protection precautions taken, "The metallic cries of the cicadas are upstaged by the sound of the air siren, as familiar now like the call of insects" (8). Hiroko's direct link to the bombing of Nagasaki exemplifies the hazards of living in a manufactured nuclear war where humankind is constantly under assault,

> As soon as the war ends, there will be her and Konrad. As soon as the war ends, there will be food and silk. She'll never wear grey again, never re-use tea leaves again, lift a bamboo spear again, or enter a factory or bomb shelter. As soon as the war ends, there will be a ship to carry her and Konrad far away into a world without duty (16).

Shamsie depicts the life of the victims of nuclear warfare from a close quarter, displaying the times of war and thoroughly exploring the circumstances to bring forth the harshness of war when everything becomes vulgar. It erodes all of the epitomic buildings built in the name of civilisation, reducing everything to shattered ruins. It depicts a world that is perpetually on the verge of calamity, where ordinary humanity finds it tough to make sense of a war-torn planet, with the case for a nuclear-free world constantly running in the background.

The bomb has inhuman physical, social, economic, and psychological effects on individuals. The frenzied race for arms, combined with the mercenary interests of countries powerful enough to dominate international politics, is behind this heinous act of inhumanity. As a result, the fate of millions of people is in jeopardy, "The ones further away, it peeled off their skin, like grapes. And now that they have this New Bomb the Americans won't stop until we're all skeletons or grapes" (15).

When the world becomes white and fire pours from the sky, Hiroko Tanaka loses her father and Konrad. Hiroko survives Nagasaki after regaining consciousness, but she is scarred both symbolically and literally in more ways than one. Her back is forever tattooed with three black cranes from the white kimono she was wearing at the moment, terrifying her physically, psychologically, and symbolically. Radiation illness casts a pall over not

only her, but everyone around her, "No one knows the long-term effect of this thing. They don't know if it will affect my ability to have children. They don't know if it won't kill me in another five years" (115) but also on her son Raza years later who is bluntly told by the girl he loves that he may be carrying deformities from the bombing, "Nagasaki. The bomb. No one will give their daughter to you in marriage unless they're desperate, Raza. You could be defined. How do we know you're not? Maybe not in any way we can see. But there's no guarantee. You might have something you can pass on to your children. I've seen the pictures of babies born in Nagasaki after the bomb" (189).

The explanation for all these disasters is particularly chilling pieces "The bomb was a terrible thing, but it had to be done to save American lives" (62). It's the narrative of how uncaring superpowers, in their quest for supremacy, have increasingly devastated entire ground nations, claiming the lives of millions of people. In all of this, the human aspect is demonstrated to be the worst sufferer. Hiroko's loss of Konrad is the loss of a woman who had just had her sexual awakening and was looking forward to a future with her boyfriend when all vanishes in the blast's heat.

The sight of survivors seeking for the only remains of their loved ones after the explosion, shadows on walls, stones, and other surfaces, is powerful: Those who were closest to the blast's core were obliterated, leaving only the fat from their bodies to attach to the walls and rocks surrounding them like shadows.

The effects of war, particularly on anything human, are felt at various moments during the novel - it tosses around human emotions, bending and twisting the protagonists' fates. Hiroko longs for the comfort of breathing in a familiar environment. He wants to hear Japanese, and he wants tea that tastes the way he thinks tea should taste. He wants to

appear like the people around him; he wants people to be upset when he breaks the rules rather than simply assume he doesn't know better; he wants doors to slide open rather than swing open; and he wants all those things that never meant anything and still wouldn't if he hadn't lost them.

The novel's second half is set during the 1947 Partition of India, another heartbreaking event in history that resulted in terrible genocide on one hand and property loss and displacement on the other. The ensuing carnage ranks as one of the most tragic incidents in South Asian history: “They haven't even settled the boundaries yet. Millions of people with no idea which country they'll find themselves in less than a month. It's madness waiting to happen. And Delhi... so many Muslims, so many Hindus. It'll be carnage if the violence reaches there" (118).

The book also depicts the trauma of Partition, whose change in mindset is an example of how peaceful people are forced to change and are forced by circumstances to turn into gross murderers overnight when their family poured out a week's worth of stories from the Punjab, of Muslim men slaughtered, Muslim shops set on fire, Muslim women abducted - they had to force themselves to stay at home because if they went out and saw a single Hindu his eyes would reopen. Otherwise, a Hindu's eyes would reveal what was going on in their heart. The writer laments the pitiful deterioration of relationships in the midst of tragedy and accurately captures the bleak mood, "Everything James Burton said about violence is true. It is the most contagious of all madnesses. I don't want to know which of my childhood friends have become murderers in the time we've been away" (125).

Hiroko and Sajjad relocated to Pakistan in the 1980s, when the US became heavily involved in the country's affairs to further its economic and political interests in the region.

People's lives are once again sacrificed on the altar of power politics. It is a time when Islamic extremism is on the rise and has maintained its momentum, as illustrated by Raza, who laments, why can't we be more Pakistani? His life is also complicated by his involvement with the Afghanistan Mujahideen. When he is suspected of murdering his friend Harry Burton, he, too, becomes a victim of power politics. Afghanistan is mired in a political quagmire. It has been reduced to a political pawn in the hands of major players such as the United States, the Soviet Union, and Pakistan, among others.

Another depiction of the novel's 'clash of civilisations' is Islamophobia, which reached deadly proportions after the 9/11 attacks on the twin towers. 9/11 triggered a slew of cases in which the presence of a bearded Muslim elicited harsh reactions from authorities and the general public in all Western countries.

At the centre of the work is an appeal for global peace, depicted as a measure to counteract the complete senselessness of all the devastation caused by conflict. The terrifying depiction of the magnitude of the damage only adds to its allure:

> You just have to put them in a little comer of the big picture. What was seventy-five thousand more Japanese dead in the big picture of the Second World War? Acceptable, that's what it was. In the big picture of threats to America, what is one Afghan? Expendable. Maybe he's guilty, maybe not. Why risk it? Kim, you're the kindest, most generous woman I know. But right now, because of you, I understand for the first time how nations can applaud when their governments drop a second nuclear bomb (362).

Hiroko believes it is time to learn from the magnificent past; what she has gone through should not be repeated in any case. The story questions the recklessness with which war is launched without regard for the consequences or sensitivity to the turmoil it causes in millions of lives. It also appears to be crying out, seeking explanations as to why we let the world to devolve into such a dreadful place with few regards for human rights. Why have we enabled the superpowers to pursue their fantasies of vast empires and the desire to be viewed as the world's Godfather, reducing the rest of the world to pawns in a monopoly game? The protagonist appears to be inviting us to reflect on these features, to go beyond the narrow prejudices of devotion to one's religion, nation, race, and culture, and to make advances in the sphere of the human self, exalting it to a level where war is restricted to the pages of history.

Hiroko is a metaphor for people trying to understand their place in history. In an interview, Kamila Shamsie says she was "interested through *Burnt Shadows* in looking at what happens to people’s relationships from contrasting backgrounds. When they start to feel themselves on different sides of history/politics. In what situation do such relations endure, and in what situations do they crumble?" (Filgate).

The redeeming aspect of all this upheaval is that history shapes and damages people. One injustice leads to another, and the story suggests that devotion extends beyond less elevated attachments to home and family. Hiroko, branded by the bird-shaped scars - the charred shadows, the bomb seared into her back - survives by her ability to learn new languages, her readiness to assume new identities, and her refusal to judge others based on their origins. Konrad, whose shadow hangs over much of the narrative, informs Hiroko at one point that "barriers were made of metals that could turn fluid when touched

simultaneously by people on either side" (82). Or, as beautifully said by Harry, "how could you fail to regard the world as your oyster, regardless of whether you saw yourself as a gemstone or as a mollusc" (163).

As a result, in order to highlight the faults and corruption that abound in Pakistan, these women writers have risked to write; writing is a powerful tool for exposing society's follies. They have succeeded in demonstrating how power can corrupt men and how they rely on violence and perpetration to attain their goals.

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Chapter IV

Writings from Afghanistan: Breaking the Shackles of Time

The writings of Afghan women highlight the disturbing condition of people in Afghanistan under social, cultural and legal subjugation, everlasting war, misogynist fundamentalist administrations and a distorted version of Islam. Religion which is seen as a strong tool to institutionalise male dominated hegemony has made Afghan women's life miserable. The narration of these women's sufferings, abuses, atrocities are reflected in their writings. These women have tried to break the shackles of time and place to vent out pain and sorrow thereby exhibiting resilience and courage. They are the real heroes of time and all women should be get encouragement by their act. The focus on Afghan women writings in the present scenario seems apt as the there is growing fundamentalism, extremism, and insurgency all over the world. Their spirt to avenge through their writings is commendable. Prolonged years of suffering under the garb of religion has made their lives miserable. The political disorder has badly hit both men and women equally. But the women have been the most susceptible victims. Apart from the patriarchal domination by men at home, they have suffered under men in political and religious power. The war has created a community of widows, displaced children and aging mothers, young girls raped and tortured, forced into usage of drugs, these helpless women have tolerated the misogynist fundamentalists just to survive. For them dying is the only option than to fight for their basic and fundamental rights. Their existence itself is at others mercy. To daringly write to voice the suffering of women, these writers have given a deep insight into the trauma, and repressive forces in Afghanistan under the Taliban.

One has to take note of the three political phases in Afghanistan, one in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan (1979-1989), resulting in the Anti-Soviet resistance and the birth of Mujahideen.

The Second is the rule of Mujahideen followed by the Taliban (1996-2001), and the third is the U.S intervention in 2001 till date. The complete understanding of Afghanistan is through accounts of oppressed women in international media, development reports, and academic literature. Instances of poor and starving widows, under-age girl's forceful marriage, maternal deaths, rape, murder, incest, abductions, wife-beating, suicide, inaccessible education, burning of girl's schools, restricted mobility and the wearing of Burqa has all created a stereotypical image of male-dominated institutions of a society. In feminist terms, Afghan society is evidently gendered; it makes a plain distinction between gendered roles for women and men. Men enjoy these gender roles to the extent of making the other gender voiceless and invisible. The men snatch away the women's agency to act.

There are several problems by giving a colossal view of the cruelty and brutality on women in Afghanistan. First, it ignores what casual observation reveals: that, despite the reports, oppressed women are not the norm. Second, accounts tend to be sensationalised by Western journalists and others probing for so-called thrilling stories or attempting to characterise Afghanistan as bizarre, backward, and different from the rest of the world. It is also type casted as being inferior and the Other. Third is the descriptions of the situation of Afghan women who are separated from their contexts and judged from western feminist standards. Their position also may be falsely attributed to Islamic beliefs and practices. Lastly, the numerous accounts depersonalise individual victims by making them stock characters set against a backdrop of Afghanistan as a disturbed, dysfunctional, and failed

state. Thus, the whole act becomes dehumanising for both men and women in Afghanistan. For better understanding of the women's plight, it is suggested one looks at State Repressive apparatus.

Louis Althusser, a Marxist critic two kinds of state apparatus, one is the Repressive and the other is the Ideological. He states that every state apparatus, Repressive or Ideological, functions both by violence and ideology, and the state emerges as a combination of repression and ideology. These ideologies are false consciousnesses or obviousness which are supposed or forced to be accepted as accurate and true. Therefore, ideological state apparatuses, for instance, religious apparatus, become a central ideological tool for domination and control. Religious ideology functions as a means by which the upholders of the Islamic state forge a mass base attempting to legitimate the misrule. In Afghanistan, this has been the case with the fundamentalist rulers who employed such ideological apparatuses to control and oppress the ordinary people. Repressive strategies employed by extremist ultraconservative mullahs against people in the garb of Sharia were labelled as a pure form of religion.

Afghanistan is a Muslim-dominated country; therefore, the mullahs or the clergy have always influenced the country's social and political scenario. The clergy stands unrivalled as the absolute interpreter of religion. Thus, the word of the clergy becomes the word of God. Whether it was their defiance of the government policies of women's liberation or emancipation before the Soviet invasion of women's claustrophobic existence, the laws interpreted by the mullahs and the religious fundamentalists became the unquestionable laws of Sharia or the Islamic law. Armed with this authority, the religious fanatics misinterpret religion from their narrow and rigid perspectives, imposing rules,

doctrines or fatwas that were, or fatwas it. The influential religious fanatics and leaders in the name of jihad and the garb of religion distorted its essence.

The religious fundamentalists played a significant role in the politics of Afghanistan after the collapse of the Soviet regime when the mullahs came to power and Afghanistan was declared an Islamic state. In the name of Islamification, shocking and terrifying atrocities were committed. The fundamentalists had no regard for individual freedom, and their policies adversely affected the people, particularly the lives and liberties of Afghan women. With the advent of the fundamentalists and the Taliban, the condition of Afghan women worsened. They denied education, employment, fundamental rights, and liberties and became victims of male oppression. Earlier, while young girls were even sold in the name of marriage, after the absolute power of the fundamentalist groups - the Mujahideen and the Taliban, women became prey to abduction, molestation, abuse, humiliation and murder. The Mujahideen and the Taliban in Afghanistan, thus, forged the religious ISA in the name of Islam, resulting in a ruthless suppression of Afghan people, particularly women.

The memoirs and autobiographical writings understudy highlight the aspect of the victimisation of Afghan men and women through the repressive ideology and power. Cloistered in their country, segregated, alienated in exile, these women from Afghanistan unveil their tragedy, the tragedy of a whole nation, race and gender. A new generation of ultraconservative fundamentalists, the Taliban, arose from the turmoil of post-Soviet Afghanistan and the civil war. The Taliban brought a new era of terror, violence and oppression to Afghan people, particularly women in Afghanistan. In the beginning, they were greeted warmly by many Afghans who had endured enormous suffering and torments

under the Mujahedeen. However, soon the Taliban proved to be equally repressive and brutal, imposing harsh and rigid edicts in the garb of Islam and Sharia law.

Kolhatkar and Ingalls, writers and activists, cite from the Washington Post about the arrival of the Taliban: …the movement practised "a heavy-handed style of conservative Islam" with a cruelty that was well documented in the cable. They had "restricted women to the home, closed girls' schools, and carried out criminal punishments including execution and amputation" (23). Well-armed and proficient in military equipment, rolling into Afghanistan "brand-new Japanese pickup trucks, with rocket launchers and satellite telephones" (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 22), the Taliban soon conquered a much larger part of Afghanistan than any other single jihadi group. The advent of the Taliban sentenced life imprisonment women. They were incarcerated in their homes only to listen either to the tremor of wars outside or the resonating cries. The Taliban controlled the people's lives by first curbing and controlling the media. The Taliban destroyed the television headquarters and broadcast stations. Instead of the BBC, Voice of America, Radio Kabul or Radio Iran now, there was only Radio Sharia which functioned only for a limited time, beginning with recitals of the verses from the Qur'an followed by announcements of the various rules, prohibitions and fatwas by the Mullahs in the garb of Islamic law and closing with reports of their victory over places and people including the unlimited massacres. It was a horrendous, barbaric jungle law practised boldly in the name of the Sharia law.

The philistinism of the Taliban- their hatred for art, literature, culture and music that was evident from the imposition of innumerable doctrines or fatwas by them, laid under the garb of Sharia Law: Girls and women were banned from schools, education, work outside the home and public life; they could leave their homes only when

accompanied by a mahram, a male relative; they were asked to wear the burqa; all bright clothing and makeup was strictly prohibited; women could not consult a male doctor or go to a male tailor; men had to grow long beards and cut moustaches; no western dresses were allowed; pictures, photographs, pets, television, music all were prohibited; only religious education was allowed, that too, only for boys. Severe punishments were given to offenders, including trials and killing at the public square, chopping off the hands of thieves, humiliation, beating and whipping with barbed wires and metal cables.

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan RAWA

> Meena says, "Afghan women are like sleeping lions... When aroused, we react with the same courage and charisma as lions. There are only two paths to choose from: Side with the criminal regime, oppose them and be ready to fight like lionesses. We might have to risk our lives and even lose them" (Chavis 94).

RAWA is the only active women's organisation that continues to fight for the rights and equality of Afghan women based in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The organisation has been throughout all the different oppressive regimes. The lone independent voice of women and all peace and freedom-loving Afghans struggling against fundamentalism and for secular democracy, women's rights, and human rights. RAWA proudly affirms its stand amid the picture of despair and hopelessness, fighting against one brutal regime after another: The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979), the consequent rise of fundamentalist Mujahedeen (1992), the Taliban (1996) and the return of fundamentalist warlords to positions of power in the Afghan Parliament after the U.S. invasion (2001).

Meena, the founder of RAWA, emerged as the symbol of peace, democracy, freedom and women's rights in Afghanistan and an inspiration for thousands of struggling Afghan women. Meena is the path paver in the light RAWA endeavours to eliminate the darkness of Afghanistan. Though she was assassinated at the young age of thirty, Meena, Afghanistan's leading feminist and democrat, continues to reside through her organisation in the hearts of many Afghan women who dream of a peaceful democracy and women's emancipation in Afghanistan. Many Afghan women are inspired and motivated to represent themselves through their writings, and the authors mentioned in the study are also indebted to her.

The primary goal of RAWA is to organise and collectively involve Afghan women and girls in social and political activities to acquire fundamental human rights for women and contribute to establishing a democratic and secular government. Meena feels Women are an untapped source of great strength…, If we can come together to act in unison, we can make changes no one has dreamed of. Before the Soviet invasion, the activities of RAWA were confined to women's rights and democracy. But after the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, RAWA became involved in the war of national liberation. As a pro-democratic, pro-secular, antifundamentalist organisation criticised the Islamic fundamentalist groups fighting against the Soviet government, who were called 'freedom fighters, due to their repressive policies against women and their imposition of a cruel and appropriated Sharia.

The mission and political strategy of RAWA are to unite and fight for their beloved country's independence, establish an Islamic republic, and build a society in which oppression, torture, execution, and injustices must be replaced by democracy and social

justice. This organisation is comprised of progressive women, fights for women's equality, and maintains that the liberation of the oppressed women is inseparable from the release of our oppressed nation; it'll continue its moral struggle for women's rights and clearance after the restoration of the country's independence and freedom from the superpowers and other imperialist powers.

As a humanitarian organisation, RAWA has unswervingly worked in various fields such as education, employment, health care, and legal rights for women: Education is the most effective strategy of RAWA. Viewing education as the most potent means to empowerment, enlightenment, and raising consciousness has created various educational opportunities for children and essential adult learners. The organisation believes that education without consciousness is insufficient to protect women or promote individual and societal improvement. RAWA believes that education has a deeper meaning and purpose of giving women consciousness that would change their lives and society as a whole. Meena was primarily concerned with the education of refugee children. During the tumultuous situation in Afghanistan, RAWA has worked tremendously for the refugees and war victims. The association has catered mainly to the needs of refugee women and children in the refugee camps in Peshawar, Pakistan. The camps sheltered many orphans, destitute widows and young girls, women and men who had been victims of war. It has raised funds through sewing and handicraft workshops to establish schools, clinics and orphanages.

RAWA has emerged as one of the most potent and significant voices of Afghan women. By boldly exposing the atrocities committed against women under the fundamentalist regime to the world, the organisation has given an expression to the unbearable, voiceless women in Afghanistan. Women of RAWA have ushered in a new dawn that fills the life of battered Afghan women with hope and inspiration. The seed of resistance and a community movement that Meena had sown sprouted in the form of RAWA, which continues to assist and offer shelter and solace to the distressed, suffering Afghan women. The life story of Meena and her uncompromising struggle against the enemies of peace and women's rights acts as a beacon for women across the world struggling for their rights, freedom and justice and working to effect a change in their lives and their environment.

This chapter will look at the writings of

1. Masuda Sultan's *My War at Home (2006)*
2. Malala Joya's *A Woman Among Warlords (2009)*
3. Fariba Nawa's *Opium Nation (2011)*

Masuda Sultan

Born in a traditional Afghanistan famiy in Kandahar in 1978, Sultan left her homeland when she was barely five. The family moved to Brooklyn, in United States. Moving from Brooklyn to Flushing and Queens, Sultan grew up in a different environment different from the traditional Afghan upbringing. Life changed for sultan when she got married at the age of seventeen to a much older husband.

Though her marriage was arranged, she could not cope up with the harsh realities of life in US as an Afghan wife. Barely after three years of marriage, much against her parents will, goes for divorce. First of its kind in her family and the community, she boldly accepts her decision and continues her studies. She persues her graduation degree in Economics and comes out with flying colours. The same year in July 2001, take her first ever journey to Kandhar to meet her family back home, she is shocked to know how life has changed for the innocent civilians after the US attack. *My War at Home* is Sultan's memoir of self-discovery.

A young Afghan woman struggles to speak for the younger generation of Afghan women staying in US. It is also about her own struggle as a Muslim living in US during a phase of Islamophobia. Her identity and others take a different image at both personal and private spheres. Being a woman, she tries to add her own perspective in understanding Muslim Feminism at a political level. It has been a few days after the 9/11 attack in New York, when she returns to US after her visit to Afghanistan, she decides to know what has happened to her family in Afghanistan after the US invasion. This time she travels with her film crew determined to expose the realities of war and its aftermath.

Presently Sultan works as an entrepreneur and international human rights advocate, with several organisations, including Women for Afghan Women and the Business Council for Peace. Masuda Sultan's Memoir is "An honest and moving memoir… Sultan's rise from a helpless bride in an arranged marriage to a strong and articulate voice for Afghan women's rights is remarkable. She is an important addition

to the growing community of Muslims who work to bridge gaps and address stereotypes" by Khaleed Hosseini, Author of *The Kite Runner* (My War at Home).

***My War at Home A Memoir* (2006)**

With an American upbringing and Afghan Values at home, Sultana experienced difficult times after her divorce. Then she decides to visit her hometown Khandar, in Afghanistan to see how life has been for women and children. The journey she took to reach Kandahar in July 2001, just before al Qaeda's terrorist attack on the U.S under the Taliban, was a brutal one, as she had to wear a burqa that she was not used to in America. After reaching the place and interacting with her family members, she gets to know the difficulties of leading a life under the Taliban, which restricts women's movement and strict imposition of the burqa; they had also banned all types of music except religious chanting without instruments. She gets to know a woman without a burqa or found wearing nail polish and lipstick could be beaten unconsciously by the Taliban's religious police. "The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) had accessed a video of a woman accused of adultery being shot in Kabul Stadium" (95).

The institutional violence inflicted on these women can be understood with medical statistics. The author says maternal deaths are the highest globally, with only one clinic for every forty thousand people. One of the young women says, "I came here for treatment. I had a bit of jewellery that I sold to get here. Most women in Afghanistan have no money, so when they get sick like I am, they just die" (126). In the chapter "The Worst Health Care in the World", Sultan's cousin Luis worked at a private clinic on the border area of the city, which served the tribes of Afghan gypsies and refugees from other areas of Afghanistan. The worst condition of a clinic with no basic amenities shows

how the country neglects women and their health. Like schools and higher education, even the education sector is not attainable for ordinary people. With a glimpse of the picture of Afghanistan Sultan returns to America.

The incident after 9/11 suddenly shook the identity question. The family tries to question their identity, whether their identity is American or Afghan, or should they accept the process of assimilation being a diaspora? There are many such unresolved questions in their minds. Being true Afghans, most of the American Afghans supported the war because they wanted to eliminate al Qaeda and the Taliban; it was more an emotional stand than a political. When these diaspora community watched bombing on their homes in Afghan in the media, their comfortable position was shaken. Sultana wonders how ordinary Afghans would handle the event; what would Khala Sherina, Nasria, January, Sulaiman, and little mousy Mamoon do? She kept wondering if they would stay in Afghanistan or were in danger. Two weeks after 9/11, After being elected as the representative of the Electoral College of Afghanistan, she wrote a letter to President Bush,

> Mr. President, we implore that you consider the ramifications of military action on the people of Afghanistan. If it is determined that it is necessary to act, please keep in mind that this is a country that has been devastated by war for more than twenty years. We pray that military action by the US does not add to the more than four million refugees and over one million deaths since the Soviet invasion (159).

Sultana again goes to her homeland as a documentary film producer to capture the US war in Afghanistan. The chapter "Nasria's Story" sums up the violence against women in war situations. Gul Agha, her uncle, tells them to visit Nasria in Chowkar-Karez related to Sultan from her maternal side. When the crew reached their home, Mohammed Rasul, Nasria's husband, greeted them in a "crumbling House" (169). There were around fifteen girls and women waiting for them. They ranged in age from one and a half to sixteen. One by one, they started narrating the incident as to how the ground would shake, deafened by the sounds of the bomb, and people ran out to save their lives.

When Nasria's daughter-in-law Almasa, a pregnant woman, ran to the doorway, a rocket hit her and fell into two pieces. Her daughters are orphaned now, which the group said and started to cry. And immediately picked up the little children and began to run out of the house. Other women continued saying that the Americans were shooting from above, right on their heads, and for them, that was the end of the earth, the day of Kaymat. (172). Most of the women in the group were hurt; a firestorm of bullets, cutting through the night, had pierced almost every single one of them. The narrator of attacked men also narrates their stories to the Sultan. After they returned to the US, the writer found out the attack on Chowkar- Karez was a mistake on the part of the Department of Defense (DOD).

In her afterword, the writer says,

> In many ways, little has changed for the average Afghan Woman. She still wears a burqa and, more important, is still poor and has little access to health care, education, or even clean drinking water. I am optimistic, however, that things can change as long as the US truly honours its commitments to Afghanistan. This remains an open question, and international attention has dwindled since the war (251).

Malalai Joya

Malalai Joya's memoir, *A Woman Among Warlords: The Extraordinary Story of an Afghan who Dared to Raise Her Voice* (2009), is also published under the title *Raising My Voice*. Malalai Joya has been called "the bravest woman in Afghanistan" (BBC News, qtd. in Woman Among). She is a former member of the Afghan Parliament, the Wolesi Jirga and an underground activist. She has emerged as the passionate 'Voice of the Voiceless', a symbol of democracy and women's rights in contemporary Afghanistan. This work contextualises the current state of affairs and the condition of women in Afghanistan under the fundamentalist warlords, Jang-e-saalaraan in the Afghan government, and the U.S.-backed Northern Alliance. Joya's book chronicles an essential phase in the political history of Afghanistan dominated by extremist warlords. After the U.S. invasion in Afghanistan, and the formation of the transitional government under President Hamid Karzai, though the situation officially seemed to improve under claims of a pretentious democracy, it has, on the contrary, deteriorated.

The Afghan Parliament continues to be dominated by religious fundamentalists or the warlords who returned to power after the downfall of the Taliban and whose misogynist laws continue to oppress Afghan women in the garb of a misinterpreted Islam and Sharia Law. Joya highlights the abusers and enemies of democracy and takes a firm stand on restoring peace, democracy and women's rights in Afghanistan. The government has harmed and ruined the image of Islam by enforcing the ideology veiled under the frame of religion, sanctioning legislation as religious doctrines to be followed unquestionably in an Islamic state.

In her memoir's account of her life's struggle, Joya has intertwined various issues and problems in contemporary Afghanistan. While she discusses the deteriorating condition in the economic, educational and health sectors in Afghanistan, she regards the current political crisis in the country as the root cause of such deterioration. She boldly stresses the role of fundamentalism, extremism and warlords backed by a foreign government in her country's exploitation and suffering. Here she describes the increasing violence and crimes committed against women and innocent people in Afghanistan. Joya distressfully states that it is worst to be a woman in Afghanistan. She openly says that democracy, human rights and women's rights are a painful joke.

***A Woman Among Warlords: The Extraordinary Story of an Afghan who Dared to Raise Her Voice* (2009)**

A Woman Among Warlords is a realistic portrait and sincere reflection of the ongoing tragedy in Afghanistan. Joya dedicates her memoir "to the Bashiras, Rahellas, Bibu Guls, Pukhtanas, and all my oppressed people whose sighs, tears, and sorrows nobody sees" (Joya). One of her supporters, Derrick O' Keefe, a Canadian writer and social justice

activist, supported Joya in writing her book. The book is remarkable for Joya's eloquent and internationally recognised condemnation of warlordism, extremism and corruption and her outspoken, courageous denunciation of religious and political oppression that led to her banishment from the Afghan Parliament and the seven assassination attempts that she has survived. It is an inspiring story of one woman's courage and determination to raise her voice against injustice, violence and exploitation prevailing under the powerful NATO-backed warlords.

Praising Malalai Joya for her determined efforts toward women's rights and democracy, Noam Chomsky, an American linguist, social critic and political activist, says: "Joya worked effectively for human rights, particularly for women; she was elected to Parliament and then expelled when she continued to denounce warlord atrocities. She now lives underground under heavy protection, but she continues the struggle, in word and deed. By such actions, repeated everywhere as best we can, the prospects for peace edge closer to hope" (qt. in Joya, Woman Among). Here Joya, unravelling the tragic political history of Afghanistan, struggling against war and instability and the false promises of the puppet government, describes the situation: … Afghanistan has long been used as a deadly playground in the "Great Game" (4) between superpowers, from the British Empire to the Soviet empire, and now the Americans and their allies. "They have tried to rule Afghanistan by dividing it…. The Afghan people are not terrorists; we are the victims of terrorism. Today the soil of Afghanistan is full of landmines, bullets, and bombs - when what we need is an invasion of hospitals, clinics, and schools for boys and girls" (4).

The majority of warlords and such fundamentalist forces dominated the Afghan Parliament ushering in another threatening era for Afghan women, who became the first and worst victims of these extremists. As Joya describes, they used rape to punish their enemies and reward their fighters. There have been terrible instances of rape and violence against Pashtun women as they belong to the same ethnic group as most Taliban. Joya cites a report in the *New York Times* (November 19, 2001): "The galaxy of warlords who tore Afghanistan apart in the early 1990s and who were vanquished by the Taliban because of their corruption and perfidy are back on their thrones, poised to exercise power in the ways they always have" (53).

Most people across the world have been led to believe that violence and brutality against women began during the rule of the Taliban. However, Joya exposes how the fundamentalist Mujahideen committed the worst atrocities and crimes against women during the civil war between 1992 and 1996. They introduced many anti-women laws that repressed and exploited women in Afghanistan. Despite the false show of liberation, the warlords have been targeting Afghan women like the Taliban and, in some cases, even worse. Cases of rape and mistreatment of women have been reported only months after the fall of the Taliban. Many houses have been looted, and women and young girls have been raped. Their families and relatives have been threatened and forced to remain silent.

Similar to the Taliban's rules and restrictions, women in Herat were required to cover themselves inside the burqa. Outside of Kabul, women and children have faced several threats. They are not safe at all. All kinds of physical and sexual violence inflict on them. In the north, three rival forces have committed abuses against Pashtun civilians, including raping entire households and girls as young as fourteen … Around the northern

city of Mazar-e-Sharif, the factional rivalry between local commanders contributed to targeted attacks on women aid workers and rapes of women and children in displacement camps that had become militarised (qt. in Kolhatkar and Ingalls 115). Violence against women became even worse than under the Taliban in some instances.

In 2003, Amnesty International published a report entitled, "No One Listens to Us and No One Treats Us as Human Beings: Justice Denied to Women", which stated: after the fall of the Taliban in 2001, violence committed by armed groups against women and girls include rape, abduction, and forced and underage marriage. The AIHRC (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission), indicate that the abuse of women by armed groups is so common that the research department wing has decided to maintain a separate category in its files for such incidents. In many parts of Afghanistan, women feel insecure and are at high risk of sexual violence. They also feel the violence has increased manifolds after the overthrowal of the Taliba. Women express a greater sense of constant fear and intimidation arising from the behaviour of illegally and heavily armed groups in parts of Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad (qt. in Kolhatkar and Ingalls 115). An epidemic of self-immolation by Afghan women has been spread across Afghanistan in the past few years since the return of the warlords. Joya, too, highlights the issue in her memoir.

She states: "Self-immolation is a new phenomenon in Afghanistan. It is a tragic and increasingly common method for women and girls to escape their misery. There is a very high suicide rate among women in our country because of all the abuse and mistreatment they suffer" (60).

In Herat, during the reign of Ismail Khan, hundreds of cases of self-immolation by young girls and women have been reported. Reflecting on his repressive rule, an eighteen-year-old girl, Nasreen, living in Herat, describes Afghan women's confinement within their homes. She stated that Ismail Khan did not want women to be "free". He said that those women should stay in their houses rather than go out "…men were forbidden from teaching women or girls in private classes, and boys and girls were not allowed to be in school buildings simultaneously" (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 114). Women's movement was restricted as they were not permitted to go on their own in taxi cars; they were "socially policed" (114) while talking to men. They faced restrictions on freedom to work, and also, driving school for women was closed. Women continued to be treated as chattel, whether transferred as "gifts" from one army commander to another or as "opium brides" to the warlords or drug lords.

The condition of Afghan women deteriorated to such as extent that a woman poignantly states: "During the Taliban regime, if a woman went to the market and showed an inch of flesh, she would have been flogged - now she's raped" (Kolhatkar and Ingalls 116). She says that these values are ingrained in the Afghan soil as proven by history and that they cannot be imposed by foreign powers and manipulated by them to strengthen their hold in Afghanistan. Joya proclaims: "…no nation can donate liberation to another country. These values must be fought for and won by the people themselves. They can only grow and flourish when planted by the people in their soil and watered by their blood and tears" (5). There are three main aspects of Joya's autobiography- a memoir of a young girl growing up in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation and raised in the refugee camps of Iran and Pakistan.

Secondly, she returns to Afghanistan as a social activist during the rule of the Taliban, secretly teaching girls, hiding her books under her burqa and establishing a free medical clinic and an orphanage.

Finally, becoming a controversial political figure through her harsh criticism of the oppressive government and its injustices, particularly against Afghan women and emerged as a fearless voice for millions of unheard, oppressed and suffering people of Afghanistan. The book is, thus, divided into fourteen chapters. The first two chapters describe Joya's early life in an invaded war-torn Afghanistan and her education and growing up as a refugee in Iran and Pakistan. The following two chapters trace her activism and association with OPAWC (Organization for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities).

The rest of the chapters relate to her stepping into politics, raising her voice as a representative of Afghan women, her wedding and her constant struggle against the warlords, which continues to date. In the introduction to her autobiography, entitled "Dust in the Eyes of the World", Malalai Joya poignantly presents the miserable and unfortunate state of Afghanistan, which she calls "a land of tragedy" (1). Joya reflects on the thwarted hopes and aspirations of the suffering and oppressed people of Afghanistan. She boldly unveils the truth which is hidden from the outside world. Explaining her purpose in writing her life's story, Malalai Joya says that it is through her autobiography that she can relate to the sad plight of the Afghan people, decades of repression, injustice and misrule and the corruption and warlordism that persists in the name of fake democracy, thus, destroying her country.

Joya states: … “this book [is] a way to talk about the plight of the Afghan people from the perspective of a member of my country’s war generation. I agreed to use my personal experiences as a way to tell the political history of Afghanistan focusing on the past three decades of oppressive misrule…. In this way, it is not just my story but the story of my struggling people” (3) Joya’s story is “the story of a generation” (1) as she explains: “For the thirty years I have been alive, my country has suffered from the constant scourge of war. Most Afghans my age and younger have only known bloodshed, displacement, and occupation” (Joya 1). Afghanistan has been struggling for human and women’s rights for decades. She hopes to see her story be a source of inspiration for those working for peace, justice and democracy. Joya says that the book shall also correct the misinformed picture of Afghanistan and the Afghan people: Afghans are sometimes represented in the media as backward people, nothing more than terrorists, criminals, and henchmen…. “The truth is that Afghans are brave and freedom-loving people with a rich culture and proud history. We are capable of defending our independence, governing ourselves, and determining our future” (4). The earnings from this book, as Joya says, will be donated to support various humanitarian projects in Afghanistan. Joya has emerged as a representative of the silenced and repressed Afghan women who has been vulnerable victims, abused and exploited under decades of war and oppression.

Highlighting the worsened condition of women in Afghanistan, Joya says: “The sad fact is that in Afghanistan, killing a woman is like killing a bird. The United States has tried to justify its occupation with rhetoric about “liberating” Afghan women. However, we remain caged in our country, without access to justice and still ruled by women-hating criminals. Fundamentalists still preach that “a woman should be in her house or the grave”.

In most places, it is still not safe for a woman to appear in public uncovered or to walk on the street without a male relative. Girls are still sold into marriage.

"Rape goes unpunished every day" (2-3). Though the puppet government promises protection, rights and justice to women, violations of women's rights exist. Many girls are deprived of education and opportunities for self-promotion. Eighty per cent of women are illiterate and confined within their homes. Wife-beating or domestic violence is a common phenomenon in most parts of the country. Yet, the government plays a mock show of women's rights and democracy. Joya was the youngest member of the Afghan Parliament before she was banished from her elected post and threatened with death for raising her voice against the fundamentalist warlords, firmly holding important positions in the puppet government.

Joya was seven years old when she joined the Watan School in Quetta, founded by Meena, the legendary figure in Afghanistan and the founder of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). Joya writes in her memoir, admiring Meena's efforts for the emancipation of Afghan women and her struggle for democracy: "Meena's blood has fertilised the struggle of all Afghan women right up to today. I am very grateful that I had a chance to meet her in person, even if only for a day as a young child. She remains an inspiration to me" (21).

Regarding religion as a personal matter, Joya points out the travesty of Islam at the hands of these warlords who twisted and appropriated the doctrines of Islam for power politics. Joya regards these extremists as the primary cause of the tragedy of Afghanistan. She describes the terrible phase of the civil war and the fight for power between warlords of different ethnic backgrounds. These warlords assaulted Afghan unity and led

Afghanistan into ethnic rivalries splitting the country into fiefdoms and making innocent people of all ethnic groups suffer. Kabul, called “the bride of the cities” (26), was pooled with bloodshed. More than 90% of the city was ruined, according to a report by the United Nations. Thousands of innocent people were slaughtered, displaced, became homeless. And the worst affected were the innocent Afghan women.

In unveiling the truth, Joya states that people in the outside world have been misled that brutality, intolerance, and repression of women in Afghanistan began with the Taliban. Highlighting the traumatic condition and abuse of Afghan women during the civil war and the rule of the fundamentalist Mujahideen, Joya mentions: “There was anarchy on the streets. Young girls were being abducted, raped, and killed by roaming gangs. We were not even safe in our home. At night, armed fighters of criminal mujahideen groups would often walk right into people’s homes… yelling and turning things upside down around the house, taking whatever, they pleased” (27). Joya describes how these extremist warlords used and distorted Islam to deprive women of their fundamental rights. Schools for girls were closed, and universities were torched. Even the sound of women’s laughter or their footsteps was prohibited. An ordinance was passed on the conduct of women: “Ordinance on the Women’s Veil”, which proclaimed, “A denier of the veil is an infidel and an unveiled woman is lewd” (28).

A new set of rules were framed for women in Afghanistan, such as Women must not perfume themselves; they must cover their entire bodies; they must not wear adorning clothes; they must not wear thin, narrow and tight dresses, and their clothes must not resemble men’s clothes; Muslim women’s clothes must not resemble clothes of non-Muslim women; their foot ornaments must not produce sound, and sound-producing

garments were forbidden; they must not walk in the middle of streets; they must not go out of their homes without the permission of their husband; they must not look at or mix with strangers; they must not talk to strange men, if necessary then they must speak in a low voice, without laughter. Joya openly says that these same warlords who have returned to power in the Afghan Parliament were even worse than the Soviet invaders.

To affirm their strong positions in the Afghan government, these fundamentalists cover their religious extremism behind the mask of fake democracy and human rights and continue to exploit Afghan women. Joya's experiences in the refugee camps acquainted her with the suffering, pain and injustice endured by innocent Afghan people, particularly Afghan women. She saw education as the chief and most potent weapon to better their condition. In her ninth year at school, Joya was still a teenager when she started teaching women in the camps to read and write. She was encouraged further when her mother joined her literacy classes. Joya was a voracious reader. Her father encouraged her to read important books that would influence her personality and ideas.

She read books ranging from history, politics, fiction, poetry and biographies. She was inspired by Ashraf Dehghani's *The Epic of Resistance* which documented the injustice and cruelties of the Iranian jails, and Maxim Gorky's books, *Mother* and *My University Days*. Joya was deeply influenced by the inspiring words of Bertolt Brecht, which she has memorised: "Some men struggle for a day, and they are good. Some men struggle, and they are better. Some men work for many years, and they are better still. But some struggle all their lives. These are the indispensable ones". (32). Joya used many inspiring passages to motivate women in the camps to educate themselves. She loved the poetry of Iranian and Afghan poets.

She read many biographies, including those of Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagat Singh, and Nelson Mandela, which profoundly impacted her revolutionary spirit. She also saw movies such as Spartacus and The Gadfly, stories of rebellion and extreme heroism that changed the course of her life as she states: "this - the conditions in the camps, my teaching, the reading I was doing - was changing my perception of the world, and I had taken Brecht's words to heart. I wanted to do something. Above all, I wanted to participate in efforts to improve the situation of the Afghan people" (33). As a young girl, Joya was influenced by the courage of Palestinian children fighting against the violence of Israeli troops. Determined to work for the progress of her country and to put an end to the barbarism persisting in Afghanistan, Joya, in 1998, joined the Organization for Promoting Afghan Women's Capabilities (OPAWC), an unofficial, unregistered NGO working to improve the health and education of women and young girls in Afghanistan.

To serve the needs of her people and Afghan women mainly, Joya started working as a social activist. Her first major project was to start classes for girls in the province of Herat in defiance of the Taliban and their numerous fatwas against girls. During this time, she adopted the surname Joya to protect her family's identity. Joya returned to Afghanistan after an exile of almost sixteen years to find her beloved country under the repressive control of the Taliban. In the chapter of her memoir, entitled "The Shadow of the Taliban", Joya sketches a detailed picture of the rule and barbarism of the Taliban. She describes: "Like the fundamentalist warlords they replaced, the Taliban leaders misused Islam and imposed strict regulations and repressive, medieval measures in the name of religion.

All men were compelled to grow beards, and women were forcibly shrouded in burqas. "And as most people are no doubt aware, the Taliban strictly forbade any formal

education for women and girls" (36). The Taliban imposed coercive laws and corporal punishments. Severe restrictions were reinforced on women's clothing. The Taliban destroyed books other than the Qur'an. Television, movies, music, and photographs were strictly banned. In her memoir, Joya vividly discusses forced marriages' painful tradition and practice. The condition of young girls who came to live in the orphanage was profoundly moving and tragic. Teenaged girls were sold off in marriage by their parents due to poverty and the moral obligation to marry their daughters. Joya cites the case of a girl who resisted against her parents, saying that "she was a human being and not an animal to be sold for the highest price" (59).

Joya triumphantly remarks that this was the lesson and courage that the girl had gained from the orphanage, that she was raising her voice against unfair practices and injustice against women. Joya, however, also mentions the tragic case of an orphan girl named Rahellah who ran to the orphanage as her uncle was forcibly marrying her off to his son, who was a drug addict. After some days of her stay in the orphanage, her uncle came, appearing polite and kind, asking to take Rahellah home for a few days to meet the family. When Rahellah reached home, the wise uncle quickly arranged for her marriage, and she was sent to Iran. Rahellah, due to her miserable plight, a few days later immolated herself. Joya's journey to the political field started when she decided to participate in the second post-Taliban Loya Jirga, the Grand Council or the council of elders, in 2003, which would formulate a new constitution determining the future of Afghanistan. Though Joya was only twenty-five years old, she had worked for many years since her teens among the people of Farah who had great trust in her, particularly women.

Explaining her decision to join politics to purge the corrupt system and to be the voice of her distressed people, Joya writes in her memoir: “I felt that our people needed their voices to be heard. This motivated me to get involved in the new political process in Afghanistan. I was determined to help finally put an end to the rule of the warlords and fundamentalists, and I knew the great majority of Afghan men and women shared this aim. My mission would be to expose the true nature of the Jirga from within it” (61). Joya was elected as one of the two women delegates to the Loya Jirga in Kabul. She gave her first formal public speech at the main UN compound in Farah, wherein she boldly raised her voice against the fundamentalist warlords and their crimes committed against women. The Loya Jirga in Kabul consisted of 502 delegates, of which 114 were women. Joya was appalled to see the majority of warlords proudly seated in the Loya Jirga. She was shocked to discover that those war criminals who should have been tried for their crimes were instead given important positions in the assembly and a voice in framing her country’s Constitution.

Describing the presence of these warlords, Joya points out: “…the assembly was full of the men who had, for the past decades, destroyed Afghanistan, waged civil war, and killed tens of thousands of innocents in their quest for power…. It was painful to see these enemies of our people making decisions about our new constitution” (67). Disgusted at the unbearable presence of these extremist warlords, Joya aggressively further states: “The voices of the countless widows who had told me of their suffering rang in my ears as I looked around the room. It was terrible enough to hear about these men and their crimes, but seeing them in person running this Loya Jirga and listening to their speeches, was like torture for me. I had to speak out” (69).

Joya was the youngest delegate in the assembly chaired by the fundamentalist Sibghatullah Mojaddedi. Joya was not allowed to speak till December 17, 2003, when she finally made her way to the dais, openly condemning the warlords. The proceedings in the assembly were being broadcasted live on Afghan television and Radio Kabul. Though she was given three minutes to speak, she hardly said when her microphone was cut off for ninety seconds. Joya began her radical speech by bravely raising her voice against the war criminals responsible for the tragic plight of her country and Afghan women: "My name is Malalai Joya from Farah Province. By the permission of the esteemed attendees and by the name of God and the martyrs of the path of freedom, I would like to speak for a few minutes. My criticism of all my compatriots is why you are allowing the legitimacy and legality of this Loya Jirga to come into question due to the presence of those criminals who have brought our country to this state. Why would you allow criminals to be present here? They are responsible for our situation now!... They are the most anti-women elements in our society who brought our country to this state. They intend to do the same again … They should be prosecuted in the national and international courts!" (70,71).

Her speech infuriated the warlords present in the assembly who shouted slogans at her: "Down with communism!" (72). She was threatened and attacked by the warlords who called themselves jihadis and heroes who liberated Afghanistan. The chairman asked her to apologise, labelled her "a communist" and an "infidel" (73). Joya, as a result, was expelled from the assembly. Inspired by the lines of Bertolt Brecht: "He who does not know the truth is only a fool. He who knows the truth and calls it a lie is a criminal" (76), Joya, despite life threats continued her struggle speaking and exposing the truth. In her lay,

the hope of the many agonised and silenced people of Afghanistan for whom “Joya was a hero” (75).

Joya, thus, became a symbol of the Afghan resistance against warlords. She received massive support worldwide after her brave and candid speech, evident through newspapers, international media, and her numerous interviews, resulting in her return to the Loya Jirga. A massive demonstration was held in Farah Province in which around three hundred women participated in support of Joya’s speech, denouncing her expulsion. Though Joya returned to the Loya Jirga, she was banned from speaking in the assembly. However, Joya signed a petition with a few more democratic-minded delegates challenging the new constitution’s provision of naming Afghanistan the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which was also dismissed. In the committee meetings, Joya openly discussed violence and crimes against women and the need to ensure women’s rights. She succeeded in including a statement (Article 22) in the adopted constitution that asserted equality for both men and women: “The citizens of Afghanistan- whether man or woman- have equal rights and duties before the law” (82). However, Article 3 states: “In Afghanistan, no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred provisions of Islam” (82). The ultraconservative warlords were able to invoke and misinterpret religion to justify the denial of equal rights to women. As a result, the law became a plaything in the hands of warlords and a powerful tool to oppress women legally.

Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, the Chairman of the constitutional Loya Jirga and former Mujahideen president, said to the women delegates at the convention: “Even God has not given you equal rights, because under his decision two women are counted as equal to one man” (82). Therefore, the provision of the supremacy of Islamic law (Article 3) was used

to further oppress Afghan women in the name of an appropriated Islam. An evident fact, as Joya describes, is the appointment of Fazil Hadi Shinwari, an ultra-fundamentalist cleric with no training in secular law, as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Kolhatkar and Ingalls describe: that Shinwari has revived the Taliban ban on cable television and has attempted to ban women from singing and dancing in public. He has declared that adulterers would be stoned to death, the hands of thieves amputated, and consumers of alcohol given eighty lashes (144).

Islamic Sharia law has been most viciously distorted and used against women in Afghanistan. Many Afghan women have been imprisoned and severely punished under the pretext of a misinterpreted Sharia, as has been discussed previously regarding cases of ‘running away. Joya returned to Farah Province and was overwhelmed by the warm welcome that she received from the people, particularly Afghan women who have suffered the most at the hands of these extremists. She witnessed the sincere support of people in Farah as a woman almost a hundred years old named Bibi Zulaikha came to greet her seated in a wheelbarrow. The faith, love, and support of the Afghan people were so profound that Joya was motivated to continue her work and struggle against the warlords even under the shadow of numerous attacks.

She relates to the plan of the warlords to kill her while returning to Farah, which could not be executed as a supporter informed her of the evil conspiracy. Joya also mentions how her supporters have formed the Malalai Joya Defense Committee to spread her message and raise funds for her protection. Though Joya succeeded in conveying the agony in Afghan women's lives, she was aware that the Loya Jirga proved to be a failure. Reflecting on how democracy in Afghanistan is “only a mirage” (84), Joya says: “Almost

none of my fellow Afghan women would ever get to drive a car, let alone fly in an aeroplane… And then there are the hundreds of women who kill themselves each year to escape their violent husbands or the shame being raped or abused" (85).

Having returned to Farah, Joya resumed her work in the clinic and the orphanage. Joya soon became a counsellor to the suffering women who came to seek her advice on personal matters. She highlights the exploitation of women and young girls in the name of religion or Afghan culture, considering it "one of the results of three decades of male chauvinism justified by cherry-picking quotes from the Holy Quran and twisting Islam" (90). Encouraging them to break their silence, Joya urges them: "Let us join hands; women's rights are not something given to you. It has to be taken, and this is something that only we can do together" (91).

In her book, Joya also describes the denial of legal rights to women. She highlights how in the repressive, conservative society under a misinterpreted Sharia, Afghan women face exploitation under the biased legal system: "It is tough for a woman to get a divorce, and even if the problems in a relationship are entirely the man's fault, people will have the view that the woman is to blame. However, Joya continued her mission, boldly exposing the warlords and the "mockery of democracy that has been imposed in Afghanistan" (103).

In an attempt, Joya met with President Hamid Karzai and his wife and discussed the tragic condition of women in Afghanistan under extremist warlords. She also explained how Afghan women had been constant sufferers of war and warlordism- facing abuse, abduction, rape, and murder. As Joya mentions, the meeting did not prove fruitful. The government's indifference towards the agony of the Afghan people made Joya more determined to become a politician "in a country where democracy remains a farce" (109)

and to continue her battle against corruption and warlordism. As a result, Joya decided to participate in the parliamentary elections held on September 18, 2005. These were the first parliamentary elections held in Afghanistan in thirty-three years, and for the first time, women were allowed to participate.

Explaining, thus her purpose, Joya says: "A seat in Parliament would allow me to voice my concerns about violence, poverty and women's rights to a larger audience, not only in Afghanistan but around the world. It would also give me a forum to expose the warlords' corruption and call for their prosecution for war crimes" (110). In the same year, Joya got married on March 10, 2005. She did not mention her husband's name for security reasons but describes how supportive and understanding he and his family were, respecting her decisions and commitment to her work. She was so devoted to her work that even she could not stay back for her engagement party.

Joya's wedding was different from a traditional Afghan wedding- simple with modest celebrations. She did not even dress like a conventional bride, wearing an expensive bridal outfit and jewels. She refused to accept extravagant gifts from her husband's family. She donated the skills and jewellery presented to her by visitors to OPAWC for funding the Hamoon Clinic. A day before her wedding, she was invited as chief guest at an event celebrating International Women's Day held in front of their orphanage in Farah. During this event, her wedding was announced, and everyone was invited. The same tent arrangement was used for the wedding the next day.

By dismissing extravagance, Joya wanted to set an example of "how to break with a harmful tradition" (115) that has caused many families in her country to fall into debt. She wanted to convey through her wedding "that a daughter is not an object to be sold, that

jewellery and expensive clothes do not bring luck. Education is what brings good fortune, and that's where the money should be spent" (113). Soon after her wedding, Joya devoted herself to the election campaign. Due to threats and escalating violence, she could not travel much outside Farah. Therefore, as part of her campaign, she recorded her speech, and her message was spread to the people through those recorded cassettes carried to remote villages by her supporters.

Joya mentions how the people greatly supported her, particularly women, who were the most dedicated supporters and who lay their hopes and trust deeply in Joya, who constantly spoke about their suffering, struggle and hardships. She even got the support of the wives and daughters of fundamentalists, although secretly. Children and youth were among her vast supporters. Even the religious leaders in Farah supported her. However, while on the one hand, Joya received massive support on the other, her enemies severely criticised her for attempting to defame her. Flyers were distributed, calling her a "prostitute", "anti-Islamic", and "communist" (119).

Despite harsh criticisms and many hardships, Joya persevered through her struggle. She had the support of international media, which was evident through a documentary about Joya's struggle for democracy and women's rights, and her journey to the battlefield to expose the brutalities of the fundamentalists. Through her life's story and her endless struggle against warlords, Joya conveys how it is essential to raise our voices against injustice rather than compromising with a powerful oppressor.

During the trips outside Afghanistan, she met many few members of RAWA. While Joya boldly confronts the "war on terror", which in reality is a myth and condemns the U.S policies, on the other hand, she is appreciative of the solidarity and support of the peace

and justice-loving people in the U.S. She aims to spread awareness among people worldwide to strengthen and unite to fight for their rights and justice. In the chapter entitled "A Bird with One Wing", Joya unveils the accurate picture of Afghan women under the rule of warlords: "…Afghanistan remains like a bird with one wing-women-clipped. As long as the subjugation of women persists, our society will not be able to take off and move forward. Not only are women still denied their rights in Afghanistan, but also, in a cruel irony, the cause of women has been used to justify and perpetuate a brutal occupation of my country" (178).

A UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) survey documents that almost eighty per cent of Afghan women suffer from domestic violence. Between sixty and eighty per cent of marriages are forced where young girls are traded and sold like commodities. Towards the end of her book, Joya provides statistical details of the violence, abuse, and exploitation of Afghan women over the years. According to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), about twenty-five per cent of Afghan women bear sexual violence. Joya cites the case of a fourteen-year-old girl, Bashira, who was gang-raped, and one of the accused was the son of a member of Parliament. When Bashira and her father decided to raise their voices, they were threatened.

Yet, the grieving father continued his struggle for justice. Referring to the increasing rates of suicides among Afghan women, Joya describes that in the first half of 2007, terrible cases of 250 suicides were reported. She cites the harrowing case of a twenty-five-year-old woman, Pukhtana, in Laghman Province, who immolated herself before the local courthouse as a protest against the injustice in Afghanistan. According to a UNIFEM report, sixty-five per cent of the fifty thousand widows in Kabul believed that suicide was

the only option to escape their misery. Joya urges Afghan women "not to choose suicide, but instead to choose to be part of the collective struggle to achieve justice for women in Afghanistan" (192).

Joya also highlights the miserable plight of Afghan widows who live in acute poverty and resort to prostitution due to economic hardships and lawlessness. Infant and maternal mortality rates are the highest in Afghanistan: "Every twenty-eight minutes, an Afghan woman dies during childbirth. Badakshan Province has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world – 6,500 deaths out of 100,000 live births…" (193). Joya also debunks the myth about girls in Afghanistan freely going to school. She mentions that although "a fortunate minority" (187) of young girls in Kabul can have access to schools and education, the condition outside Kabul remains pathetic. Joya cites the United Nations survey that indicates how more than five million children are still deprived of education.

According to a study by Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), in December 2008, only five per cent of girls and eleven per cent of boys were able to pursue education up to the twelfth grade. Young girls were attacked with acid to terrorise and prevent them from attending school. Given the worsening condition of Afghan women and the need for women's rights in Afghanistan, Joya says: "To fight for women's rights in a besieged and benighted country like Afghanistan is to accept a considerable risk, with many challenges. It is like trying to swim against a strong current. But it is a proud struggle. It is a dream that one day a democratic-minded woman will take the reins of power in Afghanistan. By shining a light on the actual state of women's rights in

Afghanistan today, we can teach even the darkest minded misogynists that women are capable of changing the world when they move into action together" (194).

Reflecting on Afghanistan's current situation and turmoil, Joya states how war and destruction continue in Afghanistan. During the past three decades, all kinds of atrocities have been committed in Afghanistan regarding religion, socialism, democracy, women's rights and liberation. She presents statistical details of the number of deaths of innocent Afghan civilians in the garb of "the war on terror" that has enhanced the tragedy of Afghanistan. Joya relates the condition of Afghans: "We live every day of our lives in the terror of an endless war…. Whenever we leave our homes… we never know if we are leaving for the last time" (196).

In the final chapter of her book, "The Long Road Ahead", Joya pleads to the international community for assistance and aid under various heads such as End the War, Send Real Humanitarian Aid, Put an End to the Rule of the Warlords, and Withdraw all foreign troops. Joya urges her readers to help and support the betterment of the condition of the Afghan people. She pleads the peace and freedom-love progressive-intended people to organise themselves for social justice and work with groups genuinely supporting Afghans, including financial assistance. Joya implores the international community: "With your help and participation, I know the suffering of the Afghan people can end. I dream of seeing an Afghanistan where women are considered human beings… where we are free to decide our future" (224).

Proclaiming her mission, Joya says that she aims to establish a robust, progressive movement within Afghanistan that would fight for freedom, equality and women's rights and drive out the fundamentalist forces and foreign troops from Afghanistan, turning it into a genuine democracy. In her endeavour toward transformation in Afghanistan, Joya considers education the most effective weapon for fighting and defeating fundamentalism and terrorism. Joya envisages a future wherein all Afghans, both men and women, are free and educated and live-in harmony and peace rather than under the shadow of an endless war. Through her life's story, Joya emphasises the importance of education for girls that would make them independent and self-reliant. She also aims at developing their political consciousness for their active participation.

Given her significant contribution to the upliftment of Afghan women and the betterment of Afghanistan, Malalai Joya has been felicitated with many awards. In 2004, she received the Malalai of Maiwand Award for courageously raising her voice against the atrocities committed by the warlords in her speech at the Loya Jirga, which she donated to the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture to be kept in the National Archives. Some of her awards include: "South Korea's Gwangju Award for Human Rights (2006)", "The women of Peace Award (2006)", she was named among the "1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize (2005)", and nominated for the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought (2007), she was named one of the World Economic Forum's 250 Young Global Leaders (2007), International Human Rights Film Award (2008) for the documentary, Enemies of Happiness, the Anna Politkovskaya Award in London (2008), which is given to courageous women who have defended human rights, and many more.

Recently, on International Women's Day, Joya went on a speaking tour to Denmark from March 8 to 15, 2016.

The event focused on the rights of Afghan women and their current position in Afghanistan under warlords. Joya gave critical insight into women's situation and boldly demanded the expulsion of warlords from Afghanistan. Joya's struggle for women's rights and democracy continues for which she has sacrificed the cherished joys of life and is even prepared to sacrifice her life for her country, as she bravely proclaims: "… I don't fear death; I fear remaining silent in the face of injustice. I fear becoming indifferent to the fate of my people … you can kill me, but you can never kill my spirit" (228). Like Malalai of Maiwand, Malalai Joya has taken up the Afghan flag continuing her battle for freedom, peace and justice. Hopeful of change, Malalai Joya says: "Our enemies can cut down the flower, but nothing can stop the coming of the spring" (229).

Reiterating the words of Martin Luther King Jr. "that no injustice could last forever", Joya quotes: "I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality. That is why right, temporarily defeated is stronger than evil triumphant" (227). Joya ends her book on an optimistic note that violence, injustice and suppression of women by warlords and the Taliban cannot last forever and that an uprising and transformation, sooner or later, is bound to happen at the hands of the awakened people of Afghanistan who "will be like a flood that no one can stop" (228).

Thus, through her memoir, A Woman Among Warlords, Joya wanted to challenge the docile image of Afghan women premiered in the world. She insisted that Afghan women are brave and struggle to fight for their rights and freedom. Though they are forced to be submissive and battered to silent, they have the strength, resilience and courage to raise their voices against injustice and violence. Joya conveys that “women are not just victims but symbols of resistance” (226). Bestowed with the gift of education, these Afghan women will redirect themselves towards the goal of rejuvenating Afghanistan.

Fariba Nawa

Fariba Nawa is an award-winning Afghan-American freelance journalist who grew up in both Afghanistan's Heart and Lashkargah, as well as Fremont, California. She covers a wide range of topics, with a focus on women's rights and conflict zones. Her report "Afghanistan Inc." is one of the key materials used in various media outlets throughout the world to debate the efficiency of Afghanistan's reconstruction efforts. She investigates the pace of reconstruction and finds some examples of where financial aid has been used to see how the international aid system works. Her fascination extends to understanding how foreigners restore war-torn communities and cities.

***Opium Nation: Child Brides, Drug Lords, and One Woman's Journey Through Afghanistan* (2011)**

Fariba Nawa opens her book by discussing her life in Afghanistan and how things changed after the Soviet invasion in 1979. She recalls a more open culture before the war, with far less emphasis on the gender and ethnic inequities that afflict Afghanistan now. Nawa discusses the dread that reigned after the coup that deposed Afghan President Mohammed Daoud and afterwards under Taliban authority. She stated that women acted

like mass lunatics, breaking Taliban laws in private while fearing the consequences. She goes into detail about the Afghan drug trade and the role of women in it.

She detailed her visit to an Iranian border village that was inundated with opium, criminality brought on by smugglers, and "opium brides" handed to traffickers in exchange for opium debt forgiveness. She argues that around two-thirds of opium was refined into heroin throughout time. Women were able to participate because the procedure entailed cooking. This many women and their families had been enmeshed in the opium economy as cultivators, refiners, or smugglers. Afghanistan gets 60% of its GDP from opium, and while the sector is worth $4 billion within the country, it is believed to be worth $65 billion outside its borders. Many multinational cartels are involved in the opium trade that originated in Afghanistan, and the industry's beneficiaries are largely not Afghans.

Nawa explains this with statistics; she says opium production, which was 75 tons in 1932, has jumped to 8200 tons by 2007 (43). Exponential growth is not reflected as progress but in the destruction of the rural economy, decrease in food production and human damage. Opium has developed its addicted population from the industry, with an estimated 10-25% consisting of women and children. She emphasised that although the opium trade has benefited some with a chance to earn a living, it has damaged the lives of many within Afghanistan. She explains,

> “These men leave behind thousands of dollars in opium debt, which the trade’s greatest victims inherit: their wives and children. Between 2001 and 2003, the number of women dousing themselves with accelerants and setting themselves on fire rose from two to three burnings a week” (91).

In the book, Nawa focused on the story of an opium bride named Darya, a twelve-year-old girl whose father had sold her to a smuggler to pay off his debts. In the society of Afghanistan, a bride becomes a sacrificing object for the greater good, for Darya realises her marriage is not about honour but lives. With her feminist views, the writer identifies with Darya and sees both her childhood and adulthood as a connection to her homeland in her frightened girl. For Nawa, "She is Afghanistan—her beauty and innocence, her resistance to control, yearning for independence, desperation, and plea for help to an outsider" (126). Very sadly, she continues by saying throughout Afghanistan's history; the country has been trying to form an identity outside of foreign interference while seeking help from those same foreigners. Now the U.N and its allies say they have to save Afghanistan, but they are destroying it simultaneously.

After Darya is taken away by her new husband, her mother implores the author to help find her. The journey she takes to find Darya reveals horror stories of suppressed women like Zainab, Nazneen and many more who are now in prison for supporting the opium trade. One of them describes how difficult it is for them to protest being raped by the correctional officers. More than half of women in Afghan jails serve sentences for moral crimes, such as running away from home, often from forced marriages (212). Nawa used Darya's story to emphasise the role of women and the family in Afghan society, pointing out that the family unit is the source of strength and resiliency.

Darya is no longer a mystery or a victim I must liberate. She's one of the thousands of girls bartered as opium bribes, an international drug problem casualty. I remember all of the people I've met across Afghanistan impacted by the opium trade, from the farmer to the addict. Each person helped me understand the effects of the trade-in differently. But

Darya had something special about her, a will to resist not just an outsider but also an internal family struggle- the injustice of forced marriage. That characteristic allows me to come to terms with the end of my search. Perhaps she will rescue herself by learning to cope, standing her ground with her husband, or even running away. Darya offers hope for change. I will always want to know what happened to her, and perhaps someday I will (304).

Thus, Nawa believes it is critical to focus on development projects that enhance families and communities rather than individual women's rights, despite the fact that her viewpoint has been criticised. She claimed that American participation in Afghanistan must inevitably cease, and that in order to avert civil conflict, it is vital to build a human rights theory, reestablish democratic institutions, and enhance assistance efforts. She comes to the end of her quest and realises that Afghanistan was a myth, and Darya embodied that myth (303), and she hopes to find Darya and transform the country for her.

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Chapter V

Writings from Bangladesh: Empowered by Empathy

Bangladesh became an independent state at the end of 1971 after a nine-month-long independence war against then-West Pakistan's 'colonisation,' a term first used in 1969 in Justice Shahabuddin's Report to describe the feelings of East Pakistani Bengalis towards the state of Pakistan (Saikia 37), and a new country Bangladesh was born. The situation is still fraught with moral, political, social, religious, and psychological complications. On the one hand, there is a want to remember, and on the other, there is a desire to forget the war's horror. These recollections are documented in Bangladeshi literature by youthful writers, often known as "war babies," in their writings, which give us stories spanning nearly three generations. Because the study focuses on women writers, themes range from multiple experiences of war, mass-scale torture, regaining a sense of humanity to reconcile and heal unresolved traumas, the position of women in a fundamentalist Islamic society where expressing oneself is considered a threat, and how they have emerged from their cocoons and spoken out loudly about sexuality and violence to be heard by others.

There is a significant heritage of female English writers from this region, beginning with the daring and controversial writer Ismat Chughtai, who belonged to the older generation and spoke on the importance of women's education, sexuality, lesbianism, and how Islam inhibited women's expression. One might also recall Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultan's Dream* and *Padmarag* (1924), in which the protagonist deviates from tradition to picture a world without men. It is still regarded as one of the best feminist utopias. Fiction written by Muslim women in English was uncommon in the first half of the twentieth century.

Diaspora Women Writers from Bangladesh

On the worldwide scene, a diaspora of Bangladeshi women writers has arisen with powerful voices. Their contributions have raised the bar for Bangladeshi English writing. Taslima Nasreen is perpetually exiled due to her blasphemous and feministic publications. *Lajja* (1993) depicted a patriotic Bangladeshi Hindu family's struggle in a Muslim environment. The Bangladeshi government banned her first memoir, *Amar Meyebela* (My Girlhood, 2002), the second part, *Utah Hawa* (Wild Wind), and the third part, *Ka* (Speak up), because of her anti-Islam and anti-Prophet statements. She has seven portions of her memoir published, the majority of which is not available for reading.

Brick Lane, written by Bangladeshi-British author Monica Ali, has been well received in England and the United States, and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2004. Then there was Tahmima Anam, who won the 2008 Commonwealth Prize for her debut novel, *A Golden Age* (2007), which was set during Bangladesh's 1971 independence war. Her second novel, *The Good Muslim*, was nominated for the Man Asian Literary Prize (2011). Ruby Zaman's *Invisible Lines* was published the same year. This first novel by Zaman was powerful and vivid, exploring the atrocities that accompanied Bangladesh's liberation war.

Even as it tore families apart, this rebellion established a country. *The Black Coat* (2013), a highly political novel by Bangladeshi-Canadian writer Neamat Imam, is a controversial historical novel that painted a grim and dystopian vision of Bangladesh under Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Shazia Omar, a social psychologist whose debut novel, *A Diamond in the Sky* (2009), gained critical acclaim for tackling the dark world of drugs and handling such a sensitive subject. These female authors have witnessed the

complexities of postwar life and have justified their acts through the characters they have created in their works. They've at least considered the subjective issues that arise from being a woman in a patriarchal society entrenched in religion.

The purpose of this study is to examine three books by Tahmima Anam in order to better comprehend violence and its effects on women's lives and the world.

The following is a list of her Bengal trilogy novels:

1. *A Golden Age* (2007) won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book in 2008, and the author was named to Granta's list of the 20 best young writers.
2. *The Good Muslim* (2011) received a nomination for the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2011.
3. *The Bones of Grace* (2016).

Tahmima Anam

Her first novel, *A Golden Age* (2007), won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book in 2007. Tahmima Anam is an anthropologist who lives in Hackney, East London, and was trained at Harvard. Her historical novels about Bangladesh are based on extensive study and are inspired by ventriloquism. Anam, born in 1975 into the cultural elite of Bangladesh and educated worldwide, was too young to remember her country's struggle for independence and war with Pakistan in 1971. Her three acclaimed novels have chosen to tell the tale of her parents' generation to a new audience. Her works are based in part on conversations she did with family members and Bangladeshis who lived during the violence.

> I did lots of research for my first book, which carried over to the second", Anam has stated, "I prefer to ask people who were there about their experiences; I don't like to use books unless they're memoirs or testimonials. I ask people the little details about what they wore, what brand of cigarettes they smoked, what music they listened to, and maybe the car they drove. And then I try and forget the research, so the reader doesn't feel like I've just given a history lesson. I want the research to be in there, to be accurate, but not feel palpable. I think the only time you notice research is when the illusion of the past gets broken, and I'm trying to avoid that (*Bookslut*, July 2011).

***A Golden Age* (2007)**

Her debut, *A Golden Age* (2007), was the first fruit of this strategy, and it opens in 1959 with the words of a widow to her departed husband: "I lost our children today" (3). Rehana Haque, a young woman from an aristocratic but destitute Calcutta family, had entered an arranged marriage with a Dhaka businessman, only to watch him die of a heart attack. With no funds to defend her husband's wealthy brother, she loses custody of her two children in the West, who are brought to Lahore. Rehana pulls them back but has been marked by the loss after a mysterious bit of luck with a real estate investment. Despite her efforts to create an orderly existence, her goals are compromised. When the civil war begins, the full scope of the unfolding events takes time to sink in.

Her children, now in their late teens, are more resolute. Maya, Rehana's daughter, moves to Calcutta to write for a newspaper about the independence fighters. Sohail, Rehana's son, attends a guerilla training camp before returning to his mother's garden to

hide a cache of weaponry. Rehana's despised brother-in-law arrives in Dhaka as an occupation member at the same time.

Fact and Fiction: A Fine Balance in *A Golden Age*

During the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, *A Golden Age* (2007) tells the emotional story of a mother. The author has altered the usual role of women as exploited, tortured, raped, subservient, and passive in war history with her protagonist Mrs Rehana Haque, a middle-aged widow. The figure represents the New Women in war narratives, who, unlike the war victims, are active, liberal, and bold women who not only confront men-dominated conditions to exist in them, but also teach how to cope with the double colonialism encountered by every woman in their house and society. Her involvement in reclaiming her children from their uncle's custody and pushing them to fight for Bangladesh's independence is both inspiring and unorthodox. Despite being evicted from her home on countless occasions, she has always aspired to possess a country of their own, regardless of their diverse culture, religion, or even language. Tahmima's handling of history and fiction is very artistic, and her novel has garnered her a lot of praise. *A Golden Age* is a fictionalised narrative of the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, during which India actively aided and patronised Bangladesh in its fight against Pakistan. The narrative of love, compassion, and a family's survival is intertwined with history. Anam has included several historical events in her story, including the aftermath of the Indian subcontinent's division. In her book, however, a human relationship takes precedence over history.

The novel tells the narrative of a mother's survival. The occurrences covered in the book include Mujib's victory in the general election, Bangladesh's declaration of independence, nine months of freedom struggle, three million deaths, and the testimonies

of two lakh rape victims. Through the words of Rehana's son Sohail, who will emerge as a truly revolutionary character, it provides some insight into the brutalities of West Pakistanis towards the East.

Motherhood and Widowhood: Gender Roles

Pakistan had ruled the country's eastern wing as a colony since 1948. First, they attempted to coerce everyone to speak Urdu rather than Bengali. They spent the jute money from Bengal in factories in Karachi and Islamabad. The protagonist sees migration, displacement, and identity crisis as motifs. Rehana's character suffers from several layers of identity problem. Born from an aristocratic family in Calcutta, India, she considers herself an outsider since she cannot stand her father's interest in British nobility, music, and culture. Following her father's death, she marries Iqbal in Dhaka, who appears to be happy and emancipated; she enjoys her freedom for a short period before becoming a widow at a young age.

Her current situation as a widow in a patriarchal society jeopardises her entire existence. Faiz, her brother-in-law, and his barren wife take care of her children. They win her children's rights carefully by claiming that a lone mother in this culture cannot provide a better upbringing for her children, and Rehana is forced to accept this and sends her children away:

> Dear Husband,
>
> I have given up the only thing you left me. When the judge asked me if I knew for sure whether I would be able to care for them, I could not bring myself to say yes.
>
> I was mute, and in my silence, he saw my hesitation. That is why he gave them

away. It was me, my fault. No others. I don't blame your brother for wanting them. Who would not want them? They are the spitting image of you (8).

As a single mother prone to both physical and mental traumas, Anam has examined the negative repercussions of parenthood. But, unlike other women her age, she is not a quitter. She resolves to continue her efforts to reclaim custody of her children despite the fact that the social and political milieu does not support her. Even in the court, as demonstrated in the preceding paragraph, the authority of the law is held by men who are unaware of the tragedy of separation.

She is perceived to be helpless and despairing. Spivak introduced the concept of 'Epistemic Violence' in "Can the Subaltern Speak?". It is clear from this that the knowledge developed about a widow is incorrect and, more importantly, beneficial to males. There are times in the story when Rehana tries to construct a better home in order to solve her stated dilemma. She sells her possessions and applies for a loan to help her financially. The bank personnel take advantage of her recent widowhood and attempts to entice her in exchange for a bank loan. In each occasion, though, Rehana demonstrates bravery and unconventionality. She struggles alone to reclaim her parental authority over her children. She demonstrates in every situation that women do not require men's sympathy; they have the courage to fight for their existence on their own.

In Anam's tale, humanity triumphs as the only religion to put a stop to the genocide and build a nation based on love, affection, and empathy rather than religious norms and practises. Rehana is the type of character for whom humanism is the best religion. She has a spiritual mentality, prays, and teaches her children Islamic norms and behaviours. Religion, on the other hand, never kills her logical sensibility and sense of society since

she always wants to impose compassion on her loving children. During the difficult period of the Bangladesh Liberation War, she houses Hindu tenants Mr. and Mrs. Sengupta in her home Shona.

She is accustomed to public gatherings with Muslims and Hindus without distinction. When it comes to socialisation, she enjoys a public life. She enjoys scotch and goes to the theatre to see Cleopatra and to the stadium to watch cricket matches with her children and Hindu renters. Her husband was similarly liberal, which motivated Rehana to take the lead in her motif. Rehana, on the other hand, never proves to be disloyal in her marriage to her husband, even when he dies young.

Despite the fact that everyone expects her to remarry, she does not. Throughout the narrative, her only goal is to regain custody of her children and provide a better future for them. She could never risk introducing an unknown man into their well-organized existence. Above all, Rehana is a caring mother who is willing to give up a small bit of her life to ensure the happiness of her children. When she loses her husband in an accident, her life becomes unbearably difficult. It becomes untenable when she loses custody of her children to Faiz on the grounds that she lacks the necessary ability to provide security for her children. Unlike other ladies, she remained steadfast and never gave in to the situation. She never gives up hope of regaining custody of her children. She maintains her status after her husband's death, tolerates widowhood, protects herself from the perils of being a widow and single woman in a patriarchal culture, and loses her fortunes while continuing to provide a better home for her children.

Women and Nationhood

When Sohail and Maya announce their desire to fight in the Bangladesh Liberation War, Rehana is once again rebuffed in her quest to reclaim her children. Sohail actively engages in the independence fight, while Maya travels to West Bengal to assist refugee camps that house nearly one million Bangladeshi refugees. Tahmima Anam uses various symbolic techniques in her story, the most prominent of which is Rehana herself, as a motherly woman, similar to the concept of 'Bharatmata' in India. She is an exceptional war heroine who makes significant sacrifices to establish Bangladesh as a nation and Bengal as a national language in opposition to Urdu, her mother tongue and the language of Pakistan. She uses her Urdu skills to protect Bengali liberation fighters against Urdu-speaking West Pakistani forces. She has no fear of being tortured or raped; her only goal is to help her sons establish a nation in which they would have a distinct identity. She is not only Sohail's mother, but the mother of every freedom fighter. Beyond the personal bond and personal vengeance, the emancipation of the country appears to be a religious duty. She even relocates to Calcutta to assist her daughter in the refugee camps that are home to millions of Bangladeshis.

A Golden Age depicts Rehana's motherhood in a larger sense, going beyond biological bonds and emotional attachments. When Rehana comes under the influence of the Major, who takes refuge in her house for a time during the liberation war, she transforms into a powerful lady devoid of the notion of secret love, compassion, and sympathy for her children. The Major instils in Rehana a sense of universal motherhood, and she begins to believe that it is her sacred mission to emerge as a saviour for all of the sons and daughters, not just Maya and Sohail. Rehana can confide in the Major about her

most profound thoughts, her background, and her cherished love for her children. Rehana gradually develops feelings for the Major, who gives his life to save the nation, ensuring a better future for all of Rehana's sons and daughters. She paid repeated trips to the cemetery of her husband, who had abandoned her in difficult moments. She can now sense the pure love that will never leave her. Rehana's love for humanity enables her to struggle against all of her physical, mental, and psychic handicaps.

She gradually forgets about her duty to visit her departed husband's grave during her service to the country. She gives away the saris that her husband gave her as gifts of love. In her article "Symbolism in *A Golden Age*: Rehana as Bangladesh", Christine Pyle writes that she disassembled the saris, converted them into blankets, and sent them to cover revolutionary soldiers. Rehana demonstrated a significant transfer of love and authority with this gift to the liberation army. Moving out from the shadow of Iqbal's death, the widow was initiating a courtship with her nation. (4) Rehana's character is not that of a superwoman, she is a woman of blood and flesh, and she falls in love with the Major. Rehana confesses her love for the Major to her deceased husband as merely a "bittersweet episode". "Dear husband, the war will end today" (315); the novel ends with the optimistic note of the formation of a new nation after nine month's struggles. Bangladesh becomes independent after a bloody episode and lots of sacrifices of lives, virtue, personal bonding, love and memory. Rehana shows how selfless love conquers all, even during a period of great crisis. The nation is built on love, and the novel ends with a great family reunion. "Today I have come here to tell you how we survive… I know what I have done. This war takes away so many boys only my son survives. This time so many girls burn only my girl left." (314-315).

War Liberates Whom?

In *A Golden Age*, Tahmima Anam does not let her diasporic background go in the way of portraying the Bangladeshi people's crisis during the Bangladesh Liberation War. Despite the fact that Tahmima is a second-generation diasporic writer, she and her family have a profound connection to Bangladesh's history and survival. Her parents were active participants in the liberation movement. Her grandmother furnished her with the essential information by recalling her memories from 1971, when she assisted war inmates in hiding in her home and providing them with fighting weapons. Anam revealed to the *Guardian* in an interview, “I have a complicated relationship with Bangladesh” (The Guardian, 13 May 2016). She claims that the country's struggle has given her mind a lot of creative energy, and that she feels from her heart whenever the country goes through a difficult period. “I’ve come to accept it’s a long-distance love affair,” she says in the same interview.

The concept of post-memory is appropriate for the writer, who has learned about the history of partition and its aftermath in the Indian subcontinent mostly through her grandmother, who is depicted by Rehana. Tahmima's father, who works as an editor for a reputable Bangladeshi English daily, has always assisted her in gaining an understanding of the country's true struggles. She chose the Bangladesh Liberation War as the focus of her research, and she conducted hundreds of interviews with independence fighters before beginning to write about the country's battle. As a result, Tahmima Anam is a true postcolonial feminist. She has depicted the actual situation of women in the Indian subcontinent following partition from the perspective of survivors, rather than as an observer.

Anam claims that when she chose to create a novel about Bangladesh, she couldn't envision writing about anything other than the war.

Tahmima Anam has created an image of an unorthodox battle heroine who is free of the duty to be exploited by the enemies in *A Golden Age*. In this work, Rehana's inspiring role as a saviour repositions women's roles in military history, which previously solely represented women as a figure without any individual existence. The work also deconstructs the popular belief that women must constantly sacrifice their innocence to men's horrors in order for the country to win independence. At the end of the novel, Rehana breaks free from the biological tie of a woman and separates herself from the household world. She is no longer her children's biological mother; she emerges as the universal mother, free of womanly weakness.

Her liberal intellect, patriotism, and feeling of responsibility to the doomed nation make her the mother of all Mukti Vahini children. “But now she was something else—a mother, yes, but not just of children. Mother of a different sort” (140). Rehana's struggle gives the next generation a better understanding of the women who had silently suffered for the nation, but their bravery had never been recognised by history. Women's bravery has never been recognised since history has always preferred to portray women as raped, exploited, and victimised in order to establish that they are the superior sex.

***The Good Muslim* (2011)**

Following the admiration of her initial novel, Aman returned to the subject in *The Good Muslim* (2011), a sequel that re-introduced the siblings Maya and Sohail a decade after they were separated during the war. Maya has followed her revolutionary beliefs, whereas her brother has evolved into a charismatic religious leader. When Sohail decides

to send his son to a madrasa, a schism develops between brother and sister. The work is renowned for its sophisticated representation of the obstacles of nation-building and the reality of corruption and compromise, continuing her focus from her debut in fresh and fascinating ways.

Secular vs Religious Ideologies

In the process of nation-building, the novel explores the link between secular and religious beliefs. It follows the Haque siblings, Maya and Sohail, as they negotiate life following the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. The narrative depicts Sohail's adherence to severe dogmatism, which led him to neglect his son, Zaid, and Maya's reluctance to accept her brother's transformation, which resulted in their estrangement and ultimately a sad family tragedy.

It is also a novel filled with ideas, ironies, and contradictions. It depicts intricate family tensions set against a tough period of nation-building in Bangladesh following the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, as well as clashes between the religious and secular. While the first book, *A Golden Age*, narrates the conflict through the eyes of the widowed matriarch, Rehana, the second novel, *The Good Muslim*, shifts the narrative to the years following the war, via the eyes of her children, Maya and Sohail, both now in their thirties. Although it is primarily set in the 1980s, it uses flashbacks to return to the 1970s, spanning a decade of Bangladesh's independence in its storyline. Anam's use of several temporal frames highlights the changing trajectories of the country, which is still reeling from the impacts of the nine-month war against Pakistan. The country has been plunged into a time of political turbulence after a moment of elation, exhilaration, and triumph of liberation.

Bengali nationalism, which defined Bengali ethnicity, language, and culture, was at the forefront of the 1971 Liberation War. East Pakistan, as it was then known, intended to establish a new secular country with a purposeful separation from religion and a focus on secularism. This was an attempt to distance itself from West Pakistan's religious identity, which exploited religion to bring the two warring brothers together while perpetuating prejudice against East Pakistan's majority Bengali population. Despite the fact that Bengali nationalist ideology was successful in bringing the country to independence, the strong religious bonds that remained in the lives of its people caused discomfort, unease, and violence in the years that followed, leading to a period of political and ideological uncertainty. Maya and Sohail's complicated sibling relationship exemplifies this. Soon after the conflict, the family's joy at having Sohail back after his voluntary participation in the Mukti Bahini, an East Pakistan guerilla, fades as he becomes increasingly radicalised.

Meanwhile, Maya, who also participated in the guerilla and is a staunch supporter of secular Bengali nationalism, opposed his brother's metamorphosis, leading in a family quarrel that pushed her away from the family. Maya returns after seven years, wiser and full of guilt, but still with a revolutionary zeal, as a "crusading doctor" (89) who works among the peasants and impoverished in rural Bangladesh. Maya is becoming increasingly disillusioned with the way her country is taking, notably with the development of the religious right in the country's administration under the authoritarian authority of General Ershad, whom she refers to throughout the novel as 'the Dictator.' Sohail, a charismatic former student leader who proudly fought alongside the Mukti Bahini, is now an Imam, a religious leader, and a Tablighi Jamaat member.

His religious beliefs are extreme, and in his effort to devote himself to God, he has rejected anything deemed 'worldly' or 'modern,' as he believes they are incompatible with Islam's teachings. This is at the expense of his family, as he neglects his responsibilities and relationships. He sees the universe as a "great design," and even his wife's death leaves him with "no place for self-pity" (82). Sohail's lack of interest causes his little son, six-year-old Zaid, to suffer, as his physical and mental well-being, as well as his schooling, are neglected. Maya fights to care for the family, both for their cancer-stricken mother, Rehana, and for Zaid, pleading with Sohail to send him to school. Maya takes matters into her own hands when he decides to send Zaid to a madrasa, a religious school in rural Bangladesh, and unwittingly causes Zaid's death. Maya and Sohail are both extremists in the story, Maya in her outspoken opposition to Sohail's adaptation to Islam, and Sohail in his blind and extreme dedication to it. Anam makes a connection between the seemingly opposite sides of the split by emphasising the porous relationship.

It depicts a considerable amount of illogic and reason, fanaticism and moderation, as well as ethical and unethical behaviour in both religious and secular settings.

Gendered War: Maya and Sohail are Victims

The Pakistani state was established following the partition of India in 1947, with Islam serving as the unifying factor. The country, however, was physically divided into two parts: East Pakistan and West Pakistan, separated by 1200 miles of India. This physical distance also highlights the country's brewing cultural and political polarisation, which eventually erupted into civil war in 1971. East Pakistanis were homogeneous, with the vast majority of the population being ethnically Bengali, with their language and culture, making them the country's largest ethnic group. Meanwhile, the Punjabis ruled over West

Pakistan. As a minority, they sought the assistance of the Urdu-speaking Bihari minority in order to contest power against the Bengalis (Saikia, 2011).

Meanwhile, the sari, a type of female everyday dress used by Bengali women, was deemed morally and religiously inappropriate, and Pakistani women were instructed not to wear it. This attitude exemplifies the new Pakistani mentality towards systematic eradication of Bengali identity. To defend these acts, the ruling authorities utilised religion to justify their ethnic-based authoritarian policies targeting Bengalis, as their Hindu-derived language and culture were judged improper for the Muslim country. However, this was an attempt at political control and dominance that continues to this day. The result was a rejection of Bengali identity as well as political and economic neglect of East Pakistan, while the Western region enjoyed greater riches, opportunities, and influence.

Tahmima Anam's novel *A Golden Age* describes the aftermath of military aggression at the university just before the conflict. When Rehana, the protagonist, sees it, she says:

> … there was a low-lying fog clinging to the pavement – no, it was smoke, whispering through the streets, leaving an ashy, sour taste in the mouth. It got thicker… She held the sari to her nose… when she looked down, she saw scraps of litter scattered over the street. She thought she saw a prayer cap and a pair of unbroken spectacles… Now there was a thin length of red ribbon on the road … The wet ribbon had followed them all the way and directly poured into a gutter, which was also red, and on the side of the gutter was a pair of hands, the fingers clasped together in prayer or begging, and next to the hands was a face. The mouth was tiny, only a pale pink smudge, like the introduction of a bruise. It was a little

girl. Her hair swallowed the top half of her face. Beneath the clumped together strands Rehana could see an eye squeezed shut (66).

The first victim of the war that Rehana witnesses in the story is a little girl, symbolically emphasising the devastating consequences that the nine-month war had on Bengali girls and women. Saikia characterises this conflict as a gendered conflict in her book Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh. When the men in the family departed to join the resistance, they were frequently left to fend for themselves, as seen in Anam's *A Golden Age*, where the widowed Rehana's lone son joins the guerilla. Many people, particularly those from the middle class, became involved in the conflict, either as volunteers in Calcutta's refugee camps or as active guerrilla fighters. However, their participation in the fight went unnoticed and unreported. Instead, they are primarily recognised as war victims, as the West Pakistani army perpetrated sexual violence against Bengali women on a large scale. Fictional works reflect the absence of representation of women's experiences during the Bangladesh Liberation War.

The war events are largely memorialised in fictional narratives in the form of short stories, which “traditionally expose the violence committed against women by West Pakistani soldiers and the valour of male freedom fighters” (Harrington, 20). The war itself is an exploitation of bodies, but only men are regarded as offering their bodies to be tortured in the struggle for freedom. Women are viewed as war's collateral damage, frequently powerless in their victimisation.

Throughout the war, various experiences in women's lives were unexplored and underrepresented. This has, however, shifted in the previous decade. Although the hush around women's experiences during the Liberation War began as early as 1973, artistic creations have continued to address this subject. We are briefly introduced to Maya's close friend, a Rajshahi villager named Nazia, who was sentenced to one hundred lashes for adultery by her husband. Having given birth to a child with Down Syndrome, which Nazia's husband says, resembles "a Chink… Chinese" (23), he refused to admit that the child was his.

This sad episode began with Maya's insistence that Nazia swim at a rural lake. At the same time, she was pregnant, breaking the village's taboo that frowns upon pregnant women swimming in public because "no one believed in those things anymore" (18). Maya was very certain that her efforts to teach the people through lectures on science and superstitions had triumphed against millennia of cultural customs rooted in the culture, but she lacked the emotional empathy needed to understand the peasants. She is a woman who sees everything in black and white. This eventually causes a schism in her relationship with her brother, Sohail. Saikia backs this viewpoint by pointing out that, in addition to creative works, there are scholars eager to break the silence: In the last decade, critical texts of many genres have emerged to break the deafening silence in Bangladesh about women's diverse experiences during the 1971 War of Liberation.

Although there is a strong tradition of War of Liberation literature, film, theatre, and television dramas in Bangladeshi mainstream media, these newer efforts have deviated from traditional norms of representation and launched a critical discussion of war, genocide, and gender justice on a global scale. Thus, Anam's portrayal of a strong-willed

Maya, the protagonist of *The Good Muslim,* is a conscious attempt to challenge the standard of how women are generally portrayed in combat. She volunteered and served in the Mukti Bahini, and her wartime experiences inspired her to be deeply committed to the resistance's ideas and values. Thus, one of the novel's key foci is her dissatisfaction with her country's current standing and her inability to come to grips with the changes taking place in her country. Maya's energy, devotion, independence, and strength define the women's role and support that the country requires in its efforts to construct a nation.

Sohail's best pal Arif, who was fighting beside him and was wearing Sohail's clothing when he died, gets killed in another event. He saves Piya, a country girl who escaped the sexual crimes perpetrated by the West Pakistani army, just after the conflict ends. Sohail eventually falls in love with her, but he is powerless to save her. Her family disowned her because she was pregnant, and as a result of the stress, she turned down Sohail's marriage proposal. However, it is the murder he committed on his way home shortly after the war ended that causes him to reconsider his morals and, ultimately, his participation in the conflict. He had come across an old man speaking Urdu, and instincts led him to kill the man only because he "had let the wrong word come out of his mouth" (123-124), making him sound like the enemies Sohail was familiar with. This weighs heavily on his mind, leading him to a frantic desire for forgiveness and redemption.

As a result, while Maya anticipates epic battle stories of how he dropped bombs and saved villages to memorialise the sorrowful pride of their involvement in the war, he only wishes he could tell her: "I have committed murder. If he were to tell his sister about the war, that is what he would have to tell her" (124). Thus, he finds himself unable to tell Maya of the murder he committed: He is afraid to talk most of all. Maya is always regarding

him hungrily, eager for small scraps of detail… “How greedy she is. He wants her to be quiet so she can hear the roar in his head, thinking that if she could hear that roar, the roar of uncertainty and the roar of death, she might understand. But she refuses to be quiet for long enough” (124). While she regards his decision to join the guerilla as courageous, he is plagued by its horrors. Thus, the open space they initially shared for discussion is met with complete silence and “this is how the war made its way into their house… A silence between siblings...” (123). He calls her greedy and selfish, wanting to experience only the gallant side of the war (125).

The silence between siblings is created by Sohail's perception of his sister as different; she is progressively becoming "the other" in his eyes. Maya becomes protective as she senses his attitude toward her. Sohail’s refusal to talk to her causes Maya to take his actions as a personal attack against her, pushing her into believing that he does not “think women are victims of the war too” (125) and does not recognise her contributions to the war. Despite her involvement in it, Maya had always felt “left out, stuck somewhere safe and unremarkable – when the fighting broke out, and she couldn’t enlist in the army” (143).

Maya's emphasis on discussing the war appears to be an attempt to interact and experience the conflict firsthand by bringing up the difficulties and complexities of the conflict. While she challenges the “long-established authority of historiography that wishes to move toward national and ideological cohesion and away from unsettling memories that destabilise national development” (Harrington, 13), this is also a personal need to prove herself to Sohail. As a result, in order to repay his deeds, she "othered" Sohail. Her reaction to his conversion to religion indicates a rejection of his newfound identity. This is evident in her comments and actions toward Sohail when he starts talking about faith. As a result,

differences in beliefs about the war are merely the beginning of the siblings' dividing self-principles.

Maya associates Islam with the atrocities of the war, which she wishes to forget in order to maintain her individuality: Maya had educated herself to reject the faith. “She had unlearned the surahs her mother had recited aloud… had erased from her memory all knowledge of the sacred, returned her body to a time before it had been taught to kneel, to prostrate itself… because of all the things she had witnessed, committed in the name of God” (206). Meanwhile, Sohail takes solace in the Qur'an, which his mother has given him since she is concerned about his mental state. In his guilt, he finds that “the Book has told him he is good, that it is in his nature to be good” (124) and that through the Qur’an, he experiences “the greatest thing that has ever happened to him… where he has found something, something that explains everything” (125). If the war had already harmed Maya and Sohail's relationship via silence, the debate over religion has brought it to a new low.

Secularism is a Fallacy

Anam employs numerous ironies as she delves more into the collapse of the sibling connection. First, when Sohail approaches his sister with his newfound ideal, she claims that he is "sick" (125) and that he is spewing "religious mumbo-jumbo" (126), calling his turn to religion hypocritical because, for her, it is the source of their suffering in the conflict. Ironically, she is the one who is being hypocritical in this scenario; she initially begs Sohail to speak. Nonetheless, the turn of events shows that she only allows this room if the discussion is oriented in her favour. As a result, this ostensibly free-speech public arena is an exclusionary place marked by a power aspect and structured by a number of constraints.

Secondly, in the same refusal to accept her brother's transformation by religion, Maya ironically admits that religion "may be what he is claiming it is, an essential human need" (126). Maya's rejection of the new Sohail could thus be a power move in which she sees the need to exert control over him. This may be seen in her adamant declaration that she will not be one of those people who buckle under the weight of a major event and allow it to alter their identity. Sohail will not either. He will not be allowed...She believes her will is more powerful than the leaf in her heart and the leaf in her brother's heart (125-126). Because the war had split the siblings apart as they took on various roles and experiences, Maya fears that Sohail's metamorphosis may drive them even further away. Maya's refusal to establish an understanding towards her brother is a systematic approach to delete any influence of religion in their lives, which as Asad argues, is the fallacy in looking at the secular "as the space which real human life gradually emancipates itself from the controlling power of "religion" and thus achieves the latter's relocation… which then allows us to think of religion as "infecting" the secular domain or as replicating within it the structure of theological concepts" (191).

However, in the context of the sibling relationship, Maya's hatred of religion is caused by a sense of weakness as well as arrogance and pride. As their mother, Rehana, gently rebukes her not to be "frightened of Sohail's transformation as it is only religion" (129), Maya remembers how boys were "butchered because they were Hindu, the university teachers shot and piled into graves because they weren't considered Islamic enough" (158) in the war.

She is well aware that religion can easily be used against her rather than being the saviour that Sohail perceives it to be. As a result, religion is a disease that infected the Pakistani nation and killed its sons and daughters in the war, according to Maya. Maya carries a country's wound inside her, which, as Chambers points out, becomes the fundamental principle that allows her to regard her brother as the weaker other. Maya's rejection of Sohail's new identity pushes him to the margins, and he realises he needs to relocate. He spends time on his mother's roof, where he starts preaching his ideals. His transformation is complete in his final confrontation with Maya, when she accuses him of throwing away his literature by singing Tagore's nationalist songs. Sohail retaliates by "Hitler-style" burning them (216). Their mother tells Maya: “Did you listen? No. You mocked him… You led him here, calling him a mullah because you couldn’t stand for him to be different” (253).

To portray Sohail's journey into the margin, Tahmima Anam employs a careful narrative method. Although the work is narrated in third person throughout, the 1970s setting is told from the perspectives of Maya and Sohail. However, in the 1980s context, the story is recounted solely from the perspective of the Maya. As a result, after his metamorphosis is complete, Sohail becomes'silent,' restricting our understanding of his activities. While readers can understand and even sympathise with his metamorphosis in the early postwar years, the same cannot be said of his subsequent deeds. His wonderful response to his wife's death, as well as his apathy to his son, Zaid's well-being, are not discussed in depth. For example, in response to Maya’s worry about the boy’s emotional condition, Sohail replies: “The boy misses his mother, I know that. I should give him more time, but… A boy needs to find his way in the world” (121). He demonstrates his loyalties

towards God “as though there were something natural about the rule he was imposing” (121), which cannot be disturbed by his attachments.

As a result, the dangers of being on the margin are highlighted. The book-burning incident is only the beginning of Sohail's religious model. If there was still opportunity to hear his side of the story before, his silence in the 1980s chronology suggests that that window has now closed.

Women, More Than Victims

Maya addresses her haunting memories of the war, which she had initially tried to push aside, as the narrative shifts to the 1980s. In a secret meeting with survivors of the war, Maya controversially says: “I think – I believe – that the first thing we must do is admit our faults, our sins. So much happened during the war – we were not just victims” (97). She is also tormented by her activities shortly after the war, when she utilised her medical expertise to assist in the abortion of babies conceived as a result of the rapes of over two lakh Bengali women. Maya is reminded of how she coaxed the women to perform abortions simply because “Bangabandhu Mujib… had said he didn’t want the children of war” (142). This is despite her mother’s warning of the complexities of the women’s feelings as they were often shamed and forced into aborting the babies as the easy way for the nation “to erase all traces of what happened to them, so that they can start to forget” (142).

Maya fails to recognise that, while the act of raping in the conflict itself represents a sense of power over the women's bodies that interrupts the war, “woman's essentialised role as a medium of producing progeny for the community and symbol of the honour of the family and community” (Mookherjee, 40), the subsequent act of state encouraged

abortions is also another form of control on the women's body and reinforcement of patriarchy where the sexual purity of women is considered essential for societal development (Hossain, 2). Maya sees a chance for forgiveness in her nephew, Zaid, as she reconsiders her relationship with her brother.

Born amid the intense family feud that had caused his father and aunt to stand against one another, "Zaid was born, brought into the world by a midwife whose face was covered by a piece of black netting. He opened his eyes to that, a space where the welcoming laugh should have been" (253). This foreshadows his tough life and terrible death, which are caused by an absent father-figure who is lost in religious fervour and the death of his mother. The first time Maya sees him, he is described to be in a sorry state: "he has a mouth of misshapen teeth… everything… about him suggested poverty: his too-short pyjamas, and the way he treated his lips, rubbing them roughly with the back of his hand" (34). Maya misses Zaid's younger years, but she rapidly develops feelings for him after meeting him.

However, parental negligence and a profound feeling of loss have transformed Zaid into a wanderer. He has nowhere to go and no sense of purpose in life since his mother's death. This is a horrible situation for a six-year-old, and he resorts to stealing and lying to fill the vacuum. Maya, who has been her nephew's victim countless times, is torn between disciplining him and allowing him get away with his crimes. Eventually, she chooses to keep Zaid's actions quiet, as she is afraid of Sohail's possible actions towards his son, and whatever she says or does, "that wouldn't bring back his mother" (65). Maya imagines Zaid having small comforts because "she had looked the other way" (65). In her growing love for the lad, Maya learns to control her behaviours and words.

To temper her dislike of her brother's fervent religiosity, even though she still imagines that "cracks would appear in his belief", for his faith to be "shaken" and for him to "see himself reflected through her eyes – see the absurdity of what he had become… see the ugliness of turning his family away, the cruelty of his own fathering" (83). She realises that her harsh acts against him as a child simply served to push him further away from her.

Through Zaid, Maya sees an opportunity to establish a bridge between herself and her brother. Maya finds herself curiously drawn to and reassured by the Jamaat's practises while she reconsiders her connection with her brother. To convey Maya's experience, Anam goes to the magical. When she returns to Dhaka, she discovers that the makeshift building that Sohail had erected above her mother's house is frequently occupied by burkha-clad women attending meetings and listening to missionaries preaching "everything there was to know about being a Muslim" (22). However, their daily lives are frequently veiled in darkness, and Maya has difficulty distinguishing them because they are always dressed in black. Maya is pulled to them when Rehana is diagnosed with cancer. Maya's mother's condition causes her to mistrust medical research, describing the treatment as "uncertain science" (131), which cannot make Rehana better. She wanders upstairs in quest of quiet and is astonished by the comfort she finds there. As they offer prayers and read the Qur'an for Rehana, Maya realises that it is only with them that "she could believe, really believe, that her mother would live" (150).

Maya's fortitude is put to the ultimate test when Sohail 'miraculously' cures Rehana by whispering prayers into their mother's ears and "tipping the Zamzam, holy water into her mouth" (212), just as her doctor has given up hope on her recovery. According to Habib, the mystification of Islam here serves to portray the religion as a misunderstood faith, with

Islamic activities frequently perceived as weird and out of place. Although this notion, is seen in Anam's depiction of religious mysticism refers to the realities of Bengali culture post-1971. To begin with, it draws on syncretism of Islamic teachings inside society, where Islam is so firmly linked with local cultural traditions that it is impossible to distinguish between Islamic belief and local practise.

Maya had experienced this in her travels: in her seven years of wandering the countryside, she had encountered a very different kind of religion. The mosques were sparse and far between; the city, professing itself freshly devout, was much more so. In villages, people worshipped both saints and the Prophet equally. Yes, they worshipped through prayer, and, like everyone else, they fasted throughout the month of Ramzan and set aside a plot of land, if they had one, to sell someday and travel to Mecca. In the forest, however, they prayed to Bon-Bibi, the goddess of the trees, and invited Bauls to their villages — thin, reedy-voiced men who sang Lalon songs, turning the words of the Qur'an into music, a liaison between lovers, casting the divine as the beloved, the poet as His supplicant (Anam, 206). Maya now sees other sides of the split that she had previously refused to perceive when she contrasts the villagers' beliefs to that of her brother. Religion is frequently used as a tool to reach specific ends and potentials rather than as a form of control.

As seen in the preceding sample, religious practises are inextricably linked to practical features and demands of daily life. They are often modelled to achieve a specific potential – be it physical or emotional – that allows the self to attain “certain kinds of capacities to provide the substance from which the world has acted upon” (27). In other words, religious rituals cannot be considered as apart from daily life, but rather as forming

a link with it. Only through this established relationship can one keep control of one's life. Sohail's devotion may be baffling to Maya, but for him, religious actions offer a sense of peace and escape as it is a symbol of Sohail giving up his life "in exchange for that death" (284). He is not only a figure that is "trumped by the tasks that lay ahead – prayer, sermon, the afterlife" (190) but is also the person that can walk away without looking back "as though this was the only way the day could have ended" (207).

Maya realises at this point that Sohail's religiosity is a type of atonement and sacrifice that removes his suffocating remorse and grief. Second, Bengali Muslims have knitted an intricate balance of behaviours between their faith in Islam and the influence of Hinduism, creating a community that is distinct in its own right. Thus, the unexpected appeal of religion to the traditionally atheist Maya exemplifies the current manifestation of this syncretism, where there is "a space for the possibility of supernatural occurrences alongside the workings of modern science" (Chambers,146). Although Sohail appears to be capable of bringing Rehana back from the edge of death, Rehana's therapy begins in the hospital. Thus, her "resurrection" represents both religious and secular triumph. This demonstrates the mobility of the local understanding of Islam, which rejects an either-or framework of Islam and emphasises the necessity for intellectual and religious balance as the country progresses forward.

Who is a Good Muslim?

The Good Muslim by Tahmima Anam depicts the societal opposites in Bangladesh's new nation and the difficulty in managing these inconsistencies. Anam draws attention to the difficulties to build a consolidated national identity in the familial conflicts between the secular Maya and the religious Sohail. The story aims to disentangle the conflicts over

the material and the sacred via the lens of a family feud. Maya and Sohail's dilemma is that they have different expectations of each other. Maya expects Sohail to be the same guy he was before the war, while Sohail wishes the opposite for Maya since he wants to get away from it all. They are both bitterly disappointed by their inability to draw similarity from one another as they both see each other through the lens of 'the other.'

However, as Chambers notes, "Maya's yearning for the 'golden period of nationalism in the early 1970s, and her reverence for the written word, is not unlike to Sohail and his congregation's commitment to God and the Qur'an" (152). They may appear to be distinct, yet as this research illustrates, there are numerous parallels in their description. These connections so pertain to Talal Asad's argument regarding the interconnectedness of the secular and religious, as well as the importance of inclusiveness in arguments about one or the other. Inclusivity will enable the development of the hybrid, or, in the case of the novel, a space of moderation. This failure exemplifies the ultra-religious and left-wing secular's misunderstanding of identity limits and syncretism. Zaid portrays himself as a means of establishing this, but he is eventually a victim of their radicalism. A balance can only be achieved by allowing the merging and mutation of identities. Anam, on the other hand, acknowledges the problems but believes that the ideal is not lost. As the novel concludes with an epilogue set in 1992, the nation's wound is the similarity that every citizen shares– a similarity that should serve as the beginning point for the government to go forward and the glue that holds them together.

The Bones of Grace (2016)

The final novel of a trilogy is generally the most majestic, but Tahmina Anam achieves something unusual with *The Bones of Grace*. In this case, the episodic structure connects each of these novels together for coherence. This work examines the epic component, which is distinct from the other two, and which not only ties the story of Bangladesh to its current problems but also speaks of the human condition. Though there is no violence towards women, the topics and subjects here follow the path of epistemic violence.

Route to Roots

The narrator of *The Bones of Grace,* Zubaida Haque, envies the moral clarity of her adoptive parents' generation. They grew up in East Pakistan and served in the national liberation army during the 1971 War of Independence. Zubaida imagines that people knew what was good and bad; Bengali nationalism had always given their life meaning, whereas hers does not. Her father's textile business has made the family affluent four decades later. Next to their upper-class, postmodern youth, Zubaida's feels excruciatingly easy, so easy that she's overwhelmed by the weight of everything she must chose, all the options of her academic life in America and her responsibilities at home.

She is finally moved by her mother's urgency near the end of the narrative, when she comes across a roomful of employees maimed by Chittagong's shipbreaking industry and whose supervisor has denied them medical attention: “The sight of those workers changed what I knew about the world and my place in it. It made everything else shrink”. The modern world is still filled with moral catastrophes.

Tahmima Anam's Bengal trilogy, which began more than a decade ago, culminates with the third novel, each chapter a self-contained portrayal of a generation of the Haque family. *A Golden Age* recounts Zubaida's grandmother, a widow, during the war. In the sequel, *The Good Muslim*, Zubaida's mother, a doctor who deals with war-torn women, tries to make sense of a rebuilt Bangladesh that has become more devout and dictatorial, ready to forget the past and embrace connections with Pakistan. This novel, the longest and most ambitious of the trilogy, takes Anam's journey beyond Bengal and into Pakistan, Dubai, and Cambridge, where its protagonist studies palaeontology at Harvard. Because no major historical moment has rooted her age, Zubaida, more than her mother and grandmother, must "cobble together an identity," as Anam puts it in an interview.

The book reads with the intimacy of a novelist who knows her heroine so well that she's afraid of revealing too much—possibly because Zubaida and Anam are nearly the same people: both raised by former Bengali freedom fighters, attending college and graduate school in the northeastern United States, and constantly feeling on the outside of things. Anam says she usually draws her characters from real life: “There’s a joke in my family that no one should ever tell me anything because it will show up in a book. It’s either that I lack the imagination to make up people or that real people are so fascinating”.

Zubaida's romance propels the plot ahead with Elijah, a philosopher she meets by chance at a piano concert in Sanders Theatre. But she has a long-term boyfriend in Bangladesh, and she feels obligated to accept his marriage proposal. This is not an arranged marriage, as some reviews have implied; her parents are far too modern for that. The

relationship is more subtly tense, coloured by Zubaida's need for security, her concern about alienating their two families, and her realisation, only after meeting Elijah, that she can only return the debt of her adoption by doing what her parents demand. When Zubaida realises she isn't okay with not knowing who her birth parents are, the novel's core question is raised. That need leads her to a deeper understanding of herself and her country, with each tangled subplot revealing a world still captive to the past even though old boundaries have collapsed: a colleague on a dig in Pakistan is suddenly arrested and dragged away, caught up in a tribal conflict; a little boy and girl are maimed at a shipbreaking site, where giant decommissioned ships and often human bodies are stripped to their skeletons.

Excavating the Hidden Past

The recurring metaphor of bones extends to Zubaida’s hunt for the fossils of an extinct walking whale. To her almost metaphysical belief in the importance of flesh-and-blood relationships. This obsession eventually unravels “when I studied the fossils of Ambulocetids and Pakicetids, I told myself the souls of those ancient creatures were in their bones,” (48) she reflects. “But now, confronted by these fragments of people, a room in which the atmosphere had been thinned by the fleeing of hope, my knowledge of bones gave me nothing, no explanation, no prescription.” (49). The plot’s heroic scale would be unconvincing if not for Anam’s humane prose.

The novel is full of ordinary people crushed by modernity's machinery, evoking Anam's anthropological background. “Of all the social-science disciplines,” she says, “anthropology is the most open to questioning what the truth is and looking at the truth subjectively, understanding that the truth is contextual.” Yet while interviewing freedom

fighters for her dissertation on historical memory in postwar Bangladesh, she felt confined by the requirement to tell the truth.

Anam's desire to "create things up" does not imply that she is uninterested in accurate narratives of Bengali history; rather, her stories are about how facts interact with national identity. She meticulously investigated the specifics of the American Revolutionary War, including massacres, war crimes, and covert activities. In Bones, the tale set farthest from the war, the characters wonder what those things mean now. Outside the courthouse where real-life Bengali politician Ghulam Azam has just been convicted of war crimes is one of the film's most brilliant sequences. A large throng, dotted with Zubaida's acquaintances, cries "Death!" and "Hang him!".

Azam, now 90, emerges in a wheelchair, his hands chained in front of his body, looking little and fading. A year later, he will die in prison. What is the point of convicting an almost-dead guy or the tribunal's fact-finding mission? For Zubaida's mother, who testified in the case and has spent her entire concerned with the conflict, this is the happiest moment of her career, a simple way to avenge her country's terrible past. But this isn't Zubaida's fight. She stares at the tragedy, unable to feel anything, and then returns to her search for the truth about her own life.

Homeless and Hopeless

The concepts of migration and home become even more complicated in Tahmima Anam's *The Bones of Grace*. It recounts the story of a whale, a ship, an orphan cum palaeontologist Zubaida and a migrant worker Anwar. It intricately conjoins the bizarre assemblage. The story is narrated as a detailed confessional note that Zubaida composes

for her lost love. She has been “living in a state of waiting” (3), gathering strength for hunting the haunting homing desire. Studying as a graduate student in the USA, travelling to Pakistan to dig the fossil of a whale, and getting back to her birthplace Bangladesh, only to travel into the depths of the country, and then travel back to the USA again – gives Zubaida the status of an “Amphibian” that “signalled people in between, people who lived with some part of themselves in perpetual elsewhere” (15).

I would like to use the concept of the Unheimlich to comprehend Zubaida and her relationship to home in the same way that Reed has used it to describe Antigone's relationship to her house in Sophocles (317). Despite being commonly translated as "uncanny," Unheimlich is derived from the term Heim, which means "home." As Reed writes:

“The range of significations associated with the word unheimlich [eerie, strange, disturbing] is shared to a certain extent by the word Heimlich [secret, furtive, hidden], even though the latter term looks like the opposite of the former, and originally had the same meaning as heimisch [homey, domestic, familiar]. This historical connection remains visible in the near-identity of the words themselves. The notion of the Unheimlich can thus suggest that there is something strange or improper about that which belongs to the home – and at the same time, something familiar or “homely” about that which belongs outside of it” (316–317).

The novel begins with Zubaida, already displaced, signifying the "unhomely." From the very beginning, there seems to be a inconsistent relationship with home, as "she is both loyal to and transgressive of its demands" (Reed 319). Her adoptive mother thinks of migration as an desertion of one's own country (19). She is ambivalent in her determination to stay in the USA (18). She cannot settle anywhere but Dhaka, Bangladesh, as her loyalty lies with her adoptive parents and her childhood love Rashid. To construct her "loyalties in any other way would constitute a betrayal." She is above "all things, aware of my commitments" (19). But her true home seems to be lying not here in Dhaka but elsewhere. An 'intrepid' self-resides in Zubaida, which comes out when she packs and sets for Pakistan to begin the fossil hunt for the Ambulocetids, an intermediate species (30). It is the help of this very 'intrepid' self that Zubaida requires to find her true home.

In Zubaida's pursuit, the American stranger Elijah, who also shares the "same restless spirit" and wishes to be "somewhere else" (265), becomes her beacon of hope, "as if we had lived together in a house and raised children" (44). After meeting him for the first time, Zubaida states, "I didn't care where or who I came from. I didn't care if I was an amphibian or a member of an in-between species because I belonged here, in this moment" (47). But her destiny takes her to Pakistan, which is only "a brief interlude" on her way home to Dhaka. But "home too was not going to be my ultimate destination, that other, final place more barren than anywhere I could have imagined?" (54). Her stay in Pakistan ends as shortly as it begins, so Zubaida has to set for home, finding herself "immune to the sight of my city" (76). Despite possessing a heart that is a "nomad" (84), Zubaida settles to marry her childhood love Rashid, perhaps because "the implication that I was not at home in my own country irritated me" (93).

Thus, she again gets displaced from one home to the boundaries of yet another house, an entirely "another world" (120). In this "another" home of her wealthy in-laws, she finds out about her pregnancy. After the initial fury passes, she thinks of "meeting a person who was related to me by blood, something that has never happened to me before" (127). She finally finds a cause to live for and feels a sense of belonging. As the baby vanishes "as suddenly as it had appeared" (128), Zubaida returns to her wanderer self and sets on alone 'upcoming' journey to Chittagong, the port city of Bangladesh, far from the "people who had known me all my life and not at all" (81). Her "arrival coincided with the purchase and arrival of a new ship called Grace," purchased by one of the ship-breaking companies, ready to be dismantled (143). Losing the baby makes Zubaida's homing desire acute (141). She braves to invite Elijah, her beacon of home, to Chittagong. Together they create a temporary home by the shores of Chittagong, observing the ship Grace, which like Zubaida, is a transitional species, dwindling between the land and the sea.

But the sudden arrival of her husband disrupts her temporary home, creating a "disjunction between the physical and the relational aspects" (Reed 320) of residence. In Chittagong's shipyard, she meets Anwar, a former ex-pat construction worker who appears to hold the key to Zubaida's life's mysteries. Like Zubaida, he is displaced. He was expelled from his nation and from Megna, his true love. He had to marry another woman since the beautiful Dubai was beckoning him. As a labourer, he faces the pangs of diasporic consciousness, being displaced to his native land once more. But it is not his original place that can satisfy his longing for home. As a result, he sets out to find his long-lost love. Zubaida discovers her true self through Anwar Tahmina Mariyam, and that she is not Zubaida Bashir but Mohona, Megna's sister.

Due to poverty, her biological mother had to dislocate one of the twins to keep the other firmly grounded at home, making her realise that "I wasn't the only one in Chittagong in search of a self. I wasn't the only one who felt like the loneliest person in the world" (252). No matter how partially, knowing who she is made her arrival at the "disjunction between the physical and the relational aspects" of home (Reed 320). The physical boundaries of the house do not restrict Zubaida's "proper place" but rather serve as an obstacle (Reed 319). Similarly, to Pakicetids, the most basal whale felt at home in the sea, unlike her ancestors (389), Zubaida "assumed an air of being able to float seamlessly from place to place." She decides on a "transgression" and "abandonment" of the familiar (396) to fulfil her homing desire. The arrival of the fossilised skeleton of Ambulocetids, the walking whale she calls Diana, makes her quest even more intense. Not unlike her, Diana, too, is "incomplete" (403). Zubaida dreams of her unity with Elijah to dispel her incompleteness, who "will always remain the making of me".

Thus, Zubaida evolves as a diasporic new woman (Hasanat 61), ready to leave "all our ghosts behind" and to stand fearless before "the terrible, dark world," taking strength from the sense of "belonging only to each other" (407), without any "roots" or "nation" to bind her. She remains, therefore, both homely and unhomely, suspended – Unheimlich (Reed 339). As Chambers suggests, "while 'going home' recalls the nostalgic associations of a mythologised point of origins (our mothers and fathers), being at home in the world involves finding ourselves in a wider, shifting, but more flexible, framework in which our mothers and fathers, bonds and traditions, the myths we know to be myths yet continue to cling on, cherish and dream, exist alongside other stories, other fragments of memory and traces of time" (16).

Along with the three novels discussed here, one must consider Yasmin Saikia's *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971*. Yasmin Saikia's book is an excellent example of an oral history study that serves several purposes concurrently; for example, it exposes truths behind modern South Asia's "made-up glorious past," and it also provides some justice to the true victims (or survivors and heroes, as she prefers to call them) of the 1971 Bangladesh War of Liberation, namely women who were raped, tortured, and then marginalised (x). Saikia examines the region's recent history from an unique viewpoint, attempting to reinterpret the meanings that the states involved—Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India—created around 1971.

Her multifaceted methodology for writing a people's history of the region draws on oral history, the scholarly literature on memory, the Holocaust, and gender studies, as well as archival documents, the majority of which are typically difficult to access. Rape and war have always gone hand in hand; it has been part of traditional wartime violence, one that specifically targets women, even if, in the aftermath of battle, none of the combatants—victorious or defeated—like to offer an honest account of these episodes in their historiography. As Saikia exhaustively lays out, the consequences of this gender violence are so severe that they cripple the victims and jeopardise society's very sense of justice and humanity. She articulately illustrates how states and societies have dealt with the outcomes of these deplorable incidents, how such products have affected the fates of the victims, and what the implications have been for the future that these societies have the potential to build for themselves in her detailed account of gender violence that women of various ethnic and religious backgrounds experienced during the war of 1971.

As part of her analysis, Saikia suggests that civilizations implicated in such tragedies use a cultural and theological notion known as Insaniyet, or a common sense of humanity, to settle outstanding grievances and free women from their double burden as victims and representatives of victimisation. During their interviews, the survivors constantly mentioned insanity, or the loss of it, to explain and give meaning to the violence they were subjected to. *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh* covers theoretical and methodological issues touching a wide range of other topics, including the commonality of violence and women's agency in relation to wartime violence, as well as resolving wartime disputes between states and civilizations.

This book examines women's experiences as victims, carers, and warriors during the conflict from a variety of perspectives. The diversity of these women's positions inspired Saikia's understanding of the complexities of women's agency in warfare, particularly in light of various nationalists' attempts to present and define women and their responsibilities, in particular, in restrictive ways. The book contains the testimonials of Pakistani and Bangladeshi soldiers; it is an interesting contribution to the overall effort, revealing the offenders' thoughts and sentiments, which ranged from complete guilt to utter indifference. These nonfictional writings by women on war challenge the one-sided and nationalist historiographies of South Asian states; it uses a plethora of previously unexplored sources, framing the study from the perspective of humanity, shifting focus onto the female victims and their role in the aftermath of war, and away from more traditional views that seek to find reasons for violence or blame one or the other side for the brutality. Finally, her most essential contribution is that she proves that during the 1971 war, "no single group had a monopoly on committing violence" (48).

These personal narratives published in the style of a novel have transforming force and do an excellent job of expressing the stories of these remarkable women in a way that is both analytically instructive and meaningful. These articles provide substantial contributions to the fields of oral history, women's and gender studies, and South Asian history, and they would make excellent academic reading. The reader is given pause to consider that the brutality these women faced was so extreme that they were unable to verbalise the cruelty at times. This demonstrates the power of oral history to give voice to the voiceless, especially when that speech is punctuated by profound silence.

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Chapter VI

Conclusion

South Asian women contest and defend their domestic territories fiercely because they are contesting not for power, but for their very identities and self-worth and living space where they can exist with dignity and some degree of security. The physical structure of their homes and the social set-up of their households are all boundaries that shape their identities and define their daily lives and rituals in subtle, often unspoken, but significant ways. The consequent manoeuvring of their domestic circumstances is all forms of struggle against their positionality within their families, societies and communities or attempts to improve the same. Those women are the most successful in implementing domestic role changes to their advantage, which eventually derive the most benefit from having their identities so irrevocably closely connected with their homes and families. Their stratagem and machinations may be weapons of the weak, but if those are the only weapons available, even such weapons will be seized upon with great determination and ferocity.

The writers record the voices of experience-charged femininity as they express their identity's revolt, disagreement, and conflict with the power that is still maintained by the different arms of patriarchal, whether it religion or misdemeanour. In response to their captivity, the women have made their inner places known through images interwoven with various personal yet powerfully collective symbolism. Inside the context of a South Asian Muslim writer's identity, confinement gives rise to many behaviours within the female subject of legacy.

The majority of women's literature attests to the diffused and ever-present risks men offer to a female's autonomy, which pervades her writings in the form of angry and observant monologues. Her attacks are addressed at every aspect of phallic culture, including customs, traditions, religion, crime, and insensibilities. As a result, her collective essence is positioned against the horizon she depicts without a real threshold. She emerges from the ogres to echo those around her — the multitudes of oppressed female bodies and their oppressors.

The authors of the thesis paint vivid pictures of gender inequality, oppression, harassment, sexual exploitation, and various forms of violence on the one hand, while negotiating the existence of alternatives for liberation on the other. The combination of similarities and variances presented by the writers in their works presents a broad range and allows for specific observations on how women writers reacted to the developments in this period. Their analysis of society is substantially influenced by their exposure and experience as an immigrant. The authors selected for study resort to modern innovations in the literary world, adopting the new trends to go with their principle, be it in the form of a novel, autobiography, testimonial or memoir and shifting them to act as a filter for contemporary ideas and problems.

The current study found that this writing is characterised by a growing confidence in dealing with issues that have previously been considered outside the purview of women authors. It's also worth noting that these writers' confidence in treating violence as a planned event, with the state as the victim, has ushered in a new sort of narrative. New ways of expressing these burgeoning areas of interest are both energising and satisfying.

Even though these writers deal with standard topics in women's writing, such as human relationships or sexual politics, their perspectives and approaches range significantly.

Furthermore, diasporic women writers are now confident enough to write books that require the reader's active engagement and attention. Social documentation, realism, and even poetic storytelling forms are no longer the only options. Conventional ways of storytelling changed into postmodernist narrative forms include fantasy and fable, utopias and dystopias, satire and comedy, and traditional modes of storytelling transformed into postmodernist narrative forms. It's also worth noting that the authors of the novels chosen for this study set the plot and nature in South Asia and South Asian surroundings. The authors continue their creative profession by showing South Asians in the novel's setting and writing about the diasporic lives of South Asians in the United States or London.

Expanding critical discourse, which would allow for the changes seen in contemporary women's writing, is required to properly analyse this new sort of women's writing. The research proposes a way out of this deadlock in the quest to establish a viable critical vocabulary for examining contemporary women novelists, and has addressed how women's agency is bound by local processes and structures of family, community, and the state. While it may be risky to arbitrarily apply Western feminism discourses to the Third World or South Asian setting, given many women writers' dislike to the term, it may also be counterproductive to dismiss any potential connection without thorough consideration. Though Islamic Feminism is seen as an oxymoron, there is a need for a ‘Geography of Literary Feminism’ that applies the theories, methods and critiques of feminism to the study of the human environment, society and geographical space.

This study has shown how women writers empower subaltern women. Despite the social class a woman is in, the treatment she undergoes is what dictates whether or not she is a subaltern. The characters are reduced to a subaltern status for being rational and liberal in a world under threat from fundamentalism. What is striking is that the gaze of the writers has become more comprehensive. They are increasingly going beyond gender-based subalterns to examine other forms of victimisation with empathy.

Despite increased awareness and support for marginalised groups, the concept of the "Other" has been embedded in society epistemologies for generations. To reverse these established views, communities must actively develop non-oppressive methods of knowing people of all nationalities, religions, genders, and social situations. Individuals and organisations must be conscious of their responsibilities to overthrow oppressive forms of 'knowing' and building knowledge that have been and continue to exist internationally, according to feminist epistemology. Those who attribute to this theory would suggest that epistemologists need to take more seriously issues of group differences. The social hierarchies that they often create encourage the previledged to exploit the non-previledged. “both limit the spheres of action available to agents from non-privileged groups and discourage those from privileged groups from being accountable for their actions when they seek and claim knowledge” (Townley 40).

A brief overview of the chapters

The first chapter, ‘Introduction’, have tried to locate the three countries for study, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. It has given a brief account of the decolonisation in South Asia, which was deepened by analysing the relationship between nation, communal and regional levels and arenas of politics based on communitarianism in nation

formation. Thus, the independence of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh cannot be understood without highlighting on Hindu-Muslim divide, partition and the war. The chapter has also focused on the discourse formation of the Muslims as evil, orient as the realm of the irrational, unscientific and inferior. This distorted image homogenised the entire east, thereby failing to recognise the heterogeneity and diversity in its culture and oral sources of indigenous knowledge. As the writers chosen for the study are diaspora, South Asian diaspora writings and their relevance in the present day are discussed.

The salient features of South Asian Literature are also highlighted here. From the yardstick of the British canonical standards, these writings are simply exotic and different. Still, these are highly original as these stories have not been told before in English language narratives and are innovative and mature. These writings represent events such as the Independence of India and Pakistan, the violence of partition, the Indo-Pak war of 1971, the formation of Bangladesh as a nation, the overthrowal of the Taliban, events of 9/11, attack on Malala, to name a few. The writing focus on the violence inflicted on women during these events. The women writers themselves have contributed to the making of a genre that represents their suffering by the state and religion. Knowing their restrictions, these writers refuse to be mired in silence and try to negotiate with culture and political context to gain agency and voice.

The Second Chapter is titled ‘Understanding Violence: Looking through the Glass’. This chapter has focused on gendered violence due to gender inequality and power hierarchies between the sexes. It has tried to define gender-based violence, types of violence and the agency causing them. According to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, these definitions are according to the Elimination of Violence.

The chapter has broadly classified Violence against women into three categories or types—physical or Domestic, Structural or Institutional and Epistemic Violence. Physical violence is further divided as the Life-cycle approach that draws on kinds of violence inflicted stage-wise from before an individual's birth till old age and death. The Ecological Approach has stressed the interaction at various levels of social ecology, about personality factors, situational and context factors, norms and gendered values. Structural violence operates daily without adequate food, housing, health, education, economic security and legal help. Usually, these conditions prevail during war and insurgency. But in South Asia, everyday living has become a threat and survival the norm. The third category is Epistemic Violence. Even after more than 30 years, Spivak's feminist postcolonial understanding of epistemic violence is still the preeminent theoretical touchstone for addressing violence. Suppose scholars do take the time to explicitly conceptualisealise the term. In that case, they usually hark back to Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', and by now a canonical feminist postcolonial description of what 'epistemic violence' is would mean a kind of remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to establish the colonial subject as the 'Other'. Knowledge is intrinsically linked to the naturalisation and legitimisation of visible and invisible forms of violence. The concept of epistemic violence must be well established and well understood to contribute to our perception of 'what is right' and 'what is wrong'? in knowledge construction. A rhetoric pattern is seen concerning Muslim women, Demonization of Veil, Homogenization of Islam and Fetishization of unveiling. All these concepts are looked into in the chapter. The importance of understanding epistemic violence is twofold. First, to recognise the process of 'Othering'; here it is the South Asian Muslim Women, and second to become aware of the process of 'Othering' to frame and

contest a solution. The third chapter, 'Writings from Pakistan: From Resistance to Resilience', begins with difficulties defining the country 'Pakistan', as it has acquired a tangible entity rather than a single one. The country is not a coherent, monolithic, homogenous idea; therefore, the debate about what characterises Pakistan is still a raging question. Understanding women's writings from this region is still a difficult task. To highlight the themes of the thesis, two women writers have defied all patriarchal norms to assert their identities. Tehmina Durrani's *My Feudal Lord* and *Blasphemy* has exposed domestic violence against the oppressed women by men in power, both political and religious. The second writer in the chapter is Kamila Shamsie. Four of her novels are discussed here. *In the City by the Sea*, *Broken Verses*, *Burnt Shadows* and *Kartography.* The writer has uncovered the falls and follies of the society in detail and has succeeded in revealing how power can corrupt men and how they rely on means of violence and perpetrate to achieve their desired ends. The victims of structural violence are portrayed in the novels.

The fourth chapter, 'Writings from Afghanistan: Breaking the Shackles of Time', has highlighted the traumatic condition of people in Afghanistan. Under Social, cultural and legal repression, perpetual war, misogynist fundamentalist regimes and a distorted version of religion. The three political phases in the country, one in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan, the second is the rule of Mujahideen followed by the Taliban, and the third is the US intervention, are reflected in the literature. The section has stressed the repressed strategies adopted by the state, which function by violence and ideology. Apart from domestic and structural violence, the region is shattered by epistemic violence that portrays a demonic picture of Muslim women to the western audience. The three works, Masuda

Sultana's *My War at Home*, Malalai Joya's *A Women Among the Warlords* and Fariba Nawa's *Opium Nation,* express the concern for women and the future of their country. As the writers here are influenced and supported by the RAWA (Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan), the chapter has also given a brief note on the organisation's formation and its aims and objectives in uplifting the condition of women in Afghanistan.

The fifth chapter, 'Writings from Bangladesh: Empowerment by Empathy', begins with a brief introduction to the 1971 nine-month-long war of Liberation against the then West Pakistan. The independent state has witnessed young writers writing on war and violence. Tehamima Anam's trilogy novels *A Golden Age*, *The Good Muslim* and *The Bones of Grace* are given a close reading to understand the cause and effect of various kinds of violence affecting three generations of characters. The gendered roles thrust upon by the cultural practices make it difficult to take sides. The homeless and the hopeless situation of women are described in the novels of Anam. The chapter has highlighted a grand vision for the nation through the eyes of the writer.

Finally, mainstream policy and support systems, as well as violence against women and domestic abuse organisations, continue to fail to serve the comprehensive and contextually specific needs of South Asian women, particularly Muslims. Women's relationships with numerous public assistance systems are altered by intersecting and mutually reinforcing race and gendered subordination systems. Structural intersectionality is defined here as South Asian women's distinctive location at the crossroads of race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and nationality, which distinguishes their experiences and narrations of gender-based violence from those of western white women. As a result, the

concept of intersectionality is crucial to comprehending the experiences of South Asian women. This provides a valuable critical sketch for illustrating how various axes of subjection interact.

The failure of any society and its institutions to adequately serve the needs of its most vulnerable individuals is highlighted by a broader propensity to disregard the unique socioeconomic and sociocultural variables impacting underprivileged South Asian Muslim women who are victims of violence. Such abuse, in particular, is frequently isolated from the larger political and socioeconomic framework in which it arises. Popular movements in support of women's rights, empowerment, and equality have highlighted multiculturalism, community cohesion, and 'culture' as places of contestation, political struggle, and control, which are sometimes overlooked in the broader public discourse. There is an urgent need to identify South Asian women who have been victims of abuse from a victim-centered, intersectional perspective. The so-called political system must enable women's agency by acknowledging their unique demands and experiences.

Moreover, every agency and the local authority must acknowledge the complexity of political and social conditions. Many factors are to be taken into consideration to empathise with the complexities of South Asian women’s experiences and responses to gendered form of abuse and violence.this includes, her financial status, health condition in terms of mental health and physical well-being, her ethnicity, race and class, linguistic affiliations, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, ability and disability, place of residence, urban and rural divide. All the above factors have a reflective effect on South Asian

women's ability to access the services and resources they need. Victims of violence may have a disability or may be poor, trafficked, asylum seekers or refugees fleeing war and conflict with their children. These conditions contribute to an individual's exceptional, gender-based 'feminine story,' and such obscuring factors need to be considered when designing, preventative, protective and interventionist responses to individual victims.

It is necessary for social and legal approaches to view the violence through a 'culturalist' gaze. Many of the so-called cultural practices such as honour killing, and forced marriages constitute a specific type of violence against women which is peculiar to the South Asian regions. The agencies and state departments disregard the victim's experience of violence as mere manifestations of cultural differences and ignore the expressions of violence. Thus, South Asian women's suffering is portrayed as a cultural problem and that agencies outside their community and region fail to address. when the cultures of these communities are invoked in essentialist ways and seen as something static, remaining unchallenged and isolated from the politics and history that shape it, then women from these communities are constructed as perpetual victim-subjects, entirely defined by their cultures.

For all its good intentions, multiculturalism has become a force of repression for the women it aims to help. It fails to recognise that Violence is a pan-cultural, human rights problem that can and should be dealt with universally. Intersectionality, especially in our awareness of how social and cultural inequalities construct victims is vital if we are to transcend the narrow vision provided by multiculturalism.

Lastly, in exploring violence in South Asian communities, the study has established the importance of viewing gender-based violence not as an explicit socio-cultural issue but as a common problem that involves a complex entwining of many different social, economic and cultural forces. An approach that holds the intersectionality of violence against women can only offer optimism for the coming generations. Yet as Abu-Lughod has argued, it is time to move beyond the east-west binary that has clouded much analysis of Muslim women to examine the processes of entanglement and othering fearlessly. Edward Said's post-9/11 essay, "The Clash of Ignorance", offers a resounding critique of the labels and binaries like Islam and the West, which mislead, confuse and poison the minds. The interconnectedness of innumerable lives is also affected by 'ours' and 'theirs'. Therefore, there is a need for a complex analysis of gender, nation, class, tradition and modernity to know the sufferings of South Asian women. There is also a need to expand the definition of feminism – a global and diverse social reality for many women today.

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KUVEMPU UNIVERSITY

Articulating Violence in Contemporary Women's Writings from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh

Thesis submitted to Kuvempu University for the Award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

ENGLISH

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2022

Chapter VI

Conclusion

South Asian women contest and defend their domestic territories fiercely because they are contesting not for power, but for their very identities and self-worth and living space where they can exist with dignity and some degree of security. The physical structure of their homes and the social set-up of their households are all boundaries that shape their identities and define their daily lives and rituals in subtle, often unspoken, but significant ways. The consequent manoeuvring of their domestic circumstances is all forms of struggle against their positionality within their families, societies and communities or attempts to improve the same. Those women are the most successful in implementing domestic role changes to their advantage, which eventually derive the most benefit from having their identities so irrevocably closely connected with their homes and families. Their stratagem and machinations may be weapons of the weak, but if those are the only weapons available, even such weapons will be seized upon with great determination and ferocity.

The writers record the voices of experience-charged femininity as they express their identity's revolt, disagreement, and conflict with the power that is still maintained by the different arms of patriarchal, whether it religion or misdemeanour. In response to their captivity, the women have made their inner places known through images interwoven with various personal yet powerfully collective symbolism. Inside the context of a South Asian Muslim writer's identity, confinement gives rise to many behaviours within the female subject of legacy.

The majority of women's literature attests to the diffused and ever-present risks men offer to a female's autonomy, which pervades her writings in the form of angry and observant monologues. Her attacks are addressed at every aspect of phallic culture, including customs, traditions, religion, crime, and insensibilities. As a result, her collective essence is positioned against the horizon she depicts without a real threshold. She emerges from the ogres to echo those around her — the multitudes of oppressed female bodies and their oppressors.

The authors of the thesis paint vivid pictures of gender inequality, oppression, harassment, sexual exploitation, and various forms of violence on the one hand, while negotiating the existence of alternatives for liberation on the other. The combination of similarities and variances presented by the writers in their works presents a broad range and allows for specific observations on how women writers reacted to the developments in this period. Their analysis of society is substantially influenced by their exposure and experience as an immigrant. The authors selected for study resort to modern innovations in the literary world, adopting the new trends to go with their principle, be it in the form of a novel, autobiography, testimonial or memoir and shifting them to act as a filter for contemporary ideas and problems.

The current study found that this writing is characterised by a growing confidence in dealing with issues that have previously been considered outside the purview of women authors. It's also worth noting that these writers' confidence in treating violence as a planned event, with the state as the victim, has ushered in a new sort of narrative. New ways of expressing these burgeoning areas of interest are both energising and satisfying.

Even though these writers deal with standard topics in women's writing, such as human relationships or sexual politics, their perspectives and approaches range significantly.

Furthermore, diasporic women writers are now confident enough to write books that require the reader's active engagement and attention. Social documentation, realism, and even poetic storytelling forms are no longer the only options. Conventional ways of storytelling changed into postmodernist narrative forms include fantasy and fable, utopias and dystopias, satire and comedy, and traditional modes of storytelling transformed into postmodernist narrative forms. It's also worth noting that the authors of the novels chosen for this study set the plot and nature in South Asia and South Asian surroundings. The authors continue their creative profession by showing South Asians in the novel's setting and writing about the diasporic lives of South Asians in the United States or London.

Expanding critical discourse, which would allow for the changes seen in contemporary women's writing, is required to properly analyse this new sort of women's writing. The research proposes a way out of this deadlock in the quest to establish a viable critical vocabulary for examining contemporary women novelists, and has addressed how women's agency is bound by local processes and structures of family, community, and the state. While it may be risky to arbitrarily apply Western feminism discourses to the Third World or South Asian setting, given many women writers' dislike to the term, it may also be counterproductive to dismiss any potential connection without thorough consideration. Though Islamic Feminism is seen as an oxymoron, there is a need for a ‘Geography of Literary Feminism’ that applies the theories, methods and critiques of feminism to the study of the human environment, society and geographical space.

This study has shown how women writers empower subaltern women. Despite the social class a woman is in, the treatment she undergoes is what dictates whether or not she is a subaltern. The characters are reduced to a subaltern status for being rational and liberal in a world under threat from fundamentalism. What is striking is that the gaze of the writers has become more comprehensive. They are increasingly going beyond gender-based subalterns to examine other forms of victimisation with empathy.

Despite increased awareness and support for marginalised groups, the concept of the "Other" has been embedded in society epistemologies for generations. To reverse these established views, communities must actively develop non-oppressive methods of knowing people of all nationalities, religions, genders, and social situations. Individuals and organisations must be conscious of their responsibilities to overthrow oppressive forms of 'knowing' and building knowledge that have been and continue to exist internationally, according to feminist epistemology. Those who attribute to this theory would suggest that epistemologists need to take more seriously issues of group differences. The social hierarchies that they often create encourage the previledged to exploit the non-previledged. “both limit the spheres of action available to agents from non-privileged groups and discourage those from privileged groups from being accountable for their actions when they seek and claim knowledge” (Townley 40).

A brief overview of the chapters

The first chapter, ‘Introduction’, have tried to locate the three countries for study, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. It has given a brief account of the decolonisation in South Asia, which was deepened by analysing the relationship between nation, communal and regional levels and arenas of politics based on communitarianism in nation

formation. Thus, the independence of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh cannot be understood without highlighting on Hindu-Muslim divide, partition and the war. The chapter has also focused on the discourse formation of the Muslims as evil, orient as the realm of the irrational, unscientific and inferior. This distorted image homogenised the entire east, thereby failing to recognise the heterogeneity and diversity in its culture and oral sources of indigenous knowledge. As the writers chosen for the study are diaspora, South Asian diaspora writings and their relevance in the present day are discussed.

The salient features of South Asian Literature are also highlighted here. From the yardstick of the British canonical standards, these writings are simply exotic and different. Still, these are highly original as these stories have not been told before in English language narratives and are innovative and mature. These writings represent events such as the Independence of India and Pakistan, the violence of partition, the Indo-Pak war of 1971, the formation of Bangladesh as a nation, the overthrowal of the Taliban, events of 9/11, attack on Malala, to name a few. The writing focus on the violence inflicted on women during these events. The women writers themselves have contributed to the making of a genre that represents their suffering by the state and religion. Knowing their restrictions, these writers refuse to be mired in silence and try to negotiate with culture and political context to gain agency and voice.

The Second Chapter is titled ‘Understanding Violence: Looking through the Glass’. This chapter has focused on gendered violence due to gender inequality and power hierarchies between the sexes. It has tried to define gender-based violence, types of violence and the agency causing them. According to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, these definitions are according to the Elimination of Violence.

The chapter has broadly classified Violence against women into three categories or types—physical or Domestic, Structural or Institutional and Epistemic Violence. Physical violence is further divided as the Life-cycle approach that draws on kinds of violence inflicted stage-wise from before an individual's birth till old age and death. The Ecological Approach has stressed the interaction at various levels of social ecology, about personality factors, situational and context factors, norms and gendered values. Structural violence operates daily without adequate food, housing, health, education, economic security and legal help. Usually, these conditions prevail during war and insurgency. But in South Asia, everyday living has become a threat and survival the norm. The third category is Epistemic Violence. Even after more than 30 years, Spivak's feminist postcolonial understanding of epistemic violence is still the preeminent theoretical touchstone for addressing violence. Suppose scholars do take the time to explicitly conceptualisealise the term. In that case, they usually hark back to Spivak's essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', and by now a canonical feminist postcolonial description of what 'epistemic violence' is would mean a kind of remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to establish the colonial subject as the 'Other'. Knowledge is intrinsically linked to the naturalisation and legitimisation of visible and invisible forms of violence. The concept of epistemic violence must be well established and well understood to contribute to our perception of 'what is right' and 'what is wrong'? in knowledge construction. A rhetoric pattern is seen concerning Muslim women, Demonization of Veil, Homogenization of Islam and Fetishization of unveiling. All these concepts are looked into in the chapter. The importance of understanding epistemic violence is twofold. First, to recognise the process of 'Othering'; here it is the South Asian Muslim Women, and second to become aware of the process of 'Othering' to frame and

contest a solution. The third chapter, 'Writings from Pakistan: From Resistance to Resilience', begins with difficulties defining the country 'Pakistan', as it has acquired a tangible entity rather than a single one. The country is not a coherent, monolithic, homogenous idea; therefore, the debate about what characterises Pakistan is still a raging question. Understanding women's writings from this region is still a difficult task. To highlight the themes of the thesis, two women writers have defied all patriarchal norms to assert their identities. Tehmina Durrani's *My Feudal Lord* and *Blasphemy* has exposed domestic violence against the oppressed women by men in power, both political and religious. The second writer in the chapter is Kamila Shamsie. Four of her novels are discussed here. *In the City by the Sea*, *Broken Verses*, *Burnt Shadows* and *Kartography.* The writer has uncovered the falls and follies of the society in detail and has succeeded in revealing how power can corrupt men and how they rely on means of violence and perpetrate to achieve their desired ends. The victims of structural violence are portrayed in the novels.

The fourth chapter, 'Writings from Afghanistan: Breaking the Shackles of Time', has highlighted the traumatic condition of people in Afghanistan. Under Social, cultural and legal repression, perpetual war, misogynist fundamentalist regimes and a distorted version of religion. The three political phases in the country, one in Soviet-occupied Afghanistan, the second is the rule of Mujahideen followed by the Taliban, and the third is the US intervention, are reflected in the literature. The section has stressed the repressed strategies adopted by the state, which function by violence and ideology. Apart from domestic and structural violence, the region is shattered by epistemic violence that portrays a demonic picture of Muslim women to the western audience. The three works, Masuda

Sultana's *My War at Home*, Malalai Joya's *A Women Among the Warlords* and Fariba Nawa's *Opium Nation,* express the concern for women and the future of their country. As the writers here are influenced and supported by the RAWA (Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan), the chapter has also given a brief note on the organisation's formation and its aims and objectives in uplifting the condition of women in Afghanistan.

The fifth chapter, 'Writings from Bangladesh: Empowerment by Empathy', begins with a brief introduction to the 1971 nine-month-long war of Liberation against the then West Pakistan. The independent state has witnessed young writers writing on war and violence. Tehamima Anam's trilogy novels *A Golden Age*, *The Good Muslim* and *The Bones of Grace* are given a close reading to understand the cause and effect of various kinds of violence affecting three generations of characters. The gendered roles thrust upon by the cultural practices make it difficult to take sides. The homeless and the hopeless situation of women are described in the novels of Anam. The chapter has highlighted a grand vision for the nation through the eyes of the writer.

Finally, mainstream policy and support systems, as well as violence against women and domestic abuse organisations, continue to fail to serve the comprehensive and contextually specific needs of South Asian women, particularly Muslims. Women's relationships with numerous public assistance systems are altered by intersecting and mutually reinforcing race and gendered subordination systems. Structural intersectionality is defined here as South Asian women's distinctive location at the crossroads of race, ethnicity, class, gender, religion, and nationality, which distinguishes their experiences and narrations of gender-based violence from those of western white women. As a result, the

concept of intersectionality is crucial to comprehending the experiences of South Asian women. This provides a valuable critical sketch for illustrating how various axes of subjection interact.

The failure of any society and its institutions to adequately serve the needs of its most vulnerable individuals is highlighted by a broader propensity to disregard the unique socioeconomic and sociocultural variables impacting underprivileged South Asian Muslim women who are victims of violence. Such abuse, in particular, is frequently isolated from the larger political and socioeconomic framework in which it arises. Popular movements in support of women's rights, empowerment, and equality have highlighted multiculturalism, community cohesion, and 'culture' as places of contestation, political struggle, and control, which are sometimes overlooked in the broader public discourse. There is an urgent need to identify South Asian women who have been victims of abuse from a victim-centered, intersectional perspective. The so-called political system must enable women's agency by acknowledging their unique demands and experiences.

Moreover, every agency and the local authority must acknowledge the complexity of political and social conditions. Many factors are to be taken into consideration to empathise with the complexities of South Asian women’s experiences and responses to gendered form of abuse and violence.this includes, her financial status, health condition in terms of mental health and physical well-being, her ethnicity, race and class, linguistic affiliations, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, ability and disability, place of residence, urban and rural divide. All the above factors have a reflective effect on South Asian

women's ability to access the services and resources they need. Victims of violence may have a disability or may be poor, trafficked, asylum seekers or refugees fleeing war and conflict with their children. These conditions contribute to an individual's exceptional, gender-based 'feminine story,' and such obscuring factors need to be considered when designing, preventative, protective and interventionist responses to individual victims.

It is necessary for social and legal approaches to view the violence through a 'culturalist' gaze. Many of the so-called cultural practices such as honour killing, and forced marriages constitute a specific type of violence against women which is peculiar to the South Asian regions. The agencies and state departments disregard the victim's experience of violence as mere manifestations of cultural differences and ignore the expressions of violence. Thus, South Asian women's suffering is portrayed as a cultural problem and that agencies outside their community and region fail to address. when the cultures of these communities are invoked in essentialist ways and seen as something static, remaining unchallenged and isolated from the politics and history that shape it, then women from these communities are constructed as perpetual victim-subjects, entirely defined by their cultures.

For all its good intentions, multiculturalism has become a force of repression for the women it aims to help. It fails to recognise that Violence is a pan-cultural, human rights problem that can and should be dealt with universally. Intersectionality, especially in our awareness of how social and cultural inequalities construct victims is vital if we are to transcend the narrow vision provided by multiculturalism.

Lastly, in exploring violence in South Asian communities, the study has established the importance of viewing gender-based violence not as an explicit socio-cultural issue but as a common problem that involves a complex entwining of many different social, economic and cultural forces. An approach that holds the intersectionality of violence against women can only offer optimism for the coming generations. Yet as Abu-Lughod has argued, it is time to move beyond the east-west binary that has clouded much analysis of Muslim women to examine the processes of entanglement and othering fearlessly. Edward Said's post-9/11 essay, "The Clash of Ignorance", offers a resounding critique of the labels and binaries like Islam and the West, which mislead, confuse and poison the minds. The interconnectedness of innumerable lives is also affected by 'ours' and 'theirs'. Therefore, there is a need for a complex analysis of gender, nation, class, tradition and modernity to know the sufferings of South Asian women. There is also a need to expand the definition of feminism – a global and diverse social reality for many women today.

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