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**#Me Too: Cultural Framing of Women in Pakistani English Fiction and Non-Fiction**



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**Abstract**

Gender discrimination as a menace has frequently been reflected in fiction, particularly the literature from the South Asian countries, where culture, religion, and patriarchy control the societies mostly. The present study aims to highlight the cultural framing of women in Pakistani English fiction and non-Fiction. De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* provides a theoretical lens to this study to highlight the representation of the sexual violence faced by women in public places portrayed in Bhutto's *Daughter of the East* Khan's *Trespassing*. The study found that, though Pakistani fiction and non-fiction in English help voice the freedom and liberty of Pakistani women, the ripple effects of these narratives fail to reach mainstream segments of society. The study implies a dire need to create activist forums for awareness among the womenfolk at a mass level to facilitate the underprivileged and marginalised, rather than benefitting the elitists.

**Keywords:** English Literature, Fiction, Non-fiction, post-Feminism, Hashtag

**Introduction**

#MeToo (#Meinbhi in Pakistan) has assumed a diverse status in non-Western, non-White, postcolonial, transnational, and indigenous feminisms (Rafi, 2022; McDougall, 2016; Ahmed, 2011; Suzack, 2011; Mohanty, 2003; Smith, 1999; Kaplan, 1994; Suleri, 1992; Minh-ha, 1989; Spivak, 1988; Jayawardena, 1986; Lorde, 1984; Mohanty, 1984). The #MeToo, with variations of related local or international names, is a movement against harassment and sexual assault of women in personal spaces or workplaces. In this context, in 2006, the phrase 'MeToo' emerged on social media as 'MySpace' by a sexual harassment survivor and activist, Tarana Burke. In Pakistan, the movement gained popularity in 2018 under the hashtag #MainBhi. Modelled after the international #MeToo movement, the movement has sparked controversy at an extreme level in Pakistani conservative society, and met a conventional patriarchal response, perceiving it as a liberal move by women in Pakistan following the footsteps of Western women. Pakistani women experience one or the other form of sexual violence in public places (Imtiaz & Kamal, 2021). They are 'damned if [they] speak, damned if [they] don't' (Johnson, 1987). Sexual harassment cases are not reported because such women are abused, blackmailed, and ruined. #MeToo or not, in the Pakistani social setup, the victims, not their offenders, are mortified and disgraced, which is a reason for silence. Even though the repercussions are vital, the #MeToo movement has created an impact in the conservative Pakistani patriarchal society. Major milestones have been the recent 'Aurat Marches' showing solidarity on International Women's Day since 2020, and the events are receiving constant condemnation across the country, often labelled as a foreign agenda that misleads Pakistani women from religion and cultural boundaries (Jangbar, 2022).

International Women's Day, March 8th, celebrates gender parity and women's rights to raise awareness among the public. Gender parity is a measure that compares the income, education, and work hours of men and women. This measurement informs policy-making, particularly in relation to legislative law that focuses on gender parity in general (Barrientos & Jeon, 2020). International Women's Day has a rich history

spanning 115 years. It began in 1909, when the Socialist Party in the United States of America organized the first observance, and 15,000 women in New York protested against long working hours, low pay, and their lack of the right to vote. It became monumental in 1917, when tens of thousands of Russian women took to the streets to demand their right to vote. In 1975, the United Nations gave final approval for International Women's Day to be officially recognized worldwide. In 1996, the United Nations adopted a mechanism to dedicate a specific theme to the day each year. The theme for 2026 is #GivetoGain, i.e., 'Give To Gain', which accentuates the power of reciprocity and support. When people, organizations, and communities give generously, opportunities and support for women increase. Giving is not a subtraction; it's intentional multiplication."

'When women thrive, we all rise' is its slogan. In March 2018, the women's forum 'Hum Auratein' (We the Women) started organising protests in the name of Aurat March. These included Women's Democratic Front (WDF), Women's Action Forum (WAF), and others. Later, the Lady Health Workers Association also endorsed Aurat March (Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020) in major cities across Pakistan. (Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020). The apparent purpose of the march is to seek accountability for violence of any form against women in Pakistan, to support women who experience different forms of violence at the hands of security forces, at homes, in public, and at workplaces (March 2020). Aurat March is a women's empowerment movement, not merely restricted to peace rallies, raising awareness placards, or sloganeering for women's equality and anti-man or the anti-elitist discourses (Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020). It asks for public spaces, with hashtags like #JaggaDein (Give Space). Since March 2018, Aurat March has been celebrated every year, and it mostly results in heated debates on talk shows, newspapers, and on social media because of its #METOO slogan (Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020). It is also considered a new dimension of feminism, which continues to spread vulgarity against the norms of Islam and the cultural values of the country (Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020).

Pakistani society, particularly the middle and lower middle class, is influenced by culture, religion, and patriarchy. Activism becomes impossible in certain situations. At that point, writings become effective strategies to address these issues; however, people still challenge the slogans arising from movements such as Aurat March (March 8, 2019-2026) in Pakistan. The present study focuses on the representation of the physical and psychological violence inflicted upon women in public spheres. Bhutto's *Daughter of the East* and Khan's *Trespassing* reflect these violences by challenging the stereotypes.

### **Gender(ed) Gap in Pakistan**

Religion, culture, and patriarchy are the binding forces in the lives of people in Pakistan (Langstieh & Sahu, 2026). Because men are the primary breadwinners, women are confined to the walls of the house to follow assigned gender roles (Lorber, 2018). The World Economic Forum (WEF) states in its 2025 Global Gender Gap report that Pakistan ranks 148th out of 153 countries (World Economic Forum, 2025), among the worst places for women in the world. In Pakistan, men are privileged to have a voice, whereas women lead voiceless lives. Women in Pakistan and around the world have faced domestic violence, harassment, rape, gender discrimination, kidnappings, social media trolling, emotional trauma, and a lack of inheritance rights for ages (Asghar & Ramisha, 2024). Women are considered physically weak, and any

physical resistance is seen as impossible. In this context, writing helps women raise their voices. Literature reflects society and the spirit of the age (Ismail, 2020). These women writers aim to convey a message of hope and survival, challenging man-made societal structures. Women writers struggle to voice opposition to age-old customs and traditions (Ahmed, 2009). They use books, newspapers, journals, and magazines to raise their voices against inflexible gender boundaries (Eisler et al., 2016) and systemic silencing (Shpungin et al., 2012), which are consistent in their societies.

UNFPA Pakistan (2026) reports '8% of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence, and 6% have experienced sexual violence. 34% of ever-married women have experienced spousal physical, sexual, or emotional violence. Five percent of women have experienced spousal sexual violence (Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18). 56% of women who have experienced any type of physical or sexual violence have not sought help or talked with anyone about the violence. 'Socio-cultural barriers, economic dependency and lack of information, accessibility as well as lack of existence of support systems such as health care and psycho-social support services' are the root causes of the gendered violence, the report states. Gender violence is seen as deeply ingrained in the everyday life of the people in this country. 'Sex' as a biological term, while "gender" as a psychological and socio-cultural one has psychological and socio-cultural implications (Khan & Khan, 2018). Women are living within cultural and religious restraints in Pakistan under the shadow of orthodox and conservative cultures. Overall, gender-based violence is a pervasive human rights violation in the country (Khan & Khan, 2018). There are 860 'honour' killings, 268 sexual assaults/harassments, 90 incidents of acid burning, 481 of domestic violence, 344 rapes/gang rapes, and 535 cases of violence against women (Khan & Khan, 2018). Women's demeanour in society has always been questioned, and, unfortunately, without support (Bukhari, 2017). The living conditions of women in Pakistan are extremely low, and their chances of moving ahead in life are miserable. However, in the portrayal of society, the representation of women emerges as the most significant aspect of English-language writing, as it reflects feminism (Ahmad, 2009). The present study has undertaken two women's writings in English to highlight the representation of Pakistani women. Benazir Bhutto, as the first and only woman Prime Minister of Pakistan, served terms as Prime Minister from 1988-1990 and 1993-1996. She was assassinated by a suicide bomber in 2007 when she was returning from her procession in Liaquat Bagh, Rawalpindi. Her autobiography, titled *Daughter of the East*, was published in 1988, and it was an attempt to reflect the resistance of numerous women in Pakistan (Bukhari, 2017). The autobiography reflects her own fight as a woman, a mother, a daughter, and a politician. It also shows her 'solitary confinement' before her political positioning as prime minister. She announces that the aim of writing her autobiography is 'to set down the record of the brutal Martial Law regime of General Zia UL-Haq' (Bhutto, 2008).

Uzma Aslam Khan, a Pakistani-origin writer, has written five novels, i.e., *Trespassing* (2003), *The Geometry of God* (2008), *Thinner Than Skin* (2012), and *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali* (2019). Khan was born in Lahore and spent most of her life in Karachi. She spent her early years as a traveller in Manila, Tokyo, and London. *Trespassing* (2003) by Uzma Aslam Khan has been translated into fourteen languages in eighteen different countries. The novel is set in the 1990s in the aftermath of the Afghan War and the Gulf War and was completed a few months before 9/11. It was designated as 'prescient', as it illustrates the dark and troubled context of the

involvement of the West in the East and a precursor to the post-9/11 fiction from Pakistan. For the 2003 Commonwealth Writers' Prize, Eurasia region, *Trespassing* (2003) was shortlisted (Khan et al., 2019).

### **Portrayal of Women in Pakistani Fiction**

Women writers across the globe, in general, and in Pakistan in particular, portray the lives of women and record women's expression through different genres of literature (Malik et al., 2022). Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Elif Shafak, Qurat-ul-ain Haider, Bina Shah, Anuradhathi Roy, Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsi, Fahmida Riaz, and Kishwar Naheed – all have used the pen as a sword against the gendered norms of society, stopping women from taking part in their development. The poems of Fahmida Riaz and Kishwar Naheed in Pakistan are informed by a different set of paradigms about self and community and, at the same time, reflect an archive (poetry) as crucial to feminist critiques of nationalism (Anantharam, 2009) and as resistance to a male-dominated society. Naheed criticised the infamous Hudood Ordinance in Pakistan through her poem 'We Sinful Women', and it reflects the rebellious character of the poet. "We Sinful Women" challenges and criticises the old customs of Chadar and Chardeewari, and the 'political and religious codifications of veiling' (Silva, 2004). Naheed, in her poem "We Sinful Women", boldly reflects her resistance:

*Who don't sell our lives?/who don't bow our heads/ who don't fold our hands together.../It is we, sinful women/ who come out raising the banner of truth up against barricades of lies on the highways* (Naheed, 1991)

Furthermore, Zehra Nigah corroborates in her poem that: *Warm and tender soft, thus chadur/Of compromise has taken me years to knit.* (cited in Silva, 2004)

These poems manifest resistance through the power of pen from female writers in Pakistan against the patriarchy and matriarchy, and how women are marginalised and subjugated (Malik et al., 2022).

Though the basic purpose of feminism is to serve as a platform to demand equal rights for women, its sole aim is to acknowledge the superior creative potential of women bestowed upon them by God (Eisler et al., 2016). A few radical feminists believe that women's writings cannot be judged rightly by male critics and hence, these women believe in gyno-criticism. With the emergence of Virginia Woolf and Henrik Ibsen, the feminist spark culminated in the stories of modern Western writers. Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879) were the first to develop a feminist consciousness for women in society (Ahmad, 2009).

This consciousness was further raised by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953), while Julia Kristeva ("Julia Kristeva," 2026), Luce Irigaray (Irigaray, n.d.), and Hélène Cixous ("Hélène Cixous," 2026) are other significant women writers who discovered new dimensions of feminism, which spread to the postcolonial regions with huge influence. This is significantly noticeable in Pakistani writers. For many, Simone de Beauvoir's feminist bible, *The Second Sex* (1953), is mostly a source of inspiration because she presented the case of females in a different manner to the world. Beauvoir presented her case in the book around the world: 'Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female – whenever she behaves as a human being, she is said to imitate a male' (Beauvoir, 1949). It showed her concerns that women were living without any identity, and in general, it was questioned by numerous feminists in the world: What is the yardstick one uses to evaluate women's agency and autonomy? (Anantharam, 2009)

In countries like Pakistan, the basic question about identity is whether notions of self and power emerge from a different set of motivations and traditions (Anantharam, 2009). Did tradition, religion, and culture have a strong influence on the lives of both genders, i.e., male and female? However, due to education and the heave of social media, a country which is considered orthodox and conservative in terms of equality for women by the West shows a constant development in the rise of the feminist movement, feminist artivism (art-as-activism) (Afzal-Khan, 2012), and with the growth of Pakistani feminist fiction.

Women raise their voices as a protest to the male-dominated society, against the imbalanced social structure (Langah & Umrani, 2022), and their struggle is clearly visible in their fiction and non-fiction writings. In Pakistan, women's rights are forcefully seized, and their voices are intentionally silenced (Khan & Khan, 2018), whether a woman is strong like Benazir Bhutto, who got her education from Oxford and served as Prime Minister of Pakistan twice, or is a commoner.

Exploring the status of women in fiction and non-fiction English writings by Pakistani female authors, we find many cases of a silenced woman (Khan & Khan, 2018). In Pakistan, patriarchy is the oppressive system benefitting men, whereas women are deprived (Khan & Khan, 2018). Moreover, women in Pakistan face the fate of Qandeel Baloch, as she constantly challenged the image of an ideal Eastern/Pakistani woman that society imposes upon many women like her. Baloch defied the conventional social and cultural expectations of a daughter, mother, wife, and sister and categorically refused to be domesticated, which resulted in her honour killing (Langah & Umrani, 2022).

### **Cultural Framing of Women in Pakistani English Fiction and Non-Fiction**

Society in Pakistan is dominantly religious and, as a result, religious men have a more discriminatory attitude toward women (Khan & Khan, 2018). Religion restricts women from the wings of freedom, and the freedom that women experience within patriarchal societies (Kanwal, 2018), like Pakistan, is a mirage. Women are deprived of education, which results in their dependency on the male members of their family. In Pakistan, women have usually been subject to patriarchal traditional norms and arbitrary social and communal practices. Honor killing is one of them; its origin can be traced back to pre-Islamic and tribal cultures (Langah & Umrani, 2022).

Throughout the world, women are coerced into letting go of their basic human rights, such as health and education, are physically mistreated, sexually abused, sold into slavery, mutilated, and married against their will in the name of tradition, religion, honour, and male entitlement (Khattak, 2018). There is no doubt that women in Pakistan also suffer from negligence in comparison to men. The living standard of many women in Pakistan is also extremely poor, and they are even denied the basic rights of women. They are also denied education, have to suffer physical mistreatment, many experience sexual abuse at home and at the workplace, and many are killed in the name of honour. Therefore, women writers are a true representation of their gendered community, and mostly their writings portray female characters and their issues in the domestic and public sphere, which ironically highlight women's subjugation in a patriarchal society (Malik et al., 2022).

In a male-dominant society, Uzma Aslam Khan (Khan, n.d.), Qaisra Shahraz (Lancaster University, n.d.), Maha Khan Philips (PEW Literary Agency, n.d.), and Kamila Shamsie (Penguin Random House, n.d.) pictured Pakistan as a land of

opportunities, predominantly for more privileged, educated women from the elite class who, “having control over their own bodies and sexualities” (Mohanty and Russo 56), are willing to stand up for their rights. In addition, they also significantly attempted to depict the working-class, less privileged, and, albeit agentive, women in Pakistani urban and rural patriarchal cultures (Kanwal, 2018). Moreover, Pakistani women writers have also set a feminine tradition, peculiar in its internalised consciousness, characteristics, and thematic features (Malik et al., 2022).

Women suffered during the Islamization of General Zia-ul-Haq’s regime in 1978-88. No account of Pakistani English-language literary production is complete without a discussion of General Zia-ul-Haq’s military regime, which has often been perceived by Pakistani women writers as the most oppressive era regarding anti-women policies (Kanwal, 2018). The Hudood Ordinance (Ministry of Law and Justice, n.d.) made the lives of females in Pakistan more miserable, and they had to suffer due to religiously enforced laws. Unfortunately, religion, when institutionalised, is used for personal gain.

Resisting the policies of Zia’s regime and raising their voices against patriarchy, clerics, and men, diasporic women from Pakistan contributed by addressing these themes in fiction. Diasporic writers discuss the status of women more outwardly. They cast their thoughts into impassive historical artefact (Bukhari, 2017).

### ***Daughter of the East: An Autobiography***

*Daughter of the East* (1988) by Benazir Bhutto is an autobiography belonging to non-fiction. It is based on the real events and experiences of Benazir Bhutto, who not only belonged to a feudal family but also remained Prime Minister of Pakistan twice. Written by a woman, the book sketches numerous problems that can also be attributed to a common woman in Pakistan. Benazir Bhutto, in her non-fiction book *Daughter of the East* (Darageh & Rahiminezhad, 2018), vividly portrayed the concept of ‘Otherness’ (Góis, 2014). Simone de Beauvoir took an existentialist view on women in *The Second Sex* (1953), where she discussed the fact that men and women belong to the same world but with an important difference. In her view, men’s world is self-defined and self-explained, but the world of women is defined and portrayed for the sake of men (Darageh & Rahiminezhad, 2018). The title also suggests that women in the East are compelled to follow certain codes of life and are expected to behave in a certain way. It draws a clear picture in the minds of the readers of how daughters in the East should be different from those in the West.

Pakistani male writers also depict the life of Pakistani women, such as Muhammad Hanif, who technically captured the life of a postcolonial subaltern in his novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011). He represented the oppressed women in many ways, and through his novel, his viewpoint has further strengthened the dichotomy of male/female, Self/Other, strong/weak, and independent/dependent (Darageh & Rahiminezhad, 2018).

As far as Benazir Bhutto, she grew up in a typical patriarchal family of Pakistan, and her views in the *Daughter of the East* (1988) reaffirm the statement of de Beauvoir that in a patriarchal society, the ‘othering’ of women is not a sign of inferiority because of some biological reason, but rather women are put into the position of being the ‘Other’. Bhutto, in her autobiography, reiterates the point of view that in our male-dominated culture, boys had always been favoured over girls and were not only more often given an education, but in extreme instances were given food first while the

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mother and daughters waited. In our family, however, there was no discrimination at all (Darageh & Rahiminezhad, 2018).

Though the condition was different in Bhutto's family, she still depicts the situation by representing thousands of women in Pakistan. Pakistani culture has been vividly presented by Bhutto in her autobiography by explaining and talking about different cultural codes around the country. She said that the code used by Pakistani delegations at the time of a disagreement is "A girl has been born" (Bhutto, 2008), but when they achieve an agreement, they use the code "A boy has been born" (Bhutto, 2008). In her autobiography, Bhutto depicts the true picture of women's lack of power in Pakistani society (Darageh & Rahiminezhad, 2018).

She further mentions that women were treated as a second sex (Bhutto, 2008) and voices the condition of women in Pakistani culture. She presents the real picture of women in her non-fiction as she mentions that women are singled out for exclusion in all aspects of society. Even at some official functions, the guests began to be divided by sex; even the highest-ranking women began being separated from their male colleagues (Bhutto, 2008). It shows the weak status of Pakistani women. Bhutto's autobiography echoes the weakness of women in every domain.

She is of the opinion that women still have to go extra mile to prove that they are equal to men. They have to work longer hours and make more sacrifices than men. She further reiterates that women must emotionally protect themselves from unfair, often vicious attacks made on them by the male members of their family (Bhutto, 2008). These lines, though, are expressed by a powerful lady of Pakistan, but if we hide the author's name, it would seem as if a common woman in Pakistan is narrating her problems. She further narrates another reality which many Pakistani women face, i.e., in purdah. According to Benazir Bhutto, in a man-oriented culture of Pakistan, a woman is considered negative and evil (Darageh & Rahiminezhad, 2018).

Bhutto has explained that 'after my mother and father married in 1951, my mother entered purdah with the other Bhutto women, and at first was allowed to leave the compound only once a week to visit her family' (Bhutto, 2008). She continues, 'sadly, many still believe that men control the women in their lives and by pressuring the man they will get him to pressure the woman' (Bhutto, 2008). This is also a reality in Pakistan, which Bhutto artistically portrays in her autobiography, which shows that in patriarchal and tribal societies, women's day-to-day affairs and other activities are monitored by their male counterparts (Langah & Umrani, 2022).

Numerous scholars have accused the influence of Western powers of working to destroy the family system of the country. Contrarily, many Pakistani writers have produced works in different genres of literature in English (which are famous all around the world) in order to counter the argument that no one is working against the Islamic and cultural values of the country by representing women and appreciating their writings. The purpose of Pakistani English literature is to feed the soul and mind with food for thought and reformation of society, and it is visible in Pakistani writers who demonstrate a feminist approach in their works.

### ***Trespassing and Rebellion***

*Trespassing* (2005) by Khan has been set in the era of the 1990s in the aftermath of the Afghan War and Gulf War, a few months before 9/11. The book has been termed "prescient", as it portrays the dark and troubled context of the involvement of the West in the East and is a precursor to the post-9/11 fiction from Pakistan that surfaced

in different genres of literature. For the Commonwealth Writers' Prize of 2003, Eurasia region, *Trespassing* (2003) was among the shortlisted novels for the prize (Khan et al., 2019). Khan highlights different complex values that are related to society, religion, and the economy of Pakistan in *Trespassing* (2005). The novel also offers the readers a hard-eyed perspective on the attitudes of Americans during the first Gulf War. The narrative of the novel has portrayed a few strong female characters who try to go against the tides of society (Khan, 2019).

The struggle of women against patriarchy, religion, and society has a long history, and resistance from women has come up in different forms. The purpose of struggle and resistance from women was to seek equality in the numerous spheres of life for survival and respect. Uzma Aslam Khan (Khan, n.d.) touches the chords of patriarchy in her narrative *Trespassing* (2003), which has no relation to the reality of women. She has dealt with the bargaining of women with patriarchy. *Trespassing* (2003) as a text deals with women who bargain in their lives. 'To look is an act of choice.' (Khan, 2013) She shares the quote of John Berger (Khan, 2013) at the beginning of the novel. *Trespassing* (2003), as a text, deals with women who are not real but bargain in their lives in the narrative.

The novel presents female characters who bargain, and it leads to bargaining (Kandiyoti, 1988) as an act of choice on their part, which is also a reality in Pakistan. In classical patriarchies, women must live with choices and bargains that they make to lives peaceful and live under the shadow of someone powerful. In third-world countries like Pakistan, bargaining in life is a requirement to live in comfort. For women, the third world countries are still under the darkness of patriarchal violence (Khan, 2024) and extended families due to poor economic conditions, whereas in the West, as Uzma Aslam Khan refers to the identity of females in the text that 'Somewhere in the world, the sun is just waking up (Khan, 2013).'

Arabs were famous for their brutal acts against women (Douki et al., 2003), and Uzma Aslam Khan, through fiction, displays that countries like Pakistan are still under the control of patriarchy in which the female gender faces discriminatory practices (Al-Saji, 2013) and is unable to live freely from cultural shackles and boundaries. Khan portrays reality in her fiction, discussing the status of women in Pakistan. She gives voice to the female characters in her fiction and assures that the female characters do not replay the history of suffering at the hands of the male gender in societies. She constantly states through her text that women should act in their lives to live according to their own beliefs and will, and not be under the influence of classical patriarchy. Her inclination for females to take actions resonates in the line that 'Today she wore a pink T-shirt' that said Take Action.' (Khan, 2013) They either must act or bargain with men in their families and societies. Although Khan writes about these issues in her fiction, the scenario is completely real.

The women in Pakistan bargain with the men and family to take advantage of the males around them and lead a better life than other female members. The characters of Uzma Aslam Khan are rebellious in nature, but still, they have to face male domination. Her characters know the price that they must pay if they stand for themselves. Uzma shares that "that was the price a proud woman had to pay (Khan, 2013).

A proud woman would never bargain, and she would never surrender her rights to any member of society, but such cases are very few in Pakistan. She would speak for herself and would take a stand for herself whenever necessary. Uzma Aslam Khan

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(Khan, n.d.) vividly explains in her novel that ‘You have no idea how hostile society gets if you challenge it (Khan, 2013). Society does accept women who bargain, according to Kandiyoti (Kandiyoti, 1988), but it would make life miserable for those women who go against the norms and set standards of society.

Women in Pakistan marry individuals who are chosen by their male family members, and they must live with them for the rest of their lives, even if they do not love them. Women even bargain here and support the argument, which Uzma Aslam Khan (Khan, n.d.) well sketched in her novel, that ‘some women say they find love after marriage’ (Khan, 2013), and the same is the case with Benazir Bhutto too. They break all the rules in their lives set by society and go against the set principles of men

Nini in the novel denies the marriage proposal and shares her idea that ‘She wants something different (Khan, 2013). The consent of women is hardly considered when deciding on their marriage and life partners. Khan also categorically mentions that society should stop honour killing because females should be allowed to choose their life partners, which, in reality, is not the case.

Pakistani English literature has depicted those women in Pakistan who marry individuals selected by their male family members. To keep the sanctity of their families, they live with them for the rest of their lives against their will and suffer marital rape even if they do not love them. Aurat March (Saigol & Chaudhary, 2020) also presents the same cases through its seminars, conferences, symposiums, marches, and placards, but still, people are not ready to accept it. This leads to a question if Pakistani English literature is not contributing to changing the mindset of people of the middle and lower middle classes through novels, dramas, and poetry. The number of readers has to be increased. Fiction must be promoted for life-changing scenarios.

## Conclusion

Women in Pakistan are living their lives with many threats. Benazir Bhutto presented her case in her autobiography, *Daughter of the East* (1988), to inform the world about the status of women in Pakistan and how she struggles in life to survive in an orthodox and conservative environment. Bhutto presents the real picture of Pakistani women who are under the shadows of political and patriarchal violence (Khan, 2024). Moreover, the author tried to present the status of women in fiction by Uzma Aslam Khan in *Trespassing* (2003). After the analysis of both non-fiction and fiction, it is evident that the status of women has been presented in the same manner, which reflects that there is still a long way to go for Pakistani women to live with freedom, both in expressions and in life. The study concluded that though Pakistani fiction and non-fiction in English contribute to voice the freedom and liberty of Pakistani women, the ripple effects of these narratives fail to reach the mainstream segments of society. The study implies a dire need to create activist forums. Reading circles, book fair, social media platforms for awareness among the womenfolk at a mass level to facilitate the underprivileged and marginalised, rather than benefitting the elitists. The society of Pakistan has a long way to go to accept a woman as a human being. Though Pakistani English literature is still continuing to contribute to voice out for women’s freedom and liberty, the ripple effects of all these narratives are not reaching the core of society. The number of middle and lower middle-class individuals is higher than the elitist, and Pakistani English literature is in no way benefiting the cause of creating awareness about women's rights in the masses because the underprivileged and marginalised do not read these books. The elites benefit from this literature,

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which is evident in their upbringing and thinking as well. Aurat March, along with its 21st-century blunt slogans, will be accepted when more and more people read the literature produced by Pakistani English writers.

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