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Women's Honour Persecutions by the Powers: A Cross-Cultural Study of Pakistan (Representation in Reality) and Manipur (Representation in Fiction)

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

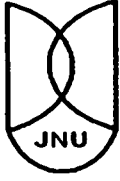


MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

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Binata N.

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Dedication

**Dedicated to my loving Bokshi (grandma), Idhou (grandpa), Parents,
family and**

**“ To my Love (Da Gung)...
for the good times together
and more to come ...”**

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And a very special thanks to my mother who has always been a guiding spirit in all my endeavors. Warmest thanks also to Priyaranjan Kaushal and Irfan Ahmad for their valuable help and assistance.

Binata Nongmaithem

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Liberation from oppression for Muslim women in both the spatio-temporal contexts of Pakistan and Manipur is by no means a linear progression from reform, to education, to a realization of rights in the classic liberal pattern. It involves an ongoing dialogue with both male hegemony and the underlying stringent religious authority and its impositions.

In my dissertation, I have delved into certain aspects of 'honour persecutions' perpetrated by the powers in both fictional narratives (of Manipur) and reality accounts (of Pakistan). Re-visiting Islamic women in two different spatio-temporal contexts and reviewing the accounts or records of their lives in the two places of the subcontinent has provided clues about what propelled them and shaped their respective visions as they acquiesced or innovated in their lives. However, a juxtaposition of these two different accounts disclose gender commonalties as well as differences linked to class and circumstance in the unfolding of Muslim women's growing feminist awareness and activisms.

They learn what it is to be a "woman", ways they react to the "fixed" constructions of "woman" and how they attempt to redefine the category "woman". As for this term "women" in the title, it contains the kernel of a dispute that has problematized the politics of contemporary feminism and come to dominate theoretical polemics.

A common thread running through all the narratives and accounts is an awareness that women's movements against 'honour

persecutions' do not occur in a vacuum and that they have often emerged out of generalized political instability and protest-circumstances that have both encouraged and constrained them.

Tension between the self and the outside forces on the one hand, and the desire for emancipation and indeed the need to break out of an incarcerating mould– pervades most chapters. The disparate vignettes of women's honour issues have provided enough insights and information to enable us to draw out some recurrent themes, and areas of concern, irrespective of the spatio-temporal difference.

The word "Honour" has a very special quality, it holds an alluring, even seductive appeal. Its spell derives from its archaic and poetic overtones: it harks back to more glorious times when men were brave, honest and principled (what women were is besides the point, since they, in both anthropological and popular conceptions, have no honour of their own to defend). This unacknowledged evocative quality of honour and the absence of women from such fields has diverted the anthropological treatment of honour away from a concern with meaning in everyday life towards normative moral discourse, among men. In the process, questions about the other half of humanity (women) – if, how, and in what respect they might think and act in terms of, and indeed possess, honour–have been virtually unexplored.

Though much work has been done on the issue of women in Islam, their portrayal in the male-dominated Islamic world, but comparison of Muslim women – their obscure zones of resistance, their entrenched attitudes, a reflection of changing times and the intensity of the conflicts between the aspirations of women and the resistance of men, who imagine despite the laws in force, that power

intensity of the conflicts between the aspirations of women and the resistance of men, who imagine despite the laws in force, that power is necessarily male – in two different places of the sub-continent, that of Pakistan and Manipur is uncommon.

Herein arises the need to compare Muslim women's fragmented identities and their representations to counter male repression, their journey to rediscover the formidable roots of Islamic feminism so as to trace a continuum of the "female identity" in Islam in two different spatio-temporal settings.

The comparison of the writings was done by taking into consideration not only the pan-Islamic women's identity regarding "honour", but also the cultural nuances which need to be addressed in exploring the dichotomy between representation in reality and representation in fiction in two different places of the subcontinent.

Apart from the varied textual readings conducted, I also underwent field studies to explore the status of Muslim women in Manipur (Mayang Imphal, Lilong, Khabeishoi, Hatta, etc.). The survey enlightened me with the different facets of their livelihood, their constant struggle in carving out their "Islamic" identity and the repercussions of their own constricting traditions. Browsing of internet sites and watching of regional documentary films on Muslim women is also part of my approach and methodology.

Muslim women subsume lesser identities of gender, class, ethnicity and spatio-territoriality. These writings of women about "honour" have provided valuable insights into the social structure of various societies, differing academic systems, the status of women,

and, of course, the anxieties and joys of women discovering a new form of self-expression (as in the writings of female fiction).

It is the story of Muslim women's agency both in reality and in fiction and their constant resilience, against injustices, through their insistence upon empowerment, through education (as in the case of Mukhtar Mai of Pakistan). It is their story of transcendence, weaved in their own narratives and records, and yearning to convey the process and vision of an unfinished business, of a journey begun. Mukhtar Mai emphasized upon education as the emancipating trope for the betterment of the condition of women in rural Pakistan.

The appalling low level of female literacy (16 percent) in Pakistan is clearly an obstacle to the development of women, especially in the rural areas where female literacy levels are as low as 7.3%. Official statistics have proved to be unreliable at both ends of the spectrum. Literacy levels are much lower than generally stated and, at the same time, economic participation of women measured in terms of the labour force is several times higher than the official figure of 4.8%.

In Pakistan, the promulgation of the infamous Hudood ordinance authorized the award of "hadd" punishment (flogging, stoning to death, cutting of limbs, etc.) for certain crimes. In its application to women, this ordinance equated adultery with rape, because the admission of rape on the part of a woman was taken as confession and proof of adultery in the event of the rape not being proved which was usually what happened since proving rape required four Muslim men as witnesses. These expressions of fascism helped crystallize the issue of the specific and universal dimensions of

women's problems. Such in reality is the grotesque condition of Pakistani women.

In Pakistan, the *Zina* ordinance (*zina* means illicit sex, outside of marriage – both adultery and fornication) suggests and regulates what constitutes ethical behaviour in sex, and, more generally, within the family and the social institution of marriage in ways in which women's fundamental rights under the Constitution, and some argue in Islam, are violated. Women's moral regulation by their families, the interconnection of morality with the legal or judicial structures, the relationship between the state and patriarchy within families and the plight of impoverished women in Pakistan in which the state is complicit are all the true facets of rural Pakistani women (Shahnaz Khan, 2003).

An *Amnesty International* statement says:

The regime of honour is unforgiving: women on whom suspicion has fallen are not given an opportunity to defend themselves, and family members have no socially acceptable alternative but to remove the stain on their honour by attacking the woman.

Nilofar Bakhtiar, advisor to Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, stated that in 2003, as many as 1,261 women in Pakistan were murdered in honour killings. Honour killing is generally the punitive murder of a female member of a family by the family, when they (and maybe the wider community) believe her to have brought dishonour upon them.

The concept of female servitude contributing to and enhancing male 'honour' (*ghairat*) is not a new concept in the subcontinent at

large. This has now projected itself to the extent that male 'honour' is now viewed and replicated and adorned as the 'honour' representing the whole family unit. Therefore, any act committed by the female that goes against male supremacy directly, or damages it indirectly, is unforgivable in Pakistan's chauvinistic patriarchal society.

Gender relations in Pakistan rest on two basic perceptions: that women are subordinate to men, and that a man's 'honour' resides in the actions of the women of his family. Not only are the restrictions of women's liberty maintained in the name of this honour, but they can also be put to death if they lose this honour.

The umbilical link between theory and praxis in this dissertation is the feminist credo that "the personal is political" in its own way in each woman's story, be it fictional portrayal (of Manipuri Muslims) or reality accounts (of Pakistani women).

As they imagined new lives, Muslim women began to withhold complicity in their own subordination. Their sexual purity was linked to the honour of men and the family, so restricting them to their homes and camouflaging them became the norm and were deemed necessary to the preservation of their purity and with it the "honour" of their men and families. As such came or was born the community surveillance of behaviour and the imposition of severe penalties in the form of "honour persecutions" for violations of the moral code of conduct.

The chapters that follow delineate in the variety of ways to reflect my engagement with the issue of "honour" in two different worldviews. Some are idealistic than the others. Some are more

abstract and analytical than the rest. Some may express their commonality with the stories and struggles of women participants in Islam.

The different genres that I deal with in my dissertation – fictional narratives of Manipur and journalistic records and case reports of Pakistan dealing with the broad umbrella term “honour” is comparable, reflecting the entrenched practices contributing to the dehumanization of the fairer sex.

I have in my dissertation negotiated between these structural inconsistencies as elements of varied female-inclusive interpretations, raising their voice against “honour persecutions” and raising the legitimacy of their claims to authority within the struggle for gender justice. Multiple, contested, and coexisting meanings of Islam are integral to the struggles for gender justice in Islamic reform today. I intend to show my engagement in the process by contributing to the multiple meanings of “honour” both in the fictional and real world.

The complexities of their struggles, coupled with the frenzied accelerated reassertion of patriarchal based interpretations of “honour” linked with the “honour” of the whole family and in broader sense the whole clan itself, marginalizes the Muslim woman to a position replete with authoritative punishments and thus subjects them to be victims of “honour persecutions” at the hands of the powers.

I have in my dissertation tried to bring out the pejorative meanings attached to the word “honour” and a struggle to establish gender justice in Muslim thought and praxis. At its simplest level,

gender justice is gender mainstreaming – the inclusion of women in *all* aspects of Muslim practice, performance, policy construction, and in both political and religious leadership. In short, trying to give voice (in literary corpus) and agency (in feminist activism) to Muslim women in two different places of the Indian subcontinent.

Chapter Outlines:

The Introduction (Chapter 1), reviewing Islamic women in two different spatio-temporal contexts that of Pakistan and Manipur locates an overview of the condition of Muslim women in these two places. It talks of women's agency in the Islamic world in the context of change and challenge. It foregrounds the incremental steps of their liberation from obscurity to authority.

Chapter 2, "Manipulation in Interpretation: Representation in Fiction (Hijam Anganghal's *Jahera*)", includes both the narrative account of a Muslim woman, Jahera falling in love with a Hindu boy, Kunjo and the subsequent unfolding of events within the larger framework of power dynamics, legitimacy and authority, imposing stringent rules against those who defy norms and codes of moral conduct, whereby Jahera becomes the victim of transgression of moral codes of "honour".

It also outlines the history of the genesis of Manipuri Muslims, commonly known as "Pangals". The historiography of the Manipuri Muslims, especially, of its more recent past, i.e., their settlement in Manipur; the emergence of the ethnic and communal consciousness; the socio-cultural and politico-religious nuances of the intra-and

inter-community relations become the functions of the ideological stance inherent in a particular historiographic construction.

In *Jahera* (1964), the blending of the historical with the fictional events entails to the exigencies of the plot of the novel. In this chapter, we would talk about how the theme of “honour persecutions” traverse the boundary line between fact and fiction, text and context to approximate history, contest cultures (of violence) and impregnate narrative emplotment with creative and critical possibilities and probabilities.

Chapter 3, “The unravelling of Mukhtar Mai’s Truth: Representation in Reality (Pakistan)”, is based on the true story of Mukhtar Mai, a Pakistani woman raised in poverty and illiteracy, who becomes an ardent feminist by responding to the violence unleashed upon her, with an insistence on justice and education.

In this chapter, we revisit and reconstruct the sordid event that took place on June 22, 2002, in Meerwala, a small village in southern Punjab district of Pakistan, near the border with India. Through the revelations and responses, not only were the lives of Mukhtar Mai’s family and their Mastoi neighbours transformed forever, the nation’s consciousness and the national conscience were shaken in a way no other rape case had done before. The medieval panchayats or jirgas at the heart of the tribal justice system were scrutinized with unprecedented intensity. The tribal courts incorporated local customs, perceptions of honour, revenge and “honour persecutions”, family histories and land trades. They fit perfectly into the fabric of the feudal societies in rural tracts like the southern Punjab (of Pakistan).

This chapter also highlights the common panchayat-decreed punishment for rape in southern Punjab which is the handover of a woman, in the guise of a compensatory marriage. As vassals of honour, women are given and taken as trophies of compensation in *watta-satta* marriage deals, which serves as the balancing of prestige. The greatest economic benefit in *watta-satta* is the curtailment of loss of family land through the departure of the bride to another family. As both families are losing brides to each other, it makes sense to keep the land without giving it to their sister or daughter who is leaving the family, which leaves their share from the inter-related property in the favour of their respective brothers. *Vani* and *Swara* compensation marriage pacts are the ultimate manifestation of the concept of woman as vassal of the family honour. *Vani* and *Swara* brides are treated ignobly by the families they are sent to: as unpaid labour, mistresses, and oppressed wives.

In this chapter, we shall discuss about the faultline created by the authoritative powers whereby “honour killings” have been ordered by jirgas. Runaway brides, rape victims, ‘black women’ (called *Kari*) who have stained a family’s honour by being seen with the wrong man – or even just accused of such – are the subjects of most cases concerning women brought before a jirga or panchayat.

The common panchayat-decreed punishment for rape in southern Punjab is the handover of a woman, in the guise of a compensatory marriage. In rape cases, the first attempt by the panchayat is to console the victim party. While trying to console the victim party, they are trying to treat the accused in the same way, because panchayats have no authority to imprison people or sentence them to torture, as the state has. To equalise the honour of both the

victim and accused parties, the panchayats are normally using this method. To avoid criminal liability, they force the accused to give the hand of a lady from his family to the victim's family, to give a female in compensation. They may call it compromise or arranged marriage, but this is the situation (Bronwyn Curran, 2008).

Chapter 4, "The Subversion of female honour stereotypes in M.K. Binodini's short stories: Representation in Fiction (Manipur)," encapsulates women's fiction in the short-story genre of Manipuri Literature by M.K. Binodini, the most prolific woman writer in Manipur. Her writings has attempted to dissolve polarities and move towards pluralistic meanings. In her short-story 'Thambal', the surreptitious repressive power structures of society are subverted by the female protagonist in an endeavour for union with her lover of another religion.

Inspite of masculine predominance in the field of Manipuri literature, M.K. Binodini emerged as a phenomenal writer who revisits the male ideologies of honour in order to recognize female power through her delineation of strong and powerful female protagonists. The emergent figure of the independent woman as portrayed in her female characters, challenges for space on traditional male territory, thus threatening the complacent superiority of male characters in her short stories.

The female protagonist in the short-story "Thambal" reflects the new-age female epitome of spontaneity and organicity of life. Thambal's recognition of the cultural differences incorporates both her sympathetic understanding and rational outlook. Her indictment of the communal enmity is the response of her secular credentials.

My concluding chapter (Chapter 5), foregrounds the proactive inclusion of women's experiences (Pakistan) and interpretations (Manipur) as crucial to transforming gender status towards its higher egalitarian potential. It talks of the "counter-hegemony" taken up by women in both fiction and reality. In this concluding chapter an attempt is made to analyse the "honour persecutions" by the powers, the levels at which it is evoked and how it is different in the two places of the subcontinent.

CHAPTER 2

MANIPULATION IN INTERPRETATION: REPRESENTATION IN FICTION (Hijam Anganghal's *Jahera*)

Literature is a potent cognitive vehicle both in its creative and critical manifestations. A desire or a belief only provides an initial impetus. Its material crystallization is an exacting process. The poetics of Hijam Anganghal's novel *Jahera* (1964) subsumes, projects, appropriates and approximates the historical, the socio-cultural, the politico-ideological and fictional narratology of the condition of Muslim women in Manipur.

'Honour' issues of Muslim women have continued to implode or explode Muslim sensibility and reality in myriad ways. The very notion of liberation from oppression is inextricably enmeshed with the reality of Muslim women's condition in Manipur—both public and private. Hijam Anganghal Singh's Manipuri novel *Jahera*, is a forceful narrative of intense unfulfilled love between a Manipuri Muslim girl 'Jahera' (meaning the "Radiant one") and a Hindu Meetei boy Kunjo, which culminated in despair and death of the female protagonist at the hands of her lover.

Here, in this novel *Jahera* (1964), Hijam Anganghal has carefully shown the manipulations of the power structures which maintain opacity of vision in dealing with the innocent love between Jahera and Kunjo. In *Jahera*, the often repetitive recapitulation of its human interest situations and an impressionistic identification with the authorial condemnation of 'honour persecutions' of women is reflected here.

Hijam Anganghal was a prolific writer, his versatility made him foray into different genres – poetry, plays, novels and allegorical essay. He, along with Khwairakpam Chaoba and Lamabam Kamal, is rightly called the founding fathers of modern Manipuri literature. They have carved out a remarkable niche in the social psyche and modern sensibility of literary corpus in Manipuri Literature.

Their literary works and fictional corpus reverberates through the socio-political and cultural discourses, emerging as a sub-species with a distinct problematic and poetics of its own within the larger matrix of Manipuri literature. Their literary works foreshadowed a resurgent literature which engages with the collective Manipuri consciousness in its own language. Their works unfolded the socio-cultural milieu of modern Manipur, encapsulating the causes and consequences of the fragmentation of the “self” wrought by political and cultural flux.

Hijam Anganghal, inspite of poverty compelling him to drop out of school at an early age, had little formal education and had no knowledge of English Literature, he gave Manipuri literature some of its most remarkable poems and novels. He wrote in traditional forms spontaneously and yet created a new language for the generation of poets to come. Of his works, his long poem of epic dimension, “*Shingel Indu*”¹ which was published in 1938 stands out along with, “*Khamba*

¹ ‘Shingel’ means a flower-used here to match and identity the beauty of ‘Indu’. ‘Indu’ was the name of an orphan girl who fell in love with Gopal, the only son of a nobleman in whose house Indu was adopted. This long poem (1938) is based on an imaginary story, developed against the contemporary social background. It is the love story, of Gopal and Indu, who fall in love at the very first sight. Both of them struggle against family indifferences, social obstacles and personal psychological problems. Each of them suffer the agony of separation for a long time after a short period of innocent but romantic rendezvous. His expressed and unexpressed feelings have been depicted beautifully in various ways by using effective situations and beautiful imageries (E.Dinamani, 1997).

Thoibi Shireng" (Khamba Thoibi Poem, 1940), his magnum opus. His "Khamba Thoibi Sheiring" (1940) is a poem of 39,000 lines, considered to be 'national' epic of the Manipuris written in the *Pena Saisak*² style of folk ballads.

The tragic love story of Khamba and Thoibi is narrated in this poem by Hijam Anganghal. The scene of this tale and the place where it was originally sung is *Moirang*, a place of historical antiquity which lies nearly twenty (20) miles to the west of Imphal city, the capital of Manipur. It is a fascinating, yet mysterious place where legends of love, romance and tragedy of epical proportions were woven into the fabric of transmigration of soul or rebirths on seven occasions. The scribes had frozen the lore into the timeless language of folk songs, manuscripts and inscribed the quintessence into the veins of the continuing generation of the mortals.

The story the poet tells, starts from the love at first sight of the lovers and ends in a happy union in marriage. But the actual folklore begins from the birth of Puremba, Khamba's father, and culminates in the death of Khamba and Thoibi. The hero and heroine are persons said to have flourished hundreds of years ago. Thoibi is the daughter of Moirang Chief's brother. She loves Khamba, a lad poor in worldly riches, but rich in personal beauty, of good descent, great modesty, courage, strength, and agility. Born in the residence of Wangon Ningthou (Thampakyum) and brought up in the residence of the king, Thoibi was described as the peerless beauty, a fearless devotee of love

² *Pena Saisak*: The folktales of Khamba-Thoibi are chanted to the accompaniment of the *pena* or fiddle, in a high-pitched key with a crooning nasal tone. The *Pena-Shakpas* are the professional singers who entertain their patrons and the people by singing the romantic love and heroic deeds of the local gods and goddesses accompanied by *Pena* (the indigenous musical instrument of Manipur),

and independent maiden who subscribed to the ethos of the Moirang pleibian, despite her royal ancestry. She was exiled to Kabaw (somewhere in Burma) for her love of Khamba and exposed to punitive sufferings of all kinds for her single minded attachment to the orphan hero.

Thoibi is a young lady of unsurpassed beauty, and Khamba, having seen her by chance whilst boating on the Loktak Lake, loves her at first sight. But the course of true love never did run smooth. A person named Angom Nongban Kongyamba saw Thoibi's love for Khamba, and wishing to gain her for himself, he used all the means that a powerful connection gave him to crush Khamba. The various perils through which Nongyai Khamba has to pass and the constancy of Thoibi form the burden of this poem. After having won his foot-race, speared his tiger, caught his wild bull, and been tied to the foot of an elephant, Khamba gains Thoibi, who also passes through various troubles. But the end is tragical. Khamba doubts his wife, and, trying her fidelity, she, not knowing who he is, spears him. To this day at the temple in Moirang are preserved the robes of Thoibi.

The legends say that Khamba and Thoibi were the last scions of a god and a goddess of Moirang in their seventh and last incarnation as they appeared on earth as mortal beings. Hari is the supreme god in Anganghal's folk story, *Khamba Thoibi*, which is believed to be based on a semi-historical and semi-legendary event of the 14th century A.D. Khamba who has been regarded an incarnation of a Manipuri deity, utters the name of Hari (Lord Vishnu).

His lone novel *Jahera* (1964) manifests itself at two levels—physical and symbolic. At the physical level, it incorporates the actual

conditions of Manipuri Muslim women and their painful journeys in search of new moorings. They are often the victims of honour persecutions by the powers or religious authority in this case. At the symbolic level, their journeys acquire the nature of a spiritual-psychological and ontological quest through time and space and hence, raise some of these 'honour' issues beyond their historical and topical immediacy.

This novel can be read as a reflection of the existing cultural distance in terms of conjugal relationship between the Meitei Hindus and the Manipuri Muslims (Pangals). The dialectics of this embedding, of this cultural dichotomy and its persistent 'honour' issues has drawn a host of creative and critical minds in its vortex and has exercised the literary imagination of Manipuri writers. This novel can be read as a social document seeped in honour issues, as tales of individual and collective consciousness encapsulating multiple shades of human personality and emotions.

His plays *Thabal Chongbi*³, *Nimai Sanyas*⁴, *Ibemma*⁵ and *Poktabi*⁶ performed by the Manipur Dramatic Union made him a rare genius gifted with great literary skills and imagination. The disruptive,

³ It is a short play by Anganghal written in 1928. It was successfully performed by his theatre group –Yaiskul Nupimacha Dramatic Party which was later on re-named as the Manipur Dramatic Union (M.D.U) on a make-shift stage erected for the purpose in the courtyard of Ngangbam Shyamkishore Singh at Yaiskul. It is said that this theatre group laid the foundation of professional theatre in Manipur. Thabal Chongba is the folk dance which accompanies the Holi festival in Manipur.

⁴ A short play written in 1927.

⁵ Literally means younger sister, madam or lady. It is a social drama of Hijam Anganghal, produced by his *Chitrangada Natya Mandir*.

⁶ It is a social play written by Anganghal where domestic problems are depicted. In this play, he tries to portray the attitude of step-mothers.

disintegrative strings of notions regarding “honour”, the study of customs like *Karo Kari* (honour killing), wulver (bartering of women) are the commonalities that we encounter both in fiction as well as in reality.

In *Jahera*, the manoeuvrings of the religious authority seek to project her as a Pariah figure, as she oscillates between her real identity as an Islamic woman and her reverence for her lover Kunjo's religion. She is seen as one that has defied her own “honour” in loving a Hindu boy. Hijam Anganghal writes as an involved observer. And as such, a tension between the professed and the felt, the conscious and the unconscious is palpably built into his narratives. This is best reflected in the love story he creates between Jahera and Kunjo. Their love story ostensibly serve as a symbol of integration, the conscious bridges between the two communities and, therefore, images the humanistic anxiety of the author. But a literary text is not merely a product of the conscious alone. It is also shaped by a host of unstated desires, acculturation processes, beliefs, [mis] understandings and interests that form the substratum of the unconscious, but, nevertheless, have a bearing on the work. The peculiar pairing of the lovers, perhaps, indicates this aspect of the creative process. The female becomes the unconscious and vicarious site of subjugating the “other”.

In *Jahera*, the violence embedded in ‘honour persecution’ comes out as a deviance that lay beyond the pale of socio-cultural structures of significance. It is seen as the ‘demonic’ other of the normal moral or social order. Embedded in this response is a sense of moral shock and bewilderment as to the intensity and scale of violence, ultimately leading to her death. And so overpowering is this emotional reaction

that most of the times the author emerges as a stunned witness, merely recording the styles of 'honour persecutions' that only catalogue the depths of human perversity. It invariably crystallizes itself around the images of rioting masses, communal killings and arson.

In my dissertation, I have plunged or ventured into the genesis and socio-cultural conditions of Manipuri Muslims, before going further into the novel. The Manipuri Muslims are known in common parlance as "Pangals". Though "Pangals" resonate within the Islamic fraternity, they are different from other Muslims because they have a different history and a unique process of their evolution. They are a naturalized people of Manipur, following Islam.

The first Muslim settlement in Manipur recorded in the Royal Chronicle of Manipur "*Cheitharol Kumbaba*"⁷ was in the year 1606.

⁷ Cheitharol Kumbaba: The Royal/Court Chronicle of the kings of Manipur records events concerning the Kings and the state up until the end of kingship in 1955. It claims to trace the history back to 33A.D. It is an official royal history and its main purpose is to record the events of state and the actions of the kings. In that sense it is (like all historical writing) biased in its selection of material and in the way it records that material. However, on the whole there is no attempt to praise the kings, and infact the recording is very flat and factual. The possibility of a later editing of events by rival successors cannot be excluded, but seems unlikely. There is no attempt to write previous kings out of history. However (with the exception of Garibniwaz) the manner of death of the kings is not given.

The title of the chronicle, *Cheitharon Kumpapa* (Cheitharol Kumbaba), reflects the Meetei manner of counting, and recording. *Chei* means 'a stick', *thapa* (thaba) means 'to place, put down'. Counting in ancient Manipur was done by placing sticks, which represented the base number. *Cheithapa* therefore means placing stick (s) to aid counting. *Kum* means a period of time, and the verb *paba* to read or reckon. (The text actually reads, *Kumpapu*, the final suffix *pu* indicating the object). The title of the chronicle thus implies 'placing of sticks or using a base as a means of reckoning the period of time, the years.'

The Cheitharol Kumbaba (or Cheitharon Kumpapa) is written in *Meetei Mayek*, the archaic Meetei Script. This began to be displaced by the Bengali script from the time of king Garibniwaz, but continued in use for both religious and secular purposes. It was only with the introduction of western education from the end of the nineteenth century that the use of *Meetei Mayek* declined (Manihar, 1996) and became the

They are known as “Pangal” which is a derivation from Bengal (Bangan = Pangan). The first batch of Muslim settlers in Manipur were war prisoners captured by King Khagemba (1597-1652).⁸ They married Manipuri Meitei woman and adopted Manipuri as their mother tongue.

It is said that king Khagemba’s younger brother Sanongba, on account of a misunderstanding with his brother, decided to rise in rebellion against the king. He fled to Cachar (Assam) and raised a big army including a large number of Muslims equipped with firearms. In 1606, Sanongba came at the head of this army and encamped at Bishnupur, about 18 miles to the south-west of Imphal. The rebellion

prerogative of the *maichous* (scribes). Manipuris of the diaspora, trained in Bengali, also introduced Bengali script for the earliest printed books in the Manipuri language (from 1900). *Meitei Mayek* never fell out of use, though the rise of printing meant that all Manipuri material after 1900 came to be produced in the Bengali script, infact Bengali script is a poor medium for writing Manipuri. Not all Bengali letters are used, and some of those which do not correspond exactly to the sounds of spoken Meiteiron. The archaic script (*Meitei Mayek*) is making a recovery today, both in schools and in public signs. The discovery of the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* was done by the palace *maichous* (scribes), who were the official scribes in the *Loisang* or Institute of Scribes (Saroj Nalini Parratt, 2005).

⁸ *Khagemba’s* real name was Ningthou Lanba. The reign name Khagemba means the “Conqueror of the Chinese.” *Khagemba* (1597-1652) was the most illustrious ruler of medieval Manipur whose long reign was a remarkable epoch in the history of the kingdom. The authentic Royal Chronicle, coupled with the contemporary literary works both historical and religious, supplemented by archaeological evidences specially coins have given a comprehensive history of Manipur under the great king. His great father Mungyamba had bequeathed to him a stable and powerful state which was further expanded by him, greater both in size and strength. His father took great care in giving proper training to his son in military warfare, statecraft, religious and literary attainments and diplomacy. He also got trained in horse riding, hiking, archery, sword and open fighting and use of *Arambai*, a weapon of the cavalry. He got instructions in the art of negotiations with foreign power and related diplomatic etiquette and behaviour. When he ascended the throne in 1597 at the age of twenty four, Khagemba was already fully matured and well equipped to preside over the affairs of the state and guide the duties of his people and the empire. He was earlier known as *Sana Hihouhan Poirei Ningthouhanba*. He had two brothers *Chingsomba* and *Sanongba* who aspired to capture the throne at an opportune time. The Chronicle gives interesting account of the military training given to him by his father which may be taken as the standard training which was undergone by a Meitei crown prince.

or rather invasion being on a large scale, the king went in person with a sufficiently strong force to repel the invaders. The king encamped at Thoubal and utilized nearby Khoijuman as his base.

After some fighting, the king won a decisive battle. According to the Royal Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur, "*The Cheitharol Kumbaba*", the king's army captured "30 elephants, 1000 guns, and a colony of 1000 Pangals⁹, including swordsmiths, brass smiths and other skilled men, makers of trumpets and long drums, those who could make brackets, washerman¹⁰, horse grooms, and grooms for elephants (elephant tenders), all these were captured."

Among the prisoners of war, there were many Muslims. "All those pangals who were captured alive were allowed to establish an institute." Another text known as *Nongshamei Puya* also refer to the invasion of Manipur by a combined force of the Kachari (Cachari) and Muslim mercenaries. Sanongba was captured and a large number of invading forces including their leaders were taken prisoners. They were "Phanlei Tao, Maika Tao, Sanaputhi¹¹, Tekka Cha the *Keirungpa*¹² and six renowned men from Ponchengkha were captured."



⁹ Bengal is sometimes referred to as Bangal. Pangal could be a corruption of Bangal. The 'b' sound came in later, and "n" and "l" were used interchangeably. Referred to men from Bengal, likely East Bengal, present-day Bangladesh. Now Pangal stands for Manipuri Muslims.

¹⁰ Washerman (dobi): for dhobi, a Bengali term for washerman.

¹¹ Sanaputhi: for Senapati, Indian term for military commander-in-chief. First time this term is used in the Royal Chronicle (*Cheitharol Kumbaba*).

¹² Keirungpa: Post name. Official in charge and who was responsible for opening state granaries.

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Prince Sanongba who was the root cause of the whole misfired military adventure was taken prisoner but was pardoned by his brother, the King. He died as a dejected man in 1619 A.D. But the impact of the invasion on Manipur was quite profound. The influence of the Muslim civilisation under the imperial Mughals was felt in Manipur. The Muslim prisoners were settled and rehabilitated in Manipur and thus they constituted a useful community in the kingdom. A new office was established for looking after the Muslims. This invasion was a major threat to the independence of Manipur. By defeating the invaders, the invasion turned to Manipur's advantage. By rehabilitation, the erstwhile enemies were turned into useful, patriotic subjects of Manipur.

Cheitharol Kumbaba makes a short reference to a fight against the Mughals on the Gwai (Barak) river in 1615 A.D. The game of polo¹³ also started during this period. In the census of 1881, their population reached 4,881. They attended Lallup¹⁴ service like any

¹³ Polo: (*Sagol Kangjei*). The entry in the Royal Chronicle states that the playing of polo began at this time. This reference here could mean as an organized game sanctioned by the King with particular rules, and not the actual game itself. The very name of the game *Kangjei*, who taken after the legendary king Kang, who reigned long before Khagemba. The pre-historical origin of this game is in line with the Meetei religious beliefs where the *lai* (God) for this game is *Khori Phaba* and also its connection with *Marjing* (god) at the *Lai Haraoba* festival.

¹⁴ Lallup was a feudal service rendered by the adult subject to the king for ten days out of every forty days. This has been sometimes wrongly described as forced labour. The service might be in the form of military duties or developmental or economic work like the construction of road, working in king's estate, etc. And those who rendered lallup service did not pay revenue. Historically speaking, this lallup system was started by king Loyamba in 1110 A.D. This king in his famous edicts known as "Loyamba Shilyen", divided the Manipur valley into six (6) administrative units known as *lup (pana)*. Each *pana (lup)* sent a team of workers who were to work for the state. Each team was called lallup (lallup means war organization; *lal* = war; *lup* = organization). Lallup was originally an organization which was called upon to play a role in the economic life of the country. Thus in the 19th century, lallup had become a socio-political, economic organization. In fact they executed great public works for the benefit of the state.

community in Manipur. They suffered greatly during the Burmese invasion.

During the reign of Chandrakriti Singh¹⁵ (1850-1186), the Muslims chiefly followed “the trades of gardening, carpentry, pottery and a number of them also served as sipoys and nearly all the drummers attached to the Raja’s army are Musalmans,”. There was a *Kaji* (priest) appointed by the king to look after the affairs of the Muslims.

King Khagemba (1597-1652) entitled the Muslims with various surnames/ “sagei”. He gave the names of 31 “sageis” to them. Instead of using the name of the sagei while writing their names, they use their original racial (khandani) title like Shah, Syed, Khan, Sheikh or achieved title like ‘Choudhury’ although these carry no socio-cultural significance for any practical purposes in Manipur. Marriage within the same Sagei is not in vogue. In other words, the Muslim Sageis are exogamous in character.

The Manipuri Muslims or Pangals had developed a new sub-culture of their own which had a spirit of tolerance and co-existence. In regard to dress, diet, mode of habitation, language, lifestyle etc. the Manipuri Muslim culture has become a synthesis of the Islamic culture and the Hindu Meitei culture. This synthesis can be found in

¹⁵ Chandrakriti succeeded his father Gambhir Singh on the throne at the age of two. He was therefore called Nigthem Pishak or child king. Nara Singh was the regent and looked after the kingdom with the assistance of the nobles. Tarang Khomba, a son of Labanya Chandra, aspired after the throne. He was therefore deported to Cachar (Assam). The British learnt ‘hockey on horseback’ from the Manipuris in Chandrakriti’s reign. It is through the British that polo spread from Manipur to all parts of the globe. This was easy because at that time, Britannia rules the waves and in her empire the sun never set. Sir James Johnstone, an eye-witness of the Manipuris playing polo, says that the world’s finest games of polo were played in Manipur.

Jahera's dress and decorum. She was often christened as a "hybrid" by the onlookers. She was labelled as a hybrid because Jahera represents the confluence of Islamic beauty in respect of her sharp features "large round eyes, pointed high nose and long neck" with the beautiful Meitei attire adorned on her.

But the hybridity of Jahera failed to withstand the allegations and accusations made from both sides of the power structures of that society. While her Muslim counterparts were accusing her of being a "Kaffir"¹⁶ for neglecting her Muslim sisters and mothers and "having more affinity with Meitei sisters," Jahera and her mother were thus ex-communicated:

Pangal Leishabi adubudi karigi pangalshingna taanthok-eeba? Kanana khangani, Meitei shanga tou-ee, sha chade, eerudrabashu chak chade haiduna taanthok-ee haibara, pao haiba adunidana (*Jahera*, p. 199)

Free translation is,

Why did the Pangals turn out the Pangal girl? Who knows? It is said that she befriends with the Meiteis, does not eat meat, does not take her meal without taking her bath and therefore she has been turned out. It is the news.

On the other side, the powerful authority of the *Brahma Sabha* resonating among the Meiteis were not in favour of a Muslim girl like Jahera putting chandan mark, worshipping the sacred tulsi plant

¹⁶ Kaffir is an Islamic term, an Arabic word meaning "rejecter", "Unbeliever" or "ingrate". It is similar to the Christian word pagan/heathen or Hebrew word Koffer.

(Basil). In Hijam Anganghal's *Jahera*, the invocation of 'Brinda Sati' can be seen in the light of universalistic dharmic complex from which it is derived. It holds the virtuous Hindu woman as 'ontologically bonded' to the husband. These myths of rigid traditions emphasize that *sati* is not simply a religious ritual but a confluence of religious, political and social ideologies.

The myth of 'sati' has become a heavily contested symbol. Its discourse has been appropriated as a symbol of female subordination and feminist resistance. The myth of 'sati' should be seen in confluence with the Hindu conceptualizations of post-death existence.¹⁷

The older Hindu literature is full of questions about birth, death and after-life and this abundant, male-focussed material on the body and soul and their imagined journeys needs to be brought into a further debate. The myth of 'sati' can be seen as paradigmatic violence against women, sanctioned by the authority. Representations or rather say mis-representations of *sati* can be seen as the object of economic, social and political machinations.

The myth of 'Brinda Sati' that reverberates or resonates frequently in the novel *Jahera* also has a mythological anecdote behind it. 'Brinda Sati' can be also referred to as the tulsi plant (basil) revered in Hindu religion. In the novel, Jahera is shown to have great respect for the tulsi plant. She planted a tulsi plant in her compound and told her mother not to uproot it at any cost, for any purpose.

¹⁷ Shirley Firth, 'Death, dying and bereavement in a Hindu community in Britain', London: SOAS 1994, to be published as *Dying, death and bereavement in a British Hindu Community*, Leuven: Pecters (forthcoming).

There is a story which explains the use of *tulsi* leaves for the dying at *Muktibhavan*¹⁸:

Tulsi! What is the story about Tulsi? I will tell you about the story of Tulsi!

There was a kind of giant we call *rakshasa*, you know? His wife was Brinda, Brinda was a very holy lady (*sati*).

So her husband could never be killed, not by any God. No God could kill him because of that *sati*, Brinda.

He did many bad things and the Gods became fearful of his actions. They prayed to Lord Vishnu, "Please save us from that *rakshasa*." Lord Vishnu said that he would do something. Vishnu made his own face look just like that *rakshasa* and went and slept with his wife, Brinda.

Her *sati* power was finished and so Brinda's husband was killed by Lord Shiva. Brinda heard the news, "How could my husband be dead? It means something is wrong with me." So she cursed the God Vishnu. "You cheated me so I am giving you the punishment that you will become a stone." Now we pray to the saligram, that black type of stone we called saligram.

¹⁸ Muktibhavan is considered a good place to die primarily because it is located in Kashi. But for most people, the Muktibhavan itself has some features which help in the obtaining of *Moksha* (supreme reality, ultimate soul). *Moksha* is the ultimate aim of Indian Philosophy. Indian Philosophy given in *Upanishads* has two main broad features: a) Theory of *Karma* (good deeds and action), b) concept of *soul* (body is perishable, but soul always remains)

But God Vishnu also gave her punishment, "you will be worshipped by the people. Because I slept with you, you have become my wife. So you will become on the earth a tulsi plant." And so Brinda became a tulsi plant.¹⁹

In the novel, Jahera's father is said to be a "Persian Muslim Sepoy" who came to Manipur in service and married her mother, a divorcee and they had two daughters. The Hindu/Muslim antagonism is merely seen as an "aberration" or a madness:

Vibhatana Hindu Musalman haina khaibiramba
karigeno? Aduga ningnabagi maribuna karigi
kakthatpiramdabage! Nangna shemba niyam ashi laali
(*Jahera*, p. 17-18)

Free translation is,

Why the creator has made a division as Hindus and Muslims? And why the line of love and desire is not cut off? The rules you make are wrong.

Ibemcha's moorings in the novel are reflexive of the author's own thought. In it, the author sees communal breakdown as "sin" and a breakdown of the "composite" reality or truth of the Manipuri social past and establishes humanistic or secular ideal as a futuristic alternative to this aberration.

The delineation and discussion of the communal "Hindu/Muslim" issue in the novel *Jahera* invariably involves a pre-

¹⁹ *Dying the Good Death: The Pilgrimage to Die in India's Holy City*, by Christopher Justice (1997).

conceived “othering” and privileging of the secular by the communal, despite the palpable presence of one as imposed or thought of and the other as felt or experienced. Here again, the novel is replete with intercommunal descriptions that have been juxtaposed with an incisive intellectual analysis of the political reality between Kunjo, the protagonist and his friend Jamini:

Hinduga Pangalga ashi yengthinaba taie, Bharatki mafham khudingda ani ashi khatneita haiba ashi karinano mashidana Bharatki maangnaba oievr/Ani ashi tinnaba eeyamak mayararoidara (*Jahera*, p. 24).

Free translation is,

It is heard that Hindus and Muslims have enmity between them. There are news of their quarrel in every part of India, why, what is the reason of their enmity? This will bring ruin to India. Will it not be possible for these two to come to terms?

The communal politics all over the country had fragmented the social fluidity and had created a situation of turbulence and dehumanizing brutalities. This intellectual exchange between the two friends in the beginning of the novel, bereft of emotional–experiential input, reduces the description of Hindu – Muslim antagonistic dichotomy to a mere reportage.

But as the novel proceeds, their mere reportage transforms into harrowing experiences wrought about by the communal divide, the emotional surcharge and arson, “Soidana lakkani, Cheina topta thao,

magumba magi parengnabu chamma ma-ngai keidounige haatlu haikhi/" (*Jahera*, p. 261)

Free translation is, "He will come surely, just strike him with the stick, a fellow like him will cost about a hundred; what will they do, kill him." The conspiracy to kill Kunjo whenever he attempts to meet Jahera was overheard by Jahera and subsequently she tried to save the life of her lover Kunjo.

On closer reading, their unexpressed love relationship tends to be both idealistic and simple. It may be effective at personal level but glosses over the power equations or the politics that was influencing communal relations at the time and of which they were otherwise ironically aware. While communal politics couched in the language of feud provided the initial impetus for violence, it was the conspiracy of Fatima and Tomba Mian, and the subsequent dislocation of Ibemcha by burning her house that had snowballed it into a dehumanizing orgy:

Yum mei thaba ashi "Jaheragi maramdagi dushmanna thabani" haina Ibemchana pramaan pi (*Jahera*, p. 187)

Free translation is,

Ibemcha, proved before the enquiry that her house was set on fire out of enmity for her relation with Jahera.

The communal rupture, once created, was exploited further by the constant play of power-politics by authorities from both angles:

Pangal nupida chandan thinba tambire haiduna amana kok hairuraga Brahma sabhana maang-ee haibiraklabadi

echedi maangnge-do/Brahmasabha haiba adubu nangbu
tadrane? (*Jahera*, p. 81)

Free translation is,

If any one of them just reports to the Brahma Sabha that
a Muslim girl has been taught how to put chandan mark
and if the Brahma Sabha has issued an order of
excommunication to me I will be nowhere. Don't you hear
there is a thing called Brahma Sabha?

Ibemcha's words echoed the conflating of religion with politics,
the pervasive influence and control of the whole ideology of the state
of Manipur in conformity with its overarching status of a 'Vaishnavite'
Hindu state at that time.

Even the name of the male protagonist "Kunjabihari" symbolizes
the name of the Hindu God, Lord Krishna:

Hindu lai (god) Krishna haibado aduna magi ebemma
aduga bonda koiduna shaannaba, shannafam adubu
kunja kaou-ee, shannababu bihar haiba, kunjada
shannei haibagi lai adugi maming Kunjabihari kaou-ye
ashi oiere (*Jahera*, p. 108)

Free translation is,

The Hindu God Krishna used to play with his beloved in
the forest groves known as Kunj, Bihar means play. As he
plays in the Kunj the name of the God is known as
Kunjabihari.

The novel is replete with “truth/fact” of the historical space surrounding the socio-religious reform movements in Manipur at that time which becomes the function of the ideological stance inherent in a particular historiographic construction.

As such, in the socio-religious history of Manipur the zenith of Gauriya Vaishnavite glory had been achieved during the reign of King Bhagyachandra²⁰ who constructed the sacred image of Govindajee out of a tree from Kaina hill in 1780 A.D. And through a vision in his dream he composed the “Ras Leela”²¹, which is the highest spiritual expression of Lord Krishna worship in dance form in the land of the aesthetic Meeteis.

The Manipuris worshipped god through dance and music in their traditional religion. When the spirit of Vaishnavism pervaded the whole Hindu Community of the kingdom specially the king, it was revealed in his dream, the composition of the Ras Leela. His daughter, Princess Bhimbati, popularly known as Shija Laioibi helped him in composing the dance which was also performed by her in a devotional dance form. King Bhagyachandra composed three “ras” forms and dedicated to Lord Govindajee; they were Kunjaras, Maharas and

²⁰ King Bhagyachandra (1748-1799): Bhagyachandra's real name was Nighthou Ching-Thang Khomba. He was a Manipuri Monarch of the eighteenth (18th) century. The inventor of the *Ras Leela* dance, he is a legendary figure in Manipur, and much of his actions as king had been mythologized. He is also credited with spreading *Vaishnavism* in Manipur after his grandfather *Pamheiba* (Garibniwaz) made Hinduism the official religion and for creating a unified Manipur.

²¹ Ras Leela: Vaishnavism expressed itself in the new very important ritual dance-drama, the “Ras Leela”, a creation of the Meiteis conceived by King Bhagyachandra of Manipur who was himself a saintly devotee of Lord Shri Krishna. This king, inspired by a religious dream, made a statue of Lord Krishna, cut from a jackfruit tree, to be placed in a new palace temple called Manipur Govindaji Temple. In the Mandop (arena) attached to this temple, centering around the statue, with his own daughter playing the part of Krishna's beloved Radha, the first “Ras Leela” was performed; and it has now become the heritage of Meiteis who perform it yearly.

Basanta ras. Ras forms the heart of the Manipuri classical dance form which is a combination of the traditional Meitei dance forms and Vaishnavite theme.

Those females who married the Europeans, who came to serve in Manipur, were regarded to be “untouchables by the Meiteis professing Gauriya²² faith” (Anganghal, 1964). This engagement with history and the subsequent process of Sanskritization in Manipur cuts across time and space, the personal and the impersonal, fact and fiction, to narrate a story in which “social ostracism” forms an important watershed.

It divides the narrative into two dichotomous segments, essential to author’s conception and representation of the Hinduised Manipur evoking and emphasizing on the “society of Gauriya faith” and that of the religious syncretism in the rural socio-cultural space which was vitiated by forces that were essentially alien to its basic ethos, having symbiotic local variations:

Eigidi tengbangdaba leite, tengbangnadaba mafhamda
amangba thok-ee/Tengbangnaba mafhamda khongthang
khuding mee-yoiebana nongma nongmagi chaokhatpa
mingthonbu fanglak-ee/Tengbangnabana nungsinei,
nungsinaraga amatta oie, amatta oieranga afhaba oie/
(*Jahera*, p. 56).

Free translation is,

²² The observation of the Hindu caste requirements.

We are interdependent and where there is no such interdependence we suffer. In those places where there is interdependence mankind is developing day by day. Interdependence brings love to each other and love brings oneness and oneness brings good to us.

This authorial revelation indicates that the “symbiotic” lives of the people in the novel were kept as closely guarded emotive testimony of the religiously syncretic state of Manipur. However, the cataloguing of atrocities against the helpless Meitei woman Ibemcha and her Muslim friend Jahera for their female bonding and friendship imparts the narrative with a sense of tortuous immediacy. Since time immemorial, women have drawn upon the metaphor of sisterhood and female bonding to express the quality of their relations with one another and to endure and resist oppression. Female bonding has helped women like Jahera and Ibemcha to break out of their walls of silence and has permitted them to forge a common language with which to express their hostility to the surreptitious repressive structures of their society, to the constraints of their lives.

The rhetoric of female bonding in the novel is the direct heir to the complicated and contradictory myth of separate spheres for Hindus and Muslims. As a myth in its own right, female bonding has proclaimed the unity of women on the basis of radically different experiences and in the name of feelings that mask the realities of power and authority.

The main narrative with interpolations from the authorial intrusions, and authorial voice enables the reader to strike a balance between the story of Jahera’s unfulfilled love-life and her constant

struggle against the honour persecutions perpetrated by the powers. The poignant tale of Jahera's hardships and her subsequent struggle with power and authority seems to veer the narrative towards an emotive surcharge.

The dispassionate cruel reality faced by her mother, Tombi Bibi and daughter, Jahera, bereft of any help constitutes the psychological build-up of tension rooted in fear, insecurity and uncertainty as to their future and the concretization of these fears in and around Amir's family and the "Inkhol"²³ compound, in the form of arson, harsh words from Fatima and her husband, Munshi and their subsequent estrangement and displacement from its surroundings. The first time the word "honour" appeared in the novel was when there was a quarrel between the Munshi, Fatima's husband and Tombi Bibi, Jahera's mother:

Nidrabadi karigino namduna lougera, namai pandra, hek pithokheide, karigi nachin thirak-ee, chowre nupisidi/
(*Jahera*, p. 115).

Free translation is,

If you do not beg, are you going to take them forcibly.
Don't you have any honour? Why don't you hand over?
Why do you brag? You are indeed too big a woman.

The author shows a strong propensity to counter the debilitating effects of "honour persecutions" perpetrated towards the fairer sex, executed in subtle manners in the novel *Jahera*. The people

²³ Homestead compound.

in power or authority unleashed their dialogues and dialectics about their preconceived notions about Hindu-Muslim differences which does not manifest themselves monochromatically, but in various shades across the extremes of amity and enmity. The issue of “honour” is pervasive in the novel:

Paangdare haiba khanduna tollabi lukrabi eibu nipa maana yakhong thumna panningba hainingbamakhei haiduna cheiba, thina haiba madutashu nattana yeige eesha shagal paiduna chinge toubamashi musalmangi eemal-la! Chahicha kaya Bharat ashigi mapu Oierakpa Mahomedangi karamba thounano? Paangdare haiba khangna lakchaba ashibu hounaba emaandarshingi karamba emaan ama leinabage? Hairaga akiba leitana tumin leire! (*Jahera*, p. 117)

Free translation is,

Knowing the fact that I am a poor destitute and helpless widow he rebuked me to the entire satisfaction of his ego, and not only that he tried to beat me pulling this side of my arms. Is it an act of honour for a Muslim? What kind of bravery is this for the Muslims who had been the masters of India for so many centuries? Is there any honour for any man of honour to treat me with all contempt knowing the fact that, I am a helpless poor destitute?

The tidings of Jahera's mother, Tombi Bibi to the Amir about her scuffle with Munshi, Fatima's husband shows the helplessness of

both the mother and daughter. The “honour” issue is also enmeshed with the gore and galore of the once powerful “Mughal” empire that ruled India for many centuries. The nostalgic reference to the Mughal glory brings out the utopian propensity of Tombi Bibi, a feature or thought she shares with her other Muslim counterparts.

The honour persecutions in the novel retain an elusive ambiguity that defies definitive delineation. Jahera bled to death at the hands of her lover Kunjo rather than surrender:

Ibungo eibu chatlo haibiyu eibu thadokpiyu, nakhong hamduma seba toubadi, ei ngamjaroi, nangidamak maangkro hairaga maangjakhrage, Ibungo eibu thadokpiyu/Ngammoi, ei ngammoi/..... Ibungo, Ei chatlage, Ei chatcharage, ei ngammaroi/ (*Jahera*, p. 276).

Free translation is,

*Ibungo*²⁴, my beloved, please tell me to go. Please release me. I will not be able to serve you as your wife. I will not be able, let me die for you if you ask me to do so. Ibungo, please release me. Not possible, I will not be able. Ibungo, may I go? Please allow me to go. I am unable to bear it any more.

She embraced death rather than make her lover fall a prey of “social ostracism” (system of “Mangba”) enforced by the orthodox *Brahma Sabha* of the Majaraja of Manipur. On one hand was the stringent orthodoxy of the *Brahma Sabha* and on the other hand, was

²⁴ Younger brother, Sir, Lord.

the fear of ex-communication by their Muslim community which had already branded Jahera as *Kaffir* (unbeliever).

The politics and representation of “honour” reverberating throughout the novel suggests the presence of a dormant yet potentially violent tension lurking below the social surface. The split or rupture of the two religions as “faith and ideology” had very subtly disturbed the moral credential of the heterogeneous Manipuri living. Its various repercussions are projected through the worshipping of *Tulsi* plant (basil) by Jahera taking it to be “something like a deity, said to be a manifestation of *Brinda Sati*,” her fondness for applying chandan mark and her reverence for her clandestine lover’s religion.

Whereas “religion as faith” gave fluidity to Jahera’s self, making it non-monolithic and plural, “religion as ideology” made Fatima, Tomba Mian and Munshi declare Jahera as *Kaffir*, thus bringing politics of language (a form of communal identifier) to bear upon the differences between Hinduism (Brahma Sabha) and Islam and souring the seeds of separation and suspicion.

The female protagonist, Jahera (the “Radiant” one) served as a scapegoat in the name of “honour”. Through the enactment of this incident of Jahera’s death, the writer suggests a continuation of the platonic love born, reborn and becoming transcendental in the end. This act suggests the metaphorical culmination of the palpable to the sublime.

In the Islamic doctrinal sense, the term “*Kaffir*” refers to a person who does not recognize God (Allah) or the prophethood of Muhammad (i.e., any non-muslim) or who hides, denies, or covers the

truth, Jahera is referred to as a *Kaffir* in the novel. In cultural terms, it is seen as a derogatory term used to describe an unbeliever, non-Muslims, apostate from Islam and even between Muslims of different sects. It is usually translated in English as “infidel” or “unbeliever”.

Kaffir has also been used historically to identify the followers of non-denominational religions or local traditions. A few years ago, the words “kaffir/Kuffar/Kafiroon” were often heard in Islamic talks, lectures and from there carried over to coffee table discussions. However, more recently the use of this term has evaporated off the Da’wah²⁵ scene and replaced with more moderate terms with similar meanings, non-Muslim, non-believer or even brothers in humanity.

It is a loaded terminology. Sometimes it is not really an offensive word, referring to non-Muslims, disbelievers and those who reject the *deen al-Haqq*²⁶ (Islam), but here in the context of this novel, Jahera is deemed as a “*Kaffir*” in the negative, derogatory terminology. During the period of Prophet, he observed that the terms *Kaffir*, *Mushrik*²⁷, etc. were used but never in a derogatory way to offend the people, rather they were used to describe the beliefs of people.

The reverberating or recurrent reference of the authority of *Brahmasabha* in the novel *Jahera* gives us an incisive discourse of

²⁵ To invite somebody to understand one’s religion.

²⁶ True religion

²⁷ It is the Islamic concept of the sin of *Polytheism* specifically, but in a more general way it refers to worshipping other than *Allah*, associating partners with *Him*, giving *His* characteristics to other than *Him*, or not believing in *His* characteristics. Within Islam, *Mushrik* is not a forgivable sin, and Muslims consider that anyone who dies subject to this sin will never enter paradise. It is the vice that is opposed to the virtue of *Tawhid*, literally ‘declaring (that which is) one’, often translated into the English term monotheism.

this religious authority, its impositions and its repercussions. *Brahmasabha*, the highest authority on religious affairs was set up during the reign of King Bhagyachandra (1759-1798), the grandson of Garibniwaz²⁸, who adopted Gauriya Vaishnavism, and a book known as *Wayen Lairik* containing all the rules and regulations was composed to be observed by an orthodox Meitei Hindus. The *Wayen Lairik* of Bhagyachandra was enlarged and enforced under the title of "Bebastharnab".

During the reign of King Churachand (1891-1941), the constructed time period when this novel *Jahera* was said to take place was "at the background of King's rule in Manipur in 1930", the *Brahmasabha* which held the rein of religious administration in Manipur had more than 100 posts. During the reign of king Churachand, *Brahmasabha*-the highest authority in religious affairs took up a number of oppressive measures in the name of Hindu orthodoxy. They used to ostracise a family or a whole village as unclean. And only when the ostracised people paid a particular sum of money, they could be purified and readmitted to the Hindu fold.

If the ostracism was ordered by the king, the victim had to pay Rs. 500; if ordered by the Brahma Sabha, 83 rupees 3 annas and 3

²⁸ Garibniwaz: Meidingu Pamheiba (1690-1751) was the real name of Garibniwaz. He was an emperor in Manipur in the early 18th century. After conversion to Hinduism, he made it the official religion of Manipur in 1717. During the early 1700s, Hindu missionaries from *Sylhet* (Bangladesh) arrived in Manipur to spread *Gauriya Vaishnavism*. They were led by Shantidas Goswami and his associate Guru Gopal Das who succeeded in converting the King from the old Meitei religion to Vaishnavism in 1710. Later during his reign, Pamheiba (Garibniwaz) made Hinduism the official religion, and converted nearly all the Meitei people to Hinduism. He converted many *Meitei shrines* into *Hindu mandirs* and fought with the traditional clergy for religious power. The day he burned a large number of Meitei religious scripts, collectively known as *Puya* in 1729, is known as "*Puya Meithaba*" in Manipur.

paisa; and if ordered by an official, Rs. 50 for readmission into the Hindu society. This was known as the "Mangba-Sengba "(clean and unclean/pollution and restitution/ex-communication and revocation) controversy. Hundreds and thousands of poor people suffered from this inhuman action of the Brahmasabha the political muscle of the Brahmans.

As such, during the reign of Chandrakriti and Churachand, Hindu orthodoxy in Manipur was so strict that lunatics, hillmen, Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) and Yaithibis (a group of Meeteis who had not adopted Hinduism) were considered as unclean and thus seen as an outcaste.

Meitei Pangals or Manipuri Muslims had been the historical outcome of Meitei-ization. The names of their clan, or family titles are given by different kings of Manipur basing on their professions or occasions whichever suitable to their nomenclature of clans by the ruling kings of Manipur. The culture of Meitei Pangal community is a queer texture of Islamic philosophy of life and the best of Manipuri ways of living. The soil of this culture is Manipuri and the life that throbes in the plant of this culture is Islam. In Manipur, the Hindu-Muslim relationship is the nexus, the confluence, the convergence, the union-that is the beauty of the religious ideology of Manipur.

Literature signifies a relationship between multiples – language and narration, cultural constructs, socio-political environments, histories of structure, resistance, suffering and issues of patronage that have now shifted to readerships and market forces. Creativity has a collaborative relationship with critical theory even though the collaboration is situated on the double metaphor of contestatoin

(resistant to each other) and decipherment (attempt to decode the meaning). Contestation creates meaning and decipherment works to understand the processes that produced this meaning, which is to be seen as an interpretation of the nature of reality. In Hijam Anganghal's *Jahera*, we see- why is it necessary to unfold the meaning of a text? Why do we wish to evaluate it in aesthetic terms? The complex relationship between meaning (contestation) and process (decipherment) is outward-directed when the text is placed in the larger world simultaneously occupying the realms of pleasure, ideas and pedagogy.

In Hijam Anganghal's *Jahera*, there is also the recurrent image of the "Brinda Sati". The use of this myth is a cultural signifier and goes beyond mere intertextuality. Its use cannot be neutral. Is this use an isolated gesture in order to present and project a national image such as the image of "Kali" or "Sati"? Myths inhabit the national consciousness, find a reflection in most art forms and have an immense capacity for being retold and rewritten. They also construct the ideas of masculinity and femininity. These ideas are not eternal, given norms. They are elaborated, institutionalized and made to seem eternal, to justify the power and authority which men enjoyed at the expense of women. This power and authority exists at several levels: the economic, the sexual, the social and the psychic.

In the novel *Jahera*, Anganghal tried to clarify the confusion in the mind of Kunjabihari by staging a play on Chandidasa with his religious problems. The mental trauma and perplexity had been showed to some extent. But the two lovers standing for humanity are defeated by the repressive society with its religious fanaticism. Anganghal was interested in social themes and concerned with

contemporary problems. "Outcaste," an outcome of caste-distinction or religious indifferences, was one of the major problems of those days in Manipur. In *Jahera*, he deals with this social reality in a vivid manner. Anganghal deals with the theme of "love" in almost all his works. He is regarded, therefore, as an idealist who believes in Gandhi's syncretic humanistic ideals (E. Dinamani, 1997).

Anganghal's depiction of the stratification in society and its internal contradictions is more in the spirit of a reformer than that of a cynic. He also delineates the vortex of Hindu-Muslim dichotomy and presents them as an integral element of India's historical reality. It is not religion per se but the politics of repressive authorities and religious fanaticism that has created the split between the two communities and has transmuted or traumatised their identities. And an unremitting hostility is always imposed upon woman who had transgressed religious boundary lines and prescribed codes of "honour" by persecuting them in the name of honour or by excommunicating them as a pariah figure as seen in the novel *Jahera*.

CHAPTER 3

THE UNRAVELLING OF MUKHTAR MAI'S 'TRUTH': REPRESENTATION IN REALITY (PAKISTAN)

Her life is a revolving dream
Of languid and sequestered ease;
Her girdles and her fillets gleam
Like changing fires on sunset seas;

Her raiment is like morning mist,
Shot opal, gold and amethyst.
From thieving light of eyes impure,
From coveting sun or wind's caress,

Her days are granded and secure
Behind her carven lattices:
Like jewels in a turbaned crest,
Like secrets in a lover's breast.'

But though no hand unsanctioned dares

Unveils the mysteries of her grace
Time lifts the curtains unawares,
And sorrow looks into her face...'

Who shall prevent the subtle years,
Or shield a woman's eyes from tears?

Sarojini Naidu¹

This poem "The Pardah Nashin" appears in Sarojini Naidu's (1879-1949), first book, *The Golden Threshold* (1905). It begins in an exotic way, but shades off into sadness, and is one of her better poems.

¹ Sarojini Naidu, 'The Pardha Nashin' in her first book *The Golden Threshold* (1905), with an introduction by Arthur Symond. New York: The John Lane Company, London: W. Heinemann, 1916 (1905).

The very concluding lines, "...though no hand
unsanctioned dares
Unveils, the mysteries of her grace
Time lifts the curtains unawares
And sorrow looks into her face...'

Who shall prevent the subtle years
Or shield a woman's eyes from tears?"

impinge on Mukhtar Mai's grotesque past and the destructive intensity of the actual violence that had swept away the props of her own existence.

The connotative potentials reverberating through the naturalistic term "mysteries of her grace" strike an ominous keynote. It suggests the presence of a dormant yet potentially violent tension lurking below the interior of Pakistan's rural social set-up.

The violence that had defied the limits of sacrificial or legal discourses was now drowned in the absurdity of her situation:

Amid the longings for death rose anger. It planted a seed,
"I felt no shame. I had done nothing wrong. I felt angry."

As the anger grew, defiance began to flicker under the dark moth wings suffocating her heart, "I want to fight them," Mukhtar declared to her family. The men folk refused.

"If you go to the police I will commit suicide," said Hazoor Bakhsh, voice high, eyes bulging.

"Go ahead," Mukhtar replied. "It's a pity you didn't kill yourself when they were raping me."

Mukhtaran Bibi, a Pakistani woman of the peasant Tatla clan of Gujjars, descendants of buffalo herders from the northern Punjab, living in the village of Meerwala, Southern Punjab, raised in poverty and illiteracy, became an ardent feminist by responding to the violence and gender apartheid directed at her and other women with an insistence on justice and education.

Her endeavours to raise and uplift the conditions of underprivileged women in rural Pakistan are ceaseless. She has channelised her "defiance" in a positive pathway for the underprivileged and abused women of rural Pakistan by expanding her girls' primary school, establishing a high school, setting up a health centre and welfare centre for women, in addition to giving succour to those abused and showing them the way to fight.

She has now evolved into a real, iconic hero and a powerful symbol of women's rights travelling the world speaking out in monosyllabic whispers for women subjected to violence, barbarity and corrupted codes of "honour". Her story is not a fabrication of the fictional world streaming out of the precincts of the author's imaginative, creative juices. Rather, it is a sordid, inhumane tale of reality and the agonizing cries of a helpless woman screaming, "Please for God's sake, let me go. I have brought the Quran with me, so please forgive me."

The stark reality of her life touches our emotional chords, generating pathos. *In the Name of Honour* (2006) written by Marie Thérèse Cuny and translated from French into English by Linda

Coverdale, transformed Mukhtar Mai's (who speaks only Saraiki²) emotions, thoughts and impressions in the rousing and moving account of the enormity of violence unleashed first by the gang rape on the night of June 22, 2002 and then by the subsequent overturning of the judicial system, into a memoir.

There is a common saying in rural Sindh, "A daughter of the house is revered as the Qur'an seven times over".

In a society full of stark contradictions between preachings and practice, only monstrous exaggerations could be used to veil the actual heinous attitudes. In the end, it turns out that what is truly revered is neither the wretched daughter of the house nor the Qur'an, but only brute force.

Mukhtar Mai is no doubt a victim of many injustices: the chattelisation of women by their families in rural areas, handed over by her own family to the men of an enemy clan (here Mastoi clan of

² (During the Bhutto era) The Saraiki-speaking area of the vast region, loosely termed as Punjab, began to show signs of awareness of a separate cultural and linguistic identity. It is a great paradox of Pakistan's linguistic priorities that Saraiki, which was never given even a regional status, is the language of the largest section of the peoples of Pakistan. Mainly concentrated in Bhawalpur, Multan and Khairpur divisions, Saraiki – speaking people branch out and penetrate deeply into all regions of Pakistan. In Sindh, Baluchistan and the Frontier province, there are solid blocks as well as scattered areas of Saraiki speaking people.

If the number of people speaking a language were the criterion, Saraiki could well qualify to be the national language of Pakistan. Yet many Punjabis strongly resent acknowledging it as a separate language and insist on defining it as a dialect of Punjabi. However, it can be observed that, despite its kinship with both Punjabi and Sindhi, (many of its phonemes are common only with Sindhi) Saraiki is distinct from both and is a complete language in its own right.

Saraiki people have a distinct ethics and ethos. Saraiki culture is distinct from Pakistani Punjabi culture, for it is free of flamboyance. It has a quiet inner resilience. For a long time, there existed an incipient self-awareness among the Saraiki people.

Baloch, descendants of warriors and cattle-thieves from Central Asia) to atone for her brother's sin, "an offence for which there was never any proof", in a perpetuation of the old tribal traditions of "*vani*"³ and "*watta-satta*"⁴; manipulated by others pushing their own agendas and personal vendetta. Women commodified in much of rural Pakistan as pawns for trade in markets of arbitrary concepts of "honour" and retribution, are frequently made to bear punishments on behalf of accused male relatives.

Under tribal practices of *vani* and *swara*, even baby girls have been betrothed to a relative of the man murdered by their fathers, to save their murderous fathers from prison. Women are chattel especially in resolving feuds between men:

no drums beat for these brides;
there is no wedding dress,
no mendhi,
no procession, no festivity.
For a *vani* bride, her wedding is a funeral.

(Pakistani Activist)

Atonement. Penance. Reparation. But the tribes call it 'settlement', 'compromise', 'compensation' (Bronwyn Curran, 2008).

In the name of the menfolks of the family, in the name of traditions, young girls in Pakistan's rural backwaters are given away as sacrificial brides to the enemies of their families, to save their own

³ The custom of giving away a girl as a drudge bride to compensate for the crime of her father, uncle or brother and, save the male relative from jail or death sentence.

⁴ Exchange marriage (one family gives a bride away to another family and receives a bride from that family in exchange).

menfolk from jail or the gallows. The marriage is a guise for a lifetime of perpetual bondage.

The girls are given away wearing their ordinary clothes, no bridal makeup, no jewellery, no dowry, no drumbeating. This cruel centuries old custom is known as *Vani* or *Swara*. *Vani* loosely translates as 'blood marriage', from the Pashto *vannay* for blood, drawing a vague reference to its hallowed effect of staving off a blood feud down generations. The custom condemns girls into virtual slavery; they become the vassal of the wronged family's perpetual revenge, being betrothed into a family wronged by one of their menfolk. Thus, in rural Pakistan, a man's womenfolk are his property. It is usually the jirgas and panchayats that broker the cruel *vani* and *swara* pacts.⁵

Here, the marriage *nikah* ceremonies are performed orally, in the '*Sharai nikah*'⁶ tradition and no certificates are issued. The Peshawar High Court in November 2000 declared *Swara* unlawful. The "honour persecutions" of the women in Pakistan manifest in the way that young girls are sacrificed at the altar of their family or community "honour" and packed off to alien households, where they live as virtual slaves.

Vani and *Swara* are barbaric traditions seeped in tribal concepts of revenge carried down generations, blood feuds, arranged marriage, collective punishment, and the value of women as chattel

⁵ Amnesty International, 'Child Marriages' report in *Stop Violence Against Women campaign*: "These decisions are often made by a jirga or panchayat who are a council of elders from the community who convene an informal court to decide methods for resolving disputes".

⁶ Oral Marriage, without certificate.

for enacting transactions in justice. The fate of the Vani bride is to bear a lifetime of recriminations and abuse from vengeful victim's relatives. A vani bride is betrothed into drudgery and slavery. Yet the cruel custom has its defendants even today.

Hina Jilani, lawyer and Human Rights activist says that, "The right to life of women in Pakistan is conditional on their obeying social norms and traditions." During the year 2002 in Pakistan, it is estimated that 245 women and 137 men were killed in the name of *Karo-Kari* ("black" man and "black" woman) in Sindh. These killings target women and men who choose to have relationships outside of their family's tribal affiliation and/or religious community.

Human Rights Watch defines "honour killings" as follows:

Honour crimes are acts of violence, usually murder, committed by male family members against female family members, who are held to have brought dishonour upon the family. A woman can be targeted by (individuals within) her family for a variety of reasons, including: refusing to enter into an *arranged* marriage, being the victim of a *sexual assault*, seeking a divorce-even from an *abusive* husband - or (allegedly) committing *adultery*. The mere perception that a woman has behaved in a way that "dishonours" her family is sufficient to trigger an attack on her life.

While others accept it as their destiny in Pakistan, Mukhtar Mai decided to fight back her rapists. Mukhtar Mai was gang-raped by the members of the influential Mastoi tribe on June 22, 2002, when Mai's

12-year- old brother, Shakur was seen together with a girl (Salma) of the Mastoi tribe. In this ultra-conservative corner of the Indus plains, this is enough for her family to cry rape, “Raised eyebrows countered that the pair were illicit lovers”.

To further humiliate Mukhtar Mai, she was paraded half-naked before hundreds of onlookers. Mukhtaran Bibi fought for her rights and the accused were later arrested. Mukhtar in Arabic means “someone invested with power and authority”. A lesser known meaning is “the chosen, the selected.” Mukhtar had grown into her name. She says, “My slogan is to end oppression through education.” Mukhtar Mai’s bravery made her a cause celebre. Time Magazine (Asia) profiled her as one of “Asia’s Heroes”. The book *In the Name of Honour* (2006) written by Marie Thérèse Cuny in French and translated by Linda Coverdale, tells us about the arduous journey of this Pakistani peasant woman, Mukhtar Mai, in her own words and is nothing but an accomplishment in itself.

Mukhtaran Bibi, as she was earlier called till the ghastly day in June 22, 2002, lived as a 30- year-old divorcee with her parents and brothers in the village of Meerwala in Pakistan’s Punjab. A gujjar by caste, Mukhtar was illiterate like most women in the village which had been dominated by Mastois. However, ever willing to learn, Mukhtar learnt the Koran by heart and thus could earn a livelihood by teaching the children in her village.

But in Bronwyn Curran’s book *Into the Mirror: The Untold Story of Mukhtar Mai* (2008) she wrote that the cross-examiners’ targeted press claims that Mukhtar was a “Hafiz”, a person who knows and recites the Qur’an off by heart. Hafiz are revered figures in Muslim

society. Illiteracy has proven no barrier to such endeavours. Many Hafiz cannot read or write their own language, but they can commit the Arabic verses of the Qur'an to memory. Mukhtar admitted that in fact she could not recite the Qur'an from memory, and therefore was not a Hafiz, "I am not Hafiz – Qur'an, but I read Nazira⁷ Qur'an (by sight)," she stated.

Life took a miserable turn when Mukhtar's brother Shakur was allegedly put in police custody, accused of sexual misconduct with Salma Mastoi, a woman from the more influential Mastoi tribe. The guilt or innocence of the Mastoi woman or of Shakur remained unclear.

However, a meeting of the village council was called and Mukhtaran was made to take responsibility for her brother's deeds and was ordered to be gang raped by four men from the Mastoi tribe, one of them was a member of the *Jirga*⁸. When she protested, reports indicate that her pleas were ignored and she was told that all the women of the family would be "spoilt" if she resisted the Jirga's decisions.

However, instead of accepting an apology, the powerful Mastois decided to punish Mukhtaran's family by gang-raping the allegedly accuser's sister. The verdict of the jirga was the word of justice and governed by fear, no-one had the courage to stand up to this decision that day.

⁷ Nazira Qur'an: a person who recites the Koran by sight, not by memory as a Hafiz does.

⁸ Jirga: A village council in rural Pakistan.

Thus began the tale of unimaginable suffering and steadfast courage that this illiterate woman decides to show and thus change the crooked lines of her fate. While many women suffer an ill-fate at the hands of a tribal jirga, Mukhtaran was able to find justice when her story leaked to the media. The uproar across Pakistan came with an intensity that made her case impossible for officials to overlook.

Her case was taken up by the non-governmental Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and the perpetrators were tried and convicted in anti-terrorism courts. Death sentences were handed down to those found guilty. Appeals to their death sentences are believed to be pending before the higher Judiciary. Two years after the gang rape, two men of the Mastoi tribe were sentenced to imprisonment for sodomising Shakur, Mukhtar's brother.

Women have been used as a means for settling disputes, establishing ties and paying off old debts within the alternative justice system. While the Jirga or panchayat system is not endorsed under the Constitution of Pakistan as a formal mechanism for serving justice, it has been legitimized by the lack of action taken against its existence.

Jirgas have assumed quasi-judicial functions and passed "judgements" which have predominantly violated girls' and women's rights. They are being killed for supposed infringements of their families' or community's "honour", to women being punitively raped and to their being forcibly married to settle disputes.

Amnesty International welcomes a ban on trials by Jirgas, which act as the extra-judicial tribunals in rural Pakistan, issued by

the High Court of Sindh Province on 23 April, 2004. The High court has directed that contravention of the ban would be prosecuted as contempt of court which is punishable with imprisonment. The Sindh High Court announced the ban on trials by Jirga during the hearing of a petition brought by a couple who had married of their own free will. They had been declared "Karo-Kari" (literally 'black man' and 'black woman' where 'blackness' denotes their having brought shame on their family or community) by their tribe and feared that a Jirga would decide that they should be killed on grounds of "honour".

The couple asked the High Court to restrain the leaders of their community from holding trial by Jirga and using force against them. The High Court declared trials by Jirga unlawful and in breach of provisions of the Constitution and the law. It observed that police were obliged to take action to prevent the holding of Jirgas.

Over 600 women across Pakistan reportedly became victims of "honour persecutions" in 2003 with hundreds more cases presumed to have taken place without being reported. In many of these cases, jirgas instigated these persecutions.

In the past, local officials are also known to have encouraged and even participated in jirgas. The belief is widespread that jirgas are quicker, cheaper and more reliable than regular court trials. A ban on trial by jirga must therefore be accompanied by a strengthening of the criminal justice system so that the resort to jirgas to settle disputes ceases to be seen as a viable alternative.

The significance of female enslavement (the harem, the veil, polygamy) help obscure and legitimize sexual and cultural repression of women in Pakistan, their non-person status and the sexual double

standard. The reality that we encounter is that colonial or home-grown, externally imposed or locally generated, compelled by misinterpretations of Qur'anic injunctions and *Shari'a*⁹ rulings or the erratic interpretations of local *ulama*¹⁰, 'Muslim woman', her sexuality and her moral conduct, has remained a central preoccupation of Muslim men over many centuries. This preoccupation has been translated into institutions, polices, legal practices, and personal

⁹ *Shari'a*: It is the body of Islamic religious law. The term means "way" or "path to the water source" it is the legal framework within which the public and private aspects of life are regulated for those living in a legal system based on *Islamic principles of jurisprudence* and for muslims living outside the domain. *Shari'a* deals with many aspects of day-to-day life, including politics, economics, banking, business, contracts, family, sexuality, hygiene and social issues. *Shari'a* is more of a system of how law ought to serve humanity, a consensus of the unified spirit, based on the *Qur'an* (the religious text of Islam), *Ijma* (consensus), *Qiyas* (reasoning by analogy) and centuries of debate and interpretation. The *Shari'a* consists of two sets of rules. The first set of rules has a religious character and consists of a classification of human behaviour into 5 categories: obligatory, recommended, indifferent, reprehensible and forbidden. These categories are related to reward and punishment in the Hereafter (life after death as believed in Islam). The other set of rules governs the relations between human beings and consists of rules dealing with the legal effects of juridical acts and transactions, i.e., the rights and duties of people with regard to one another. The *Shari'a* gives the caliph and judges the discretionary power to inflict punishment on those who have committed sinful acts. The penalties they may impose vary, according to the gravity of the act and the social status of the defendant, from reprimand to death. This discretionary power is called *ta'zir*. Beside this general power of the authorities to mete out punishment, the *shari'a* knows a number of more precisely defined offences that can be regarded as Islamic criminal law *stricto sensu*. They fall under two headings: *djinayat*, or offences against another's person, and crimes with fixed penalties (*hadd*, plural *hudud*), called *hadd* crimes. The first group consists of homicide and injury. This is essentially the domain of private prosecution, in the sense that the culprit may be punished with death, whereas the penalty for intentional injury causing a loss of limbs or senses, is the inflection of the same injury on the perpetrator. If the death or injury are not caused intentionally or if the victim or his heirs are willing to waive their right to retribution, it is then replaced by the payment of blood money.

¹⁰ *Ulema*: (transliteration: *Ulama*) [the people of Islamic knowledge] refers to the educated class of Muslim legal scholars engaged in the several fields of Islamic studies. They are best known as the arbiters of *shari'a* law. In a broader sense, the term *Ulema* is used to describe the body of Muslim clergy who have completed several years of training and study of Islamic sciences. Some Muslims include under this term the village *mullahs*, *imams* and *maulvis* who have attained on the lowest rungs on the ladder of Islamic scholarship; other Muslims would say that clerics must meet higher standards to be considered *ulema*.

status codes which determine women's life options and the extent of women's participation in public life.

This is to say that the systematic, vigorous and often violent opposition to change is a grim reality in many Islamic societies, despite its capacity to adapt and to change face and force under the influence of various social, political and economic stimuli. Caught in conflicting roles, brutalized by extra legal oppressive practices and traditions, Mukhtar Mai has emerged as the voice for Pakistan women's agency and empowerment.

In a certain sense, the notion of "Islamic feminism", though considered to be an oxymoron, can be applied to Mukhtar Mai's undertakings after the grotesque event. The term, nevertheless, is used increasingly to identify the beliefs and activities of Muslim women who are trying to improve the lot of their sex within the confines of their faith. As a matter of political expediency, secular Muslim women, as well, have made use of an Islamic framework in demanding change.

"When a woman is raped, she has no feelings, I was like a stone, I felt nothing. I was senseless," Mukhtar Mai's words here reflect the numbness fused into her limbs after the horrible incident of her "fornication". She felt "no longer touchable". In this connection, we can have a glimpse of the Islamic concept of sexuality and the issue of body politic in Mukhtar Mai's case and several cases like her.

In Islamic societies like that of Pakistan, the woman's body generates fascination, pleasure and fantasy which is exploited for procreation and acts as a symbol of communal dignity. It is

manipulated and its activities are codified, it is covered and confined. It is disciplined for defiance and is mutilated in anticipation of trespassing – all this often sanctioned legally and, particularly, culturally.

Is there no Muslim here who can save my honour? Is there nobody who can save my respect? Mukhtar cried. But none came forward (Bronwyn Curran, 2008).

The female body is the site of struggle between the proponents and opponents of power structures and is used as a playing card between them. In Islamic societies, sexuality, the site of love, desire, sexual fulfilment and physical procreation, is at the same time, for women, the site of shame, confinement, anxiety, compulsion. Woman's expression of her desires and the pursuit of her interests contradicts the interests of man and challenges man's God-given rights over woman. Underpinning the sexual and moral beliefs and practices is the conception of women as weak in moral judgement and deficient in cognitive capacity, yet sexually forceful and irresistibly seductive.

The obsessions with sexual purity in Islamic cultures justify the surveillance of women by family, community and state. It makes more sense to understand the plight of Muslim women in Pakistan as the combined impact of socio-historical, economic and political retardation of Islamic societies and its articulation with indigenous customs and patriarchal cultural values which conspire to sustain the authority of misogynist religious commands over the lives of women.

Legitimacy is given for the idea that female sexuality has to be confined, tamed and controlled for the good of the community. The state's control over women's moral conduct is so far as policing women's movement in public sphere. An unremitting hostility is shown to the social, cultural and political processes of change in the rural, orthodox Pakistani societies. The ebbs and flows of women's responses to the honour persecutions perpetrated by the powers requires an analysis which takes into account the social and cultural context in which the societies operate.

The circumstance of women in rural Pakistan must be understood dialectically, as their determined resistance strains against the forces of social, economic, cultural and political retardation. If we stopped identifying as "cultural practices", various forms of traditional or state-enforced gender violence, including honour-killing, stoning of women to death on charges of adultery and fornication, public lashing for improper veiling, child marriage and female genital mutilation, we would see the sorry state of women's lives in Islamic societies like that of Pakistan. These are legally sanctioned gender crimes, even though they are not so considered by Muslim rulers and community leaders.

Pivotal to unravelling what exactly happened on the night of June 22, 2002 in the village of Meerwala are the tribal justice codes and the tribal marriage traditions of southern Punjab:

Trying to unearth what happened to Mukhtar Mai on the night of June 22 (2002) means deciphering which tribal traditions prevailed when she was brought forth by her men folk and presented before Salma Mastoi's men folk,

to win pardon for her brother's alleged rape of Salma (Curran, 2008).

In this part of the world, it is forbidden for males and females from different families to be together, especially alone. It is forbidden for a woman to be seen by a man not from her family. A family's girls are their wealth, investments, and savings. Girls are traded, in the guise of brides, to gain land or to secure land already within the family; they are traded in the guise of brides, to save a male relative from jail or murder, they are traded in the guise of brides, in exchange for a bride from another family for their brother, cousin or uncle, and sometimes for their father.

The reconstruction according to the Defence version says that Mukhtar Mai was given in *watta-satta* deal (exchange marriage) to Abdul Khaliq, Salma Mastoi's brother. According to the Defence version, a *sharai nikah* (oral marriage, without certificate) was performed. A *Sharai nikah* ritual, an oral marriage in accordance with Qur'anic traditions was common in rural areas of Pakistan. The Gujjars proposed to marry Shakur (Mukhtar Mai's brother) to Salma Mastoi, and in exchange they offered their eldest daughter Mukhtar Mai to one of Salma's brothers, if they free Shakur from police custody.

The defence version claimed that Abdul Shakur had first committed *ziadti* (rape) with Salma Mastoi. "Our honour is violated by the Gujjar boy. It must be equalized!" Khalid spat. As such, Mukhtar

Mai was delivered by her menfolk to the house of the groom's (Abdul Khaliq's) family to perform the *rukhsati*.¹¹

Whether Mukhtar Mai was gang-raped by four men, as the prosecution said, or whether she was married off to Abdul Khaliq under a *watta-satta* exchange marriage deal, as the defence said, Mukhtar had nevertheless been reduced to chattel to settle a dispute between her tribe and another over an act that had nothing to do with her. Mukhtar had refused to accept her gender's status as pawn for barter in an arbitrary market of men's "honour".

An illiterate woman who had passed most of her adult life inside the four walls of her family compound, teaching embroidery and the Qur'an to village girls had taken a generations-old tribal system to a modern-day court for terrorists, and won, "For her, it was a collective victory for all women in her region reduced to chattel."

This case has also raised a very important issue: the role of extra-judicial tribunals taking law into her own hands and handing down barbaric punishments. Mukhtar Mai's apparent rape by - decree was the pronouncement made by the local jirgas or Panchayat system on the orders of village tribal council elders. She was sentenced by a tribal council to be gang-raped because of an infraction supposedly committed by her brother. Jirgas and Panchayats convene to resolve conflicts over the three 'Z's: Zar (gold/money), Zamin (land), Zan (women).

¹¹ Rukhsati: It has evolved to connote the consummation of a marriage. Varying periods of time may fall between the nikah (marriage ceremony) and the Rukhsati (delivery of the bride to the groom's family).

Women are taken as the traditional repositories of honour. But the conflict resolution in rural Pakistan is exclusively a male domain. The role of females is that of pawns for trade in dispute settlement and her opinion is not sought. They are never given the chance to explain or, defend themselves, nor a voice is given to buy women plaintiffs witnesses or character referees.¹²

The judgement of the Jirga and Panchayat is final. There is no system of appeal against their arbitrary rulings. The Jirga is conducted purely according to tribal customs, or the will of the tribal chief and it therefore exists completely outside the legal framework in Pakistan. They hear disputes, make judgements, enforce decisions, and impose punishments. Their main priority is to restore honour (izzat) and order. Truth and punishment of the guilty are secondary considerations. In the genesis of the jirgas, it has been found that Jirgas and panchayats pre-date Islam.

The Qura'n lays down a set of punishments known as "hadd". Jirgas are not part of this system of criminal law. Nor are common jirga punishments, like the giving away of small girls as compensation brides, connected to Islam. In fact, Jirgas are un-Islamic.

The jirgas evolved from tribal sardari and feudal land ownership systems predating both Islam and British colonial rule on the subcontinent. Such traditional power structures in rural Pakistan

¹² Amnesty International: "Women are not consulted, when important decisions affecting their lives are made; even when they are handed over as part of a compensation agreement to settle a revenge killing or an 'honour' crime. The treatment they can expect in the family to which they are given cannot be thought to be sympathetic. Tribal leaders and others supporting this practice betray a high level of disregard for women's rights when they argue that the handing over of women to settle a dispute produces blood bonds which make for lasting peace and are therefore, desirable."

revolve around tribal chiefs and powerful landowners. They play a major role in settling disputes, as the most powerful figures in society. They perpetrate and propagate honour persecutions of women in rural Pakistan. The jirgas do not acknowledge woman's identity, let alone her rights. If she is involved in a case, her male family members are left to pledge their agreement to the jirga or panchayat verdict. Women are not consulted on whether the jirga's decision is acceptable.¹³

The burden of proof required to prove a woman's violation of honour (for example, illicit relations with a man from outside the family) is extremely low. The mere allegation of wrongdoing is often considered enough to justify honour killing.¹⁴

Anyone who reports an honour crime to the authorities would be put to death by jirga. The rulings effectively legitimize honour killings, in an area more adherent to the law of the jirga than the state of Pakistan.¹⁵ Women are the only victims of this indifference, tribal customs and its parish politics. They are the target of this "culturally specific" justice system which denies their basic rights.

¹³ Amnesty International: "Women do not as a rule have access to the tribal justice system. If issues including inheritance or custody of children affecting women arise, they are usually settled in the family with women's interests represented – or misrepresented – by male relatives. Senator Jatoi summarized the situation: 'In our system, we cannot call a woman to the Jirga'. Only in rare cases will jirgas deal with civil issues affecting women, for instance property disputes or inheritance or custody matters; in such forms, it has so far been inevitably men who represent women's interests there. Amnesty International was told that women's testimony would not be accepted in murder cases."

¹⁴ Amnesty International: "It is the rumour about a woman's inappropriate behaviour that damages the 'honour' of her family or community and the truth of such allegation is not sought to be established. Hence a woman's testimony on her own behalf is not heard at a jirga."

¹⁵ Khan, Raza Rahman, 'Shrinking Living Space for Dir woman, 'The News, May 23 2006.

In rural Pakistan, the superficial discourse of honour is the manifestation of the extent of particularized male hegemony. It is a trope and we can look at how it is advocated as a reality along with other dialectical games played to convince women to submit to the limitations of this façade of honour in the domestic realm and to accept second-class status vis-à-vis other women worldwide, as well as Muslim men in their own families and communities.

The power structures in rural Pakistan ignore certain limitations on women's full and free agency. One of the most effective ways to defend this is to keep women silent about their actual experiences. The main method of silence is to authorize neo-traditional concepts about women's roles – no matter how abusive – as integral to "Islam".

That is why national and international public exposure of the atrocities experienced by Muslim women is such an affront to the image of perfect "Islam" that they wish to express. They pretend such practices do not exist, because "Islam gave women their rights fourteen hundred years before the west" (Curran, 2008).

Paradoxically, many Muslim women still acquiesce to these images of honour in Islam, irrespective of actual experiences, which they shrug off as merely the consequences of men not practicing real Islam. They are unwilling and sometimes ill equipped to challenge whatever articulations of "Islam" allow double and triple standards.

Attempts to measure Pakistani women's status with a single yardstick like autonomy run into significant difficulties. State prescriptions of morality help sustain an eternal Islam not grounded in a geo-political context. Policies and practices influenced by such

determinations regulate gendered and classed bodies into docile citizens in ways that serve capitalist and patriarchal interests. As individual bodies become the focus of the regulating gaze, discourse promoting morality in Pakistan remains limited to containing illicit sex.

Fatima Mernissi of Morocco regards that the main assumption about woman in the Islamic system is that she is a source of *fitna* (a word of many meanings, a source of trouble in this context), and that she is endowed with a fatal attraction which erodes man's will to resist her. Perhaps the sociological factors such as *ghairat* (modesty, shame), *izzat* (honour), and a strong commitment to kinship and patrilineal links, have further contributed to this attitude of men towards women. What is then paraded as an Islamic virtue is in fact rooted in the social fabric of a traditional society.

Pakistani women are induced to defensive strategies in the name of family *honour* and, owing to their dependent status, these strategies are influenced by a hierarchy of age and of relations with dominant males. The gender inequities persist, therefore, because the conflicts of interest are normally not given to open struggle. Pakistani women's rights are, nevertheless, not just linked to the political exigencies and the ulama. There are deep cultural roots in the male attitudes of Pakistani men towards women, and these attitudes are nourished by the economic and socio-cultural factors.

But in a country where Human Rights Watch says the vast majority of rapes and other violent crimes against women go unpunished, Mukhtar Mai broke the silence. She not only pressed charges, she fought her case all the way to the nation's highest court.

She demanded the prosecution of her attackers, and six were sent to death row. After prosecuting the rapists, Mukhtaran Bibi used the compensation money of \$ 8300 to start schools in her village, because she thinks that education is the best way to overcome feudal attitudes. With a torrent of more contributions, more than \$1,30,000, Mukhtaran has used the money to improve the schools and 'endow' them by buying cows, which will generate income to pay expenses.

She has also bought an ambulance for the area and built a police station that provides security. Moreover, she has built the first high school in the area, along with a clinic and a woman's shelter. The most pressing moral challenge today is to overcome the brutality and inequality faced by women and girls in the developing world, and Mukhtaran has become a leader of that struggle.

CHAPTER 4

THE SUBVERSION OF FEMALE HONOUR STEREOTYPES IN M.K. BINODINI'S SHORT STORIES: REPRESENTATION IN FICTION (MANIPUR)

M.K. Binodini Devi was born in 1926. She has written short stories, short plays, travelogues and a novel. M.K. Binodini received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979 for her only novel *Bor Saheb Ongbi Sanatombi*. She received the Jamini Sunder Guha Gold Medal for her collection of short stories, *Nungairakta Chandramukhi*¹ in 1966. She is the most popular woman writer in Manipuri and she is the daughter of Sir Churachand Maharaj² (1891-1941), the last of the Royal Kings of Manipur. She was awarded Padmashree by the President of India.

The short story genre in Manipuri Literature had its origin in the third decade of this century in periodicals. 'Brajendagi Luhongba' (1933) by Lamabam Kamal Singh, considered the first short story in Manipuri, was published in the "*Lalit Manjari Patrika*" edited by A. Dorendrajit Singh. Another short story 'Yum Panba' by Sarvajit Singh was published in "*Yakairol (awakening)*" (1932) edited by N. Leiren Singh.

The journals *Ngasi*³, *Jyoti*, and *Meitei Chanu*⁴ published in the forties and fifties also played an important role in this field of

¹ Desert Flower

² Churachand Maharaj (1891-1941): He was one of the five brothers and two sisters. His father Chaoyaima was the son of Bhubansana Yuvraj, the eldest son of Narasingh Maharaj. He was brought up at the Nongmeibung royal residence. He was the father of M.K. Binodini.

³ Today

⁴ Meitei Chanu: (Mother Manipur) it is a hand-written magazine/journal (1922), started by Hijam Irabat (1896-1951). It is the first magazine of its kind in Manipur, to be followed by other literary magazines. His first novel *Mohini* was serialised in

publishing short stories. These journals helped in moulding the taste of the public, and in the late forties individual writers came up with their own volumes of short stories.

The short stories of Lamabam Kamal Singh and R.K. Shitaljit Singh, who wrote in the thirties and forties, were more concerned with the problems of noble characters caught in unfavourable situations. Their short stories serve as an effective instrument for depicting the idealistic and romantic aspect of life and its problems.

Subsequently, the increasing complexity and social fluidity of contemporary life, the agony and misery of man trapped in the simmering uneasiness of ambivalence and the turmoil of corruption generated by the social, economic and political systems and the decline of humanism day by day have produced a new crop of short stories. Instead of writing about the agony and ecstasy of existence, these new forms of short stories are more concerned with social injustices, the variegated social topography and the wide chasm or gap between the haves and the have-nots and the miserable victims of the corruption that pervades modern life. Thus, most of the short stories of the sixties (60s) and after, became consciously and manifestly social, pragmatic, dealing with characters and situations,

the journal, *Yakairol* (awakening) since 1931 and so also his biography of Lokmanya Tilak, the great freedom fighter who happens to be his guru in politics, in the journal *Lalit Manjari Patrika* since October, 1931. He gave his heart and soul to the social reform movement which found expression in the establishment of Nikhil 'Hindu' Manipuri Mahasabha (1939) with the king as the Chief patron. This later on became a political organisation. Hijam Irabat Singh, son of the soil of Manipur was one of the distinguished harbingers of the renaissance ushered in Manipur in the fields of letters, many aspects of culture, thought and outlook at the turn of the century of this country what with the fetters of imperialist British and the tyranny of the feudal monarchy. Hemango Biswas, poet and revolutionary, aptly called him "the Sentinel" of the eastern frontier of India.

embodying all its anxieties, confusions and doubts, pessimistic, cynical and tragic in tone.

Complexity and corruption in public and private space, injustice and the apparent 'existential angst' of the human situation and societal ambivalence have become the dominant themes of the contemporary Manipuri short story genre. These social problems and the degenerating patterns of social relations are dealt with in different measures and parameters by M.K. Binodini (b. 1926), Kh. Prakash Singh (b. 1932), N. Kunjamohan Singh (b. 1935), E. Dinamani Singh (b. 1940), and L. Viramani Singh (b. 1946) who are ^{the} major short story writers in modern Manipuri Literature.

M.K. Binodini is well known for her stories in *Nungairakta Chandramukhi* (1964) which deal mostly with the emotional problems of individuals caught in the mesh of changes at several stages of life. Her stories are an effective exposition of characters trapped in the follies and foibles of life. M.K. Binodini seeks to locate the communal mapping of the phenomenon within the religious "gaze" of the characters in the short story 'Thambal'. Neither does she expand on the protean nature of communalism and "honour persecution" of women as it unfolds in Hijam Anganghal Singh's *Jahera* (1964).

Hijam Anganghal, the author of *Jahera* (1964), also wrote an allegorical narrative essay by the same name *Thambal* (The "Lotus") in 1938. It is often regarded as a piece of poetry in prose form. M.K. Binodini's *Thambal* was a strong female protagonist who defied the social and moral codes of 'honour' of a stringent orthodox society whereas Hijam Anganghal's *Thambal* represented the tender and

docile portrayal of "Indian Womanhood" (E. Dinamani, 1997)⁵. He narrates a long story of Thambal (Lotus, the water-flower) and he personifies it with a maiden. In due course, Thambal falls in love with a black bee when "she" was at the prime of her youth. During their short acquaintance, the black bee sucks the honey from "her" and leaves her alone deserted. She pines for his love again but to no avail. The chimes of old age rings against "her", her beautiful petals fall off and she starts bearing black fruits but nevertheless, she still yearns for her only husband, the black bee. Even in death, she embraces her husband's image in heart.

In *Thambal*, Anganghal has developed an eternal love in a philosophical way. Thambal's devotional love ('Bhakti') for the black bee is beautifully shown in this prose work. The sensual and then the sublimatory aspect of the love story is depicted here. Hijam Anganghal's *Thambal (The Lotus)*, is an allegory in which a woman is represented as pure and divine as the lotus is (E. Dinamani, 1997).

Manipuri Muslim's ethnic composition is diverse; they are a close-knit society because of the egalitarian and congregational nature of Islam; yet community authority is feudalistic. The Hindu-Muslim communal conflagrations are very rare in Manipur. Religious laxity, close economic ties and interdependence are often ascribed to the communal amity. There is another view that inter-religious exchanges and composite culture at the grass-roots and even at higher echelons provide a basis for harmonious living in Manipur. The state has very few records of communal conflagrations compared to other states of India.

⁵ *Hijam Anganghal Singh: Makers of Indian Literature* by Elangbam Dinamani Singh (1997).

Although composite culture is quite an important feature in India portraying a synthesis of Hindustani and Islamic music, dance, art and language, the eclecticism is confined mainly to the elements evident in North India and Pakistan. Gendered cultural practices and legal traditions are a recurring theme in women's fiction, women travelogues, diplomats' reports and in the diaries of traders, physicians, teachers and other Europeans whoever came in contact with Islamic societies. But it is particularly after the colonial encounter that we discover the West's inferiorizing gaze, coupled with the derogatory gyrations by self-declared Muslims who do so to appease bigots and such gyrations of a self-hating sensationalist please the Islamophobes.

In colonial records, we find descriptions of "local" Muslim traditions and practices hostile to women, contemplating sanctimoniously how and when Muslim women can be liberated from the yoke of Muslim men. These stereotypes are often fraught with the sexual fantasies of the European male. In the midst of all these essentialist gaze, M.K. Binodini tries to bring out a narrative which becomes the site of female subject construction.

The movement from oppression to female assertion and expression of cultural and social difference from the male writers is a pertinent aspect in M.K. Binodini's writings. In her short stories, she tries to re-assert the pride in "feminine sensibility," she uses the idea of female assertion as a fervent desire to express the consciousness of Manipuri women.

Manipur, a small state in the northeastern corner of India, is the home of the "Meiteis" (commonly known as "Manipuri" in India) –

a patrilineal society unique in its distinct overtones of female power and independence. Meitei women's traditional sex roles in the ritual and non-ritual spheres of Meitei life analyses how *Lai Haraoba*, a principal ritual of the indigenous pre-Hindu faith (which at present coexists with Hinduism) stresses intersexual harmony by recognizing two contrasting models for Manipuri women: the primary role as a mother, wife, and daughter and the alternative role of priestess.

This chapter envisage the perception of "honour" of a contingent reality in a short story "Thambal". The travesty of female fiction containing memories, dreams, and nostalgia reflected in M.K. Binodini's writings in the whole matrix of multiplicitous politics move beyond history and tries to acquire a subversive role. It attempts to unleash a (de)-politicized category of counter-discourse in the form of short-stories, reminiscing the "past", romancing the "present" and constructing the "future".

Literature *per se* is recognized as a special kind of writing that has to be understood aesthetically. This aesthetic space, however, does not exist in a vacuum. It is constitutive of certain strategic literary and extra-literary dimensions that ineluctably ground it in life or society. This grounding entails the existence of a "relational framework" between literature as representation and society as its generative context. This is what we can explore in M.K. Binodini's writings.

Her short stories can be viewed as an aspect of the creative – critical discourses inhabiting and incorporating the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of the 'life-events' that impact the self and the society. Her short stories serve as a referential tool to gauze at the historical

and sociological worth of inter-community cohesion. However, the concept of literature has moved away from being a mere reflection or perception of reality to being a more complex entity which is neither fully reflective nor fully autonomous.

M.K. Binodini is more interested in investigating the verisimilitudinal fidelity of the story within the short story genre or mode. She is commendable for her pioneering efforts at etching out and expanding the critical parameters of this genre in Manipuri Literature. The sociological link that she has given has extended the thematic potentials of this genre, by giving cognizance to the underlying humanistic vision. She integrates and synthesizes the myriad condition of Muslims in Manipur in this short story "Thambal" by implicating a unifocal critical framework. M.K. Binodini's short stories are dynamic, protean and evasive and the contours of her creative endeavour contain discourses on the self and the society.

In my dissertation, I have analyzed how far fictional representations of women can be reconciled with the women in real life and whether representations can offer viable answers rather than remaining confined within the precincts of the 'ideal'. The re-occurrence of the thematic paradigm of 'honour' is a function of a broader consensus – socio-cultural, historical and moral – that exists among the overall oeuvre of women writers in Manipuri Literature.

In her short story "Thambal" she visualizes the discord that was spawned between the Manipuri Muslims (or Pangals) and the Hindu Meiteis which was the result of manipulative political manoeuvres which vitiated the spirit of co-existence and compositeness by propagating differences. The subtle reference to the "honour

persecution” of any transgression is deemed as cleansing of the society’s evils. In the short story ‘Thambal’, the female protagonist by the same name Thambal (meaning “lotus” flower) is considered an outcaste and condemned for defying customs.

But she reverts her position by defying the repressive customs and exulting in the emergence of herself as a woman who follows her heart. She overturns the traditional honour stereotypes of females by dislocating the traditional myths of their own silence. Her subversive actions in following her desires and marrying the Muslim man, Usman indicate her strong personality. She emerged as a new female figure who exults in the sensuous luxuriance of her own body and claims legitimacy for choosing her own life partner:

Adubu nongma Thambalna samajgi thouridagi
naanthoktuna karishu leitraba Pangal darjee amabu
mapuroibani haikhiba numit adudagi Thambal fajabi
Oiekhare; magi waarina lambi tennaba oiekhare/Dharma
khangba vaishnav kayana ubada tin shitnei/Kanana
norok tagani kibana magi maklaba waari asidagi nakong
menduna khangnakhi/Adubu nahagi thamoigi eethilbu
kananashu thingba ngamkhide (‘Thambal’, p. 13).

Free translation is,

But when Thambal released herself from the shackles of oppressive society and made the Muslim tailor her husband, she emerged into a real beauty; her story became the talk of the town. But many religious authorities spit on seeing her. Some even refrained themselves from hearing her story for fear of being

polluted. But who could stop the yearnings and feelings of youthful love?

Usman and Thambal's love defied all codes of moral conduct and state repression in the form of the king's authority. The author uses the metaphor of 'waves' to define this relationship. It is as elusive and yet as palpable as the wind. They share an emotional bond which is poignantly delicate and almost primordial. Its nature has been deliberately left undefined. Though it carries with it sensual overtones, as Thambal and Usman pine for each other and meet clandestinely in the soft and sensuous riverside (Nambul river), yet this physical attraction is tempered with by a sense of self-imposed restraint on either side. The cementing force is the gradual increment of their love which started with verbal attack from Thambal's side, but which, ultimately culminated in their love union.

In the beginning of the story, when Thambal came to the riverside to take bath with her friends, Usman called her from the other side of the river asking Thambal to offer him some home-made rice-shampoo (chinghee⁶) teasingly. To this, Thambal got infuriated and replied back in anger:

Kari haiba/Laima ushitteda kari thokey haiduna
khigatchaba sharibano? Pirarani haiee-/chinghee
laanbadi hairuranu eikhoidi nakhoibu tukatchei/
(‘Thambal’, p. 14)

Free translation is,

⁶ Home-made rice shampoo made of herbs and rice water.

What did you say? It seems you are indeed very sarcastic. Giving you rice shampoo (chingee) is a far distant question, we scorn you people as untouchables!

The verbal tirade of Thambal reflects the intense anxiety within her and the manifestation of the stereotyping of Muslim men as inferior and thus otherising them. Though she possesses a distinctive female voice, she can give expression to it only in an indirect manner.

More often than not, women's fiction in Manipuri Literature has been moving from marginality to self-expression and self-questioning, towards self-assertions and its redefinitions. Herein, we find the subversion of female honour stereotypes by projecting alternative structures and meanings, and transforming disorder and chaos into enabling structures. It has attempted to dissolve polarities and move towards pluralistic meanings.

The reflective representation and creative comprehension of M.K. Binodini's short story, 'Thambal' locates the implications of the socio-cultural reality embedded in the narrative contestations of "honour persecutions" by the powers covertly:

Wari ashi ningthou sana nakhong yaourabadi akhoibu
maang-ee haigani – Leikai faoba chenthani! Maangle,
maangle, eeshunglanggi mee maanghanba!" (Nungairakta
Chandramukhi, p. 18).

Free translation is,

If the king's authority learns about this, we will be ex-communicated- even our locality will be ostracized!

Outcast, outcast, making my own community abominable!

The aforementioned King's authority represents the state repressive authority that acts as the moral police of the whole society. They are the ones who carry out the King's order in persecuting those women who have defied customs and transgressed the codes of conduct prescribed for them.

On the social and cultural front they had to face the bitter music of *Mangba-Shengba* (pollution and restitution) a widely practiced, but unlawful, form of extortion charges imposed on the public by the members of *Brahma Sabha* of which the king happened to be the Chairman. During the thirties, this *Mangba-Shengba* scandal swept over Manipur like a plague, leading to excommunication of the thousands of the poor people which the state Darbar had to check ultimately.

At that time the Maharaja (king) wielded great powers. A sentence of imprisonment for five years or more passed by the Manipur State Darbar of which the King was initially the President became operative if confirmed by him. The King could exercise much power in matters religious, ritual, customary and other practices. The King and the Brahma Sabha often exercised the powers of excommunicating or outcasting persons summarily for petty reasons in religious and customary practices. At the same time they could revoke the orders of excommunication on payment of money. The value of the rupee was very high in those days and one can figure out the plight of the people when such penalty like *Mangba* (excommunication) was imposed on them; and a *Shengba* (revocation)

was favoured. A person excommunicated could not even in death, be cremated according to Hindu rites but was buried.

The fear psychosis embedded in the whole society's psyche for crossing the lines of certain prescribed codes of conduct—was immense. The punishment could range from ex-communication to even death. The narrative graph of this short story is by and large, bound within the limits of communalism and secularism. Communalism is the most conspicuous cause responsible for honour punishments and can only be countered through humanism inherent in secularism.

The symbolic transformation of the female protagonist Thambal is achieved through love, forgiveness, reason and personal sanity. She reiterates:

Adunadi makhoi ashi akhoigumba ngaktani; karidi khetnari – ashibu karamma oieribano? Karino mahaakna pamlibana – adubu maadi Pangalni – Keidouge maashu Meitei Pakhanga karidi Khetnei, wangang, sha-ngang, fijet, chakcha amattani/ (Binodini, p. 17)

Free translation is,

They (Muslims) are also same like us; what's the difference? How does it happen? What does he want? But he is a Muslim – what difference is there between him and a Meitei youth? Language, culture, dress, food habits – it is the same!

And Thambal becomes a means through whom this message is sought to be propagated by the writer.

Women's fiction in a way focuses attention on both the manifestation of a female sensibility, a feminine reality, and on its significance as a means of bringing about an awareness of this reality. It is evident, that like other categories such as race and class, gender has become a significant category of social and political reality. Thus, in M.K. Binodini's short story "Thambal", the female protagonist Thambal's consciousness initially locates the breakdown of social amity in her place in terms of the violation of the honour code imposed by her society and the personal vendetta arising out of it. However, it is the corrupt stereotyping of Muslim men as sorcerers and black magicians that turn this feud into communal enmity, creating a sharp perceptual wedge:

Makhoi ashidi potshem thourang hei haiko/karigumba
eingondashu shemjin laklabadi karam tougani? Magi
maangolda eina leplagani hairiba aduna kari
hairibano/Aduga, maadi shaokhreko/Eina aduk thina
chinghee khajiktang piyu haibada hairuriba ashi
chumdabani/Issh, mashigi waa ashi houjik khallaroi/
(Binodini, p. 15)

Free translation is,

It is said that they (Muslims) are good in black magic.
What, if he ensnares and captivates me with his magical
whims? What does he mean when he says that I'll stand
outside his main door? And, he said that in anger and in

fury. It's my fault that I've used such harsh words on him when he had just asked for some homemade rice shampoo (Chinghee). Alas! I won't think about this anymore.

This prepares ground for the justification of stereotyping, despite its destructive forebodings, as a pseudo identity-endowing tool. The stereotyping or essentializing of the Muslim men in the short story is as equipped and tacit as in 'black magic'. The vicissitudes of the characters in the story "Thambal" metaphorically parallels the interplay of the historical forces that shaped the destiny of the Muslims in Manipur. At the intercommunal level, the relational matrix within the context of the King's rule (monarchy) is shown to depend on the changing socio-political fortunes of the state. The Hindu - Muslim relational pattern and the honour persecutions of women retains an elusive ambiguity that defies easy categorization.

The intensification of the outside repressive forces in both the religions ruptures this bond. Usman, the male protagonist in the story is conceived of as not less than a sorcerer who tries to trap the Hindu girl, Thambal.

Through this fictional anecdote, M.K. Binodini tries to demythify the stereotypes of Manipuri Muslims as monolithic cultural and political blocks. She does so by defying all cultural differences and ultimately all issues of "honour" and the oppositional forces between the two by the culmination of their love-union. Their love became the repository of syncretic harmony.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

By surveying women's roles and statuses in various Islamic societies, by exposing vested interests in colonial and stereotypical images of Islam and of Muslim women, also by analysing in greater detail the honour persecutions of the Muslim women by the authoritative powers both in fictional world (of Manipur) and in reality (of Pakistan), we have come to the concluding lines.

The few thoughts I include here by way of conclusion are not a summary of the dissertation. They are a few reiterations, but in the final analysis, this is really the place where I hope the preceding pages can come to some concluding words and purposeful closure.

A continuous struggle waged against hegemonic practices by the Muslim women both in reality and in fiction has in a way created a 'counter-hegemony'. They have secured and are still trying to secure the space they need to articulate oppositional discourses and counter-cultural politics.

Jahera, the female protagonist of the novel *Jahera* (1964) and Mukhtar Mai of Pakistan who have been the victims of honour persecutions by the powers, have both emerged as the epitome of new age Muslim women in two different spatio-temporal contexts.

The variability and complexities of Muslim women's concerns in different countries, nationalities, cultures and religions should not cloud the reality that no other feature of the pre-modern scene has persisted so stubbornly as 'male dominance'.

The principal feminist responses have consisted in a celebration of difference and in a denial or repudiation of it. Feminist consciousness, confronting massive legacy and present power of male culture, has tended either towards female separatism, with an emphasis on essentialism, or towards integration, with an emphasis on androgyny.

In two different spatio-temporal contexts—of Pakistan and Manipur – I have tried to weave and interweave in my dissertation – the feminist concern that encompasses a range of attitudes and voices regarding “honour persecutions” by the powers, mapping out the effects in the realms of emotions, renewed communal upsurges as well as in the body politic. Such is the objective of my research wherein the unjust customs are defied to bring about radical reforms both in reality and in fiction, exploring the facets of modern Islam and bringing out the roots of Islamic feminism.

In the preceding chapters an attempt was made to explore the political dissensions in Islam. For the slightest degree of freedom to participate in public spaces, women are dependent on the good will of their families, husbands, in-laws, community, ethnic tribe and the generosity of the judiciary. Women are bartered to settle debts and seal bargains and the criminal system treats women running away from the domestic abuse and sexual violence as perpetrators of a crime, and not as its victims, for having violated the family “honour”.

As is apparent from the above chapters, the presence of communal consciousness—a result of the fragmentation of religion as a political ideology – among Hindus and Muslims is a natural outcome of political putrefaction wrought in by “honour persecutions”.

sometimes in the punishment for transgression of the moral codes of conduct or loving a person of the other religion.

However, when viewed from the perspective of the “honour persecutions” by the powers, we see sharp perceptual and consequently representational divergences between the Muslims in Pakistan and Muslims in Manipur.

This, as already hinted in the above chapters, is largely a function of their situational and temporal distance of the nuances of their cultural diversity and the imposition of myriad codes of moral conduct. In Pakistan, the honour persecutions are stringent while in Manipur, the narration of honour persecutions by the powers differ significantly. These horrors might have formed a part of the family's/community's folklore, but these were, nevertheless, imagined/heard anecdotes, out there and hence not a part of the experienced. This difference, between the experienced and the heard, influences the nature of their narrations.

In my dissertation I have delved into how the three concepts normally independent of each other – the relationship to time, the relationship to power, and the relationship to femaleness – become connected as a discourse of female's identity. Herein, we deal with the nonexistent, feminized, veiled, obliterated identity of the Muslim women in rural Pakistan.

In two different spatio-temporal contexts, we deal with the “honour persecutions” of women and their subsequent renaissance in the case of Mukhtar Mai who undermined the sexual hierarchy and

violence, by undergoing a process of redefinition - taking recourse to education.

The metamorphosis of such powerful Muslim women from a veiled, secluded, marginalized object, reduced to inertia, into a subject with voice and rights, erased the lines that defined the identity hierarchy which organized politics and relations between the sexes.

The traditional identity of rural Pakistan hardly acknowledged the individual, whom it abhorred as a disturber of the collective harmony, "Minister and parliamentarians, men and women alike, have accused her of 'tarnishing Pakistan's image' and 'airing her dirty linen in public, and not behaving in a manner behoving 'eastern women' " (Curran, 2008).

In Islam, the idea of the individual in a state of nature, in the philosophical meaning of the word, is nonexistent. Traditional society produced Muslims who were literally "submissive" to the will of the group. Individuality in such a system is discouraged; any private initiative is *bid'a* (innovation), which necessarily constitutes errant behaviour. The traditional society tried to stop the development of individuality at a stage that did not threaten the authority of the leader, creating a ghost of an individual, who would not have autonomy (identified with rebellion).

So, even in the contemporary rural Pakistan, a lone woman, Mukhtar Mai's fight for justice is seen with 'voices of scepticism', hostility, doubts about her truthfulness and women parliamentarians themselves have castigated her for talking too much about something "most women here keep secret" (Curran, 2008). The flow of hefty

foreign donations to Mukhtar and her women's welfare projects has inspired scorn. Her divorcee status acts as fodder for aspersions for her relentless character assassination in one small newspaper of Pakistan.

Overseas Mukhtar is glorified as an icon for trying to raise third world rural women out of the dimness of illiteracy and brutalisation, and for braving scorn and stigma to speak out against her own abuse, her determination to save the next generation of girls from her own cataclysmic fate is worth-noticing in reality. Her simplicity and bravery, her distilled sense of justice, the nobility of her altruism and the act of transforming her own bitter experience into an opportunity to educate the girls of her village and elevate their futures makes her their "*beacon of light*". In one of the above chapters (Chapter 3), I have dealt with the genesis of the feud that had culminated in Mukhtar Mai's violation, her honour persecution per say.

Finally, improvements in the quality of gender relations have only come about when women have secured the space they need to articulate oppositional discourses and counter-cultural politics. They need to formulate interpretations of their identities, interests and needs in fiction as well as in reality. And by using this discursive arena, they can nurture cultural values, circulate social and political dissent, and promote myriad ways of gender justice and doing away with 'honour persecutions' of their lot.

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