

# Exploring the Representation of Gender Roles and Patriarchal Norms in Pakistani Society Through a Feminist Lens: A Critical Analysis of Shazaf Fatima Haider's Novel "How It Happened" (2012)

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## Abstract

The study has been carried out to evaluate Shazaf Fatima Haider's novel "How It Happened" in order to examine the impact of socially and culturally imposed gender norms on the lives of women in Pakistan, as well as the role of matriarchy in oppressing women. The research approach employed for this study is qualitative, involving the collection of pertinent information from academic journals, textbooks, and online resources. The gathered text has undergone meticulous examination using the approach of close textual analysis. In the pertinent chapters, the material has been gathered and organized into contrasted categories. The selected text has been analyzed using the sociological theory of Gender Socialization, which serves as the theoretical framework. The present study aims to enhance comprehension of how Pakistani authors see the overarching notion of gender roles in Pakistani culture. Society and culture exert significant influence on women's lives through the imposition of socially and culturally established gender standards. The impact of gender stereotypes on women's life varies and detrimentally affects their mental well-being. In addition, the matriarch (Dadi) in the given literature assumes the position of a patriarch and imposes socially and culturally defined gender norms on the women within a particular family setting. The study examines the strategies employed by the matriarchs to subdue other women.

**Key words:** Gender roles; Gender norms; Matriarchy; Patriarchy; Culture; Society

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Women are one of the most important components of human social development. Whether at home or outside, they play an essential role in the overall make-up of society. Without women, the human species would come to an end. Women so strongly influence the different aspects and patterns of organization that their essence cannot be denied. It's a woman who bears a child in her womb and gives birth to a new life. She's a mother who teaches her children how to talk, walk, eat, run, write, read and succeed at different stages of life but they are not fortunate enough because they have not been provided the place they deserve and thought to spend the bad time they got in life. Old-Aged practices of patriarchy are at the center of women's subjugation, suffering and regrettably these practices still exist in extensive amount. Divisional trends have been established in patriarchal societies that pave the way for men to be seen to be superior to women.

For ages, women have endured the constraints and restrictions placed upon them. Various constraints, especially those of cultural and social nature, significantly influence the lives of women. The imposition of limitations on women resulted in their presence being reduced to a muted and obscure role. These limitations constitute a type of exploitation. The subjugation of women by society and culture has been the focal point of gender discussions, as their voices have been silenced and they are compelled to acquiesce and adhere to the

limitations imposed upon them. Women are compelled to conform to societal and cultural expectations by relinquishing their personal preferences. Recognizing this reality, my thesis examines Shazaf Fatima Haider's novel *How It Happened*, specifically focusing on the gender roles depicted in the book.

In Pakistan, individuals are grappling with several socioeconomic challenges. Nevertheless, the most notable factor that profoundly affects the lives of numerous individuals, especially women, is the socially and culturally formed gender roles. Women and their customs are imperceptible and disregarded in this culture as their responsibilities are confined to household matters. Women in Pakistan face persecution from both men and elder women, since vulnerable and powerless women are marginalized by their own gender. In order to maintain the prevailing patriarchal system, women are oppressed by the imposition of limitations on their freedom. Society, patriarchy, and matriarchy in Pakistan assign biased and discriminatory gender roles that determine the characteristics and expectations associated with being a man or woman. This research examines the concept of gender roles, specifically focusing on the exploitation of women through the imposition of restrictive gender norms and the resulting impact on their life. An analytical research has been conducted on the selected English writer from Pakistan to examine the challenges that women encounter in a culture where gender roles are limited for women. These restrictions are enforced not only by male figures but also by female figures. Insufficient study has been conducted on the novel *How it Happened* to assess it in terms of gender roles. The present study aims to gain insight into Shazaf Fatima Haider's perspective on the prevailing gender norms in Pakistani culture, as shown in her works of English fiction. This research employs a qualitative study approach, specifically utilizing the method of close textual analysis to analyze the chosen text.

### 1.1 Problem Statement

The disparities in gender, particularly favoring men, in areas such as education, health, personal autonomy, and others, are far more pronounced in developing countries compared to affluent nations. Women in Pakistan are primarily confined to their homes and confined to domestic responsibilities, with minimal participation in social matters due to their constrained gender roles. These roles are not only enforced by societal and paternal figures, but also by maternal figures inside the family. There are concerns about the impact of culturally and socially created roles on individuals, especially women in Pakistan. It is important to understand the extent to which family patriarchs and matriarchs enforce these gender roles. Insufficient or minimal analysis has been conducted on the novel *How it Happened* to examine how this literary work provides a deeper understanding

of the socially and culturally established gender norms that impact the lives of women in Pakistan. The current research aims to examine how Shazaf Fatima Haider, a Pakistani English fiction writer, addresses the prevailing gender norms in Pakistani culture and explores women's responses to them.

### 1.2 Research Questions

a) What is the impact of culturally and socially established gender norms on the characters' lives in the novel *How it Happened* by Shazaf Fatima Haider?

b) How do the matriarchs (Dadi) in the family restrict the gender roles of females in the story "*How it Happened*"?

### 1.3 Research Objectives

a) To examine the impact of culturally and socially established gender norms on the characters' lives in the novel "*How it Happened*" by Shazaf Fatima Haider.

b) To emphasize the ways in which the matriarchs (Dadi) in the family oppress females by restricting their gender roles in *How it Happened*?

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

Gender-sensitive research focuses on identifying and analyzing both the similarities and contrasts in the experiences and perspectives of men and women, giving equal importance to both. It assists individuals of all genders who are troubled by a problem in examining an issue, comprehending its origins, and identifying remedies. A study approach that takes into account gender sensitivity is often more interactive and may make a substantial contribution to empowering individuals, particularly women (Callamard & Leduc). The discussions around gender, women's literature, and feminist activism have significantly contributed to bringing attention to the suffering and despair experienced by women. The primary emphasis of feminist movements has consistently been on the maltreatment of women by males and the harm inflicted upon women by the socially acknowledged patriarchal system. The research is significant since it thoroughly examines the writings of a prominent Pakistani English writer to document the challenges faced by women in a society where gender roles are limited for women. These restrictions are not only imposed by male figures but also by female figures. This study is important because it will empower women in Pakistan to challenge and overcome traditional gender norms imposed by males, allowing them to live more liberated lives. Furthermore, this research offers a comprehensive comprehension of Pakistani society. The research offers a solid foundation for future researchers to investigate the current societal views and academic biases that impede a comprehensive comprehension of the family's function, specifically regarding its women, community, and society.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Paradigms

This study uses a qualitative research methodology to address the research question and shed light on the study's aims. The analysis of the novel examines the events and circumstances from the perspective of gender theories.

#### 2.1.1 Data Collection

The study data is obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The novel "How it Happened" serves as the main source for this research, while additional materials include books, papers, journals, and websites.

#### 2.1.2 Data Analysis

Qualitative research consists of four closely interconnected phases. Each of these has its own significance.

a) The Descriptive phase is the initial stage of data analysis. During this stage, data is categorized according to the research problem.

b) The Analyzing phase is the second stage of data analysis. During this stage, the explorer utilizes the concepts of alienation and absurdity to analyze the data obtained from the novel.

c) The Interpretation phase is the third stage of data analysis. During this step, the researcher examines the analysis in relation to the set objectives.

d) The Evaluation phase is the fourth step. During this phase, the researcher evaluates the logical coherence and organization of all the concepts and supporting ideas, and then formulates a conclusion.

### 2.2 Theoretical Framework

The research study focuses on the impact of culturally and socially created gender roles on the lives of women in Pakistan, and how these roles are enforced in society. The applicable theory for this study is the sociological theory of Gender Socialization. The theory examines the process by which gender roles are formed via socialization and how individuals in a certain culture internalize and conform to societal expectations around gender. The idea also addresses how one's family maintains gender norms.

#### 2.2.1 Theory of Gender Socialization

Gender socialization refers to the process by which individuals are assigned gender roles and schooled about the behaviors and norms associated with a specific gender. The concept of gender socialization is an integral component of the unconventional approach to understanding gender. The concept of gender socialization seeks to explore how society conveys its expectations for appropriate male and female behavior to its members. How do individuals acquire knowledge about masculinity and femininity (Wharton, 2005)? According to Wharton (2005), socialization refers to the processes by which individuals acquire gendered features and attributes and develop self-awareness. According to this description, individuals learn about the unique roles that society

expects them to fulfill based on their gender. Overall, by engaging in public cooperation, individuals learn about the socially acceptable behaviors associated with femininity and masculinity, and they are expected to adhere to society's norms about appropriate feminine and masculine conduct (Wharton, 2005).

#### 2.2.2 Social Constructionism

Social constructivism is an intellectual framework that focuses on the process by which society constructs and defines gender. This ideology posits that all aspects of human perception and understanding, including what individuals observe, comprehend, and consider as reality, are influenced to varying degrees by social factors. Nevertheless, the potency of the idea remains undiminished when someone asserts that something is socially created. For example, the notion of money is completely a product of social construction. The paper banknotes are inherently dependent on the value that individuals attribute to them. Social constructivism is a theoretical framework that may be used to analyze any issue related to human existence, such as gender. Now, the inquiry emerges: Is gender truly a social construct? If gender is considered a social construct, how does it fulfill its purpose? Who gains from the construction of gender?

When examining gender, a social constructionist goes beyond the established classifications. The individual analyzes gender by examining the intersection of numerous identities and blurring the boundaries between distinct categories. This mostly pertains to the classifications of females and males. The classification of individuals into male and female categories is commonly perceived as a binary opposition. Social constructionism obscures the distinction between the two categories, which are often regarded as highly significant, and confuses them.

#### 2.2.3 Judith Butler and Gender Performativity

Judith Butler is a prominent social theorist. She primarily focuses on themes pertaining to the social construction of gender. Judith Butler's scholarly focus has been on queer theory and feminism. Butler's most renowned work is *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Butler's work advocates for the concept of gender performativity. She claims that gender is not an essential category. The repeated enactments of "male" and "female" in accordance with societal standards and norms solidify the categories, creating the illusion of natural and necessary duality. Gender does not serve as a descriptor for an individual. Nevertheless, every person is always engaging in the performance of gender. He is either conforming to or diverging from socially accepted gender norms.

Furthermore, the concept of "doing gender" encompasses not just conforming to certain behavioral expectations, but also embracing and embodying particular gender norms and engaging in activities that

align with those standards. These performances establish a standardized representation of gender groups based on their fundamental characteristics. To put it in other words, engaging in specific gender-related behaviors might strengthen the notion that there are only two distinct gender groups. The underlying assumption that men and women possess inherent differences is what influences their distinct actions and behaviors. Gender is established and sustained as a classification by socially manufactured displays of gender. The reference is from Butler's work published in 1990.

#### 2.2.4 Gender and Social

Gender roles are a collection of commonly accepted standards that define the expected behavior and characteristics for individuals based on their biological and perceived gender. Gender role theory posits that individuals acquire the ability to conform to their biologically determined gender through certain attitudes and behaviors. The theory examines the impact of the environment on the development of gender roles and the function of socialization in shaping individuals' values, norms, beliefs, and behaviors in relation to their gender identity.

### 3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Gender roles encompass the societal expectations and standards that dictate the right and desirable behaviors for individuals based on their actual or perceived sex. Typically, these discussions revolve on contrasting ideas of strength and femininity; however there are several instances that deviate from this pattern. The details about these gender exclusions may differ across different civilizations, while other traits may be shared throughout a variety of cultures (Gochman, 2013). Gender roles, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), are the socially created roles, behaviors, activities, and qualities that a particular community deems suitable for males and females. *How It Happened* is the first novel written by Pakistani author Shazaf Fatima Haider, published in 2012.

The tale acquaints readers with the turmoil that typically arises within Pakistani households when it comes to the marriage of young individuals. *How It Happened* is a narrative about a highly traditional Shia Bundian family. Haider recounts the narrative to unveil the current state of Pakistani society, where culture and tradition grapple with adapting to modern times. In this society, it is possible for women to lack proficiency in sewing and cooking, and the older generation does not always arrange marriages.

In the patriarchal systems of South Asian nations, women are frequently subjected to the devaluation of their status as human beings. The process of devaluing begins at the very moment of girls' birth. From an early age, girls are often perceived as burdens or disadvantages to a family (Neuback, 1996). Nevertheless, their male siblings

inherit the family's possessions. They are instructed to possess a high degree of adaptability and versatility in order to effectively navigate various situations. They must adapt by completely obeying and submitting to the desires of their families, and after getting married, to the desires of their husbands and their families. Individuals must relinquish their own desires and exhibit patience in the face of their relentless responsibilities.

From an early age, girls see the lifelong advantages bestowed to their male siblings and dads, which are granted through preferential treatment. The observed normative behavior can be attributed to the presence of institutional discrimination in the domains of health, education, and work. This leads to socio-economic and political disadvantage and comparatively lower salaries for women (Sharma, 2014). In developing nations such as Pakistan, the perception of women as a burden is not limited to patriarchal individuals alone. Matriarchy also has a significant impact on the devaluation of other women. Women are expected to conform to established social and cultural norms despite living in a society and culture that is controlled by males. They are acknowledged as being of lower status compared to males. Patriarchal ideologies are not just perpetuated by the patriarchs themselves; the matriarchs within the family also contribute equally to the reinforcement of such ideologies. The matriarch displays profound fondness and tenderness for male offspring while exhibiting bias and differentiation based on gender. The way it occurred vividly mirrors this truth.

Dadi's character assumes the role of a matriarch, bestowing her affection and care only upon the male members of the household. The text contains several examples that demonstrate the matriarch's preference for men and disregard for female members of the household. For example, Dadi demonstrates affection and loyalty towards her male descendant by setting aside a dedicated room and a place in her life for her grandson. Dadi's immense affection for her grandson is demonstrated through a collection of photographs housed in large drawers (*How It Happened*, 2012). The initial drawer has a plethora of photographs of Haroon throughout his infancy. The second drawer has photographs from Haroon's school years. The third drawer has the photographs from the time when he acquired his own automobile. The two drawers are designated for the wedding photographs of Haroon and his prospective offspring (*How it Happened*, 2012).

The older women in the family do not display much affection towards the daughters, as they are aware that the girls would eventually have to leave their father's home. The perpetuation of quiet oppression persists, with women being subjected to subservient treatment by males. Simultaneously, the elder females assume the positions of matriarchs and uphold the established gender norms that promote subjugation within the society. The narrator expresses the affection of mature women (matriarchs)

towards the dominant male figures by conveying her sense of being overshadowed.

When I asked her [Dadi] where Zeba Baji's and my chests of drawers were, she replied, "Don't I have framed photographs of both of my chandas on the walls?" Since her two chandas were lost amidst the sea of faces of her other grand offspring, it was clear that furniture storage space was to be reserved exclusively for Haroonmia (*How it Happened*, 2012).

In Pakistan, gender relations are primarily characterized by two fundamental beliefs: the subordinate status of women to males, and the notion that a man's dignity is contingent upon the behavior of the women in his household. Thus, in traditional Muslim civilizations, women bear the responsibility of upholding the family's honor. Society and culture impose constraints on women's movement and impose regulations on their actions and conduct to safeguard the family's honor. Women are compelled to adhere to "Purdah" and wear a veil in order to maintain their modesty and honor. Through the practice of Purdah, society and culture establish distinct worlds for men and women, literally and metaphorically, effectively segregating their activities. The majority of women in Pakistani civilizations dedicate a significant portion of their time to domestic activities inside their households. They only leave for significant matters and authorized purposes. Families that do not impose restrictions on their women's mobility or unusual behavior are regarded as immodest and brazen. In the book *How It Happened*, Dadi repeatedly cautions her grandchildren to confine themselves inside the boundaries of their house. Dadi consistently expresses her disapproval of Zeba due to her "exhibiting unsettling indications of autonomy." Zeba committed the crime by wearing a sleeveless Kameez and eating supper with her group of pals in her grandmother's book "How it Happened" (2012).

Dadi claims that Zeba is behaving promiscuously. In addition, Dadi does not fully endorse the idea of Bundian women engaging in employment outside their household responsibilities. In her statement, she claims that "Respectable women from the eastern region prioritize their children and refrain from spending their days in the workplace, where unfamiliar men may gaze at their chests" (*How it Happened*, 2012). She believes that women who work in offices are promiscuous individuals always seeking to ensnare a financially stable man. According to her, a "prudent woman should be a homemaker, and her sole responsibility should be to satisfy God and her spouse. That is the end. (*How it Happened*, 2012). Similarly, women are prohibited from engaging in family gatherings or socializing with males, since it is perceived as a reflection of Western culture and linked to the profession of courtesans. According to Dadi, "dignified young women never imitated courtesans" (*How it Happened*, 2012). Women's gender roles in Pakistani culture are severely limited, since they are primarily valued for their

capacity to give birth to male children and maintain their reputation. (*How it Happened*, 2012). Their reputation is interconnected with the reputation of the family.

Rubin, in her paper, argues that females and males, as well as girls and boys, exhibit more similarities than differences. The imposition of the taboo of sameness is done by society (*How it Happened*, 2012). Gender roles in society provide a certain set of rules that determine the appropriate conduct for individuals depending on their perceived biological sex. Gender inequality is prevalent worldwide, but it is particularly ingrained in Asian society. Pakistani society perpetuates gender bias by ascribing specific patterns of conduct to individuals based on their gender. For example, ladies are expected to be attired in a suitable manner. There exists a specific clothing code designated for ladies. Nonconformists are typically subject to disdain. Dadi's persona is intolerant of women who exhibit masculine behavior or mannerisms, as it goes against their cultural norms. She finds it difficult to accept that contemporary women may adopt masculine attire and challenge traditional gender standards.

They have no sense of shame... working with men half turns them INTO men! Yesterday I saw this career woman on a talk show, and she was wearing a SUIT (*How It Happened*, 2012).

The societal and cultural norms place specific limitations on young girls and women, leading to acts of aggression based on gender and consequent negative impacts on their physical and emotional well-being. Women are compelled to acquiesce to their inferior status to males, which has a detrimental impact on their well-being. In addition, women are socialized to adopt conventional beliefs and behaviors about gender roles. For example, Qurrat Dadi (Dadi's cousin) redirected all her hopes and focus onto her daughter Parveen after her son's unfortunate marriage to a "plump African American woman" (*How it Happened*, 2012). Parveen's marriage has been entirely planned, and she has never failed to meet expectations. She has given birth to a daughter named Noureen. "She not only mimics her phonetically, but also in terms of obedience and submission" (*How it Happened*, 2012).

Gender discrimination can occur to both men and women in individual settings. Nevertheless, gender discrimination is a widespread and pervasive issue worldwide. These discriminations arise from the societal frameworks in which institutionalized notions of gender differences and the subjugation of women are established. These cultural prejudices are deeply rooted in both males and females. In Pakistani society, males have considerable freedom to pursue their desires and make choices. They have the freedom to engage in activities that are even forbidden by religion, whereas women are limited in their ability to fully exercise the rights granted to them by religion and the law. The character of Dadi in the story eloquently delves into this subject when she states:

"In their youth, men can be as "liberal" as they like, kissing-shissing, dating-shating half-undressed women. But when it comes to choose a wife, they want someone as pure as snow!" (*How it Happened*, 2012).

In Pakistani communities and culture, the notion of a "good woman" is firmly ingrained, in addition to the conventional teaching on appropriate behavior for women. Whether a woman is educated or illiterate is irrelevant; what matters is that she have qualities such as composure, selflessness, tolerance, organization, adaptability, maintenance, and the ability to manage household affairs with hospitality.

"A woman's knowledge of the kitchen is essential for her completeness." (*How it Happened*, 2012).

In addition to domestic responsibilities, a virtuous woman should devote herself to her spouse and offspring.

"The sole desire a woman experiences is the desire to embrace her child and ensure her husband is well-nourished and satisfied" (*How it Happened*, 2012).

Women in Pakistani society are consistently required to make concessions with their viewpoints and conceal their feelings. Not all women who possess independent thinking and have their own opinions are accepted in eastern culture (*How it Happened*, 2012). During her instruction to her granddaughter on proper etiquette when receiving marriage proposals, Dadi defines a well-mannered young woman in Eastern culture as:

"Like Good Eastern Girl, she would be brought in with dupatta on her head...she would not discuss politics or literature under any circumstances because this would reveal her in all her opinionated glory. Good Eastern Girl should not have a strong opinion of their own, only those of their husbands or in-laws" (*How it Happened*, 2012).

In addition, a commendable lady demonstrates the qualities of a "good daughter-in-law" by treating her mother-in-law with the same respect and care as she would her own mother, even when faced with limitations and maltreatment from her. According to Dadi, it is expected that well-behaved girls should maintain a quiet presence and refrain from expressing their opinions. That is the way their relatives via marriage prefer them! (*How it Happened*, 2012). Dadi meticulously compiles an extensive inventory of regulations and prerequisites that a prospective suitor for Haroon must meet. Dadi, a symbol of a culture where women have power, states on the list that "the girl must possess the necessary qualifications to secure a lucrative employment.

"It appears that she lacks the desire to engage in employment. What is the purpose of men?" (*How it Happened*, 2012).

These limitations are enforced due to the belief that a working woman lacks the time to fulfill her roles as a wife and daughter-in-law (*How it Happened*, 2012). Therefore,

she classifies males as breadwinners and women as housewives.

Within Eastern Pakistani homes, the matriarchs have a significant role in providing gender education to their offspring. Typically, it is the mother or another older female member of the family who teaches the girls in the family about humanity, religion, and gender education. In Pakistani culture and society, a commendable mother is one who demonstrates responsibility by imparting various limitations onto her daughter, with the aim of shaping her into a virtuous lady. The girl's parents have the authority to determine their daughter's attire, lifestyle, and choice of spouse. In Pakistani society, it is customary for females to marry the boys chosen by their mothers (*How it Happened*, 2012).

Saleha, the narrator of the story, regards the issue of forced marriages with great gravity and asserts that they must depend on the older members of their family to organize any marriage offers. They are prohibited from taking matters into their own hands (*How it Happened*, 2012). In the story, Dadi boasts about these coerced weddings to illustrate the unwavering obedience and sense of duty that the characters had towards their elders. They refrain from expressing dissatisfaction because to the ingrained principles of obedience and subjection instilled in them during their upbringing. Saleha explains the root cause of this oppression by examining the historical background of her society, which takes pride in the submission of women:

"We hailed from the ancient village called Bhakuraj in India, a village that has become famous for its female population's singular of unquestionably deferring to the mother's wishes when it came to the matters of matrimony. [...] Through the use of guile, blackmail, and several subtle and not-so-subtle pressure tactics, our great grandmothers, and mothers had managed to avoid the stigma of love marriage blackening the name of our prodigiously chaste family tree. None of our female relatives had been exempt from the Sacred Tradition: each saw her husband and Representative of God on Earth through a silver mirror placed on her lap during the ceremonial" (*How it Happened*, 2012).

In addition, women are denied any form of agency in their marital unions. When a woman develops an attraction towards someone, she is required to make concessions and prioritize the wishes of a family as a rational choice. Bandian women are aware that the concept of love-shove is completely nonsensical (*How it Happened*, 2012). Women are supposed to emulate Naureen, a compliant and subservient daughter of Qurrat Dadi (Dadi's cousin), who only understands how to acquiesce with "Yes" and "of course" to their parents' desires. In Pakistani society, women are limited in their ability to work due to the expectation that they will either marry or devote their life to caring for their dad and brothers (*How it Happened*, 2012). Haider quietly notes that gender norms are enforced by patriarchal systems.

Girls are often stereotyped as unintelligent and lazy. Dadi, being aware of the societal preference for females who are reserved and perceived as less clever, tells Zeba to maintain silence and refrain from expressing her intelligence (*How it Happened*, 2012). In addition, Dadi's character disapproves of females who enthusiastically engage in the wedding ceremony, since it is believed that a traditional eastern bride should not actively participate in such events (*How it Happened*, 2012).

The institution of marriage operates according to a customary arrangement structure. Marriages disproportionately suppress young women. In marriages, boys have exclusive authority while girls have no authority whatsoever. Boys engage in the pursuit of finding a suitable spouse, while females are expected to accept being shown in front of visitors without any opportunity to voice their objections, akin to being treated like livestock. The females are anticipated to march in front of the boy's family. The sole criterion for a marriage proposal in relation to a boy is the possession of employment or a substantial means of income, regardless of his lack of consideration or physical appearance. The Pakistani society exhibits a lack of concern for the emotions of a female, which is most evident when Dadi establishes the protocol for choosing a girl for Haroon. Dadi incorporated all aspects into the design, with the exception of considering the emotions and preferences of a female. In the novel, Mrs. Haque expresses her enthusiasm in Zeba's proposition by confidently stating that she will provide a list of potential females to her sons, who will then make a selection. The girl's permission is disregarded, as we have also considered the opinions of around four additional girls to present to him. He is not very discerning and is likely to find one of them appealing. "You are aware of the current situation with boys, right? They possess exceedingly high criteria!" The occurrence took place in 2012. Women influence their sons to choose a lady for marriage as if they are picking an item from a store.

In her article, Vashnavi Pallapathu examines the socially and culturally established norms of beauty, highlighting the problematic nature of the criteria used to select and determine eligibility for women. These criteria include age (between 18 and 25), specific height and weight requirements, and limitations on body measurements. Pageants frequently perpetuate notions like the ideal length of hair on the head and body, the fairness of complexion, the specific cosmetics that should be applied, and the prescribed attire to be worn. The imposition of these limits fosters a constricted and confining understanding of beauty" (Pallapathu). When searching for potential brides within traditional families, elder family members tend to prioritize finding a young and inexperienced female.

According to Dadi,

"The younger they are, the more malleable! They will be able to learn and adapt to our way of life" (*How It Happened*, 2012).

Young girls can be easily shaped to conform to gender and cultural expectations within the context of family. Nevertheless, women who are both young and educated exhibit a lower propensity to adjust to unfamiliar situations. During that stage of life, women possess malleability akin to that of pliable clay. According to *How it Happened* (2012), women may be readily shaped and influenced by their spouses and in-laws.

In Pakistani society, the male heads of the family and the female figures with lower authority hold influence over family affairs. They attempt to ascertain the destiny of the youthful members of the families; nonetheless, they overshadow the viewpoint of subordinate women in affairs, notably in the selection of a life partner. The novel *How It Happened* by Shazaf Fatima Haider provides insight on the adherence of the elder generation to gender stereotypes within Pakistani culture, within the context of gender education and gender roles. Early parenting and socialization significantly influence an individual's personality and their attitudes towards society, culture, and conventional, stereotyped ideas. A similar pattern may be observed in the personality of Dadi. She has been indoctrinated to exhibit submissiveness and obedience throughout her lifetime. Consequently, upon assuming a position of authority, she anticipates her daughter-in-law and granddaughter to demonstrate comparable levels of obedience and submission. In order to conform to gender norms, she endeavors to apply them to her granddaughters, daughter-in-law, and grand-daughter-in-law.

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## CONCLUSION

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Gender, in contrast to sex, is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses social, cultural, and psychological aspects. The gender system engenders disparities and distinctions between males and females. The social structure plays a crucial role in differentiating gender, as gender is a construct shaped by society and cultural influences. An individual's social conduct and behavior are influenced by society and culture. Society encourages sex-differentiating behavior by providing different gender roles to males and females. These gender roles are enforced by many individuals in society, mainly by patriarchs and matriarchs. Shazaf Fatima Haider's novel, *How It Happened*, reveals the current state of Pakistani society and the inability of culture to adapt to the evolving globe. The story critically examines how educated households in Pakistan enforce gender norms on women and treat their daughters as just objects to be shown. The narrative emphasizes the discriminatory practices inside matriarchal families based on gender. In Pakistani households, males are granted autonomy,

whilst girls are anticipated to conform to established gender norms. Women are subjected to disdain, while the midwives take delight in the birth of males. Women are obligated to do domestic tasks and are prohibited from engaging in employment outside the home, regardless of their intelligence and level of education. According to the book "How It Happened" published in 2012, a woman is considered deficient if she lacks knowledge and skills in the kitchen.

Both the male and female heads of the household actively encourage this type of conduct. Gender roles that are socially and culturally established have an impact on the lives of women in Pakistan. Women experience lifelong oppression, with their wishes being disregarded and their expectation to conceal and sacrifice their desires for the sake of family traditions and honor. Women are not only obligated to adhere to the societal and cultural expectations of gender roles, but they are also prohibited from openly expressing their ideas and emotions, since they are supposed to be submissive and silent, as the saying goes "good girls should be seen and not heard" (How it Happened, 2012). Furthermore, it is not customary for girls to engage in employment outside of office settings and actively pursue their professional aspirations. Their main responsibility is to provide care for their spouse, offspring, and legal obligations. From a young age, they are ingrained with the belief that a woman's sole desire is to embrace her kid and ensure her husband is well-fed and satisfied (How it Happened, 2012). Women are typically exclusively expected to fulfill the role of a homemaker. She must possess proficiency in culinary arts, needlework, and several domestic tasks. If a female lacks culinary skills or has no inclination towards domestic tasks, she is seen without value and ineligible for marriage. Furthermore, a deliberate effort is made to cultivate a feeling of inferiority complex among young girls by giving priority to the demands of their brothers above their own. The younger family members are overshadowed by the elder ones who impose limitations on their desires. Saleha, the protagonist of the tale, experiences a sense of being overshadowed as her grandma displays greater affection towards her older brother, neglecting both Saleha and her sister Zeba. The novel examines the impact of socially and culturally established gender roles on individuals' lives.

In addition to patriarchy, matriarchy also has a significant impact on enforcing socially and culturally determined gender norms on women. Women are marginalized and suppressed by the older members of their family, who consistently dictate the manner in which females should speak, dress, eat, and conduct themselves. Upon gaining power, rather than rebelling against the tyranny they have endured, the elder women engage in the act of condemning fellow women and

endorsing the patriarchal system. In the novel "How It Happened," the character of Dadi assumes the role of a matriarch who not only supports the patriarchy but also seeks to exert control on her granddaughters, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter-in-law by enforcing traditional gender norms upon them. She prohibits female members of the family from pursuing employment in professional settings and instructs them to conform to traditional gender norms by wearing modestly and behaving in a feminine manner. She consistently attempts to establish a narrative of a "virtuous woman" and "virtuous eastern girl" in order to dominate her granddaughter, all the while fully endorsing the unethical conduct of male relatives. Therefore, the study asserts that society and culture have a significant impact on shaping women's lives through the imposition of socially and culturally produced gender standards. Gender norms exert varying impacts on women's life and detrimentally influence their mental well-being. Furthermore, matriarchs have an equivalent influence to patriarchs in enforcing these gender patterns.

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