

**QAISRA SHAHRAZ'S *THE HOLY WOMAN* A CONFRONTATION  
AGAINST RELIGION, TRADITION AND PATRIARCHY**

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**ABSTARCT**

This paper aims to discover how Zarri Bano, standing at the cross-roads of the forces of obscurantism in the name of religion and globalization settle her way at the same way it focuses on her rebellious attitude and at last her achievement to the desired things. Zarri Bano, is a strange combination of age-old feudal society and shifting urban tendency. In the starting of the novel Zarri Bano stylishly dressed with a insolent look, as she is attending an yearly village fair (Shahraz 2001: 12). Gradually we come to know of Zarri Bano as the darling child of her father who loves his land as intensely as he adores his daughter and is determined to have complete, undisputed, and unchallenged hold over her life. Shahraz is very much conscious of the transitions coming in society. Rural women in exacting and urban women in common do live in extremely forbidden societies. She believes in transformation but is not fundamental. Her point of view is different than of her contemporaries. Shahraz opines that women should generate space for herself by fuller self-development and amalgamation of the modern with the traditional as. In the case of Zarri Bano She feels tradition and co modification are responsible for woman's present persecution. Women therefore, appear as playing a subordinate role in practical life. The road to woman's empowerment and knowing about woman's rights in Islam and evolving cultural norms Shahraz suggests more engaged feminism. As she redefines feminism for a Pakistani woman and believes that a discourse needs to be started between first and third world women in order to have a painstaking understanding about similarities and differences. Shahraaz is a realist and not a visionary. If her heroines are not free souls, it is because she focuses on women in rural Pakistan. She does not have an agenda to uphold but tries to share her own experiences here condition must be developed at ground level first.

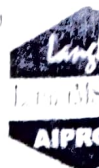
Qaisra Shahraz is regarded as a well known novelist; her novels deal with Pakistan's rural life she prominently deals with the issues of women as in the world of patriarchy women becomes marginalized in today's globalized world also she is treated like an object. Shahraz novel, *The Holy Woman* (2001), spotlight how the old and the new, the patriarch and the feminist, status a connection of rural Pakistan, as she struggles to gain an identify, and go after the path of their selection.. Shahraz very skillfully deconstructs the Islamophobic

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dialogues of the orientalist, and confront the fundamentalist approach, and unite the reader to discuss about the changes for man-woman equality.

Novel is about the dichotomies in women's day today life in Pakistan: it is the story of a educated woman with professed feminist vision who has been victimized by her caring feudal father. The heroine is not rebellious but her continual struggle for figuring an identity and raising her voice in the male-oriented world ends in her accomplishment. heroine of the novel Zarri Bano symbolize how women, knotted by traditions, Shahraz here discuss the matter of self-realization through combination of modern with the traditional. Through Zarri Bano, he promotes that motivation from the West is not sufficient; but the Pakistani women have to reposition themselves to their roots. Only then change would be achievable. Change, not only struggling alone but there should be consistent cohesion between first and third world women.

Gayatri Spivak, highlights this issue of moral jeopardy at stake when privileged intellectuals make political claim on behalf of subjugated people. These jeopardy comprise the danger that the voices, lives and struggles of 'Third World' women will be silenced and contained within the technical vocabulary of western critical theory" (Morton 2003: 7). Spivak, however, also experiences the need to register the protest against the world-view based on western knowledge that 'all women's lives and histories are the same' (Ibid:90).

Qaisra Shahraz, still, chooses the other way. Zarri Bano, as a daughter much loved by her father and later suffers and faces oppression, even if she has been skilled to raise as a self-determining woman with feminist realization, because of her only brothers death, her feudal father has only way to conserve his land and name is by erecting an old tradition of turning his beloved daughter into Shahzadi Ibadat (a rural custom when a girl is forcefully married to the Qur'an). So he decides to do so at a ceremony, in which he would declare her marriage to the Qur'an.

This paper aims to discover how Zarri Bano, standing at the cross-roads of the forces of obscurantism in the name of religion and globalization settle her way at the same way it focuses on her rebellious attitude and at last her achievement to the desired things. Zarri Bano, is a strange combination of age-old feudal society and shifting urban tendency. In the starting of the novel Zarri Bano stylishly dressed with a insolent look, as she is attending an yearly village fair (Shahraz 2001: 12). Gradually we come to know of Zarri Bano as the darling child of her father who loves his land as intensely as he adores his daughter and is determined to have complete, undisputed, and unchallenged hold over her life.

In Zarri Bano's life we find series of difficulties and challenges, she travels on brutal tidal waves, rapidly incorporating with each other. Unlike most daughters of the feudal chiefs of Sindh, Zarri Bano is pursued higher education, she walks liberally out of the boundaries of the home, and knows how to share the benefits of her education and training with others, primarily with the deprived members of her society.

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Zarri chastise her sister: 'I am not a fish to be angled at, caught and trapped, Ruby' (Ibid:16). Zarri Bano announces to her sister, "I am a free woman, I will decide if I want this or any other man. This is why ten years have elapsed and I still have not married. You will probably marry before me and I will be an old maid" (Ibid:16-17).

*"The story of her life takes unexpected and sharp turns when she falls in love with Sikander and decides to marry him but her father wants his beloved daughter becomes 'Shahzadi Ibadat' (a holy woman) So Marriage with Sikander was not possible to Zarri Bano as her feudal father announce that with all the might running through his body that he is not going to hand over his lands to some stranger who just happens to marry my daughter" (Ibid: 66).*

Zarri Bano, transformed into a new woman being in love for the first time, falls prey to the brutal force of an inhumane, primitive tradition - a tradition condemned by her faith but upheld by her society. Here, the stark irony is that this happens not to a woman who cannot speak: it happens to a woman known for her feminist stance in her social circle. As expected, she struggles for herself. She resists. She appeals to her father - "I want to be a normal woman, and live a normal life! I want to get married. I am not a very religious person you know. I am a twentieth-century modern, educated woman. I am not living in the Mughal period- a pawn in the game of male chess don't you know father. I have hardly ever prayed in my life, nor opened the Holy Quran on a regular basis. How can I become a Holy Woman. I am not suited to that role" (Ibid:85). The Mother moves to rescue her daughter, and chastises and pleads, all in one breathe, to her husband, "You and your father are the puppeteers Habib,

Zarri Bano's transition from a free and independent woman into a mere toy in the hands of her father for sake of the protection of male honor and inherited lands is story of many a woman tricked in feudal culture. Her protests are of no avail and she finally submits to male supremacy. Shahraz dexterously takes the tragic story to its climax when the reader almost hears Zarri Bano crying at her helplessness. Her distorted character even shock Zarri Bano herself; wrapped in the burqa the real Zarri is removed. Shahraz paints this new camouflaged Zarri Bano who "stood frozen wearing the Burqa dehumanized. This new role, she feels has deprived her of real identity" (Ibid:144).

Shahraz in her narrative condemn fundamentalist mania with conventional gender relationships and the role of women as transmitters of culture and religion. Thus, on the pretext of protecting Islamic individuality women are subjected to patriarchal aggression under the guise of tradition. Enforced marriages are common in Pakistan, particularly in rural areas. If a woman is 'chaste' and docile she may break out violence; if she rises up, then violence and exploitation await her. Zarri Bano regrets, 'How am I going to come to terms with a longing that has to be denied and to a life of sterility?' (Ibid: 163).

In the Asian society represented, the expectation that women should remain faithful to the domestic sphere, obedient to male authority and sexually passive is pervasive" (Bernett & Manderson: 2003:11).

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We can say that Habib's choice of making Zarri Bano Shahzadi Ibadat has a socio-political hint too. He has knowledge that this decision will fortify his place socially. People would respect him more in knotting his daughter's fate with the Qur'an and would ask for his daughter's advice on matters related to religion.

Zarri Bano's struggles and at the end of the novel decides to live a ordinary life with Sikander. He guarantees her complete freedom and independence. He says, "Let the passionate woman come to life again you can still carry on leading your life the way you have chosen to do. You can even run your own madrasas; go to conventions, hold seminars- whatever you want. I am not going to strip you of your religious identity, if that is what you are afraid of. I respect and accept you as you are. In fact, it is a great honor for me to have a pakeeza woman and a scholar for a wife. Do not see me as threat to yourself, but as a friend" (Shahraz 2001:488-89).

Zarri Bano's decides to marry Sikander put forward that she has complete control over her life and body. Besides, the situation also favors here she got once again her lost love the man to whom she passionately loved once. Now Sikander is also turned down and is ready to do anything for his love. Zarri's decision to marry Sikander also replicate Shahraz's opinion that a woman should not discount her physical needs, as remaining within the limits given by religion.

Hence, peace is bringing back when there is a reconciliation of two loved person the spiritual and the physical. Therefore, believes that religion is responsible for the oppression of woman. Women have to be escape from this enforced tradition and its evil clutches.

### Conclusion

Shahraz is very much conscious of the transitions coming in society. Rural women in exacting and urban women in common do live in extremely forbidden societies. She believes in transformation but is not fundamental. Her point of view is different than of her contemporaries. Shahraz opines that women should generate space for herself by fuller self-development and amalgamation of the modern with the traditional as. In the case of Zarri Bano She feels tradition and co modification are responsible for woman's present persecution. Women therefore, appear as playing a subordinate role in practical life. The road to woman's empowerment and knowing about woman's rights in Islam and evolving cultural norms Shahraz suggests more engaged feminism. As she redefines feminism for a Pakistani woman and believes that a discourse needs to be started between first and third world women in order to have a painstaking understanding about similarities and differences. Shahraaz is a realist and not a visionary. If her heroines are not free souls, it is because she focuses on women in rural Pakistan. She does not have an agenda to uphold but tries to share her own experiences here condition must be developed at ground level first.

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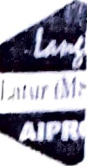
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