



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

**INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN  
OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No. 4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 26-43*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

Email: [researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com](mailto:researchsyndicate.vv@gmail.com) Website: <http://ibll.com.pk/index.php/ibll/index>

**ANALYZING GENDER INDOCTRINATION AS A SUBJUGATING  
POLICY AGAINST WOMEN IN PAKISTANI ENGLISH FICTION**

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**Abstract**

*The concepts like rejection, objectification, deprivation, and discrimination are not new regarding the suffering of women in the twenty-first century. Women are particularly susceptible to the situations that are prevalent in today's fast-paced society. This paper analyzes The Holy Woman by Qaisara Shahraz in the context of women subjugation based on gender discrimination. It focuses on how Pakistani society and culture are portrayed in the novel and examines gender discrimination in terms of stereotypes, inequality, racial preferences, otherness, targeting objectification and personal prejudice in various facets of the lives of the novel's characters. Gender discrimination includes the systematic mistreatment of women because it is prejudiced against their socially prescribed roles. The goal of this research is to examine how inherited patriarchal culture operating against women and gender discrimination that affects the lives of the characters portrayed in the novel. This study makes use of qualitative research and theoretical framework of gender theory and demonstrates how historically, socially, and traditionally, women are assigned poor positions in society. The finding shows that Qaisra Shahraz artistically portrayed the challenges of gender discrimination against women in the society that treats them as their commodity and operates against their dreams and wishes. The study further reveals that women in Pakistani culture are subjugated and they are denied their basic rights as portrayed in the novel.*

**Keywords: Subjugation, Gender Inequality, Commodification, Segregation, Oppression, Patriarchy and Discrimination.**



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### **Introduction**

Discrimination and rejection in the context of women receive huge applaud in literature regarding their subjugation and subordination. There is a lot of debate on the various factors behind this inequality in literature and particular focus has been given to gender incarnation. The topic of gender-based segregation and marginalization has been heavily debated during the last several centuries in Pakistani English fiction. The Holy Woman by Qaisra Shahraz is the focus of the present paper that deals with women subjugation in terms of gender discrimination. The selected novel provides examples of a variety of gender-related issues, including prejudice, discrimination, racial preferences, objectification, and sexual injustices. According to this paper, gender discrimination is the systematic maltreatment of both male and female people due to some biases against the social roles that those people are supposed to play in the society. The study's further consideration of social intolerance, marginalization, prejudice, and rejection also touches on the rejection of a person or character based on specific sexual objectification. This research shows how gender inequality impacts the lives of the characters and represents the oppressive and unequal treatment of women in Pakistani society as portrayed in *the Holy Women*. The researchers look at how gender discrimination and systemic inequality are shown in the book as they relate to the lives of the characters in Pakistani society. These characteristics are examined by employing gender theory to the selected novel, which depicts a loosely organized Pakistani society in which people are categorized as 'Other' or 'Object' rather than functioning on their attributes.

In Pakistani culture, women face several challenges. They can't decide whether and where to get married. They are "educated, but due financial pressure they leave the school early and enter the job market" (p. 10). Future choices are made by their parents. While they are still young and immature and assigned domestic duties. They have a duty which "includes different activities such as washing dishes, laundry, cleaning, sweeping, mopping or cooking" (Hussain, 2009, p. 6). to take care of their family. Women give up something in every part of their lives. Men are seen to have the right to subjugate them. Women are paid lesser than men because they are more agreeable. They run across obstacles while looking for work. Even if they can get a job, they will experience harassment there. For instance, women do not even have the right to vote in certain regions of Pakistan. Similarly, to "limit their freedom of movement they are encouraged only in activities inside their home" (13). Their basic rights are not protected. It's important to consider how a society's ethics and norms are depicted in the media. It portrays women as weak and helpless. Men also suffer in certain places when women are given preference over men (Allama, 1998). For instance, this percentage is smaller than the gender discrimination that women face in society while paying bills, utilizing the transit system, and standing in line. All these issues are presented by Qaisra Shahraz in *The Holy Woman*.



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Pakistani lady Qaisra Shahraz works as an author, playwright, teacher training, education consultant, and freelance writer. She belongs to the Royal Society of Arts. She has taken part in several seminars and training sessions on quality in education in Pakistan and India via the British Council. She examines racial, gender, and cultural obstacles while concentrating on human variety. She mostly investigates women's issues and writes humor. She writes about Muslim women who reside in western nations. Many of her works have been published in publications and newspapers, including The Times. Before authoring several novels, she began by concentrating on short stories. The Holy Woman, her first work, is a novel from 2001. In 2002, this novel won the Jubilee Prize. It is published in a variety of countries and tongues. Hurricane is her follow-up novel (2003). She was the creator of the drama series Dil he to Hay, which was shown on Pakistani television and won two customary awards. She published her book A Pair of Jeans in 1988, which tackles issues with clothing, feminine modesty, multiple identities, and cultural conflicts.

There is no question that when the subject of gender discrimination is brought up in Pakistan, women suffer more damage than men. There are numerous dubious and disagreeable conditions made for women, yet “men are granted unfair advantages over women under dubious conditions” (Easah, 2017, p. 17). Many organizations, both public and private, adopt a range of unfair and unofficial regulations that demonstrate bias and discrimination when it comes to hiring women. There is no denying that males endure gender bias and discrimination, but an honest evaluation reveals that the situation for women is far worse (Eashah, 2017). Through these barriers and women's ongoing struggle, empowerment can only be achieved. The researcher focuses on women since it has historically been shown that they suffer disproportionately from sex, class, and gender issues. Women in Pakistani culture are often abandoned to have harder lives and are marginalized. Because women's status is not often seen as being equal to that of men, our culture's weaker side is usually impacted by this disparity. History and custom have shown that most people see women as less valuable than men (Pakistani Country Gender profiles, 2007).

Gender inequality is a hotly debated issue in Pakistan and is becoming more prevalent globally. In Pakistan, there are more challenges impacting women than in other developing countries. They experience prejudice in almost every facet of life. They often have lower levels of education than men. Despite all the discrimination, women are often assigned regular jobs and responsibilities, and they still get lesser pay for these demanding, demanding, and unsettling working conditions. The fact that we never bother to watch out for all these issues as they arise in our society is the situation that is the most worrisome in this regard.

Gender issues are depicted in The Holy Woman by Qaisra Shahraz. Zarri Bano, the heroine, is trapped in a stereotypically conventional society, and she suffers because of



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traditional ideals and male dominance. She makes an effort to be independent, but despite this, she is treated differently from her brother Jafar and her status is ignored. Habib Khan is Zarri Bano's father. He comes off as an avaricious person. Sikander is unable to wed Zarri Bano since she made the decision. Despite her love for him, her choice is ignored. Habib Khan used property as a weapon against her will. She has little social contact and is restricted to her immediate surroundings. After the death of her only brother, she is left as the only heir to her father's wealth. Habib Khan keeps Zarri Bano in the dark regarding his intentions as well as the truth. To save his belongings, he ultimately marries her to the Holy Quran. This kind of patriarchal system, which is common in Pakistani society, traps Zarri Bano. She becomes a victim of a system that continuously favours males and strives to marginalise women who behave in privileged ways. Landowner Habib Khan exhibits his normal gender bias after the death of his only son by choosing to sacrifice his daughter in the name of religion and handing her the terrible destiny of becoming a Holy Woman and living an unmarried life for the rest of her life. He knows that Zarri Bano, who is 27 years old, is a lovely and smart woman. Habib Khan marries her to the Holy Qur'an, nevertheless. By declaring that he is the head of the home and would decide what is best for his daughter Zarri Bano, he illustrates the patriarchal worldview in the narrative. He then confesses to Shahzada that he did not like Sikander despite Shahzada's promises that Zarri Bano wanted to marry him. The idea advanced by Savitt and Beauvoir is shown through Habib Khan's depiction of a stereotypical, misogynistic guy. This study aims to analyse the patriarchal system as it is shown in Qaisra Shahraz's novel *The Holy Woman*. It also looks at the reasons behind it and how it has affected Pakistani society. Gender theory is applied in this research to analyse each of these issues.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Currently, women continue to experience a variety of types of bias, which makes it challenging for them to make choices and achieve their objectives. The most controversial and widespread issue among these factors is gender discrimination. In these unsafe situations, prejudice develops as a consequence of harsh treatment, rejection, unfavorable impressions, and sexual objectification. Qaisra Shahraz has captured this issue in Pakistani society in her work *The Holy Woman* that is not explored by the researchers. This research pinpoints the impact of gender discrimination on Pakistani society as shown in *The Holy Woman*, as well as how it affects those who support injustice and stereotypes.



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### **Research Questions.**

1. What is the role of inherent patriarchal cultural in subjugating and disadvantaging women *The Holy Woman*?
2. How do female characters face discrimination on account of gender biases as portrayed in the selected novel?

### **Research Objectives.**

1. To trace out the role of inherent patriarchal cultural in subjugating and disadvantaging women *The Holy Woman*.
2. To investigate various kinds of discrimination against female characters on account of gender biases as portrayed in the selected novel.

### **Significance of the Study**

Gender discrimination is a severe and urgent issue everywhere in the world. It specifically has significant ramifications for Pakistani society. This study is noteworthy because it explores and analyses how gender inequality in Pakistani culture is shown in the selected work by Qaisra Shahraz. The study will help the researchers in better understanding the work since it will explicitly highlight the issues with gender inequality in Pakistan. The study will be also useful in the eradication of prejudice and stereotyping by providing guidance and supplying further knowledge on the themes to future scholars.

### **Literature Review**

The review of literature is divided into two parts. Part 1 presents the viewpoints of several scholars and supporters of gender theory. The discussion and analysis of *The Holy Woman* by Qaisra Shahraz by numerous critics is presented in the second part to help readers understand it and develop objectivity in this research effort. Sandra Bern originally put up the idea of gender theory in the cognitive domain in 1981 to explain how an individual or a person in society develops gender. The argument demonstrates how sex relationships and sex roles are created and maintained in a society where men and women are divided into gender-based groupings. Men and women are two separate sexes, each gifted with characteristics influenced by society, culture, and beliefs as well as their innate biology. Finally, these characteristics associated with two different bodies are categorized in accordance with their mental, physical, behavioral, and natural characteristics, changing these bodies into the categories of genders.

Similarly, Wilkins (2002) states, “gender is a system of classification that describes characteristics and behaviors that we ascribe to bodies” (p. 4). In other words, when social,





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cultural, and psychological aspects are taken into account, men and women belong to the same category of gender despite of their biological differences. The statement also challenges conventional ideas of what it means to be a man or a woman.

According to Stuart John (2009), gender inequality is a significant issue that has to be severely addressed. He contends that genders have distinct positions in social reality. While ignoring these realities entails rejecting the existence of genders, taking these truths into account is necessary for developing initiatives, allocating resources, generating job opportunities, and categorizing creatures. He contends that gender studies continuously strive to bring society back into balance by addressing gender issues and any imbalances. He believes that gender studies is the best academic subject for studying masculinity, femininity, and the roles that each sex is assigned. The word "gender," he continues, refers to a set of characteristics that individuals who identify as male or female in society are expected to possess. In gender studies, stereotypical models start to emerge, and they might change through time. This area of research focuses on several factors that influence these transitions. It demonstrates the root reasons and contributing variables that society, culture, and other concepts employ to create gender stereotypes. According to him, gender studies show how caste, culture, and sex relations in society have an influence on how men and women really exist and evolve through time.

Emile (1995) argues that gender studies are essential because of the role they play in the creation of gender. Typically, gender has effects on men and women in terms of social, cultural, and biological roles. Instead of only observing gender roles, people respond to the ideas, attitudes, and social norms that are common in society. Children observe and categories gender rights and features in their early years as they strive to negotiate the challenges they face in society. They start acting in ways that are often designated for males and women. They start such behaviors early in childhood that later manifest in their adult life. Gender has an impact on men's and women's behavior in line with society conventions. Understanding gender makes it easier to comprehend the ways in which men and women differ in society. Gender is purely a social and ideological phenomenon according to the gender construct. Gender can only be understood and acquired after understanding about how it is socialized and developed. Therefore, the term "gender construct" refers to the understanding and observation of gender status in connection to its interaction with society.

In this context, Maya Marx Ferree (2005) rightly says, "gender and power exist, and gender represents gender as a relationship of power and object of struggle that changes overtime" (p. 13). Gender studies give gender stereotypes a lot of consideration. It is merely a generalization about how men and women behave. It is another name for a variety of features and qualities associated with masculinity and femininity. Society teaches residents to interact with men and females in a normal way by focusing on certain qualities and traits. These



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characteristics may be helpful or harmful, although accuracy in them is rare. In this way, we may argue that whereas women are seen as emotional, weak, and soft, males are considered as powerful, aggressive, and intelligent. Gender theorists often object to the use of these overused images. The discipline of gender studies includes both men's and women's studies. Gender is examined in connection to language, literature, geography, political science, history, and sociology. It also looks at the effects of class, race, ethnicity, and country on the undersigned.

Beauvoir (1953) indicates the role of gender. He says, “a woman is not born woman, but she is made woman” (p. 56). He claims that since culture and norms give women certain roles and behaviors, they are defined as such. This indicates the precise role played by a culture in assigning genders to traditional roles and making them the object of discrimination. It is not because of a woman's gender that she is assigned the task of taking care of the home; rather, it is because of the preconceptions that her culture, society, and the rules she upholds have of her. In addition, society teaches its members how to behave around both men and women. This suggests that society and culture have a complete effect over how a gender functions and is perceived. According to gender theory, sex is only a biological difference that is normal between male and female, but other differences are merely products of the culture, beliefs, and social conventions that have predominated in the society. The words "gender" and "femininity," according to Savitt (2011), should only be used to characterize masculinity and femininity, respectively, and not the real, full states of being male and female. The term "gender" has been employed by several different writers in a range of genres, including the arts, literature, language, cinema, and film, while their viewpoints and methods of approaching it differed. Despite all these many perspectives and uses, gender studies is a field in and of itself.

Sam Kellerman (2002) identified biological sex, gender expression, and gender identity as the three primary categories of gender. Gender development is influenced by a wide range of fields of study and environmental factors. Understanding these Kellerman views is necessary to comprehend the function of gender and the challenges it presents. Academic feminists take action to protect women from discrimination based on gender. Gender studies are attributed for exposing the most common issues that women experience in society and bringing these issues to light. The situation was seen by all the female academics, who discussed different facets of female suffering. These achievements in gender studies are significant. Both male and female academics started to pay attention to the suffering of women when research on gender issues impacting women was released. The purpose and obligations of masculinity in society have been critically examined as a result of all of these endeavors. The issues pertaining to women were acknowledged historically and culturally, and they expanded across society after laborious and painful effort in the field of gender studies. The problems and tragedies faced by women are highlighted by looking at many



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parts of life. Since gender inequality is a social problem, feminist studies can fully comprehend the issues that women confront and the gender-based discrimination that results from it. This disparity exists in a society that mistreats women. They inspire feminist studies, which are investigated to end this injustice.

In both urban and rural Pakistan, gender inequality is ubiquitous. Gender discrimination is a problem in Pakistan for several reasons, including a patriarchal society, a feudal system, rigid customs, illiteracy, a lack of access to high-quality healthcare, and the power of religious leaders. In their daily lives, women face a number of challenges that are connected to social interactions, health care, and education. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) provides the following definition of gender discrimination:

Any differentiation, exclusion or limitation made on the basis of sex which has the purpose or effect of impairing of avoiding the realization, enjoyment or exercise by women, disregarding of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women of human rights and basic freedoms in the social, civil, political, cultural, economic or any other field. (p.45)

Gordon Brown (2006) asserts that prejudice, intolerance, and snobbishness of any kind always reflect adversely on the one judging as opposed to the one being assessed. Everyone should get equal treatment (p.10). Gender equality is a myth because society does not acknowledge the role that women play. Women and men are not treated equally in Pakistan. In Pakistani culture, most women do not get the care they need. Unfortunately, men have not been able to change the way they treat women. Women seldom ever get salary that is equivalent to that of men in various parts of Pakistan. This sort of concept, in accordance with Jagger (1983), is connected to the rise of social classes based on capitalism and surplus costs. It is also supported by gender inequality and rules of society that devalue and punish women.

The major subjects of Bern Sargent's 1981 book are women's social status and the recognition of their rights within the Marxist class system. The economic rights of women in society are promoted by Marxists. They also fight for the equitable allocation of the financial resources, such as money, that are disproportionately owned by men in society. Socialist feminists seek to remove the economic and capitalist oppression of women, according to Hartmann (2003). The economic and social progress of women in society is a cause that feminists work for. They want to break the links between capitalism and patriarchy. They strive to sever social and patriarchal ties that bind men and women. Males mostly regard women who are members of social groupings poorly, claim Rowland and Klein (1996). In an attempt to remove this tyranny, women have created their own social organization where they





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may publicly exhibit their sexual orientation. The idea once again relates to the problem of gender inequality and masculine bias towards women. Most radical organizations originated in America, but over time they moved to other parts of the world and came to dominate worldwide literature. Many writers from different cultures and countries have focused on them and developed their own standards for identifying prejudice against women. In addition to novels, poems, plays, paintings, magazines, and other literary genres all emphasize slogans against this injustice. The concept highlights the way that men and women are often depicted in their use and application within the context of a social and cultural production of the society. It does not only focus on the roles that men and women play in society.

Sam Kellerman (2002) divided gender into three subcategories: biological differences, gender expression, and gender identity. These kinds show how the meanings of the gender categories are influenced by social and cultural perspectives on gender representation. In her book "the Second Sex," French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1953), explores the preconceptions and many stories about women in literature. She claims that traditionally, women have been regarded as objects, seen as 'other,' and given second-class status. In addition, she claims that women are increasingly accepting the positions that males have given them. When members of a group are marginalized or excluded because they belong to that group, discrimination has taken place. His or her individual characteristics are ignored, and treatment is exclusively based on membership in a certain group. Women are not treated equally to men. A lot of the elements that lead to discrimination between men and women may be attributed to gender symmetries, according to a detailed analysis of gender theorists including Maya Marx, Beauvoir, Kellerman, and Bern Sargent, among others. These elements—ambivalent prejudice, race, ethnicity, commoditization, gender stereotypes, social inequality and segregation, social norms and traditions, and objectification—provide an intuitive explanation for gender discrimination in the book and serve as a theoretical framework for its analysis. Together, they provide a comprehensive picture of gender discrimination in the book. These elements are presented in the next chapter to show how gender inequality permeates *The Holy Woman* by Qaisra Shahraz and is still present today.

## **Research Methodology**

This study attempts to investigate how gender discrimination and prejudice towards both men and women are shown in Qaisra Shahraz's *The Holy Woman*. A woman in the novel is victimized by the patriarchal culture, which wrecks her life. In the perspective of gender theory, which speaks out against this form of bias and discrimination against women, this prejudice in society is further studied. *The Holy Woman* focuses on gender, social, cultural, and historical concerns, claims Shamaila Haleem (2014). It addresses social and cultural issues using a social science perspective. The research in question is qualitative as a consequence. Investigating how society is seen from a sociocultural perspective is the aim of



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qualitative research. Based on an examination of the text, this literal and historical study looks at gender roles in social behavior and culture in relation to Pakistani society as it is shown in the cultural and social study *The Holy Woman*. This work's technique is inductive since a complete theory is provided at the end. To address the proposed concerns under debate, this study's research approach is analytical and descriptive. The researcher analyses the selected text using qualitative content analysis techniques. For qualitative content analysis, which focuses on the theme analysis of the data acquired, only the contents that best match the study's framework are selected. The research's major source is *The Holy Woman* by Qaisra Shahraz, while secondary sources for the study's thesis include several book reviews, author interviews, and other publications and journals. Secondary data is also acquired from books, papers, and journals on gender-related topics and social and economic pressures in Pakistani society. The female heroine of Qaisra Shahraz's novel *The Holy Woman* experiences discrimination and tribulations because of her identification with a certain gender. These subjects have been discussed considering gender theory. Gender theory was used to evaluate the information that was acquired for this paper. For the purpose of interpreting future data, the theory's general framework will be used, and the idea put forward by Beauvoir in 1953 has been expressly taken into consideration. One is not born a lady; rather, one is developed to be one, according to the notion.

### **Data Analysis**

*The Holy Woman* by Qaisra Shahraz illustrates a number of situations in which a society that typically favors men sometimes marginalizes women and exposes them to stereotypical behavior. Zarri Bano thinks she is receiving a different kind of treatment from her parents. Additionally, she explains to Nighat (another *Holy Woman*) that in their patriarchal society, women are obligated to marry in line with their parents' preferences. She further says "Yes, I could have refused my father, if I had wanted to. But I didn't at the end, for the same reason, as thousands of other young women in our patriarchal society end up saying "yes" (p.173). For the sake of the sack of izzat and family honour, she alleges that she has become a victim of family tradition. The idea that social norms and traditions imprison women in society is supported by gender theory. She speaks against her father's desires after being forced and cajoled by him. He criticizes acceptance in her nature "Where have your feminists' beliefs and idealism disappeared to? How can a woman of your calibre, with a university degree, a former editor of a magazine, at the end of the twentieth century, be so blinded?" (p.126). Sikandar encourages her to speak out against this injustice and prejudice. He takes a distinct position in support of Zarri Bano and identifies as a fierce feminist. Despite being able to make her realise everything, he is unable to persuade her family to make the right decision. She grew to despise her father even more as a result, which caused him to go through a lot of suffering. He is discriminated against by Zarri Bano's father since he is his suitor and is not



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given the power to make choices for her. Sikander is against this repressive social order. He urges her to take action to counteract this injustice, but she was unable to oppose her father's demands. He supports her and further says, "All I can assure you now is that everything will be in your hand. I will make no demands on you" (p. 387). When he discovers the real reason for her resistance, he convinces her to change her family's decision in their favour. He understands that her views on women's rights are inappropriate in her family. Geetha (2002) expands on this positional shift by asserting that males change postures to best use the situation. Sikandar is aware of the dire conditions her family is going through. He expresses; "she has already been oppressed and exploited by her father and grandfather. I am not going to be another male oppressor in the guise of a husband. I will be a friend and companion to her" (p.388). Sikandar expresses compassion for her predicament and best wishes. He is aware of the harm her grandfather and father have caused her. The phrase serves as an example of how men in society either embrace or reject women.

In Pakistani many women feel it quite difficult to do '*Pardah*'. Zarri Bano is a fashionable girl. She is imposed to keep wearing '*dupatta*' and '*burqa*'. She says, 'How can I wear a burqa?' she moaned to herself that she "will never get used to it, not me. I, who have an instinct for glamour and fashion, I will be smothered alive behind it" (p.129). In the novel, Kulsoom says to Naimat Bibi, "I haven't been through any school doors. I am just as illiterate as you are. It is so unfortunate that there were no girl's schools in the village in our childhood days" (p.186). This serves as an example of the societal structure and conventions that provide women less possibilities to get an education.

According to Kellerman (1992), the most important gender theorist, gender and how it is used depend on the characteristics and behaviour of the society in which it exists. Both genders display the same behaviour in a society where equality is the norm. Despite her best attempts, she fails because of the customs and structure of the community. She tells Ruby, her younger sister, "don't talk to me about nets and webs!" Zarri Bano snapped, moving away from the window. 'I am not a fish to be angled at, caught at and trapped Ruby" (p.16). Zarri Bano steers out of the social framework of her society, where her marriage is being planned, with these lines. She asks her sister not to describe her as being in a traditional bondage. She also warns her from considering trying to dictate any family matters to her. She states that she will always stand up for her rights and refuses to be coerced or restrained.

Shahzada, the mother of Zarri Bano, is discriminated against and ignored by her husband Habib Khan in all matters relating to the marriage of her daughter. Her thoughts and points of view are irrelevant to him. He will sometimes ignore her to keep her calm. She is concerned about the connection between Zarri Bano and Sikandar. She wants to express her viewpoint on this, but she often gets ignored. All of this happens because of discrimination against both men and women in society. Shahzada encounters gender prejudice, and her



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## **INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN OF LITERATURE AND LINGUISTICS**

*Vol. 7 No. 4 (December) 2024*

*Pages: 26-43*

**Published by: Research Syndicate**

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husband often ignores her. She has the right to speak out and be involved in any choices made regarding her daughter's marriage, but her husband won't allow her. Sikandar asks Zarri Bano, and she jumps to answer. Shahzada discusses this matter with her husband, but he disagrees with her position. She suggests that they should accept the proposal of Sikander, but her husband forbids her and, "replies flippantly that there was plenty of time" (p.19). He further says, "now you are being melodramatic." Habib Khan turned away from his wife, laughing, bringing the conversation to an end" (p.19). Here, he gives her a rigorous treatment. More significantly, he steers clear of serious subjects with her. He doesn't address her directly. Habib Khan and other male residents of the village disregard Zarri Bano and Shahzada, which is a prevalent issue in society. Both women have a significant part in deciding how to live their lives, yet neither is given the respect they deserve or given the chance to express their opinions.

The treatment of Habib Khan's daughter is another example of how the patriarchal system is changing. He calls Zarri Bano "Possessive," implying that he wants to have power over her life. He never behaves or thinks in such a manner about his son Jafar. He says, "don't be silly! I am just very possessive of my daughter and wants the best for her" (p. 19). He acts as though he should have custody of his daughter and marries her to the Holy Quran in a possessive manner. She is unable to accomplish her ambitions because of his attitude. When male group members treat women like property and never give them the chance to follow their dreams, this is an example of bias towards women. This exemplifies the bias towards women that is shown in the novel as a true representation of Pakistani society. When someone asks his daughter out, Habib Khan never accepts them; instead, he offers a series of remarks that turn them off. Sikandar's father severely reprimands her when she approaches Zarri Bano to plead for her hand. Habib Khan says, "He followed her every movement as she walked towards him" (p. 23). He says, "I haven't decided yet" (p. 23). He tries to exert control over everything since this is what led to his ownership in the first place. Gender theorists contend that males alone can possess and discriminating against women in order to serve their own interests.

Qaisra Shahraz illustrates this gender inequality in her novel. Zarri Bano's father often acts disrespectfully and asserts his dominance over the family. As the family's leader, he tries to manage every situation. Never are his wife or kids permitted to interfere with his business. When Sikander recommends Zarri Bano, he asserts that he will have the final say in this situation. Although it is the right and choice of Zarri Bano to answer Sikander, but he says, "I am head of the family and I will decide what is good for my Zarri Bano, I don't like this man" (p. 23). It is her right to decide her future, but Habib Khan says, "I will decide if this man is to be my daughter's destiny or not" (p. 23). This way of thinking is biased in favour of women. Because of his continued control over everything, Zarri Bano remained desolate until ultimately becoming married to the Holy Quran. This catastrophe is entirely the result of her



**ISSN Online: 2709-9180**  
**ISSN Print: 2709-9172**

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father's intolerance and disregard. He behaves and thinks divinely in her eyes. He consistently provides for her daughter in a loving manner, but the effect is that she is unhappy and damaged. Like many other subtly discriminatory practises, gender inequality in the home is apparent and evident. It is tragic that prejudice often manifests at this level before extending to other racial or ethnic groups in society, where the need for equality is greatest in family structures and domestic difficulties. Similar imagery is used in *The Holy Woman* to show readers how gender discrimination is present throughout the whole novel. Gender inequality is an important topic that is covered in the book. Siraj Din, Zarri Bano's grandfather, pays a visit and inquiries about his grandson. In Karachi, she is with Sikandar. He responds by calling his child names and being furious. Habib Khan's "wife was given an angry look when the grandpa asked about her" (p. 34), which illustrates the routine and consistency of Habib Khan and his wife's existence. She is seen as being in command of the home. Siraj Din questions her about why she left her alone with a strange family and person. He asks her in so sounding voice, "words cut Shahzada's ears like a whiplash" (p. 35). Shahzada kept telling him that she had done nothing wrong in this circumstance. This exemplifies the bias that certain male society members have against the female population, who are often the objects of traditions and rituals. Because of Habib Khan's disgusting technique of questioning, Shahzada dares to avoid speaking with him:

Cast another helpless look at her husband, desperate for his support, hoping that he would say something in her defence. However, Habib, his eyes as cold as his father's, remained self- righteously silent by her side. (p. 36)

Even now, they find it incomprehensible how a woman could send a woman into the world and use that power to rule over her own daughter. Both men exchange penetrating stares that indicate they both think she is mistaken. Gender inequality exists in both men's and women's homes. It is a common misconception that men are completely independent, while women are confined to the home. Gender theorist Locas Jackson (2018) asserts that men and women experience pleasure in different ways. At a motel, Sikander bumps across Zarri Bano and starts pestering him with unwelcome questions. She inquires throughout dinner about when she and Sikander check into a hotel:

Do you often bring women here to dine with you?' for some reason it had become very important for her to know how many other women had sat across the table from him. (p. 50)

Even though the context of this phrase may not immediately connect to the study's current problem, a pragmatic analysis of it shows that she is posing an uncomfortable and unanswerable question. She treats him as her "sahaili," disregarding his moral integrity





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(friend). She is filled with a range of emotions and doubts in this scenario rather than thinking about his masculinity.

The author successfully confronts the theme of divorce via the use of Habib Khan in the selected piece. He shows off his strength and often makes threats to leave his wife. She is completely defenceless as he puts her to the test. He uses this supernatural power to manipulate his wife and persuade her to support his choice of Zarri Bano. Both times, he treats women unfairly. On the one hand, he never accepts the choice of his daughter and on the other hands he abuses his wife says “Remember what I said: I will divorce you on the spot if you rebel against us” (p. 67). He threatens her of three ‘*talaqs*’. This is also a great psychological torture seen against women. Islam gives a complete way and pattern of ‘*talaqs*’. Islam never allows anyone to give three times ‘*talaqs*’ simultaneously because according to the rules of ‘*talaq*’ both male and female have right and option to return and think back on their decision. Habib Khan asks: “Father, I need to talk to you. It’s about Zarri Bano and our inheritance,” (p. 69). He describes as “one of the handsomest! Tragically so young; yet unwed and no children to pass on the male line” (p. 57). This phrase implies that the son is insensitive to women and favours the male line of the family. This exemplifies the prevalent culture and norms in Pakistani society, which place little emphasis on women as parents and only respect and desire for men to be parents. In Pakistani society, sons are highly esteemed when it comes to inheriting a portion of the family's wealth. Zarri Bano is the acknowledged heiress of the family. After the death of his son, people think “would Habib follow his centuries- old tradition of making one of his daughters his heir?” (p. 57). When the subject of a girl's property is brought up, Pakistani family elders often emphasise their long-standing customs and practises of the family to pass on the wealth to females. When he comes back, he promises his wife that he will make their daughter a pious girl. His wife then collapses and cries out in a shaky voice to her daughter:

Your father...’ Shahzada swallowed, finding it hard to say the words, ‘... wants you to become his heiress, and our Shahzadi Ibadat, our “Holy Woman”, in the traditional way.’ Zarri Bano stared, stupefied, as the meaning of what her mother had just said sank in it. (p. 62)

When Habib Khan announces that he is going to make his daughter Shahzadi Ibadat, starting the most important portion of the narrative, he does the cruellest act in the whole novel. Shahzada questions Habib Khan about his worry over his daughter's upcoming marriage. He replied, “now that I have no son, who is going to be my heir, Shahzada? To whom am I going to bequeath all this land? I am not going to hand it over to some stranger who just happens to marry my daughter” (p. 66). She says, “I will never forgive you, but I’ll do my best to support you in everything, as it is my duty” (p. 71). This is how gender is seen in a society where males are favoured, and women are considered as nothing more than puppets. Today,



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wives are expected to submit to their husbands, who are considered as having the right to do so. Shahzada agrees with everything said. At one occasion she says, “I am just a puppet, a mere worthless woman to do your bidding” (p. 72). She also questions that he is a puppeteer and “you hold my daughter’s fate in your hand” (p. 72). The issue of women being objectified has subtly permeated our society. Their independence, morality, and movement are the things that are most severely and rigorously impacted by objectification. It doesn't feel proper to Zarri Bano to voice her viewpoint to her parents. She is treated like a commodity. She lacks both self-awareness and dignity, thus her only choice is to comply with her family's norms and customs. She says to her mother when she is made holy woman. “Do you think I am a wax doll, a purely, that you can mould to dance to your tune when and however it suits you? I am a human being! A woman who can never contemplate wedlock!” (p. 349). To protect their estate and give it the appellation "Holy Woman," feudalists in Sindh would convert their oldest daughter to Islam and marry her off to a holy man. Zarri Bano receives "Shahzadi Ibadat." Zarri Bano is unable to persuade her to take a risk and topple this system, despite Sikander's best efforts. He said that her pride was a weakness that her father had exploited (p. 134). Sikander claims that Zarri Bano's problem is that she takes pleasure in making sacrifices for her father, but that her father has seen this as vulnerability and exploited it.

Gender and gender inequality are impacted by the economic condition of the society. Girls often struggle with a variety of societal economic issues. Most often, one woman is preferred over the other because of financial benefits. According to Beauvoir (1953), economic circumstances are an important aspect of social structure and have a significant impact on how gender categories are developed. a washerwoman. Although his mother Kaniz is opposed to it, Khawar is in love with her. She is described as the second chaudhrani of the hamlet and is the second major character in the novel. Kaniz opposes this marriage due to Firdaus's family and social background. She forbids her child from interacting with such people. When Kaniz visits her sister in Lahore, she meets a girl whom she believes would be a good match for her son due to her wealth and prosperity. She favours the girl for her son Khawar because of her daughter's wealth. She comes back to home and tries to convince Khawar: “the young woman was attractive and well- educated, but more to the point she came from a wealthy family of good repute and background” (p. 24). This reveals gender inequality based on economic supremacy and is the most important and prevalent issue in the society the book depicts.

Fatima works at Habib Khan House to meet her basic needs, according to The Holy Woman by Qaisra Shahraz. She often goes to Habib Khan House. She goes back to her house after a couple of weeks. Fiaz is the husband of Fatima. He lost one of his legs while working in the field. She makes her way back home this time after around two months. Fiaz says to Fatima “it is a strange world; he mused sadly to himself, ‘for a husband to wait patiently for



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his wife to come home from work'. Normally it would be the husband coming back from the fields, or the city or from the abroad" (p. 100). She responds in a lighter mood to decrease the effect of his pressure on her saying that "Shush, Fiaz Sahb! Don't be silly. I married you, not Sarwar. This was my kismet. You are a good husband, and so understanding, I have only worked" (p. 102). Instead of accepting her own fault she blames Fatima and her daughter that "witch, Fatima, was alright along. I have lost my son. They have eaten him away from me-if not physically. Fatima took everything from me. My husband - he was hers. And now her daughter has tricked my son away from me" (p. 324). Now Kaniz is terribly ill. She can't put up with Firdous' behaviour. She thinks of killing herself since she is the chaudhrani and she never contemplates this strange incident. He informs her, "I still haven't finished." His voice shattered her heart. You've ultimately shown that you're worse than my other, he remarked. I don't want to wed someone who disrespects my mother. You are a cold-hearted, disdainful woman. I'm an idiot for spending my time on you so much (p. 340). Due to sociocultural gender indoctrination, this has happened. In these circumstances, societal pressure compels male members to take major action against female. Firdous is dismissed by Khawar, who calls himself an idiot for spending time with her and behaves in a prejudiced way. He agrees that Firdous' mother's disapproval had a big effect. Another illustration of how male dominance in society benefits men and disadvantages women may be found here. It also shows how prejudice towards women makes them the object of societal tyranny and enslavement.

In conclusion, the Holy Woman portrays gender discrimination as a system of ongoing slavery that causes misery, boredom, oppression, rejection, and suffering for both male and female members of society. This specific instance of biased behavior results in ongoing peer pressure on female characters, preventing them from achieving their life objectives and lowering their chances of having a bright future. The books show how women's rights are disregarded, treated like commodities, and constantly subject to male power in the Pakistani society shown in the novels. All genders, not just women, are impacted by gender inequality in society. This condition may also affect men. Additionally, they are prone to the following problems, including gender socialization, equality, and gender stereotyping.

### **Conclusion**

The study provides a picture of Pakistani society that practices gender discrimination against female characters and inherits patriarchal culture. The novel portrays a culture in Pakistan that is biased towards women, discriminates against people of other genders, and denigrates female characters. Zarri Bano, the protagonist of the story, encounters and is exposed to gender bias and stereotyping from her father and other characters. According to others, Zarri Bano has a weak personality and is compelled to adhere to her family's traditions. Her father



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treats her cruelly and bans her from picking her own partner after the death of her only brother. She loses her right to be married and is transformed into the Holy Woman. Without any consideration for her own preferences or the traditions of the family, she is treated like a commodity. She never weds and leaves her father's house under the alias Shahzadi Ibadat. Zarri Bano never allows for the pursuit of dreams. She falls in love with Sikander while in Karachi and wants to marry him, but her father rejects his proposal. She must also follow specific social and cultural norms that are normally imposed on women, it has been stated. Zarri Bano is compelled to wear purdah since she has never before in her life worn a dupatta on her head. It has also been discovered that Naimat Bibi tells Kulsoom there were no female schools in her day. There were only schools for men. Additionally, it shows how poorly women still do in the educational system. Throughout the narrative, her mother Shahzada also encounters gender prejudice. Habib Khan is defined as a traditional husband who puts up with stiffness and oppression during his whole life. He treats her like a servant and ignores her nonstop. The narrative depicts Pakistani society, in which husbands hold their women responsible for all domestic choices and hold them responsible in the event of a family disaster. Pakistani culture often values sons. Although it is believed that daughters will attend college, they are still given great weight and sent to the top colleges. Similar problems occur in Habib's family, where his daughter suffers due to ingrained family traditions while his son is seen to be the most gorgeous. One might argue that *The Holy Woman* by Qaisra Shahraz provides sufficient insight into the issues of gender discrimination and inherited patriarchal culture. Gender discrimination has a significant influence on the protagonists' life, objectives, dreams, and desires. The gender of the characters determines their exclusion. The discussion has effectively achieved the objectives of the study and offered thoughtful answers to its research questions.

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