

Family Dynamics and Gender Roles in 'How It Happened': A Critical Analysis



Ushna Khan	Lecturer at University of Poonch Rawalkot. Ph.D scholar at Muslim Youth University Islamabad ushnakhan1996@gmail.com
Muhammad Ashraf Kaloi	Lecturer At Department Of English University Of Sindh Dadu Campus ashraf.kaloi@usindh.edu.pk
Ahmad Ali Khan	PhD linguistics scholar at department of English Kohat university of science and technology. ahmadali1985khan@gmail.com
Sajid Hussain	MS English Linguistics, Abasyn University Islamabad. English Lecture, Department of Economics, Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science, and Technology, Islamabad. sajidhussain1386@gmail.com
Muhammad Hussain Damsaaz	Lecturer in the department of English City University of Science and Information Technology, Dalazak Road, Peshawar damsaz@cusit.edu.pk

Abstract: *This critical review explores the intricate family dynamics and gender roles depicted in the novel 'How It Happened.' The narrative unfolds within a traditional Muslim family in Pakistan, where societal norms and cultural expectations profoundly shape the characters' lives and relationships. The novel portrays the tension between modernity and tradition, highlighting the struggles of women who navigate their identities and aspirations within a patriarchal framework. By examining the interactions between family members, the review delves into the nuanced portrayals of obedience, rebellion, and the quest for autonomy. The characters' experiences reflect broader societal issues, such as the pressure to conform to prescribed gender roles and the impact of these roles on personal and familial relationships. Through a critical lens, this review assesses how the author captures the complexities of gender dynamics, shedding light on the challenges and resilience of women in a conservative society. The analysis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which literature can illuminate and critique the persistent issues of gender inequality and cultural constraints.*

Keywords: Family dynamics, Gender roles, Patriarchy, Tradition vs. modernity, Women's struggle, Cultural expectations

Introduction

Women in eastern society have endured decades of marginalisation and oppression. The concept of feminism emerged in Pakistan during the 1960s women's movement, when women demanded reasonable representation. Despite the passage of nearly fifty years, our culture still does not fully embrace the non-traditional roles that women play. Gender discrimination is pervasive worldwide, with a prevailing belief that males hold a greater status compared to daughters. Confucian civilisations, including

modern ones, impart essential survival skills and rudimentary education to male children, confine female children to the household, and instruct them in domestic tasks (Guisso, 1981, p. 58). This study aims to emphasise the conventional gender roles that women assume in present-day Pakistani society and the profound influence they have on the lives of other women.

Shazaf Fatima Haider, born in the capital city of Pakistan Islamabad in 1982, and shifted to the United Kingdom (UK) for higher studies, Master in literature and resided the UK

permanently. Although she has relocated to a Western country, she identifies herself as a Pakistani writer rather than a writer of the diaspora. Haider claims that she continues to see Pakistani voices and narratives, prompting her to make an effort to record and express them in a creative manner.

Haider's writings contain autobiographical elements, as she openly acknowledges writing about both her society and her personal experiences. She hails from a Shia community in Pakistan, which she amusingly portrays in her debut book. Haider uses humour as a means to provide a social critique of the native culture and customs, which frequently perceive women as commodities to be traded at the most lucrative price during the process of marriage (Aggarwal, 2016).

Hence, the inclusion of autobiographical parts in the book enhances the research's authenticity. Her works draw constant inspiration from her own life. While depicting the local populace, she also directs her attention towards her native audience, portraying their authentic experiences and challenges. She underscores that she specifically crafts her literature for an eager and receptive readership (Haider, 2019). The resemblance between reality and fiction pushes the research closer to practical and realistic foundations.

How It Happened is a work of literature that features compelling characters whose stories and viewpoints are equally important in illuminating society's issues. Haider intentionally crafts "well-rounded characters" (Haider, 2019) and employs humor to critique the notion of arranged weddings, portraying a culture that devalues women and fails to recognize them as human beings (Aggarwal, 2016). The text portrays the culture and customs of arranged marriage, specifically those followed by the Bhakuraj family of Bandians.

The book examines, critiques, and refutes the long-standing practice of treating women as property, where strangers display and examine them without any consequences or concern, from a feminist standpoint. The poem has elicited varied reactions, ranging from the

redemption of those depicted in it to the endorsement of feminists (Aslam, 2013), and has enabled readers to imagine the challenges linked to the institution of marriage in a middle-class culture.

The study report discloses that the book is a familial narrative that chronicles the course of two matrimonial ceremonies inside a Syed Shia household in Karachi. Haider (2019) portrays the occurrence as a comedy of social behavior, reflecting the marriage customs of middle-class households in Pakistan. This eloquent social satire acquaints us with the turmoil that might arise in lavishly decorated Pakistani drawing rooms when young individuals opt for their own life partners (Mohyidin, 2013).

Haider's novel provides an accurate portrayal of individuals from all generations grappling with the concept of arranged marriages. The author achieves a "slightly farcical" tone through the representation of the characters and their actions (Haider, 2019). The reliance on the practice of arranged marriage clearly highlights the possibility of a generational divide. This study article aims to investigate the factors that contribute to the widening generational divide, resulting in the younger generation's inability to adapt to the older generation's perspectives on arranged marriage, cultural norms, traditions, and moral standards.

Haider asserts that she subtly depicts reality in the book, providing the reader with a subtle understanding of various facets of society. The author openly acknowledges that the primary purpose of producing the essay is to "reflect society back to itself, but in a manner that it can comprehend and accept" (Aslam, 2013). The text examines the conflict that arises from the contradiction of two distinct opinions held by two distinct generations, and this paper explores how this conflict transforms into a clash between modernity and tradition.

This study will utilize secondary sources to assess and examine the research issues and obtain solutions to the research inquiries. The distinguished English sociologist Anthony Giddens authored his initial work, titled *The Consequences of Modernity*. He is renowned for

his comprehensive perspectives on contemporary cultures and his influential structuration theory. This research paper will examine how the concepts of modernity and its effects on society have changed people's perceptions over time. It will focus on how modernization and contemporary ideas have influenced both individuals and society as a whole.

This research paper will also explore the viewpoints offered in Muhammad Abdul Qadeer's book. This paper will utilize the concepts presented in his book on social and cultural change in Pakistan, titled *Social and Cultural Transformations in a Muslim Nation*. This paper seeks to emphasize the substantial obstacles that arise in the interaction between traditions and families, namely between younger and older generations.

However, we will also apply renowned Hungarian sociologist Karl Mannheim's ideas about generations to critically analyze the main text and its historical context. Mannheim argues that these are the generations that provide a foundation for understanding society. We will examine Mannheim's essay "The Problem of Generations" to discuss the crucial aspects of the generations and demonstrate how the continuous influx of new members in society influences the cultural evolution by emphasizing the erasure of older generations in the tradition-building process.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In her model's introductory segment, she denoted gender discrimination as "sexism." She defines a text or remark as sexist if it actively contributes to the oppression or domination of women. She concurs. According to this particular meaning of sexism; nevertheless, she deems it to be quite restrictive, hence she has proffered an alternative definition of sexism. According to Mills (2003, p. 63), she categorizes a statement as sexist if it creates or supports an unjust differentiation between males and females. At the Novel begin, the Dadi frequently uses the term "Bandians" to describe her devout family. A Sufi, a Muslim mystic, rescued the life of a nearby healer, and in return, the healer offered

his daughter's hand in marriage to the Sufi, forming this family. Following the marriage, the Sufi assumed the esteemed position of being the inaugural Bandian of Bhakuraj. As a result, the novel commonly employs Bandian as a generic pronoun to specifically refer to men. Although Dadi uses the term to introduce her family, it is evident that Bandian specifically refers to her family's male members. The novel's opening page contains another instance of a generic pronoun: The Bandians of Bhakuraj, in accordance with their inherited traditions, entered into matrimony not out of affection (Haider, 2013, p. 1). Within the context of the story, the term "Bandians" encompasses both the female and male members of the Bandian clan. Nevertheless, its usage implies that it specifically denotes the males within this family. Dadi, as well as other female characters, contribute to the continuation of this sexism. For instance, during the visit of the entire family to Saima's residence to discuss a potential marriage proposal for Haroon, Saleha's mother inquires about Saleha's opinion on Saima. Saleha affirms, in reply to her mother's question, that Saima possesses a compelling visage as a result of her symmetrical nose and engaging eyes (Haider, 2013, 13, p. 64). Saleha's statement unequivocally highlights the prevailing shallowness of our society, which appraises women solely based on their physical attractiveness.

Sara Mills' model analyzes sexism across a range of linguistic categories, including generic, generic nouns, pronouns, terms for women, derogatory phrases for females, gender-neutral terms, euphemistic terms, derogatory labels for female body parts, and the belittlement of females through semantics. The novel also includes multiple occurrences of misogynistic language. At the onset of the work, the narrator reveals to the reader that Dadi's unmarried status during her childhood stemmed from her unexpected marriage (Haider, 2013, p. 1). The term "spinster" denotes an elderly, unmarried lady, and employing this label to describe a woman who has not married at a young age is wholly pejorative. The use of sexist words in the text could have a detrimental impact on women

who are reading it and have surpassed the typical age for marriage. Sara Mills also references Sapir and Whorf's concept of linguistic determination. According to this idea, linguistic variation significantly influences the way diverse societies perceive the world (Mills, 2003, p. 63). As a result, Dadi's use of offensive language to describe older, unmarried women reinforces preconceptions associated with this demographic.

Sara Mills argues that sexist language can have various impacts on women, one of which is the tendency to compel women to perceive themselves in a detrimental or stereotypical way (Mills, 2003, p. 72). Dadi also employs more sexist language when explaining to her grandchildren the rationale behind her postponed marriage. She tells them that her skin tone is not as pale as milk, and that her complexion resembles the color of old register paper. Haider (2013, 13, p. 2) asserts that her face had blemishes and lacked a radiant appearance. In both Pakistani society and other parts of the world, Dadi's sexist comments about her own appearance clearly indicate that all females must possess a light complexion and flawless skin in order to get married at the appropriate time; otherwise, they will remain single. Such comments are extremely offensive, as they do not apply to males, and it is never considered essential for men to have a light skin tone or flawless skin. Furthermore, men should not feel compelled to marry at a young age as adults, nor should they endure the emotional distress of social rejection if they choose not to marry within a specific timeframe.

The second component of the model centers on analyzing statements that express derogatory implications for females. Sara Mills' feminist stylistics focuses on analyzing sentences or phrases that display sexism or derogatory attitudes towards women. For example, when a young boy expresses fear of diving into a swimming pool, his parents often admonish him not to behave in a manner stereotypically associated with girls. This implication that the boy should avoid acting like a female is a statement that promotes sexism. Men often portray women negatively in specific languages

due to their reluctance to adhere to cultural norms. Mills (2003) identifies these sentences as sexist. In the narrative, Haider introduces one of Dadi's children, Fatima, and Dadi dismissively exclaims, "Oh ho, don't mention Fatima to me." Haider (2013, p. 72) claims that the demon possessed her on the day her husband passed away. Dadi's remarks about her own daughter stem from her daughter's refusal to conform to cultural norms following her husband's demise. Fatima, referred to as Fati Phupps in the novel, declined to mourn for her spouse due to her contentment and sense of relief in being free from the risk of pregnancy (Haider, 2013, p. 72). In addition to that, she also sparked a scandal by not waiting for her husband's deceased body. Contrarily, she independently traveled to her residence on the day her spouse passed away, proceeded to bathe, and deliberately chose to wear a red sari with the intention of provoking her mother and her in-laws (Haider, 2013, p. 73). Fati's inclusion in the story serves as a representation of Pakistani culture's attitudes towards women who are modern and focused on their careers, and who reject living their lives under the control of men. People often categorize these ladies as either mentally unstable or exhibiting promiscuous behavior.

Mills presents a variety of discriminatory statements, citing Samuel Johnson's remark that compared a woman preaching to a hound on its hind legs. Despite the task's subpar execution, its completion was unexpected and surprising (Mills, 2003, p. 99). This statement pertains to women's abilities and accurately depicts situations where women engage in activities beyond their specific field of knowledge or skill (Mills, 2003, p. 99). Dadi's question to Haroon about Saima's post-marriage career aspirations provides another example of Mills' argument. She expresses to Haroon her objection to Saima's employment after marriage, arguing that a woman who works lacks the time to fulfill her roles as a wife and a daughter-in-law (Haider, 2013, p. 58). At Haroon's Baraat, an obese woman approaches Zeba and asks about her educational qualifications. Upon learning that Zeba attended St. Joseph's Convent, the woman has a sense of relief, knowing that Zeba received

her education at a school exclusively for girls. She informs Dadi about a girl she encountered who not only attended a co-educational institution but also had already been involved with three partners (Haider, 2013, p. 121). This woman's treatment of a female student in a mixed-gender educational institution exemplifies the discriminatory attitudes older women in Pakistani culture harbor towards young females. Haider has highlighted our culture's hypocritical behavior by revealing that Haroon obtained his education in the United States while Zeba attended a local women's institute.

Although most people consider metaphors as individual words, Mills has utilized them at the level of phrases. According to Mills (2003, p. 105), Black's (1979) quote emphasizes the importance of metaphors in feminist stylistics. The novel contains multiple metaphors that explicitly illustrate sexism or depict women in an unfavorable manner. At the start of the narrative, Dadi tells her granddaughters a story that has metaphorical importance in the book. Dadi recounts the renowned story of Raja Takhur Majhu to her nieces, detailing the unjust treatment of a widow by her mother-in-law, who blamed her for her son's death. Upon Raja's arrival in the village, he observed a widow diligently preparing chappatis for her mother-in-law, who subjected her to a life of servitude (Haider, 2013, p. 6). This line paints a troubling picture of widowhood, highlighting the unequal treatment of widows in society. Raja abducts the widow, who reappears around six months later while pregnant (Haider, 2013, p. 6). In the initial statement, the author depicts the widow as a subjugated individual, yet in the subsequent sentence, the author characterizes her as an unscrupulous individual who willingly absconds with the first male she encounters.

Mills argues that specific statements have a tendency to perpetuate stereotypes about the social standing of women. The well-known expression "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach" demeans women by suggesting that their main duty is to please their partners by preparing appetizing meals (Mills, 2003, p. 99). Sara Mills has categorized several types of

sentences that could be considered sexist, including the use of pre-established words, the author's implicit assumptions and deductions, and the use of derogatory metaphors to depict female characteristics (Mills, 2003, p. 105). Upon learning of her grandson Haroon's desire to marry, Dadi meticulously compiles a comprehensive checklist to guide her search for a suitable bride. The majority of the conditions listed in this checklist are both derogatory and discriminatory towards a specific gender. The initial prerequisite for complete femininity (Haider, 2013, p. 32) diminishes women by ridiculing their feminine qualities. Dadi states in the checklist that her grandson's possible spouse must belong to a superior socioeconomic stratum. Dadi firmly maintains that she unequivocally belongs to the Syedda caste (Haider, 2013, p. 32), a statement that also intends to belittle girls who do not belong to this specific caste or family. In the following remark, Dadi asserts that we, as Bandians, belong to the Syed community, and hence we will not mix our sacred bloodline with the children of those who are of lower status (Haider, 2013, p. 32). Dadi's profound sense of pride is evident in this line, as she actively seeks a marriage for her grandson, imposing stringent criteria that cause anguish for women who are not part of the Syed or Bandian families.

At the discourse level, the initial factor for analysis is usually the text's character count. Stereotypical assumptions purely influence the analysis, describing each character's personality based on their gender. The stereotypical perceptions generally focus on women's physical attributes (Mills, 2003, p. 124). During their talk, Dadi and Saleha assigned derogatory labels to each of the girls they encountered based solely on their physical looks. Dadi and Saleha's actions provide significant insight into the psychological attitudes of many countries towards women, as body-shaming is very prevalent globally. The first girl they encountered had a prominent strand of hair extending over her forehead. It is possible that she was experiencing a hormonal problem, but Saleha harshly attacked her appearance, suggesting that the girl should have made an

effort to improve her facial appearance (Haider, 2013, p. 41) because people were coming to meet her. Dadi unequivocally rejected the daughter due to her excessive facial hair growth, asserting that such growth would have negative implications for her great-grandchildren.

Fragmentation, a common analysis method at the discourse level, breaks down a woman into her individual physical components to describe herself. Explicit sexual content, where heterosexual men objectify and deconstruct the feminine physique, has influenced this method. The literature also employs this technique (Mills, 2003, p. 133). In the analyzed novel, Haroon and Zeba reject a young woman's proposal because of the significant age gap between them. Nevertheless, Dadi develops romantic feelings for the girl due to her alluring bosom and curvaceous hips (Haider, 2013, p. 42), which serve as a nostalgic reminder of Dadi's own young beauty. In a separate occurrence, although Dadi is pleased by the girl's religious inclinations, she makes derogatory comments about her light complexion and abnormally tall stature. Dadi's remarks: Due to her fair complexion, she will appear visually appealing when wearing black. Slightly towering. It would be preferable if she could position herself alongside Haroon so that I can verify that she is not taller than him (Haider, 2013, p. 43). This request is both offensive and based on stereotypes. Saleha denies the girl's fit physique, asserting that she possesses the remarkable physical power to carry a dozen alams. Dadi and Saleha's investigation reveals that both men and women tend to assess other women's appearance by dissecting them into distinct anatomical components rather than perceiving them as whole individuals.

Gender stereotyping is a pervasive characteristic of Eastern society and is particularly widespread in Pakistan. At birth, society immediately distinguishes between girls and boys, assigning them distinct social duties for the future. Traditionally, boys are often seen as the future providers for their families, and as a result, they tend to receive more affection, attention, freedom, and chances compared to girls, who are

sometimes viewed as a financial liability. Women in Pakistani society face a multitude of stereotypes. Women are often subject to stereotyping based on their physical appearance, social status, and specifically their marital status. Shazaf Fatima Haider has addressed all of these concerns in her story by portraying them through the characters of Dadi, Fati Phupps, Saleha, Saima, Haroon, Zeba, and Saleha's parents. Dadi demonstrates a significant propensity for gender stereotyping, yet, as the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that Qurrat Dadi, Haroon, Saleha, Saima, and also engage in this stereotyping.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The examination of the selected text reveals that in modern society, individuals of both genders marginalize women based on their gender, physical attractiveness, and social standing. Men have superiority over women in all aspects. An alarming phenomenon is the pervasive subjugation of women by their female counterparts. In Haider's work, Dadi, a female character, faces numerous challenges both before and after her marriage due to her involvement in an arranged marriage with a person she barely knows. Nevertheless, Dadi prohibits her granddaughters from marrying according to their own wishes. She accomplishes this by recounting anecdotes from her personal history as well as the narratives of other young women who had willingly entered into marriage only to experience a sorrowful demise. Dadi not only discriminates against her own granddaughters, but she also exempts her grandson from all family laws and restrictions, as she readily approves of his desire to marry the girl he is fond of.

Dadi not only displays gender discrimination, but she also demonstrates a sexist attitude towards the several females she visits in her pursuit of finding the perfect marriage for her grandson. She engages in derogatory and degrading remarks about the girls' physical attractiveness. Dadi's remarks epitomize the reality that in today's culture, despite the progress achieved in technology, people still prioritize a slender physique and light skin tone when it comes to evaluating girls. A major

finding from this study is that women, in addition to men, contribute significantly to the stereotyping and oppression of other women. Women have the ability to reduce this tyranny by recognizing their societal obligations and actively advocating for social consciousness in order to cultivate an informed and enlightened society.

Shazaf Fatima Haider's art depicts the stereotyped portrayal prevalent in Pakistani society. Academics have the ability to analyze this piece of art from multiple perspectives. Studying the conventions of arranged marriages in Pakistani culture can be advantageous. Linguistic analysis can also examine the author's utilization of a combination of Roman and English languages. Subsequent studies could also investigate the author's use of imagery, wit, and humor. The examination of the chosen piece elucidates the notion that even small collectives have the capacity to effect global transformation. Occasionally, the comments of a family member can deeply influence another lady. The women you interact with have a significant impact on the world. You thrive when you adjust and forge purposeful lives and professions, often with reciprocal support. Altering our strategy for empowering women in our vicinity could perhaps foster a robust and inclusive social network.

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