



RESEARCH PAPER

An Analysis of Qaisra Shahraz's *The Holy Woman* from Islamic Feminism Perspective

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DOI

[http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022\(6-II\)26](http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022(6-II)26)

PAPER INFO

ABSTRACT

**Received:**

February 13, 2022

**Accepted:**

April 20, 2022

**Online:**

April 22, 2022

**Keywords:**

Gender Roles,  
Holy Quran  
Islamic Feminism,  
Transformation

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This present study aims to analyze issues encountered by women as depicted in Qaisra Shahraz's *The Holy Woman*. The study investigates those gender stereotypes remaining within the ambit of a central character in the novel named *Zari Bano* in the light of Islamic feminism. The role transformation from demoralized to highly optimistic, demotivated to highly motivated, nonromantic to a romantic and many other shades have been critically assessed in the journey of this character during the research. The thorough analysis of the study helped to figure out the root causes of a general mindset about females, particularly relating to their rights of inheritance and marriage. The analysis concludes the most significant root cause depicted in the novel is the surrendering or sacrificing of their rights to their father, brother or husband. They do not raise their voices on the violation of their rights and tolerate all the ill-behaviors considering it as an obligation due to lack of moral support and awareness.

Introduction

The concept of Islamic ideologies and role transformation in Qaisra Shahraz's *The Holy Woman* carries a huge range of diversity and complexity due to having multi-dimensional, controversial and sociocultural aspects. This has been tried to discuss all the diversified variations of the topic. The research has been divided into two parts: 1) Exploration of Islamic Ideologies 2) Role Transformation in Qaisra Shahraz, *The Holy Woman*.

Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) was introduced at the time of movement that was bound for the women empowerment. At that time there was a strong wave of the impression that there is male dominance in society at political and institutional level, everywhere the woman is being suppressed due to a factor of male dominance. Kate Millett launched a radical theory of feminism which is a significant concept and being researched since then. Kate Millett describes the complicity of women in

patriarchal treatment in which females are usually treated and socialized. The basic idea of *The Holy Woman* was also that it is based on the story of a woman who is accepting the dominance of male members of her family and is satisfied in it, no matter what happens to her dream or her future because she has accepted it as an obligation. The main character, Zarri Bano is focused on obeying her father at any cost because she is not aware of her basic rights.

However, Kate Millett did not just discuss the suppression of women, she also discussed the role revolution. According to her, the women have been given a certain role in the world by men, however, the rights of women are beyond voting and legal privileges. The roles are now changing in society which demands that women should have equal gender rights, workplace opportunities, and sexual freedom like men. If we deeply analyze the novel, it can be concluded that Zarri Bano was suppressed before by the family in which her father and grandfather were an example of male dominance. However, she started to oppose norms after some time and understood that her role was not just to sit at home and give up everything, she tried to seize every opportunity that she had because she knew it was her right.

Amrita Basu (2005) asserts that Gender jobs have not been inside and out reformed in Pakistan yet have still been stepping the best approach to change. The contemporary socio-political and financial conditions in Pakistan are limited in the worldview of male controlled society and private enterprise. The agents of female rights developments have been yelling for all to hear the transformation in the sex jobs that have brought about ladies working in each field of life. Ladies have emerged from their circles at home to partake in the track of progress however they have induced some underlying stages yet and have far to travel on. Women in Pakistan are usually suppressed and are not allowed to work freely like men.

The dilemma of female identity and the dichotomy of woman as a creature and woman as a gender still prevail in society. Her role and status compared to her freedom and equality of rights are still under question. This present study is aimed to address the study of implicit and understated crucial issues faced by women in the third world and eastern regions where challenges and problems faced by the women have reopened the issue of women identity and their quest for equality and freedom to live. The main reason behind the tyranny against the women increased from ancient times is the silence of women and the patriarchal mindset that infused the belief of male dominance and authority in every aspect of life.

## **Literature Review**

Charlotte Wilson is of the view that patriarchy is the concept that gives privileges to men in a social and political structure (Wilson, 3). This concept insists that men inherently have the rights of dominance and superiority over everything particularly women. They have the right to rule over the oppressed or weak in society to satisfy their inner. Patriarchy is the fundamental concept that elaborates "a social and political structure where the men dominate, oppress and exploit women". This concept has risen to develop several feminist movements and ideas. Kate Millett was one of the principal authors who clarified the cutting edge idea of man controlled society and the general mistreatment of ladies from society. Millett additionally built up a hypothesis of Patriarchy and disconnected the sex and sexual misuse of ladies in

wording that request a sex-job transformation with radical changes of individual and family ways of life (Green n.p).

### **Forced Marriage with Quran**

Islam negates the concept of forced marriage and mentions that forced marriages are unacceptable in Islam. The commandments made in the Holy Quran and Hadith are transparent about the concept of forced Marriage (Qadri n.p). According to a Hadith, narrated by Abu Hurairah that Holy Prophet S.AW said that “ No female whether a widow or a divorcee will be forced to marry anyone unless her express and categorical consent has been freely taken and in the same way a woman not previously married can never be forced to marry anyone unless her free consent and permission is taken”. (AL-Bakra232)

Similarly, at another place, it is quoted by Imam Bukhari that, “if parents force their daughter to marry someone against her wish then the marriage will be void.” Moreover, it is important to note that the Zarri Bano was forced to marry the Quran in the novel, although she has expressed her wish to her parents that she wants Sikander as her husband. The father of Bano goes completely against the principles of Islam, tortured her psychologically to follow family traditions and get married to the Holy Quran.

Bhavnani Foran and Kurian (2003) says that women in developing countries have played quite an active role to gain their rights and struggled against the discrimination faced by them, and they are currently involved in many activities and movements to speak for their rights. Pakistan is still amongst those countries where women are struggling and fighting for their equal rights but they are still oppressed and face asymmetrical treatment from the families and society particularly relating their life, security, property, and health.

### **Radical Feminism**

Shulamith Firestone is of the view that radical feminism is a concept which claims that there is a need for rearranging or reordering of the societal standards in which the male supremacy is eliminated from all the social and economic contexts of society (Firestone, 10).

Sara Evans says that radical feminists have an opinion that patriarchy always exists in the social setup where male dominates and oppresses the women in society. Radical feminists aim to abolish patriarchy from society and liberate women from the unjust and uneven social standards and norms of the society. The Radical feminism tends to locate the root cause of female oppression in patriarchal gender relations within the male dominant society. The ideology that runs the concept of radical feminism is that society is a patriarchy in which a group of males is the dictator of the group of women. The radical feminists assert that the oppression of women is one of the most oppression since the beginning of humanity (Evens, 1).

The feminist movement that began in the Islamic world showed aggressiveness at an extreme level. The concept of feminism developed its roots in 1975 in Pakistan, the government of Pakistan encouraged women to follow the concept of Pakistan which was again suppressed in the year 1977, when the era of Islamization and military rule emerged. However, in the 1980s, the roots of feminism got strengthened again in Pakistan.

Bhavnani Foran and Kurian (2003) says that some of the feminists reject the concept of patriarchy to be used or considered. The second wave feminists consider that concept is artificially infused in the culture to create male dominance in the society. There is no natural or biological standing of the concept rather it is established in the mindset of people.

### **Feminism in Islam**

According to a Hadith (Bakra, 232) narrated by Abu Hurairah that Holy Prophet S.AW said that "No female whether a widow or a divorced person will be compelled to wed anybody except if her expressed assent has been uninhibitedly taken and similarly a lady not recently wedded can never be compelled to wed anybody except if her free assent and acknowledgment is taken". So also, at somewhere else, it is cited by Imam Bukhari that, "in the event that guardians power their girl to wed somebody against her desire, at that point the marriage will be void."

The previous studies that were conducted on the subject highlighted by Qaisra Shahraz covered the concepts of patriarchy and feminist activism and mostly covered western authors. The researcher has identified the gap in the study regarding the Islamic teachings and perspectives of the issue and status of woman in Islam. The researcher aims to fill the gap and highlight the concepts of Islam regarding the marriage and property rights of women in Islam.

### **Material and Methods**

This research employs a descriptive and analytical research design having textual and argumentative discussions. Henceforth, the qualitative research methodology is used for data analysis. The researcher analyzes the concept of Shahzadi Ibadat from the Islamic and cultural point of view in order to establish the results and conclusion of the study. The researcher utilizes the concepts of Islamic feminism to review the struggle of Zarri Bano against the Patriarchy that she faced.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The concept of Islamic feminism is not that much old and has been propounded in 1990 firstly. In the beginning, there was a great deal of misunderstanding and misinterpretation about Islam and feminism. The Islamic injunctions clarify the above-said concept as a glaring point of gender equality. This study is intended to present the Islamic ideology and debate on feminism and its place in Islam and society. The women are now more aware of their role in the society; the role of feminism that is depicted by Kate Millet is also discussed in accordance with the Islamic concept of women role in society. The empowerment of women needs the revolution in gender roles that is the core scope of this research. Role reversal in the

novel *The Holy Women* reflects the socially built jobs, practices, exercises, and qualities that are viewed as adept for people in any general public. The two crucial observations build up the sexual orientation relations in Pakistan that ladies are substandard compared to men and that a man's honor is controlled by the activities of ladies of his family. In Muslim social orders, ladies bear the honor of the family name. To guarantee that honor, they should not feel shame on their families, their versatility is restricted and they have limitations on their conduct and exercises and have restricted contact with the other gender.

### Results and Discussion

After going through the entire research material, the content exploration of the novel, *The Holy Woman* confirms the role reversals and difficulties that are faced by women and the generalizations of a male playing a dominant part, and a female is simply playing the controlled parts. The prior is considered a decisive, determined, striking, overcoming, free, sound, safe, predominant and the former is considered just a hoard of feelingless flesh, dejected, bashful, resigned, passionate and submissive, and Zarri Bano is a personification of all of these.

The portrayal of Zarri Bano's character is, actually, purported to take the dark side and duplicity of society in limelight: where natural rights of soft sex are infringed for self financial interests and honour. Emotional, physical and sexual aloofness is made, compulsively and oppressively, destined to a young, educated, beautiful, vibrant and motivated girl to protect a family's heritage and inheritance. Hence the most important question which arises is the responsibility of Zarri Bano to protect heritage while, religiously and socially, males are considered custodians of family inheritance and name? The novel wright also leaves another question for its readers that why all the responsibility of all the Family honour, prestige and inheritance are put on the shoulders of Zarri Bano to maintain whereas males have lion's share in inheritance so that a bigger responsibility must lie on males shoulders from which according to my point of view, Zarri Bano's brothers absolve off.

Moreover, a family is a key unit of society and family is constituted of members living together under one roof helping each other out in hard times and cherishing the good moments. The members do not cause any problems and try to create ease for each other. But

Qaisra Sheraz's novel depicts a different story where all male members of the family are becoming a cause of troublesome and undesired life for a female member by restricting her to have her natural right. This is just one type of marriage where a girl is being married under constraint. There are many similar types of marriages exist in society with a little difference. In this way, throughout the whole novel, the novel wright has developed a strong case-scenario to highlight and then criticize the ugliest side of a social taboo prevailing in the under-developed areas of Pakistan and it is up to the reader to conclude.

In a unit of the family, a mother plays an important role in the training and mind making of her children. She has the responsibility to mould the mindset of her

children. She can better educate them about ethics, fairness, respecting elders, siblings and others in society. In the matter of claiming a share in the inheritance, this is also commonly observed even in the urban areas where education rate is, comparatively, better than the rural areas and people are more aware than the people in the rural areas that mothers make the minds of their daughters from their childhood that they should not claim their share in the inheritance because this will make their brothers poor. So indirectly, the novel wright is also questioning the training of the mothers who, as women, are not playing their proper role in making their sons respect their sisters and give them their right of inheritance which is their major responsibility.

Qaisra Shehraz throws light on how men are burdened by the idea of masculine and how women are reduced to a mere backdrop of households due to the concept of ideal feminine. She further shows how these traditions have been passed on to our generation and that no matter how much we try to act modern and liberal at the end of the day everyone, male or female falls into the group that the society has allocated for them. She portrays how men are burdened by society's idea of masculinity and how women are reduced to a mere backdrop of households due to the idea of ideal femininity. She further shows how these traditions have been passed on to our generation and that no matter how much we try to act modern and liberal at the end of the day everyone, male or female falls into the group that the society has allocated for them. Every writer has its own perceptions however according to the writer the women must be respected and should be encouraged to maintain equality in the society and to change the stereotype of women as a weak creature. As Basu says in this novel the writer tells us about the women who are trapped into a practice controlled by men in society. However, despite all the odds and the problems that she faces, she turns out to be a strong woman and, she became an independent woman. In Pakistan, there are certain regions where women are promoted to take part in the prosperity of a country however there are certain regions of Pakistan where, due to old traditions, women are suppressed and are not allowed to take part in anything. In this novel, the writer has focused on that aspect, according to the research the women of Pakistan should be strong enough in order to take part in the prosperity and protection of their country (Allen 130).

### **Misinterpretation of Islamic Concepts and Values**

As David Bouchier says that there are several important characters in this novel, some of the characters are major and some of them are minor. The notable characters of the novel are Sikander Din, who is the central male character, Habib Khan, who is the father of a girl named Zarri Bano, Siraj Din, who is the father of Habib, Ibrahim Musa is the man who lives in Cairo and Khawer is the landlord. Each of these characters is very important and have their own perceptions that are being demonstrated in the novel and the understanding of each of these characters and their mentality is very important, and also to understand the core and concept of the novel. Only after understanding the true mentality of each character we can understand the examples and then the scenario is understood properly. There are different point of views of people on the basis of their approach toward problem, according to Savitt the male members of society mostly are given the powerful roles and the positions having the authorities in the society, this is true to a certain level because in society, most men are the ones that are considered to be capable of leading a group of people

and dealing with other members with ease and women are always underestimated, however, on the other hand, Beauvoir says that the women accept the roles which are given to them by the male members, according to him it is quite clear that women accept which role is given to them, they do not fight back for their rights or their position in the society, the mentality of some women are shaped in a way that they do not feel that if they are being suppressed or not, they think that what the male members are doing is right and they should follow them, the women of this culture do not want to lead because they do not think that they are capable of doing it ( David 146 ).

Characters depict certain realities to the readers, in this novel, one of the characters named Habib Khan is a landlord, this person is demonstrated as a strong gender biased person in the novel. He is the main character of the novel after the death of his son he wants to sacrifice the daughter in the name of religion, he wanted to set a cruel ending for his daughter and decided to marry her with the Holy Quran and become Holy Woman of his family, moreover, he wanted her to inherit all his property and live her remaining life unmarried. Zarri Bano was a young beautiful woman of age 27 years, she was also an active member of feminism movement ( Qadwani). She had a beautiful dream of establishing a publishing company of her own in the region of Karachi. She was in love with a handsome business tycoon from Karachi named Sikander, however, Habib Khan does not give any respect to her daughter's choice and marries her to the Holy Quran.

### **Gender Stereotypes**

Jennifer Gove (2005) opines that there are two aspects that can be analyzed from the context. One is that in the culture of Pakistan while marrying the girls their choice is not given any kind of respect, they marry her with anyone they want and do not even bother to take her advice on this matter, however, this is the most important decision of anyone's life. Habib Khan, being all in all in his decision, he can take any decision about anyone's life. This is a very cruel way to deal with any kind of situation and to decide about anyone's future, mostly about the children, whom a person loves more than anything else in the world. Another point to notice about Habib Khan is that for him, his son was everything and he only used to love his son, when his son died, he started to spit anger upon others and in this anger, he decided to marry his daughter with the Holy Quran, he did not even ask his daughter and just decided about her future on his own. Moreover, as he comes to know about the love of Zarri Bano Sikander, he says that he does not like Sikander and he decided for the future benefit of his daughter. In this way, he marries his daughter to the Holy Quran. Habib Khan was very excited about his decision and despite realizing that his decision is so man- controlling and cruel, he was satisfied with his decision. He talked to his wife about the decision and took her into confidence which is also called the Holy Woman.

Mostly, this tactic is used by the parents to get the girls emotionally convinced on the choices made by their parents. However, the girls do not come under pressure and present their own choices in a decent way before them. It is the right of women and they must be able to fight for it and they should have that confidence to fight for themselves.

Siraj Din is a specific type of male and is chief of the family which is described in the novel and Habib Khan went to him to get the final permission for the case of Zarri Bano. The words that were said by the person who is the father of Zarri Bano were the example of pure man-controlling and he said to him that he wants to talk about Zarri Bano and their inheritance. So, the person called Siraj Din also verifies the identity about whom Savitt and Beauvoir being talking about. It is also a belief by Geetha that whether the man is a controlling creature, his traits can be changed from authoritative, oppressive and being gender-biased to a kind and polite person. (Becker 11).

Gove is of the view that this type of change in a stereotype about men that can be identified in the form of character named Sikander in the Qiasra Shahbaz's novel in which the male takes an untraditional role. The example of Sikander is being revealed by the help of an example in which he gets so angry about making Zarri Bano a Holy Woman, not only he became angry but also, he tried to stop her and convince her to evaluate the decision one more time. From the above discussion, it is quite clear that it is true that male members have a sense of power and being superior to their fellow female members, however, there are some of the males who are beyond those stereotypes and they do not think of females as inferior people, however, according to them each member of society have a right to live freely and also have a right to decide better for their future and how they want to live their life whether they are female members or male there should be no discrimination in that respect. Sikander was one of those people who think of gender equality in all respects and he applied that in this scenario that Zarri Bano was being treated badly so he came to advise her for her betterment.

Allen and Newman (1998) assert that the things that Sikander wanted Zarri Bano to know where that it is a cruel action being performed by her family and once she becomes a *Holy Women*, she will lose her womanhood and also her freedom will also be loosened in that process and she will be doing it for just the sake of her family, which is so cruel to her that they are not thinking of her freedom and self-esteem and just to keep inheritance in the family they are being cruel to the woman. This was a very good act by Sikander that he tried to save her from harm in future. This was the second face of a man of our society that was depicted in this novel and how the customs and traditions bind the women of our society against their will.

She emerged as independent partner and got married to Sikander. She leaves her new domestic, and the very succeeding day of her bridal ceremony, due to her excursion of land and the Asian nation. Sikander's phrases spoken to his father computer screen her liberating, "you already perceive, Father, Zarri Bano includes a % of commitments" She goes to be prepared to undoubtedly drop all, presently that she is married to a true pine state. One amongst these commitments is that the girls' Jamaat-i-Muslimeen tour of the land and the Asian nation. Zarri Bano had created plans for this associate degree. Fatima, Firdous, Naimat Bibi and Kulsoom are operational and fair-minded women. Kaniz lives independently with her great child Khawer and the individual were determined of picking her better half. Sakina and Ruby are inactive and customary of their strategy.

### **Role Transformation**

Jennifer Gove and Staurt Watt (2004) are of the view that feminism may be a wholly crucial plan to acknowledge and keep with Kate Millet's feminism idea the exchange in gender roles. Stereotypes are not the best sort of looks we have to grasp others. Regardless of whether depend content is manly or female relies on the spot given to male or woman characters, severally. The offbeat underneath examination demonstrates that the standard character is some of the time a youngster - Zarri Bano. The novel basically represents male dominant society where their power is exercised over women.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides a lot of evidence about the roles of genders that are changing with time. It is also evident that in our culture and society male take a lot of charge and authoritative roles however, women just take some of the limited roles. A male is thought of being a confident gender, he is a brave, bold, rational, more independent and dominant, and however, the female gender is considered to be submissive, emotional, obedient and shy. This kind of behaviour put women in a weaker state and men consider them as their subordinates. This is a very alarming situation for our society. In this novel the change in roles is described, Zarri Bano and Shahzada show a lot of obedience and submissiveness to the opposite gender, however, with the passing time, she realizes her potential and about the rights that she must honour, then they become confident, authoritative, more dominant and independent individuals. The male members of the novel who are Musa, Sikander and Khawer expressed their feelings openly about how they feel and love, however in return, Zarri demonstrates mostly the cold behaviour and is kind of reserve at this emotional expression. In the end, she became completely independent and made her own choices and was working mostly towards the activities that were religious and was also declined towards the educational activities. She started serving the women of Muslim community and women who belonged to her own society. Fatima and Naimat Bibi are also an example of the gender roles that were changed with that of time as they were also independently living working women themselves.

After a thorough analysis of the male characters of the novel it can be said that there is a lot of gender bias in them such as Habib and Siraj Din. All the members depict a typical gender role of society and how they treat the opposite gender. Afterwards those characters change along with the course of events. There is also a change in gender stereotypes when we take a look at Sikander, Musa and Khawer. These men are shown as young members of society who are modern, educated well, came from a noble family and are generally unbiased. However, if we see at Siraj Din or Habib Khan, they are older people and have their gender biases, moreover, they have a conservative behaviour, but if we analyze more deeply, their behaviour was not too conservative as they provided Zarri Bano with the opportunity to go to the university and gave her good education, moreover they were also open-minded enough to let her stay away from home. This study manifests how the roles of different genders are being transformed and these all are the result of proper education, awareness as well as globalization.

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