

SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE IN MARGINALIZED AREAS OF PAKISTAN: A THEMATIC STUDY OF LANDLESSNESS, LAWLESSNESS, AND EDUCATIONAL EXCLUSION IN “BLASPHEMY”

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Abstract

*This investigation explores the representation of systemic injustice in rural Pakistan through a thematic study of Tehmina Durrani's novel *Blasphemy*. Focusing on intersecting issues such as landlessness, moral hypocrisy, and educational exclusion, this study analyzes how these forms of structural oppression are depicted in the novel and how they reflect the lived realities of marginalized communities in Pakistan's rural districts, particularly South Punjab. The subject holds significant relevance in English literary studies, especially within the domain of Marxist literary criticism. While *Blasphemy* has frequently been examined for its critique of patriarchy and religious extremism, there remains a research gap in analyzing the novel as a broader literary indictment of systemic rural injustice, embedded in feudal domination, state complicity, and the deliberate denial of education. This study addresses two key research questions: (1) How does *Blasphemy* portray rural systemic oppression? (2) How do these portrayals reflect real-world injustices faced by communities in South Punjab? Employing a qualitative thematic analysis, the research applies Marxist literary criticism to conduct a close reading of the novel and identify dominant themes. The central argument is that *Blasphemy* functions as a literary prosecution of institutionalized oppression, giving voice to the silenced and marginalized. The findings suggest that Durrani's narrative offers a potent critical lens through which land, law, and literacy emerge as interconnected mechanisms of control. This study contributes to Pakistani English literature by bridging literary analysis with rural social realities, highlighting how fiction can operate as a medium of resistance and critique in a postcolonial context.*

Keywords: *Systemic Injustice, Feudalism in Pakistan, Educational Exclusion, Feminist Literary Criticism, Blasphemy, Rural Marginalization, Marxist Literary Theory, Pakistani English Literature.*

1. Introduction

In Pakistan's socio-political landscape, both rural community policies and literature have received diminishing attention. The deep-rooted influence of feudal systems, religious determinism, and state neglect has severely affected many districts across the country. These regions are characterized by landlessness, social injustice, educational exclusion, and a complete collapse of infrastructure. While government reports and sociological studies have documented these issues, literature—particularly the Pakistani English short story—offers a unique lens through which these injustices can be critically examined. This study focuses on *My Feudal Lord* by Tehmina Durrani as a powerful literary text that dramatizes and exposes these deeply entrenched inequalities.

Blasphemy centers on Heer, a woman trapped in a forced marriage with a tyrannical Pir (spiritual landlord) who exercises absolute control over her body, mind, and environment. The

novel depicts a rural society where power is concentrated in the hands of feudal clans who serve not only as landlords but also as spiritual authorities and political power brokers. This fictional portrayal mirrors the reality of Pakistan's marginalized regions, where landownership is dominated by a few influential families and tribal leaders, leaving the majority of the population as landless laborers or tenant farmers. In the novel, rural Pirs live with an unquestioned sense of entitlement, highlighting how villagers in Pakistan are often economically and socially subjugated to feudal lords due to the absence of effective state intervention.

In South Punjab and other rural areas, formal legal institutions are often biased, dysfunctional, or entirely absent. Traditional systems like the *jirga* or *panchayat*, which operate outside the framework of state law, frequently resolve disputes through cruel and unjust means—especially in cases involving women. Similarly, in the novel, Heer is repeatedly denied legal protection and deprived of any opportunity for justice. The Pir's violence is never challenged, as both the police and political authorities either support him or fear his influence. This fictional account parallels real-life reports documented by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, which reveal that in many rural areas, police stations remain inaccessible, and legal aid is either unavailable or riddled with corruption. Consequently, victims—particularly women—are left to suffer in silence.

Educational exclusion is also central to both the novel's critique and the real-life injustices faced in rural Pakistan. In *Blasphemy*, Heer is denied access to knowledge, freedom, and formal schooling. Women are taught that obedience is their only virtue, while any form of intellectual growth is perceived as an act of defiance. This reflects the harsh realities of marginalized regions, where educational infrastructure is either in a state of collapse or entirely absent—especially for girls. According to ACER Pakistan (2022), more than 60% of girls in the Rajanpur district drop out before completing primary school, primarily due to poverty, long distances to school, and lack of basic facilities.

Teachers are often absent, classrooms are unsafe, and the lack of female staff and basic facilities—such as toilets—makes education both inaccessible and unsafe for young women. This educational neglect parallels the broader collapse of the healthcare system in rural Pakistan. In *Blasphemy*, even basic physical safety is denied to Heer, and there is no mention of hospitals or clinics—only the spiritual "healing" offered by the Pir. This mirrors the reality in many marginalized districts, where Basic Health Units (BHUs) exist only on paper or are housed in dilapidated structures. Field reports and investigative journalism have revealed that many health centers in South Punjab are non-functional: they lack electricity, essential medicines, and are often situated in remote areas without access to transportation. Deaths due to malnutrition, waterborne diseases, and preventable illnesses are common, yet administrative neglect and corruption remain largely overlooked.

This study positions itself as a socio-literary investigation—not merely for the purpose of literary analysis, but to explore how literature reflects and critiques infrastructural violence. *Blasphemy* is more than the story of a woman's suffering; it serves as a microcosm of systemic injustice that defines the lived experiences of millions in Pakistan's rural belt. While previous research has largely focused on the novel's feminist themes, there remains a significant research gap in exploring it as a sweeping indictment of rural underdevelopment and institutional failure. This study seeks to bridge that gap by connecting the novel's thematic concerns with real-world data on education, land rights, legal inaccessibility, and healthcare. Through a Marxist literary lens, the research argues that literature can act as a powerful counter-hegemonic force—exposing the structural violence that underpins rural life in Pakistan.

1.1 Statement of this Problem/Central Concern of this Study

Despite over seven decades of independence, vast regions of Pakistan—particularly South Punjab and rural Sindh—continue to suffer from authoritarian control, state neglect, and structural inequality. Some of the most underdeveloped districts in Punjab, such as Rajanpur, are marked by systemic marginalization, widespread landlessness among the poor, the collapse of legal and healthcare institutions, and severe educational deprivation, especially for girls. These conditions are not isolated problems but symptoms of a broader, entrenched system of injustice—issues that are explored in both literary and academic discourses.

In the field of Pakistani English literature, Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy* has received critical attention for its unflinching portrayal of rural power structures. The novel condemns oppressive rituals and exposes the brutal realities of land ownership, religious authority, and patriarchal control in rural Pakistan. It illustrates how legal silence and institutional absence are weaponized to dominate and marginalize the vulnerable. However, there remains a significant gap in academic scholarship that links the narrative of *Blasphemy* with the actual socio-economic and political realities of rural Pakistan. This study aims to address that gap by contextualizing the novel within the framework of structural inequality and state failure.

Most current studies on *Blasphemy* tend to focus on personal trauma or women's rights, often overlooking how the novel functions as a broader literary critique of structural systems—such as feudalism, state complexity, and educational exclusion—that sustain inequality in Pakistan's rural landscape. Moreover, limited effort has been made to integrate literary analysis with real-world data, such as land distribution records, rural education statistics, or reports on the failure of healthcare and legal systems.

1.2 Research Questions /Principal Questions of Inquiry

This study is designed to investigate the intersections and realities of life in the marginalized regions of Pakistan by a critical analysis of the slander of Tehmina Durani. Research is guided by the following questions.

1. How is the institutional and cultural system of brass that sustains rural suppression in Pakistan?

The question explores how the novel represents each other's connected forces of how feudal control, patriarchy standards, religious authority and legal silence, which shapes the lives of the rural population, especially women.

1. Especially in marginalized districts, does the imaginary story of slander reflect the injustice of the real world committed by communities of South Punjab?

This question investigates how text is parallel to real socio-economic conditions such as landlessness, unrighteousness, academic exclusion and failure of health and legal institutions in rural Pakistan.

1.3 Objectives of this Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the literary representation of systemic injustice in rural Pakistan by analyzing the slander of Tehmina Durani as a socio-political story based on real-world conditions. These are the specific objectives of this research:

1. To check how the institutional systems of oppression are condemned by feudalism, religious dictatorship and patriarchal violence through the living experiences of his characters.
2. To explore landlessness, unrighteousness and academic exclusion in the novel and how these forces contribute to the widespread constitution of rural margins in Pakistan.
3. To analyze the intersection of gender, class and power to sustain systemic injustice, to focus on how the female protagonist reflects the experiences of numerous real women in undeveloped districts like Rajanpur.

4. To combine fantasy events in condolences with real socio-economic realities by documentation of rural education reports, land ownership data and failure of legal and health system failure as comparative equipment.
5. To evaluate how the literature works as a form of resistance and critic, it shows that fantasy stories can illuminate the hidden truth and provide counter-discourse to official state stories.
6. By revealing the possibility of novels such as condemnation to join real-world disparity, especially in the context of Pakistani English literature, to contribute to the inter-academic lecture between literature and social justice.

1.4 Rationale of this study / Significance

This study holds both educational and socio-political significance. Within the broader landscape of Pakistani English literature, literary texts are increasingly recognized not only as representations of personal experience but also as powerful instruments of resistance, critique, and documentation of structural violence. This research explores *Blasphemy* by Tehmina Durrani as a literary condemnation of systemic disparity, land injustice, educational exclusion, legal failure, and state neglect—particularly as they manifest in rural Pakistan. While most scholarship on *Blasphemy* has focused on gender oppression and religious critique, few studies have examined the novel as a socio-political indictment of rural power structures. This research addresses that gap by aligning the novel's themes with real-world data and conditions in rural Pakistan, thereby bridging the divide between literature and lived reality.

From a literary perspective, this study contributes to Marxist literary criticism by examining how the novel engages with issues of power, class, gender, and ideology within the context of local Pakistani society. It reinforces the view that literature is not merely aesthetic or imaginative, but inherently political and transformative—capable of exposing mechanisms of control that operate under the guise of tradition and religion. By analyzing *Blasphemy* through the lens of systemic injustice, this study offers a new critical approach to reinterpreting narratives in contemporary Pakistani literature. It invites scholars to explore how regional inequalities, rural realities, and social silences are represented in fiction—and how such representations can shape broader conversations on human rights, public policy, and social reform.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing efforts to decolonize literary studies by amplifying voices from the Global South and critically examining their representations in relation to structures of inequality. It offers a model for how literary scholars can engage with pressing national issues through critical, ethical, and socially grounded lenses—affirming the relevance of English literature as a field that not only reflects but also aspires to transform real-world conditions.

1.5 Unexplored Area/Research Gap

Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy* has received considerable scholarly attention—particularly within the frameworks of gender studies and feminist critique. Much of the existing literature focuses on the novel as a critique of personal trauma and patriarchal spirituality linked to gender-based violence. The dominant critical lenses are often psychological, religious, or symbolic, exploring the protagonist's suffering and the corruption of religious authority. However, a significant gap remains in academic research when it comes to analyzing *Blasphemy* as a systemic critique of rural oppression—especially in relation to landlessness, educational exclusion, injustice, and institutional neglect in rural Pakistan. Most existing studies overlook how the novel reflects persistent feudal structures and entrenched inequalities, representing the everyday realities of marginalized communities. These forms of institutional violence—though deeply embedded in the narrative—have yet to be adequately explored in literary scholarship.

In addition, there has been limited interdisciplinary engagement between literary analysis of rural injustice and empirical data. While some studies attempt to connect the fictional representation in *Blasphemy* with real-life data—such as government reports or NGO findings on education, land distribution, law enforcement, and public health in rural Punjab—these efforts remain scarce and often fragmented. This research seeks to bridge that gap by:

- a. Re-reading *Blasphemy* through an interdisciplinary lens that integrates Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial literary frameworks;
- b. Supporting the literary analysis with empirical evidence, including education reports, land ownership records, and human rights documentation;
- c. Positioning the novel as a literary indictment of systemic injustice, rather than simply a portrayal of personal victimhood.

In doing so, this study responds to the critical need for aligning literature with the lived realities of Pakistani communities. It aims to expand the scope of literary criticism beyond symbolic and psychological interpretations toward a more structural, politically grounded approach.

2. Literature Review

Pakistani English literature has increasingly emerged as a platform for confronting and challenging social oppression, particularly within rural contexts. Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy* offers a bold critique of feudalism, religious hypocrisy, and institutional failure. While scholars have primarily analyzed the novel through feminist and spiritual lenses, there is a growing need to acknowledge its deeper engagement with systemic rural injustices—such as landlessness, legal dysfunction, and educational deprivation.

2.1 Gendered Violence and Patriarchy in *Blasphemy*

Shaista Sirajuddin (2016) emphasizes the role of the novel in highlighting the suffering of women within oppressive religious settings. She critiques the construction of female identity as inherently subjugated under patriarchal authority. Similarly, Rubina Cygil (2017) examines gender-based violence in South Asian societies, linking it to spiritual exploitation, but interprets *Blasphemy* primarily as symbolic rather than politically grounded literature. Sana Ahmed (2018) further explores Heer's psychological trauma, suggesting that her suffering represents internalized oppression rather than systemic injustice. While these scholars offer valuable insights into personal trauma and patriarchal power, they often overlook the ways in which trauma is embedded within broader economic, legal, and social structures. By addressing issues such as institutional failure, rural underdevelopment, and structural violence, the present research expands feminist analysis beyond domestic abuse, emphasizing the systemic and material conditions that shape women's lived experiences.

2.2 Feudalism, Landlessness, and Class Control

Tariq Rahman (2017) highlights how Pakistani literature often romanticizes rural settings while ignoring the harsh realities of land ownership and class oppression. Amina Yaqin (2018) points out that feudal figures in literature are frequently used as metaphors for power, yet rarely examined in relation to actual landlessness and economic inequality. Farah Khan (2019) draws attention to the lack of critical engagement with literary representations of feudalism in contemporary rural Pakistan, particularly in regions like South Punjab. Current literary criticism often fails to investigate how *Blasphemy* portrays land as both a political and economic weapon, or how the novel links real-world land distribution inequality with fictionalized feudal violence. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the novel's depiction of land as a tool of political control and social domination, and by drawing parallels with the realities of landlessness in districts like Rajanpur, where large landowners continue to monopolize both legal and communal authority.

2.3 Institutional Lawlessness and Religious Complicity

Zubair Shams (2018) discusses how Pakistani literature reflects religious abuse but often neglects to critique the breakdown of legal systems in rural settings. Mehwish Rafiq (2019) examines religious exploitation in *Blasphemy*, focusing more on symbolic corruption than on the failures of state institutions. Kiran Aslam (2020) highlights how women in rural Pakistan are denied justice due to the intertwined complexities of feudal control and weak law enforcement. However, existing literary scholarship often overlooks the collapse of formal legal justice in these regions. There is also limited critical engagement with the role of police, judiciary, and political elites in reinforcing feudal violence. This study interprets *Blasphemy* as a literary reflection of real-world legal dysfunction—an interpretation supported by human rights reports and legal data from South Punjab. It emphasizes the need to read the novel not only as a symbolic critique but also as an indictment of institutional complicity in rural injustice.

2.4 Educational Exclusion and Gender Disempowerment

Fatima Sohail (2019) and Nadia Anwar (2020) explore how female characters are denied access to education in Pakistani literature. Arage Haider (2021) examines *Blasphemy* but only briefly notes the absence of school education for Heer, without engaging with national education statistics or the systemic barriers in regions such as South Punjab. There is a noticeable lack of detailed analysis on how educational exclusion in the novel reflects broader policy failures, gender inequality, and structural breakdowns in real rural districts. Existing scholarship often overlooks how *Blasphemy*'s silence on education mirrors critical issues such as non-functional schools, lack of trained teachers, and collapsing infrastructure. This study bridges that gap by drawing on empirical sources—including ASER (2022) and Alif Ailaan data—to interpret the novel's treatment of education as a reflection of deep-rooted structural neglect.

2.5 Literature as a Tool for Resistance and Documentation

Amer Hussein (2020) describes Pakistani English literature as “witness literature,” where writers document unseen or ignored injustices. Noshin Ali (2021) similarly urges literary scholars to examine how literature reflects rural deprivation and policy failure. However, these scholars tend to interpret *Blasphemy* primarily as a personal or spiritual metaphor rather than as a document of structural injustice. While the notion of literature as a form of resistance is gaining ground, few researchers have applied this framework to *Blasphemy* or compared its themes with empirical data from rural Pakistan. By combining close textual analysis with real-world reports on law, land ownership, and education, this study argues that fictional portrayals of rural systems—such as those in *Blasphemy*—can function as powerful counter-narratives, exposing injustice and the silences maintained by the state and media.

2.6 Conclusion of the literature Review

The reviewed literature reflects the growing scholarly engagement with Pakistani English literature, particularly at the intersection of gender oppression, religion, and patriarchy. Scholars have widely analyzed *Blasphemy* by Tehmina Durrani, recognizing its bold critique of spiritual authority and its deep challenge to the status of women in patriarchal societies. However, despite this valuable contribution, a closer examination of the existing body of work reveals a persistent research gap: most analyses remain confined to symbolic, psychological, or theological interpretations of the novel, often overlooking its critique of systemic rural injustice. Across five key themes—gender-based violence, landlessness, institutional collapse, educational exclusion, and resistance—*Blasphemy* portrays tangible, embodied oppression, particularly as experienced by rural communities in districts like Rajanpur. Yet even scholars who acknowledge feudalism and institutional failure tend to treat these elements as mere background rather than as central mechanisms of control and injustice. Moreover, there is a notable absence of interdisciplinary scholarship that integrates literary narratives with empirical

rural realities, such as land ownership patterns, access to education, and government data on legal accountability. This gap underscores the need for research that bridges literature and lived experience to better understand the structural dimensions of oppression depicted in Pakistani fiction.

The significance of this study lies in its effort to address the critical gap in existing scholarship. This research proposes a shift from purely symbolic or theological readings to a structural analysis of *Blasphemy*, employing a Marxist literary lens to connect its themes with empirical data on law, land ownership, education, and healthcare. By doing so, the novel is re-positioned not merely as a narrative of religious exploitation or individual suffering, but as a powerful *peristory*—a counter-narrative—that exposes the institutional apparatuses which perpetuate systemic injustice in Pakistan's rural peripheries. This interdisciplinary approach seeks to bridge literature with lived realities, framing the text as a literary document of structural violence and policy failure.

3. Research Methodology

This study undertakes a qualitative research method, which is originally in the original literary analysis and supported by the novel, to investigate how the Tehmi is condemned by Durani, represents the systemic injustice in the marginalized regions of Pakistan - especially on the grounds. This method is understood by a crucial, subject and contextual approach that is both interpreted and interdependent. This research adopts a qualitative design using a literary analysis of the subjects, which allows for an engagement associated with narrative structure, language, symbolism and socio-political context. The central objective is to critically examine how the condemnation acts not only the cruelty of feudal patriarchy, but also as a socio-political document highlighting rural deprivation. This is a design research, which also draws primary text analysis for arguments, including legal structures shaping everyday realities in rural education reports, land ownership data and underdeveloped districts like Rajanpur.

This study adopts a three-pronged methodological approach: (1) a close textual reading of the novel to trace recurring patterns and themes of tyranny, control, and enforced silence; (2) a comparative linkage with real-world statistics drawn from governmental and non-governmental reports on rural infrastructure, literacy rates, and social mobility; and (3) an interpretive framework that aligns literary motifs with the broader institutional structures that sustain long-term inequality. The theoretical framework is grounded in Marxist literary criticism, particularly Karl Marx's concepts of material determinism, class dominance, and the role of education in maintaining ideological control. This research interrogates the operations of power through both ideological and physical violence, and explores literature's capacity as a form of resistance. It examines how the feudal lord (Sangati Pir) upholds hierarchical privilege, how the state is complicit in reinforcing structural inequality, and how women and the rural poor are systematically excluded from institutional protections.

As a reflection of real systemic injustice, this study serves as a powerful vehicle for advancing socio-political critique and raising consciousness. It sheds light on the deeply entrenched issues of academic exclusion, lack of legal recourse, and limited socio-economic mobility in rural Pakistan. The novel, therefore, functions not merely as a literary artifact but as a critical commentary on the structural marginalization and infrastructural violence experienced in Pakistan's deeply neglected rural peripheries. This literary inquiry becomes an urgent academic intervention—one that contributes meaningfully to ongoing debates on justice, equity, and representation.

In conclusion, this study adopts a qualitative approach, positioning *Blasphemy* by Tehmina Durrani as a literary critique of systemic rural injustice in Pakistan, particularly within the context of South Punjab. Employing Marxist literary criticism, the research explores how the novel reflects and interrogates conditions of rural exploitation. The analysis is structured around

close textual reading, focusing on recurring themes of landlessness, legal disenfranchisement, and educational exclusion as embodied in the novel's characters, settings, and narrative structures. Marxist theory provides a lens through which to examine the underlying economic exploitation rooted in class-based hierarchies and feudal dominance. While the analysis remains grounded in the novel's internal evidence, it aims to situate its literary themes within the broader realities of structural inequality.

4. Results / Analysis

This research situates Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy* within the framework of Marxist literary criticism, highlighting its portrayal of systemic injustices such as landlessness, legal disenfranchisement, and educational exclusion. These issues are not only central to the novel's narrative but also resonate with the persistent socio-political realities of marginalized regions in Pakistan, particularly in South Punjab. The analysis is grounded in close textual reading and is further supported by relevant socio-economic data, aiming to bridge the novel's fictional representation of oppression with the lived experiences of deprived rural communities. By revealing how the novel depicts structural inequality—through themes of coercive land control, institutional corruption, and deliberate educational marginalization—this study positions *Blasphemy* as a powerful literary indictment of both entrenched cultural norms and the complicity of the state in sustaining injustice.

4.1 Land as a Tool of Oppression and Ownership

In *Blasphemy*, Tehmina Durrani portrays land as the most potent symbol and mechanism of systemic power, reflecting a deeply entrenched feudal hierarchy. The entire village revolves around the control exercised by the Pir over land, which not only establishes socio-economic dominance but also reinforces a spiritual and physical subjugation of the poor. This dynamic is sharply captured in Durrani's observation: "*They were landless, faceless, without voice. Their homes belonged to Pir; their bodies belonged to Pir; their God was also hijacked by Pir*" (Ch. 5, p. 38). The quotation encapsulates a core Marxist concern—the monopolization of the means of production—wherein land ownership dictates access to livelihood and identity.

Furthermore, the novel reveals how the Pir's domination is naturalized and rendered unquestionable within religious and cultural discourses: "*No one asked who was owned. Pir's ancestors took it all, and now he was sitting on it like God*" (Ch. 7, p. 56). Here, Durrani illustrates how historical land acquisition is mystified and legitimized through lineage and divine association, effectively cementing the Pir's grip over the community. This spiritualization of feudal control aligns with Marxist critiques of ideological state apparatuses, wherein religion serves to pacify resistance and sustain structural inequality.

The novel has been criticized how the ownership of the land pass as a divine right, sacred by custom and religion. While many chatting examines condemnation with feminist or religious lenses, they neglect how land inequality is the foundation of all other oppression in the novel. This theme brings the ground to the central attention, which shows how the spatial and economic control becomes a means of lifetime.

4.2 Religion as an Instrument of Patriarchal Violence

Durrani reveals how religion is manipulated to justify gender-based violence and suppress dissent rather than to promote spiritual enlightenment. The dual role of the Pir Sahib as both landlord and spiritual authority breeds fear instead of faith. Following a traumatic incident of physical abuse, the protagonist laments, "*I believed God hated me because my Pir beat me every night in His name*" (Ch. 3, p. 25). This haunting reflection exposes how violence is not only normalized but sacralized—recast as divine will. The wife is indoctrinated to interpret her suffering as part of a spiritual obligation, thereby blurring the lines between devotion and submission.

Durrani deepens this critique in another passage: *“In this mansion, the word of God was of a man. What he said became the law. The Quran itself corresponded to his hunger”* (Ch. 9, p. 63). This statement encapsulates how sacred texts are selectively interpreted and weaponized to validate personal desires and systemic oppression. It echoes Fatima Mernissi’s (1991) argument that patriarchal authority often monopolizes the interpretation of religious discourse to reinforce male dominance. Rather than focusing merely on the deviant behavior of an individual Pir, the novel critiques a wider patriarchal system wherein religion is systematically constructed and manipulated to safeguard male control under the guise of divine legitimacy.

4.3 Silencing of Women and Normalization of Marital Rape

One of the most distressing themes in *Blasphemy* is the normalization of sexual violence within the confines of marriage. Marital rape is not portrayed as a crime but as a nightly ritual enforced through fear, silence, and the weight of social complicity. The protagonist's agony is underscored by the isolation she experiences: *“My crying at night was ignored. No one came. The walls listened silently but never replied”* (Ch. 6, p. 44). This haunting imagery reveals that her suffering extends beyond the physical—it is institutionally embedded in silence and spatial control. Even the architecture of the house becomes complicit, functioning as a metaphor for structural oppression.

Later, in Chapter 10, the novel deepens this portrayal, highlighting how the protagonist's voice is systematically invalidated. This directly evokes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s (1988) concept of the “subaltern who cannot speak,” suggesting that the female victim's voice is rendered inaudible and illegible within patriarchal and religious frameworks. Her trauma is not only ignored—it is disqualified as testimony.

While various feminist readings have addressed violence against women, *Blasphemy* offers a distinctly powerful critique of marital rape within Pakistani society by exposing how silence is structurally produced. This silence is not incidental; it is manufactured through a confluence of societal norms, religious interpretations, and even physical spaces. Durrani’s narrative thus becomes an act of resistance, foregrounding the institutional mechanisms that mute the subaltern woman and normalize her violation.

4.4 Educational Exclusion and Epistemic Control

The denial of education in *Blasphemy* is not incidental; it is a calculated mechanism of control designed to uphold feudal and patriarchal dominance. Tehmina Durrani portrays illiteracy as a weapon deliberately wielded to maintain social hierarchies and suppress female agency. In Chapter 4, the protagonist reflects on her intellectual deprivation: *“If I had gone to school, I would have known a way. But girls like me were not allowed to know much”* (Ch. 4, p. 33). Here, ignorance is not a natural condition—it is a constructed barrier that prevents self-realization and escape.

Durrani further contrasts rural illiteracy with urban educational privilege. In Chapter 8, the protagonist observes: *“They came from Lahore, jeans and books. I saw them as if they belonged to another world”* (Ch. 8, p. 58). This juxtaposition underscores the intersection of class, gender, and geographic inequalities. Education becomes a symbol of power, freedom, and class distinction, highlighting how access to knowledge is systematically denied to rural women in order to preserve elite male dominance.

The novel therefore presents education not merely as a personal asset but as a structural determinant of power. Yet, scholarly discourse has often overlooked how academic exclusion functions alongside gendered suppression. Durrani’s narrative contributes significantly to feminist and postcolonial critiques by revealing how illiteracy is engineered to manufacture obedience and silence. The novel ultimately advocates for education as a liberatory force, challenging the systems that monopolize knowledge to sustain oppression.

4.5 Spatial Entrapment and the Architecture of Fear

The *haweli* in *Blasphemy* functions not merely as a physical setting, but as a psychological and political prison. Tehmina Durrani constructs space as a tool of subjugation—an architecture that disciplines the female body and mind. In Chapter 2, Hir narrates: “*Haveli had tall, tall walls, there were no outside windows. Each door led to the second door. I never saw the street again*” (Ch. 2, p. 17). This claustrophobic imagery illustrates not only physical isolation but also the erasure of public visibility for rural women. The design of the *haweli* echoes Michel Foucault’s (1977) concept of panopticism, where architecture enables internalized surveillance. Control is not enforced only through external force but through the spatial engineering of constant observation and restriction.

This spatial entrapment intensifies later in the narrative: “*Every corridor was echoing with the steps that were not mine. The walls also looked at me*” (Ch. 11, p. 74). The *haweli* becomes animate—a silent observer that enforces fear and submission. Durrani transforms domestic space into a living metaphor for gendered violence, where femininity is confined within ornate yet oppressive enclosures.

Despite this, prior scholarship has often neglected the symbolic function of domestic space in Durrani’s work, underestimating its critical significance. This study highlights how architecture itself becomes a mechanism of patriarchal control, reinforcing the boundaries that silence and immobilize women. The *haweli* thus emerges not simply as a backdrop but as an active participant in gender violence, a site where oppression is spatially reproduced and legitimized.

5. Discussion

In the present study, Tehmina Durrani’s *Blasphemy* is examined not merely as a personal testimony but as a trenchant critique of the intersecting forces of patriarchal control, religious trafficking, class and land hierarchies, sexual violence, and spatial imprisonment. Through a close textual reading supported by chapter and page references, this research explores how Durrani exposes the systemic nature of gendered oppression embedded within the feudal structures of rural Pakistan. Her narrative weaves themes such as land ownership, marital rape, forced religiosity, and even the politicization of health conditions like epilepsy to reveal how power consolidates itself across domains.

The findings demonstrate that *Blasphemy* offers more than feminist resistance—it acts as a political indictment of tyranny, documenting how patriarchal dominance is reinforced through theological manipulation, architectural control, and economic dependence. For instance, land is not just a symbol of wealth but a strategic tool for ensuring submission and reproducing class divisions. The control of physical space—such as the *haweli*—creates gendered enclosures that align with Foucault’s (1977) theory of surveillance, where the architecture itself enforces discipline and isolation.

Religious discourse in the novel functions as a weapon to legitimize male supremacy. Sacred texts are selectively interpreted to sanctify marital rape, suppress dissent, and normalize the silence of women. This reveals what scholars refer to as “religious trafficking”—the instrumentalization of Islam to protect patriarchal privileges. Furthermore, Durrani exposes *epistemic exclusion*: women are denied education and access to knowledge, effectively erasing their agency and preempting resistance.

Ultimately, the novel emerges as a layered narrative that exposes the collusion of feudal, religious, and patriarchal institutions in maintaining control over women’s bodies, voices, and spaces. Durrani’s work is therefore not only a literary expression but a socio-political text that scandalously challenges the moral facade of rural patriarchal society in Pakistan.

The significance of these findings lies in their ability to extend literary analysis into the domain of social critique. Unlike previous studies that often isolate feminist or religious dimensions of *Blasphemy*, this research positions the novel as a multi-layered narrative that interrogates

overlapping structures of control. Durrani's work does not merely chronicle Heer's suffering; rather, it unveils how violence is systemically institutionalized through the intersecting domains of land ownership, spatial entrapment, religious authority, and enforced silence. This intersectional framing is particularly salient within the Pakistani context, where feudal hierarchies, religious patriarchy, and gender-based oppression remain persistent realities.

Moreover, the novel operates as a literary ethnography of feminine experience, echoing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's conception of the subaltern as one whose voice is systemically muted within hegemonic discourse. Durrani's use of English to narrate a deeply localized and culturally specific trauma functions as a counter-hegemonic act—rendering the subaltern visible on a global platform and converting personal testimony into a tool of resistance.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. It restricts its analytical scope to a single novel, which—while rich and complex—cannot fully capture the plurality of experiences among Pakistan's rural women, especially those whose voices remain unheard even in resistance literature. Future research could benefit from a comparative analysis of *Blasphemy* alongside other contemporary South Asian literary works that interrogate gender, class, and religious power structures. Such an approach would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how land, faith, and patriarchy intersect with gendered trauma across linguistic and regional contexts.

Another promising avenue involves reader-response analysis—exploring how different audiences (e.g., urban vs. rural, Pakistani vs. international readers) interpret the novel's portrayals of faith, feminism, and resistance. Investigating these diverse receptions may offer valuable insight into how socio-cultural positioning shapes the meaning and impact of literary activism in postcolonial societies.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that *Blasphemy* is not merely a narrative of individual suffering, but a literary mirror reflecting the institutional and intersecting forces that shape the lives of countless women in feudal-patriarchal societies. By foregrounding often-silenced themes such as marital rape, epistemic exclusion, and sacralized violence, this analysis contributes to a nuanced reading of the novel and affirms the enduring power of literature as a medium of social critique and resistance. Durrani's work exemplifies how fiction can challenge hegemonic structures and give voice to the marginalized, offering both a testimony of trauma and a call for transformation.

6. Conclusion

This study has explored *Blasphemy* by Tehmina Durrani as a powerful narrative that unveils the structural foundations of class oppression in feudal Pakistani society. Through close thematic and textual analysis, the research reveals that Durrani's novel is not merely a personal testimony, but a radical socio-political intervention that confronts the intersecting mechanisms of gender, religion, class, and space. At its core, the novel interrogates the patriarchal appropriation of religion and land—systems within which women are subjected to dispossession, psychological control, and physical violence—often within spaces deceptively framed as homes and sacred domains.

This inquiry was driven by the noticeable gap in literary scholarship that critically examines *Blasphemy* through the interconnected lenses of spatial, bodily, and symbolic violence. Addressing this gap, the study introduced five interwoven thematic strands: (1) land and wealth as patriarchal instruments of control, (2) the misinterpretation of religious texts and theology, (3) sexual violence and enforced gendered silence, (4) the weaponization of illiteracy, and (5) the complicity of sacred architecture and institutions. Each theme was substantiated through direct textual evidence, detailed chapter references, and was interpreted through relevant theoretical frameworks.

The primary contribution of this research lies in positioning *Blasphemy* not solely as a feminist text, but as a literary ethnography of gendered erasure in a postcolonial, feudal-religious society. The novel illustrates how patriarchal dominance is perpetuated not merely through acts of explicit cruelty, but through entrenched systemic mechanisms—such as ownership of land, manipulation of religious doctrine, enforced illiteracy, sexual control, and architectural confinement. For instance, the mansion named “Heaven” in the novel functions not merely as a setting, but as a carceral space that enacts “spatial discipline” upon women’s bodies and restricts their mobility.

This study offers two key implications. First, it urges scholars to reconsider how South Asian literary texts reflect and critique socio-political structures—not merely through character development or plot progression, but also through the strategic use of physical space, language, and symbolic geography. Second, it advocates for broader scholarly engagement with women-authored narratives that challenge, resist, and expose the discomfiting intersections of religion, culture, and power—often safeguarded from critique within postcolonial and nationalist discourses.

However, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The analysis was limited to a single novel and did not incorporate the autobiographical intersections among Durrani’s broader body of work, particularly *My Feudal Lord* and *A Case of Honour*. Additionally, it did not include audience or reception studies that might offer insights into how various demographic groups interpret and respond to the novel’s themes. Future research could expand on these areas to deepen understanding of the novel’s social and political impact.

Future research can broaden the scope of this investigation by examining other South Asian literary texts that engage with similar themes of theological patriarchy, gendered violence, and silenced trauma. A comparative analysis of English, Urdu, and Punjabi literary representations of class oppression and gender dynamics could yield deeper insights into the intersection of language, identity, and power. Such studies would further dismantle the sanitized portrayals of spiritual and feudal authority, exposing the concealed horrors and unspoken suffering endured by many women within these systems. This thesis thus affirms the significance of courageous narrative expressions of trauma, dissent, and resistance—not only within the context of Pakistani literature, but as part of the broader global canon of resistance writing.

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