

**Patriarchy, Power and Prostitution in Lahore's Red Light District:  
A Feminist Study of Fouzia Saeed's *Taboo***

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In her 2002 book *Taboo: The Hidden Culture of Red Light Area*, Fouzia Saeed explains how patriarchal norms in Pakistani society rigidly categorise women into 'pure' and 'polluted', shaping perceptions of prostitution and human trafficking. This article argues that patriarchy has its roots in materiality, and plays an indispensable role in pushing many women into the dreadful practice of prostitution or trafficking for sexual slavery through the structural and institutional flaws threaded within Pakistani culture. Women in Pakistan yet also have internalised the deep-rooted patriarchal ideologies and sexism that lead to a holistic understanding of what this patriarchal culture entails. Focusing on *Heera Mandi* – Lahore's traditional red light district as depicted in Saeed's ethnographic book, this textual cum descriptive analysis contributes to unveil the dilemmas of women engaged in prostitution who are constantly under threat from patriarchy and other institutions. While unfolding men formulated cultural norms through radical feminist analysis of *Taboo*, this article concludes that the patriarchal metamorphosing of women into valueless commodities perpetuates the practice of prostitution and trafficking in *Heera Mandi*. The study also suggests that, to eliminate female inferiority, feminist activism in Pakistan requires measures to restructure patriarchy together with consciousness-raising and political education of women in all respects.

**Keywords:** feminism, gender hierarchy, heera mandi, prostitution, patriarchy

Medieval courts in the Mughal Empire were renowned for dancing, music and singing activities to entertain the elite. The artists were used to live outside the royal court, the premises known as *Shahi Mohalla* ((Royal Neighbourhood). *Shahi Mohalla* was given the name of *Heera Mandi* during the de-facto rule of Heera Singh Dogra who established grain market there. However, during colonial period, the grain market was relocated to Akbari and Delhi gate, and *Heera Mandi* was turned into a flesh market (Mahmood, 2023). The venue for cultural activities, including melodious singing and dancing thus was transformed into a sex industry or prostitution hub, exploiting the vulnerability of women.

The present research examines the role of patriarchy and state institutions to study the women engaged in prostitution in Fouzia Saeed's ethnographic book, *Taboo: The Hidden Culture of Red Light Area* (2002). It investigates women's conditions in Lahore's traditional red light district, where patriarchy prevents women from exercising their basic rights to health care, education, and employment options, and forcing them instead to work endlessly in the commercial sex industry in order to make money. They are also subjected to the worst physical and financial exploitation at the hands of state institutions. This study also looks at how mainstream women have absorbed male ideologies and unknowingly put them into practice in their daily lives in *Taboo*. Set in *Heera Mandi* (Diamond Market), a distinct area of the Walled City of Lahore, Pakistan which is also referred to as *Shahi Mohalla*, or the red light area of Lahore, *Taboo* exposes that all the characters are forced to continue exchange of sex for earning money what radical feminists call irrational and forced sex, thereby, as used by Catharine MacKinnon, the term 'women engaged in prostitution' (MacKinnon, 2007, P. 51) have been used preferably in the article. Instead of presenting a linear depiction of women engaged in prostitution, the article considers their various kinds like trafficked women, call girls, singers, slave girls, and dancers working in *Heera Mandi* as subjects of its study to analyse their plight in Pakistani patriarchal society as depicted in *Taboo*.

The article informs through multiple voices from *Heera Mandi* that women in Pakistani patriarchal society are taken as carriers of culture, tradition, and most importantly the honour of families. This is why, in the process of identity formation of a family, men have complete control over women's sexuality. The notion of 'pure' and 'polluted', and 'good' or 'bad' is also embedded in the roots of patriarchal culture, by virtue of which the character of a woman is evaluated. Likewise, the dichotomy between 'virtuous' and 'evil' women further marginalises women engaged in prostitution in *Heera Mandi*, where along with traditional prostitution, the emerging bourgeois and male-centered public arenas bring vulnerable women of mainstream society into the emerging trends of commercial sexual services (Saeed, 2002).

Men from mainstream society who visit women engaged in prostitution often tell them that they are not to marry, but rather as free women, their role is to entertain men (Saeed 2002, p. 310). They are also told about their specific place in *Shahi Mohalla*, an alienated place, thereby highlighting that women of this particular place are commodities for providing erotic favours to men. Along with the concepts of supporting theorists – Andrea Dworkin, Sheila Jeffreys and Cynthia Enloe, the article considers Catharine MacKinnon's ideas as the main lens for the textual analysis of Saeed's book.

Delving into the context, by the end of the nineteenth century during British colonial period in India, tawaifs were equated to whores, and the word itself was no more in use. Instead, the word prostitute came into fashion, so that courtesans' culture and their associated powers were rubbed out (Kidwai, 2004). Similarly, Oldenburg found that in colonial times, the official policy was to choose pretty prostitutes from salons who then were transferred to cantonments for the sexual use of European soldiers (Oldenburg, 1990). Hence, not only was their profession dehumanised, but these women also suffered venereal infections. They were subjected to regular medical examinations and even quarantined in 'lock hospitals' (Ghosh, 1994). Especially the Cantonment Act of 1864 made prostitutes subject to strict clinical examination and detention of women carrying an infection, whereas the 1869 Act prescribed moral instructions, religious preaching and personal hygiene (Bell, 1994). Adding to the scholarship of Oldenburg, it is also noticed that not only did these colonial powers bring about a transformation to this sexual practice, but a rather prominent class who was denied attending royal social gatherings also revolted to destabilise the older structure of prostitution (Gupta, 2001). Undeniably, once uprooted from their roots they are still fighting to recollect their art and revitalise their culture (Kidwai, 2004).

In Pakistan, prostitution is not only illegal but taboo and practiced only clandestinely. Saeed's *Taboo* shows an undeniable link between traditional patriarchal structure, and socio-economic disparity among women engaged in prostitution. These women of the *Heera Mandi* have a family tradition of being engaged in this activity for centuries. They are called *Kanjar* in Pakistan (Saeed, 2002), an epithet for a clan with a traditional role of prostitution for generations. In the past, they were associated with the Mughal courts and aristocracy in North India, and their practice made Lucknow a cultural centre by preserving high culture.

Fouzia Saeed as a social scientist and activist is well-reputed for her works on women's issues in Pakistan. She exposes the social insincerity and politics of morality, when men act as agents and pimps, work for and with these women whom they consider bad or immoral, while the mainstream women as good (Saeed, 2006). *Taboo* covers the complete culture of *Heera Mandi* as Saeed meticulously records the conventions of the particular *Kanjar* clan of the place and gets to know that the girls associate with dancing under the guardianship of a mentor and attend *mujra* —A kind of variety show usually performed in villages in a combination of sitcoms, dance and singing.

Saeed proclaims that before partition, it was the role of the Hindu Nationalist Movement to segregate courtesans and prostitutes while considering sex as ignominious. The idea has been embedded in human minds so deeply that no one talks about prostitutes' exploitation and their rights (Saeed, 2002). The patriarchal setup further victimises women by snatching the right to education, in that way leaving them illiterate, unemployed and poor. In such stressed circumstances, they are more prone to the practice of prostitution in Pakistan.

Saeed also states that sexual relations between adults based on consent were not unlawful before 1979 in Pakistan. However, prostitutes, under General Zia's regime in Pakistan (1978-1988) were evicted from brothels under Islamisation moves, but prostitutes were neither given any rehabilitation support nor any alternative opportunity for survival. By putting their traditional work areas under threat, the practice was dispersed in several areas in Lahore, Pakistan. Furthermore, in Pakistan, women engaged in prostitution are deprived of the rights given by their families, and getting any rights from the state is a difficult job. Hence, they live a despondent life, most often at the mercy of those men who drag them there and become their pimps afterwards.

*Taboo* exposes the gender power relations where women are always weaker, whether they are from mainstream society or engaged in prostitution. When the girls in *Heera Mandi* reach puberty, their families search for a wealthy customer for what they call *Nath Utrwai* (Taking off the nose ring) or *shadi* (marriage) (Saeed, 2002). The practice of putting off the nose ring is called selling or deflowering virginity, for which men of the family negotiate the price with the client. In this way, the article scrutinises the plight of such women engaged in prostitution in a ‘double fold’ patriarchal setup — patriarchy from mainstream society and patriarchal control within the prostitution system. Moreover, *Taboo* also exposes the working of state institutions – police and politics in Pakistan by directly negotiating with women engaged in prostitution, exploiting them for getting bribery and manipulating them for sexual favours, therefore making clear how patriarchy exerts power in succeeding the practice of prostitution.

Since no optimal work in the literary field is carried out in this dimension in Pakistan, and the book *Taboo*, though with significant subject matter, has not given attention in past studies, therefore, this article contributes to understanding and unveiling the mysteries of prostitution, always under the threat from patriarchy and other institutions, yet at their mercy to survive, as this is how patriarchy works with paradoxical standards. On one side, patriarchy considers these women engaged in prostitution depraved and wants to eliminate the practice; on the other hand, they want the institution of prostitution to grow so that they can attain sexual services with no trouble. Moreover, while patriarchy has remained a subject of discussion in sociological studies in Pakistan, discussing it in the context of prostitution is quite novel. Secondly, how even mainstream women are made to comply with male-designed ideologies and strategies has also never been part of research studies. Hence, these two aspects make this work an innovative contribution to the field of existing knowledge.

#### Research Objectives

- To investigate the roles played by patriarchy and state institutions in rendering women vulnerable and driving them into the sex industry in *Taboo: The Hidden Culture of the Red Light Area*.
- To highlight women’s submission to patriarchal ideologies rationalised in the mainstream society of Pakistan.

#### Research Questions

1. How do the patriarchy and state institutions force women into the practice of prostitution in Fouzia Saeed’s ethnographic book, *Taboo: The Hidden Culture of Red Light Area*?
2. In what ways does Fouzia Saeed’s ethnographic book illustrate women’s subservience to male ideologies in the mainstream world in a patriarchal Pakistan?

#### Literature Review

At present, no substantial theoretical analysis is available on *Taboo*, and the criticism available on Saeed’s work is constrained to a review only (Zubair, 2019). Though the terminology and diction used by Zubair are not as powerful as the aspects which Saeed has covered during her long visits to *Heera Mandi*, this is a no-go area, especially for women who are sound on moral grounds. Hassan notices, while discussing the culture of the place with these people, Saeed pinpoints the decline in this culture in the contemporary period as compared to fifteenth and sixteenth-century Mughal Emperors and Nawabs. People of the *Heera Mandi* lament that it was a golden time for them to alleviate their poverty, helplessness and miseries. Zubair highlights Saeed’s claim that her book is about reducing the social dishonour which is associated with these women.

Prostitution as a degraded practice, carried out on and in women’s bodies directly, can in no way be considered nonviolent and safe, since the pain, unwanted pregnancy, the transmission of infection, and scratches are incontrovertible realities (Sullivan, 2005). Radical feminists have been criticised for their exposing the practice as a mandatory part of patriarchal cultures, and that politics survives on the ideologies shaped by patriarchy and support this unhealthy practice. Smith attacks this view of radical feminists by labeling it a conservative, monolithic, and stagnant approach since it ignores other various kinds of relationships between women and patriarchy (Truong, 2016). Smith’s next criticism is the radical voices in favour of prostitutes, to which she responds that a rich space is shared with prostitutes to discuss and fix their issues no matter how terrible they are (Smith, 2011).

In the context of Pakistan where the most illiterate and vulnerable women join this practice of prostitution, they are manipulated and exploited, and not allowed to speak or share their sorrows, as it has been noticed by Saeed, who took years to listen to the problems experienced by young prostitutes, who were repeatedly told by some family members not to share these details. Like Smith, Elizabeth Kingdon also takes radical feminists’ approach, particularly MacKinnon’s views that laws insufficiently define women’s rights and violence committed

against women in male chauvinist societies as reductionist. Kingdon thinks that by this means, radical feminists condense legal relations to mere economic relations and similarly reduce the power relations between men and women only (Kingdon, 1991).

Mackinnon's arguments are aptly valid in the context of the current study where patriarchy survives through women's subordination and violence against them in Pakistan, and laws are either insufficient or if they exist, they are not exercised against men. Pitiably, there does not exist much work on prostitutes; and the concepts of stigma and taboo are so prevalent that the study in this dimension is called creepy. For this reason, women engaged in prostitution in East and South Asia whenever asked, they talk about the alternatives that relate not to becoming a prostitute, as a Filipino prostitute spoke at the Second World Whores' Congress, that "the right not to become a prostitute is not given to them" (Second World Whores' Congress, 1986).

Similarly, International Labour Organisation (ILO) – that has designed its protocols for tumbling poverty, attaining impartial globalisation, and increasing opportunities for men and women to attain decent work along with the settings of security, freedom, dignity and equity (International Labor Organisation, 1919) also damp down this sexual practice. According to the protocols of this organisation, prostitution cannot be taken as a rewarding commercial activity. As Satz adds that practice of prostitution is a "desperate exchange" that can be eradicated if realistic alternative resources are provided for their living (Satz, 2010).

### Method

This article uses qualitative cum descriptive approach along with textual analysis as method to analyse Saeed's ethnographic book *Taboo: The Hidden Culture of the Red Light Area*. Using the conceptual framework of radical feminist theorist of sexuality, Catherine MacKinnon, this inductive study analyses and explains the selected book under a descriptive methodology. For the said purpose, the book has been read closely to select the manageable chunks relevant to the argument of the study to support the analysis. In order to enhance the validity, along with the textual references, the other scholarly and theoretical support is also made part of the analysis.

### Theoretical and Conceptual Inclinations

The theoretical model of radical feminist, Catharine A. MacKinnon from her work *Toward A Feminist Theory of the State* (1989) is used to analyse the selected book. MacKinnon explicates how patriarchy subverts women engaged in prostitution in Pakistan by having a full control over their bodies, and by making them objects to be used in sex market for creating capital. She asserts that women's power of sexuality is yet not in their control. She defines sexuality, as "a social procedure which forms, systematises, and guides desire, shaping the social categories we understand as men and women, and their mutual relation creates a society" (MacKinnon, 1989). She is of the view that women comply with the dominant patriarchal norms and that compliance becomes a curtain to cover social reality into a natural order. Hence, social reality is rendered indiscernible. In male-centered setup, women are made to learn that they can only be defined with submissive roles; however, if they challenge those roles, it means they put male supremacy in question which brings patriarchy in danger.

Mackinnon's argument that sexuality brings alienation to women instead of power; that is why women are the objects of men's sexual desires in every patriarchal society helps us understand women's alienation in the context of Pakistan. However, capitalist and patriarchal men claim that sexuality provides women with desire and power, which is why they exercise it in prostitution, a notion that MacKinnon forthrightly rejects. She further argues that this alienation makes a woman engaged in prostitution an oppressed and disturbed individual being used as the customer wants. She becomes a commodity since female sexuality is an object that can be sold, stolen, battered, bought or swapped by others. Hence, sexuality is never a woman's possession (MacKinnon, 1989, p. 87). Her these ideas help us locate the perceptions and external expectations surrounding women's sexuality in the selected book.

Mackinnon further argues about the denial of choice due to the social construction of women's roles, which define them as objects of sex available for men all the time. The patriarchal system where men have absolute powers binds women to perform (sexual) actions redundantly without consent. MacKinnon asserts that the idea of consent becomes insignificant since she understands that men embed their ideas in women's minds which can be called internalisation leading toward yes, every time. Consequently, the concept of consent becomes irrelevant; it is simply powerlessness, what women think, "power forged from powerlessness" (MacKinnon, 2007). The idea is additionally relevant to women engaged in prostitution, who, in dire circumstances have no other choice except to sell themselves, hence, their choice is forged into powerlessness. MacKinnon takes this powerlessness as an exploitation of women since she links this inability to the economy and material conditions,

henceforth, making clear that this powerlessness is an external factor imposed by men. These theoretical grounds are helpful in locating external factors responsible for making women vulnerable in Saeed's *Taboo*.

MacKinnon quotes Dworkin while adding to the rights of women engaged in prostitution, who says, "whatever can be stolen can be sold, the security of a woman's person is stolen and sold in prostitution" (Dworkin, 1979). Similarly, MacKinnon expounds that ownership of property is also a civil right, but women in this sexual slavery are systematically kept deprived by the brothel owners and pimps who attain the lion's share of their earnings. Explaining the concept of exploitation, MacKinnon remarks that it does not make any difference to a woman engaged in prostitution whatever she earns since the more she earns the more the pimp snatches, and she is penniless at last. Further, a woman engaged in prostitution turns into a low-priced commodity, a commodity which is metamorphosed over time, and what she gets in her later age is the realisation of being an object along with hunger. Prostitution brings stigma to her since sexuality is a stigma and most importantly being a woman is a stigma (MacKinnon, 1989). Moreover, a woman in prostitution survives with the only burden of satisfying male pleasure in a patriarchal culture which again reduces her to an object. They are taken as men's things, objectified, exploited, and victimised since their pleasure is unavoidably associated with what MacKinnon calls sadomasochism (MacKinnon, 1989). Thus, MacKinnon's legal interventions also serve to ground women's exploitation in *Taboo*.

MacKinnon, while highlighting women's exploitation and subordination, further writes that sadomasochism works on power dynamics because it is rooted in men's psyche to listen to the screams, yells, and cries asking for clemency. Men visit prostitutes for their psychological and physical sufferings to materialise their manhood. They abuse them and like their subjugation and helplessness. MacKinnon adds that they are exploited economically, reified, physically abused, excluded from mainstream society, and deprived of self-respect, credibility and resources. Hence, it is not the individual's but the state's fault and violation of human rights (MacKinnon, 1989).

MacKinnon's idea of consciousness-raising or the "Theory of Knowing"—the process which deliberately acts as a mirror to affirm women that they can be actors to bring change (MacKinnon, 1989), is also significant in the case of prostitution. It is a journey to know about a social being to bring transformation in her. MacKinnon illustrates noteworthy aspects of consciousness shaping under male oppression when, initially, women struggle against male subjugation, and, secondly, women think they find ways to counter male chauvinism to practice their ideas but it is never so. What MacKinnon suggests through consciousness-raising is the impression of self, leading women from nothing to an important self. It happens through a shared history of similar issues, meanwhile, shaping reality and alternatively shaping the consciousness of other women through multiple questions when they share their experience of objectification or of being taken as an imaginary thing (MacKinnon, 1989). The next section analyses the selected text by using these conceptual markers.

### Results and Discussion

In *Taboo*, Saeed puts forward several structural flaws of the patriarchal society of Pakistan, where within the sexist hierarchy, women are further dichotomised as 'good' and 'bad'. They are inferior in the social hierarchy; they do not experience the dialogical level to share their ideologies and speak about their experiences. Saeed's idea echoes the opinion of American Psychoanalyst, Jessica Benjamin, who quotes that reciprocal relationships lead toward intelligibility, subjectivity, and equality; however, women are neither subjects nor taken equal to men in Pakistan, therefore, reciprocity is not allowed there, instead, they are made silent (Benjamin, 1995). This is the case with mainstream women, however, the women of *Heera Mandi* are further excluded and left at the margins of the main society. They are considered as the things to hate, sexual objects for customers, and helpless creatures that relate to MacKinnon's idea of sexual objectification, women's inferiority and othering (MacKinnon, 1989). Saeed notices that people do not talk to them to avoid the repercussions of stigmatisation (Saeed, 2002). That is why the policeman in *Taboo* also does not provide any information to the writer about *Heera Mandi* since the actions carried out in the *Mohalla* are buried mysteries not to be revealed. Moreover, Saeed encounters disgusting remarks in the beginning when she asks questions from the people whom she visits because they think that decent women never visit the *Mohalla*. In these circumstances, speaking in their favor is no less than a crusade for these oppressed women, who are unable to make reciprocal relationships and choices due to their lack of material power (Khan, 2023).

However, another policeman shares his views that the place is taboo, nobody talks or comments about it. Then, unpredictably, he utters that "you are stepping on many people's toes" (Saeed, 2002), where 'many people's toes', we believe intrinsically indicates the complex but systematic network of people engaged to run the

‘business’ and generate revenue. In this web of people, ‘a woman engaged in prostitution’ is the center of the business, but she is at the margin – the phenomenon what MacKinnon indicates as organised expropriation or alienation of females’ sexuality, especially those who are engaged in prostitution. Sheila Jeffreys and Richard Poulin also argue that, in the past, women were heading towards equality; however, men as a powerful section, promoted sex industries so that they reinstall their authority to exploit women economically and sexually (Jeffreys, 2009; Poulin, 2004). Moreover, Dworkin’s remarks that it is not only sexuality but rather women are objectified since the self is very much important for the working of a body, further explicate MacKinnon’s idea of female alienation. Keeping the above remarks in observation, it can be said that women engaged in prostitution refute the claim of patriarchy and capitalists that sexuality empowers female gender and brings agency and desire to them. However, Saeed’s response to the policeman’s comments “it is a dilemma if there exists any study, it focuses on prostitutes, whereas men’s structural superiority and practice to show themselves as subjects remain unexposed” (Saeed, 2002) seems a challenge to hush the policeman and continue with her work. Thus, Saeed’s claim has power since it is a woman engaged in prostitution who is stigmatised, gazed at, deemed untouchable, and inferior in Pakistan; she is an inferior gender, detested and stereotyped, and in her case, the justice system falls prey to red tapism.

Furthermore, this ethnographic work exposes important aspect of the masculine version of depicting ‘women engaged in prostitution’ which Saeed takes as fabricated, politicised and shaped as men desire. Amjad Shah remarks that “a prostitute is not fit to be a sister, wife or mother” (Saeed, 2002, P. 4). Shah’s discourse represents the ideology of the state’s institution, which ultimately represents the ideas of patriarchy. He declares these women another class, quite intolerable in conventional society. That is why these women bear a hostile stigma. Shah’s point of view further conveys that men construe them as extraordinary creatures instead of normal human beings, thus his notion resonates with radical feminists’ view that men’s easy access to these women in prostitution, the vulnerability of these women who are triply subjugated — being women, poor, and radical others, and exercise of male power make them the extraordinary and eccentric characters in the mainstream society (MacKinnon, 1989; Farley, 2004). Saeed debunks these stereotypes constructed against the women engaged in prostitution in a patriarchal Pakistan, and against this illogical depiction, she re-imagines the practice of prostitution in *Heera Mandi* by accentuating the role of clients instead of prostitutes (Saeed, 2002,). In so doing, she exposes the powerful business dynamics, showing how men are more energetic to keep these sexual services going on, while women wish to terminate if they were offered some alternate opportunities for survival. As a result, Saeed unveils women’s powerlessness and devaluation as a sexist practice that has taken the shape of a social fact in red light district in Pakistan.

*Taboo* depicts the adulterated area of *Heera Mandi* as a metaphor for men’s carnal pleasures and ‘women engaged in prostitution’ as their fantasies with their commodified bodies instantly accessible. Economics and sexuality run parallel there for the existence of sexual practice. With lost virtue and no honour, women of *Heera Mandi* expose paradoxes, how traditional patriarchy and feudal system facilitate their business to sustain despite multiple attempts to unsettle it. This fact leads to assume that patriarchy accomplishes its sexual pleasures by violating the bodies of the women of *Heera Mandi*; and alternatively use the metonym of public women, defiled and whores to marginalise them.

Saeed delves deep into the intricate web of prostitution in *Heera Mandi* through *Ustad* — a teacher or mentor— Sadiq, a musician, who trains the girls of *Kanjar* families in their formative years of life, therefore helps in revealing the secrets through his student, Laila (Saeed, 2002). Laila considers prostitution as Dworkin mentions, ‘an abuse of a female body’ (Dworkin, 1993). It signifies that the younger generation wants to speak up about the authenticities veiled behind the concept of taboo. In so doing, they confront this widespread concept to restructure it by shifting and reconstructing their identities as artists — singers, musicians, dancers, or as what “Laila desires to be, an actress” (Saeed, 2002). This younger generation does not want to become the victims of this practice but rather attempts to highlight the primary cause of this sexual slavery, bringing political and social contexts also into this debate. It is not Laila’s choice to engage in the practice of prostitution but she is forced by her family which becomes dialogic to Geetanjali Gangoli’s remarks that women engaged in prostitution need attention with a priority to listen to their issues (on political and state levels) and it needs further hard work to free them from this sex-selling business (Gangoli, 2008). MacKinnon also prioritises the voices of these marginalised women to understand structural inequalities (MacKinnon, 1989). Saeed’s ethnographic book has given voice to Laila’s career choice in her future. Also, Janice Raymond’s words support the idea of choice, “No matter whether women experience forced entry or initial ‘choice’, they are still used and used up by an industry that exploits them to the hilt” (Raymond, 2013). These assertions help to understand Laila’s subjugation in red light district of patriarchal Pakistan.

For women in *Heera Mandi*, the alternate roles like singers and dancers seem exotic to men, and these women become men's playthings when they are pinched, ridiculed and pulled during their performance hours, and in the end, they are asked for sexual services. Saeed's characters, Laila and Pami are desecrated when they go to artistic performances, as some feudal lords and businessmen contact them for sexual advances. Laila utters, "Pami was pinched so hard that she had a bruise" (Saeed, 2002). These details are similar to what MacKinnon indicates that women exist for the realisation of male pleasures and that women in sexual practice are not better than dead (MacKinnon, 1989), or women engaged in prostitution are nonhumans legally, so, they are dishonored (Anderson, 2002). Dworkin's views also validate the given points that affluent men buy sex services for pleasure and that pleasure is conditioned with the intimidation and humiliation of 'women engaged in prostitution' (Dworkin, 1979). That is why the patriarchal call for sexual contact leaves art of singing and dancing as an unsettling and unstable idea for Laila and challenges the traditional concept of art as a self-governing activity that cannot be associated with the political and social circumstances in Pakistani patriarchal society. Among these brutal power structures, Laila convinces herself "to drop her somber thoughts and kneel to the orders of her pimp aunt" (Saeed, 2002). In Laila's case, her wish to only dance does not materialise, instead, the idea of men's power works and she is used for sexual services. Nonetheless, Laila needed to know how to erase what MacKinnon views as women's extraordinary reliance on others — pimps or brothel managers — for economic purposes, which MacKinnon suggests, can be erased through consciousness-raising. This method erases women's conditioned thoughts related to powerlessness through socialisation, sharing experiences, and creating space where they can move freely (MacKinnon, 1989). Furthermore, consciousness-raising erases the idea of being an object, as Laila is being treated; and in its place, it gives women the concept of freedom and self.

Saeed's ethnographic work also informs about the working of patriarchal practices in the *Kanjar* family itself, where men abuse and beat their girls if they do not entertain clients. "They fight with them for not paying the full price of living in their parent's home" (Saeed, 2002), stressing how a brother or a father becomes a pimp in *Heera Mandi*. MacKinnon's concept that 'women engaged in prostitution' are things, so, they are victimised and taken with greater sexual power for realising men's pleasure also called sadomasochism; and a failure to tolerate clients' violence brings out wrath in their pimps who may be a father or brother (MacKinnon, 1985) aptly responds to the ongoing practice in *Heera Mandi* as depicted in *Taboo*. These girls are men's things as their pimps think; they can use and abuse them; therefore, they torture them if they fail in their duties (Saeed 2002). MacKinnon's idea that sadomasochism is practiced in a power/subjugation dichotomy further exposes the female gender's vulnerability in the patriarchal Pakistan, where men belong to power and women are subjugated, because, the state provides power to men what MacKinnon again asserts that it is a human right's violation (MacKinnon, 1989).

In *Taboo*, Soni, is a teenage girl as Saeed states that she has not reached her puberty, but her father negotiates with client the price of *Nath Utrwae* (deflowering her virginity), which shows working of patriarchal power dynamics within the family in *Heera Mandi*. Her father exercises his power (as feminists argue that patriarchy has its roots in materiality) over his daughter or as another character in *Taboo*, Ustad Gaman articulates, "this happens when *dalle* (pimp) take the management" (Saeed, 2002). In so doing, her father violated her human rights (Saeed, 2002). Soni experienced unequal power relations, sexual exploitation and coercion. The money that her father obtained for his daughter's rape is thus a form of force for Soni, but not a measure of her consent. In this oppression, Soni was unable to avail any other alternative. Emotionally and mentally, she was unable to manage the sexual activity in which she was forcefully engaged that made her stressed and silent (MacKinnon, 2007).

*Taboo* also makes us understand the ways of linking sexual practice with power structures and the country's economy through different institutions. In so doing, the book exposes the role of institutional exploitation also. Saeed figures out this exploitation through the appointment of a police station officer of *Tibbi Thana*, the adjacent police station of *Heera Mandi*, through "heavy bribery to the city government" (Saeed, 2002). Since the officer has paid bribes, he controls and harasses the people of the *Mohalla* to recover thrice times more than the money he paid as bribery. Mehmud Kanjar — known as "the greatest pimp of our times" in *Heera Mandi*, a philanthropist for his community which he thinks is already oppressed by the police, administration and political leaders, exposes (Saeed, 2002) this corruption of state institutions. This mirrors MacKinnon's claim (1989) that the state underhandedly guards male sexual misconduct, which further unveils the fact that victimisation is a politically stimulated phenomenon because of men's dominant place in society. Similarly, Andrea Dworkin and Dorothy Roberts also argue that instead of protecting these women, policing practices exacerbate their exploitation (Dworkin, 1979; Roberts, 1998). *Taboo* conveys that police act as commanding and punishing forces with complete control over 'women engaged in prostitution' by taking a hefty part of their earnings. Mehmud Kanjar discloses that being poor, they are abused, shamed and humiliated. One Police officer remarks in a discussion with Saeed that they are "the scum of society, so they will disgrace them and crush them" not only exhibit the exercise

of power but (Saeed, 2002) also validate Mehmud's statement that due to having power, state institutions manipulate these women.

State institution of Police collect heavy money from the brothel owners or '*dairedaar*' (landlords), as Saeed reports that "the police officers distribute the bribe money among themselves as settled in ascending hierarchy" (Saeed, 2002). Thereby, it indicates that the police also support patriarchs, who go there to use these women. It also stresses that along with gendered power structure, institutions too, oblige male-designed norms. As women engaged in prostitution usually belong to the vulnerable class, therefore, it becomes easy for police to judge them on strict terms. Politicians also are striking customers of *Heera Mandi* with their mistresses there, whom they visit when the *Mohalla's* working hours, 7pm to 11 pm are over (Saeed, 2002). These institutions – police and politics, expose the paradox of patriarchy that want to sustain the practice of men's entertainment. Another angle of men's conversation with 'women engaged in prostitution' opens up the patriarchal paradox to sustain the practice when men not only use these women, but recurrently remark that they are not for marriage but to amuse men sexually. Saeed's character, Chanda is repeatedly told by elite men that her life would end up in sexual services. Some other businessmen and bureaucrats tell her that "free women are not to marry since the place of their work is reserved for them" (Saeed, 2002). This idea of patriarchal men explicitly conveys the ruling attitude of men and these women's victimisation and sexual objectification. That is why for radical feminists also, prostitution is rape; it is rape in Chanda's case also since she is forced to earn extra money by entertaining many clients. It is not only the use of women as sexual objects, it also establishes men's power over women; and the activity reduces women to their sex and dehumanises them (Dworkin, 1979, 1993, MacKinnon, 1985; Jeffreys, 2009; Barry, 1995). The practice of forced sex also exposes how the basic right of women engaged in prostitution to take a decision about their life is snatched; and instead, they are snubbed, shamed, and ridiculed for their deviance, so that they remain silent.

In addition, abduction and trafficking are also part of *Taboo*, for which, women of traditional society become victims, when they are brought to *Heera Mandi*. Pimps manage their private brothels in *Heera Mandi* to run their business by using trafficked women – who are vulnerable in mainstream society. As Yasmeen's empirical study indicates that women in Lahore, Pakistan are kidnapped for prostitution, acid attacked and killed in honour killing. Also, almost 70-90 % women face domestic violence (Yasmeen, 2018, p. 26). Yet, another study reveals the familial determinants as major reasons of trafficking in children. Family is found to be mainly associated with the vulnerability of child to be trafficked due to parents' lack of knowledge, voracity for economic benefits, abusive behavior at home, family dissolution and drug abuse (Ali et al., 2014). Razia in *Taboo* is a teenage character who is trafficked first and then sold to the next procurer (Saeed, 2002). By this means, the pimp produces goods to keep the business functioning (Jeffreys, 2009). Melissa Farley's claim that trafficking expands the market of women's sexual exploitation and subordination in a patriarchal society (Farley, 2009) also supports the idea of expansion of sexual business in patriarchal Pakistan. Razia's trafficking, according to Cynthia Enloe (2014) is gendered, commercialised and patriarchal, and she is the most exploited object since she does not have links either in *Mohalla* or back in family. As Mackinnon also indicates that along with sexuality, patriarchy intersects with class and race also – the common constituents of oppression (MacKinnon, 1985), which brings to light, how numerous systems of power transect and shape women's experiences of subjugation. It is not only social acceptance of prostitution but demand for the cheap goods and sexual services that fuels sex trafficking (Lilley, 2019). As soon as Razia comes under a pimp's control, she is conditioned that she is a woman with lost virtue and has nothing to do with traditional people. Razia is subjected to a number of rapes and violence, as while explaining the trafficked women's position, Enloe writes that they use drugs to control active women to make them entirely numbed; they are forced to have as many rapes as possible (since radical feminists call sex without consent rape) in one day (Enloe, 2014). Razia has "death threats, torture and abuse" (Saeed, 2002, P. 248) as psychological pressure. This violence, radical feminists inform, destroys the integrity of trafficked woman's body and soul (Radin, 1996; Camirand, 2004; Audet, 2008) as in Saeed's book, Razia has been destroyed because she has made herself a "drug addict and exposed to many sexual infections" (Saeed, 2002). She is trafficked because pimps traffic adults; also, they remark that they traffic adults because they are excessive in demand. Trafficked victims like Razia are not kept in a fixed place but are rather traded on and on to the next procurer, so that they never come out of debt and try to go back, an idea that construes them as commodities, an object of mere sexual trade to be sold and bought again and again.

### **Internalisation of Patriarchal Ideologies**

Since this article also argues that mainstream women have also internalised the patriarchal ideologies and Fouzia Saeed – the author of *Taboo* herself is the explicit example of this contention, this section elaborates the process of patriarchal internalisation. Though national media of Pakistan critically covered Saeed's project and she



was labelled as “a PhD girl in *Heera Mandi*” in news headlines (Saeed, 2002), Saeed writes that all her male friends walked on her both sides protectively (Saeed, 2002). In so doing, Saeed deviates from her thoroughgoing claim of exposing mysteries of patriarchal powers against prostitution to an innocent assertion of acknowledging the difference of power. She proves herself unknowingly as a member of mainstream society where women have what MacKinnon says, internalised male power (MacKinnon, 1989), and men are conditioned that they are protective, therefore, superior, which willfully leaves the female gender as fragile, powerless, and inferior. If men in patriarchal culture are not offensive and abusive to women, the concept of protection dwindles entirely. However, if women have conceptualised that men are their protectors, it points to denouncing one kind of power (exercised by men in prostitution which Saeed is claiming to denounce) by replacing it with another kind of power, (that they practice on mainstream women by becoming their protector/guards) which according to radical feminists is the internalisation of the incessant conception of patriarchy and sexism (Jeffreys, 2009; Poulin, 2004; Farley, 2004). MacKinnon asserts it as male supremacy since men consider their control as protection, and then violate the bodies of the protected by means of acting as a relative (uncle, cousin, or brother in law etc.) (MacKinnon, 1987).

Once more, Saeed shows partial behaviour, when during her visit to the *Mohalla*, Saeed’s cousin, Sara dances for a while. In response, not only does Saeed’s tone get angry, but she stops her by shouting “it is not the place to dance, do you see what are you doing?” (Saeed, 2002). It was precisely the same objection Saeed encountered from her friends at the commencement of her project when they warned her that “you don’t know what you are doing by taking this chapter as a study” (Saeed, 2002). Thereby, Saeed’s lens is very much the same as that of mainstream people since people are conditioned to the superior gender’s stereotypical constructions in Patriarchal culture of Pakistan. Saeed is also conditioned to what men think of and speak about the place (*Mohalla*) that she might have taken from her family or the place where she works. As Kate Millet also highlights, that power works through the institution of family, authority, coercive control, and through institutions (state, church, military, etc.) to practice ideologies that validate men’s power and women’s subservience (Millet, 1978). In Saeed’s context, MacKinnon’s idea about women’s compliance in patriarchal societies also becomes relevant (MacKinnon, 1989). Correspondingly, Rothenberg and Jaggar’s notion that patriarchy has its roots in materiality and institutionalises male superiority, no matter in which class they have their place, they are superior, who practice their power to make women subordinate; and women’s submission whether voluntary or through false consciousness leads toward compliance and conditioning (Jaggar & Rothenberg, 1993) also supports the discussion. Unsympathetically, with this conditioning, women follow all patriarchal ideologies and false myths, and it has become a convention in patriarchal societies like Pakistan.

Furthermore, Saeed refers to ‘women engaged in prostitution’ in *Heera Mandi* as “unruly and rowdy” (Saeed, 2002), as they are mentioned frequently in traditional society, and the *Mohalla* is taken as a place of cheap pleasures. It appears as an involuntary and unexpected turn of Saeed about women engaged in prostitution, which makes her a little bit naive during her writing project since she leaves the adjectives used for ‘women engaged in prostitution’ unattended. Dworkin’s concepts elucidate Saeed’s given remarks about these women that ‘women engaged in prostitution’ are destined to serve due to their family’s pressure. They stray from the traditional marker of sexuality; thus, they need to attend to clients whom they hate enough. They are compelled to earn money essentially one or two hundred Pakistani rupees from each customer, who comes to attain violent sex what Dworkin calls on vaginal slime (Dworkin, 1983). The vagina thus acts like slime, a plaything for men. It also shows that they are taken as subjugated beings due to their vulnerability. Hence, Saeed’s approach towards the ‘women engaged in prostitution’ in *Heera Mandi* explicates her internalisation of mainstream patriarchal ideologies.

## Conclusion

This article has informed that sexually transgressive practices along with trafficking for sexual activities are executed under the shadow of patriarchy and state institutions in *Heera Mandi*, Lahore, Pakistan. Saeed has faithfully revealed the ruthless tradition of patriarchy in realising the patronised practices of transgressive sex and trafficking for sexual slavery since in the patriarchal setup of Pakistan, men are given absolute power, and women are defined and re-defined in terms of sexuality. Moreover, the article has informed that patriarchal notions are threaded in society’s structure and institutional setup in the form of their ideologies which conveys the idea that society and institutions oblige patriarchal ideologies and therefore marginalise the female gender. By means of these structural flaws, women in the patriarchal setup of Pakistan’s *Heera Mandi* are objectified, stigmatised, and abridged under the adjectives of whores, diseased, not for marriage and polluting male bodies. However, the study has unveiled this secret as well, that while setting aside women’s degradation, patriarchy wants the institution of prostitution to grow so that they get entertained without trouble. The article also has proved that mainstream women have also internalised the patriarchal ideologies when they unintentionally speak patriarchal thoughts. Thus,

this textual analysis concludes that patriarchal ideologies admittedly sanction women's inferiority and allow the practices of prostitution and human trafficking to survive in *Heera Mandi*. The article suggests the restructuring of the social fabric of patriarchy to eradicate gender inequality through feminist activism as well as consciousness-raising and political awareness of women in its entirety. In Saeed's *Taboo*, there are certain aspects, i.e., the culture of courtesans in Mughal times, traditions of *Mohalla*, and political economy of prostitution that can be studied under historical, cultural and Marxist theoretical frameworks, respectively in future.

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