

**TRADITIONS AGAINST WOMEN IN THE NOVELS**  
***POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY, BLISS, RICH LIKE***  
***US AND RAISE THE LANTERNS HIGH***

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## ABSTRACT

TRADITIONS AGAINST WOMEN IN THE NOVELS  
*POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY, BLISS, RICH LIKE US*  
AND *RAISE THE LANTERNS HIGH*

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Some cultures have customs against women. The *sati* tradition in India is one of them. According to *sati*, if the husband dies the woman is set on fire with his corpse. These women are believed to become immortal saints. A woman who dies burning herself on her husband's funeral fire is considered virtuous, and are believed to go to Heaven. Another tradition is "female circumcision." It is performed in African countries. People believing in the necessity of this custom circumcise women by cutting their clitoris. Circumcised women cannot have sexually pleasur. These women are there to satisfy men's desires and give birth to babies. The third tradition is the general name of which is *töre* is performed in the eastern parts of Turkey. According to *töre*, women are put on trial by their families and killed if they have any sexual relationships without marriage bond. In other words, even if a woman is raped, she is found guilty because of having a sexual relationship. In this thesis, these issues and how women are degraded

in cultures will be discussed by using the works of famous Indian, Black American and Turkish writers. The books that are discussed in this thesis, Nayantara Sahgal's "*Rich Like Us*," Lakshmi Persaud's "*Raise the Lanterns High*," "*Possessing the Secret of Joy*" by Alice Walker and "*Bliss*" by Zülfü Livaneli all contribute to this study showing how women are oppressed by different customs in different countries, the common point of which is to serve men's interests.

Key words: Tradition, Female Genital Mutilation, *Sati*, *Töre*

## ÖZ

*POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY, BLISS, RICH LIKE US VE  
RAISE THE LANTERNS HIGH* ADLI ROMANLARDA KADINA  
KARŞI GELENEKLER

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Yüksek Lisans, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü

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Bazı kültürlerde kadına karşı bazı gelenekler vardır. Hindistan'daki "Sati" geleneği bunlardan bir tanesidir. Hint geleneklerine göre, eşi ölen dul kadın kocasının cesediyle birlikte ateşe atılır. Bu kadınların ölümsüz azizeler olduğuna inanılır. Kendisini kocasının cenaze ateşinde yakan kadının en erdemli kadın olduğuna ve doğrudan cennete gittiğine inanılır. Kadına karşı olan bir başka gelenek de "kadın sünneti" dir. Bu gelenek genellikle Afrika ülkelerinde uygulanır. Bu geleneğin gerekliliğine inananlar kadınları klitorislerini keserek sünnet ederler. Sünnet olan kadınlar cinsellikten zevk alamazlar. Bu kadınlar sadece erkeklerin cinsel dürtülerini tatmin etmek ve çocuk doğurmak için vardırırlar. Kadının değerini düşüren üçüncü gelenek Türkiye'nin doğu taraflarında uygulanan gelenektir. Töre olarak adlandırılan bu geleneğe göre kadınlar istemeseler bile evlilik bağı dışında kurdukları cinsel ilişkiler yüzünden suçlanır ve öldürülürler. Başka bir deyişle, bir kadın tecavüze uğrasa bile cinsel ilişki kurmaktan suçlu bulunurlar. Bu tezde, bu konular ve bu kültürlerdeki kadınların erkekler tarafından nasıl aşağılandığı Hint,

Siyahi Amerikalı, Karayipli ve Türk yazarların eserleri aracılığıyla ilgilendirecektir. Bu tezde incelenen kitaplar, Alice Walker'dan *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Zülfü Livaneli'den *Bliss*, Nayantara Sahgal'dan *Rich Like Us* ve Lakshmi Persaud'dan *Raise the Lanterns High*, farklı kültürlerde bulunan bu gelenekler tarafından nasıl aşağılandığını göstermek açısından tez için çok faydalı olmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gelenek, Kadın Sünneti, *Sati*, Töre

**To my family**



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## INTRODUCTION

The social positions of men and women have always been different. Both men and women have been bounded by certain roles and they have been made live according to the rules and traditions which have been adopted throughout the history. As a result of this discrimination, women have been the oppressed members of society.

Women have always been the symbols of the things that men can benefit from like compassion, motherhood, sex. Men have seen themselves as the rulers of the world and women as their servants who do not have right to live in the way they want. Men think that the main aim of any women should be to satisfy their sexual desires, provide all other daily needs, and the needs of women are ignored. This way of thinking is produced by the patriarchal structure in which men are the masters and women are the subservient ones. In other words, this patriarchal structure causes women to be bound to men in every aspect of life.

The patriarchal social structure and men's expectations from women to devote their lives to satisfy men's desires are the foremost factors leading the communities to have traditions which constitute advantages for men whereas pose danger for women. The traditions that are examined in this thesis are the examples of customs which are all claimed to be rooted in religion although they destroy women's lives making women tools for men's happiness.

In Chapter I, Female Genital Mutilation, it's social, historical and religious background, and Alice Walker's important work about FGM, *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, is examined in terms of the factors causing a woman getting mutilated and how it affects her life.

Female Genital Mutilation refers to:

all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural, religious or other non-therapeutic reasons (World Health Organization 2 June 2006).

It is clearly one of the most harmful ways to violate women's rights as it constitutes a great inequality between the sexes. Also, it is a great threat for women because it is generally performed under primitive conditions and results in death. According to the World Health Organization, there are 100-140 million women who live with the consequences of FGM. There are many reasons that lead these women to undergo this operation. In most countries in which FGM is performed, it is a social construction and there is a great pressure on women to be mutilated. In these societies, FGM is considered one of the most important elements in raising a girl. It is seen as a way to prepare a girl for adulthood and marriage. It is also performed to prevent a girl having a sexual intercourse with a man before getting married because the vagina is narrowed making it impossible to have a sexual intercourse and it is reopened with a painful procedure when she gets married. It is performed on married women, too. It abolishes or decreases the pleasure women have sexually and increases the pleasure men get. In other words, for men's sexual pleasure, women are mutilated and suffer, even die.

The novel that is discussed in terms of how it reflects FGM is *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, an important work of Alice Walker, who is a prominent black writer, focusing on black women's problems. In her *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, there is the story of a girl Tashi, who has sex with her boyfriend and experienced orgasm although it is strictly forbidden to have sexual intercourse before getting married in

their society. Then, she decides to get mutilated as a reaction to the colonial forces and their social structure. However, she cannot reach sexual and mental satisfaction she had before, and in the end she kills the woman who mutilated a lot of girls and Tashi herself. The novel is an influential one reflecting the life of a woman who has both a normal and mutilated sexual life. It brings out the suffering of mutilated women while telling the reader how and why it is still practised. Walker claims that men are the ones who take advantage of this tradition in all terms. However, women go through the process eagerly as they are afraid of being excluded from society. In other words, through the experiences of Tashi, Walker discusses that the society is structured in such a way that everything, even the suffering of women serve to men's interests and both men and women are willing to carry on these traditions; men with the pleasure of being satisfied in all terms and women with the fear of being left out.

Chapter II is about the honour crimes in Turkey and *töre* the set of rules that causes them, and *Bliss*, Zülfü Livaneli's prominent novel dealing with *töre* is discussed. *töre* is the term used for the general rules that shape a community's ways of living; their social habits, natural properties, the hierarchy in the society. In Turkey, *töre* is a determining factor in the eastern parts of the country. Although, *töre* is also used for harmless traditions, this thesis deals with the negative side which includes honour crimes and the obligation of men to kill women who are regarded dishonourful.

An honour crime is the one committed by a man who, generally, kills a woman in his family as she cannot protect the family's honour. Women are punished in this way when they have a sexual relationship without the marriage bond; even if a girl is raped, she is sentenced to death by her family. Although there are some cases in which women

are killed by men from their families because they have had sexual relationship willingly, generally, the girls are the victims of men; they are raped, they are forced to have sexual experiences involuntarily and they are found guilty even though they are damaged both physically and mentally. Hence, honour crimes are also the results of patriarchal structure; men have what they want to satisfy their desires and women are considered to be guilty.

The concept of *töre* is discussed in *Bliss*, by Zülfü Livaneli. *Bliss* is about the stories of three people from different social backgrounds. The part that is studied in this thesis is the one that is about a girl called Meryem, who lives in one of the villages of Van, an eastern city in Turkey. Meryem is a young girl who is raped by her own uncle and sentenced to death by the same uncle who is the head of the family and claims that he is devoted to what *töre* requires from them. Meryem is sent to Istanbul with her cousin Cemal, who is assigned to kill Meryem there. However, she is saved from death at the end of the novel. Livaneli examines the way *töre* is seen and practiced in this community through Meryem's life in the village, the points of view of Meryem, her uncle and the other members of the community. The writer also attracts attention to how negatively *töre* affects lives of women and what kinds of differences it causes between the oppressed and free women via Meryem's journey from Van to Istanbul. The main point that is stressed in the book is that *töre* is one of the tools created and used by the social structure which is in favour of men and oppresses women in all ways possible.

The third Chapter is about *sati*, which is an Indian tradition. Although it is claimed that *sati* is an ancient period and not followed any more, the fact that Indian government had to pass laws against it

many times shows that traditional people in India insist on performing this ritual.

*Sati* is the name of the custom that widows follow in India. If a woman's husband dies, she also kills herself by ascending to the funeral pyre. Literally, *sati* means a virtuous woman. A woman who chooses to kill herself in her husband's funeral fire is believed directly to go to heaven. She is worshipped as a Goddess and temples were built in her memory. Maha-sati stones were built in memory of these brave women and are periodically worshipped. These women were believed to perform this ritual as a result of tremendous love for their husband and the belief that life as a widow is a cursed one. Thus, *sati* is more preferable than living as a widow.

Two books are studied in terms of their look at "sati." The first one is *Raise the Lanterns High* by Lakshmi Persaud and the other one is *Rich Like Us* by Nayantara Sahgal.

*Raise the Lanterns High* by Lakshmi Persaud, an Indo-Caribbean writer, tells the story of a girl called Vasti living in Trinidad in 1960s and the story of three Indian Queens who are supposed to commit sati via Vasti's mental journey to the city of Jyotika in North India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The King of Jyotika dies and he leaves three Queens behind. The book deals with the *sati* custom, how the process goes on, how the Queens feel and what the public wants. The novel analyzes the structure of the society and how widows are forced to commit "sati." One of the Queens, Queen Renu rejects being a *sati* and the two other Queens are very inconsistent about burning themselves on their husband's pyre. The process they go through and their judgement of themselves are the ways that are presented by the author to the reader to see how *sati* works, how the society and traditions compel widows

to commit it and how men are situated in an advantageous position while women are burnt alive.

The second book that is studied is *Rich Like Us* by Nayantara Sahgal. Nayantara Sahgal is one of the important Indian writers in whose works there are references to *sati* tradition. In Sahgal's *Rich Like Us*, which is set in Emergency period (1975-77) and is mainly about the controversial period in Indian history and against the capitalist invasion of India, there is considerable amount of information and discussion on *sati*. It is represented as a past ritual in the novel and is declared as "murder" by Sahgal. The main chapter on *sati* goes back to 1829 when *sati* was legally abolished by British Raj. Sahgal points out that the women were drugged before they killed themselves. Then, she shows how the widows tried to escape from performing *sati*. The main example for *sati* is given by telling the story of Sonali's grandfather, grandmother and father. The grandfather dies and the grandmother has to perform *sati* for some reasons. Throughout the chapter, Sahgal discusses these reasons and the social aspects showing the reader that this tradition goes on convincing women that they will become holy creatures while making them commit suicide.



## CHAPTER I

### A. FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)

“Female circumcision” is a term given to the traditional practices involving the intentional cutting of or partial removal of the external female genitalia (WHO 1997). According to the form of the FGM the World Health Organization categorises the various types of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as follows:

- **Type I** — Partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce (clitoridectomy).
- **Type II** — Partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (excision).
- **Type III** — Narrowing of the vaginal orifice with creation of a covering seal by cutting and appositioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris (infibulation).
- **Type IV** — All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, for example: pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterization (WHO 1997).

The origin of FGM has never been identified certainly, and its genesis and growth are the issues that are highly speculative. The most extensive belief is that FGM has its roots in Islam. David Gollaher makes it clear in his assumption that “In the world of Islam, female circumcision has long been acknowledged as a rightful counterpart to

male circumcision” (191). Nevertheless, linking it to Islam is not a realistic way to find its origin. If Islam is the basis of the FGM, it is impossible to explain why non-Muslim societies insist on performing it or why some Muslim societies do not carry out any form of it. On this issue, one of the Islamic jurists Jamal Badawi states that,

No mention of female circumcision is to be found in the Qur’an either directly or indirectly. There is no known Hadith which requires female circumcision (57).

Qur’an (the scripture believed to be revealed to the Prophet Mohammed) and the Hadith (the teachings of the Prophet) are the most important sources for the Islamic belief and that there is no hint about FGM in them can be accepted as a proof that FGM is not an Islamic practice.

Moreover, it is not a Christian practice and both the Christian and Muslim men of religion state that it is a practice that precedes both Christianity and Islam. Some critics claim that it was an ancient Egyptian tradition as it is stated, “Marie Assaad feels that there is sufficient evidence to assume that FGM was practiced in ancient Egypt, and it was perhaps there that the custom originated” (Dorkenoo 33). Another belief is that FGM is possibly originated in Africa as the most radical form of FGM, infibulation, is mostly seen in areas where Arab and Black African cultures meet. Accepting this view, James DeMeo claims that both female and male genital mutilations are transmitted from one region to another by relocation diffusion and the conquest of the cultures by the invasion of the other ones who mutilate (Dorkenoo 33). He also notes that,

Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania genital mutilations were practiced independently prior to the Islamic

period, notably among warrior-like people (Dorkenoo 33).

In conclusion, it seems that genital mutilations first occurred when the militant pastoral nomads invaded the Nile Valley. However, still it is not clear that where FGM was originated and which culture was the first to perform it, as it was:

known in Ancient Egypt and amongst ancient Arabs, and it is known to have existed in the middle belt of Africa before written records were kept. It is, therefore, difficult to date the first operation or determine the country in which it took place (Koso-Thomas 15).

Although its origins are unclear the motives behind it are similar to each other in every culture that performs it. Starting with religious reasons, FGM is practiced by the followers of different religions such as Muslims, Christians, Animists and non-believers all over the world. However, it is clear that there is no basis for this belief in the teachings of these religions (Dorkenoo 36).

Some Muslim communities believe that FGM is a procedure demanded by the Islamic faith and insist on carrying it out. Muslim law that governs the lives of the believers of Islam consists of Qur'an (the holy book), sunna (teachings of the prophet) and ijtihad (tenets of the school of Muslim law through the centuries) and in none of them there is a direct indication that female genital mutilation is obligatory. However, there are still some scholars and sects who defend FGM.

Sheikh Dr Abdel Rahman Al Nagger, a religious scholar from Sudan, explains the position of the different scholars and sects as follows:

1. The Scholars of the Shafeite sect believe that both circumcision of males and excision of females are obligatory.

2. The scholars and jurists of the Hanifite and Maliki sects believe that circumcision of males is sunna and that excision of females is preferable.
3. The scholars of the Hanbelite sect believe that circumcision is a mandatory obligation for males and a good deed for girls” (Dorkenoo 37).

However, there are still some religious leaders who defend it. One of the supporters of this act, Great Sheikh of Al Azhar declared a fatwa opposing giving up excision on 29 January 1981. He insists that excision is advised in Prophet Mohammed’s sayings and it is a sin to abandon his teachings in favour of others’ teachings. In the light of these thoughts we can say that in Islam, there are conflicting ideas about the FGM. Some believe that it is not set as a rule while there are still some religious leaders who reject abandoning the practice.

The same situation is present in Christianity: while some thinkers support it, others defend its invalidity. FGM is not mentioned in the Bible, but it is practiced in some Christian societies. The reason for this situation is that the Church has to support genital mutilation as the Christian missionaries see that they lose their believers when they try to abandon the practice. The Church has to say,

The Roman Catholic Church does not mind whether girls are circumcised or not. Christians who circumcise girls are not excommunicated (Dorkeeno 39).

Since religion’s place in FGM is a controversial issue, it might be helpful to analyze the sociological factors in order to understand the deep underlying motives in performing FGM. Among these sociological reasons, one of the most important factors that help this act to continue is the tradition. It,

accounts for the most widely justification for the practice of female circumcision which follows generations of culturally embedded beliefs (Lockhart 15).

In many communities performing this practice, it signifies the girl's being an adult. It serves as a way for the girl to be accepted in the society and prove her belonging to that community. Also, in many African countries performing FGM, the inheritance of title and kinship is through mother and "female circumcision may have been a means of ensuring the legitimacy of claims" (Lockhart 17). Hence, carrying it out is very important for the African people for whom being socially accepted is crucial.

When it comes to social factors, it is seen that the preservation of chastity is also an important reason. Virginity has a vital role for women's position in the societies where female genital mutilation is practiced. People believe that it ensures a girl's remaining virgin. Moreover, in some societies, the infibulated opening is a way to determine the bride's value, "the smaller it is, the more valuable her worth" (Lockhart 16). The virginity of the girl is also a proof for the moral quality of the girl's family. It is common in those societies to take the bride-to-be to a mid-wife and check her virginity. If a girl is not virgin, she is not suitable for marriage and if a girl is uncircumcised she is surely not virgin,

there is a strongly held belief that there can be no adult virgins amongst the uncircumcised and so none can be eligible for true matrimony (Koso-Thomas 9).

Except from ensuring virginity, there are more sexual reasons which lead to perform FGM. For instance, the clitoris is believed to be the main factor driving women to have uncontrollable desire for sex:

it is believed that the clitoris, left intact, causes women to become over-sexed, to respond too readily to sexual approaches and may provoke them into making uncontrollable sexual demands on their husbands (Koso-Thomas 8).

If the husband is unable to satisfy her demands, a woman may look for extra-marriage relationships. When it is removed, the women are prevented from having extra-marital relations without damaging her reproductive abilities. It is thought to be for the good of the society, too,

it protects them from their own sexuality and from the risk of becoming promiscuous and thereby bringing shame and disgrace not only upon their families, but on the society at large (Koso-Thomas 8).

Therefore, in order to prevent promiscuity women are the ones who are asked to make sacrifice by performing FGM.

FGM is believed to increase a woman's femininity as it is seen a way to "increase male sexual satisfaction because of tightness of the vagina and attenuate female sexual desire" (Lockhart 16). Fadwa El Guindi tells that one Nubian woman said to her it, "makes a woman nice and tight. The man finds great pleasure in tight women, unlike Cairo women whose vaginas are wide enough for four men to enter together" (Abusharaf 32) while she was talking to the Nubian women about circumcision and pleasure in sex. Women in this region believe that "man's arousal and pleasure give much pleasure to women" (Abusharaf 32). In other words, removal of the clitoris leaves no chance for women to get pleasure in sex in terms of physical senses, but they are conditioned to have pleasure out of men's pleasure in sex.

Also, the clitoris is believed to be the reason for male's early resolution and ejaculation or it makes women to have some sexual

desires that men may not be able to satisfy. In both situations, it is thought to be the origin of the conflict in the household in many patriarchal societies. To prevent this conflict, the male has to have control over the sexual relation, “it is for the man to bring sexual act to an end at such time as it may please him, not the woman” (Koso-Thomas 8). In other words, removal of the clitoris both prevents a man from early ejaculation, helps him have the sexual intercourse however they want as the woman has no desire and pleasure and prevents a possible conflict in the household. That is to say, for the sake of improving male’s sexual performance and preventing the possible problems, women sacrifice their sense of pleasure and perform or made to perform FGM.

Health factors are also effective reasons for performing FGM and pursuit of hygiene is among them. The female external genitalia are thought as dirty and the source of harmful and offensive odour. Therefore, it is believed to be necessary to remove the parts that cause this unhealthy situation and foul-smelling. Women are considered as dirty from the birth and “can only reach a state of cleanliness suitable for marriage and childbirth through excision” (Lockhart 17). In certain communities, the clitoris is believed to be the reason for the stillbirths in primigravidas. It is thought to have the power to kill the baby, if her/his head touches it during the delivery. Moreover, some communities have a stronger belief and think “the same fate awaits subsequent babies if the clitoris is not excised” (Koso- Thomas 7).

It is also believed that the enhancement of fertility is provided by FGM. This belief is the result of the situation that circumcised girls immediately marry after the operation and they get pregnant. People believe that,

if a female is not circumcised, the secretions produced by the glands of the genitalia kill the spermatozoa deposited in the vagina by the male glans penis (Koso-Thomas 9).

FGM is thought to be necessary for maintenance of good health because it is believed that circumcised women are always healthier. It is not a strong argument when the complications that occur as a result of the circumcision are examined. However, “evidence is commonly quoted of girls who were always sick, but after being circumcised became healthy, hale and hearty” (Koso-Thomas 9). Even in Europe and America, it was used as a way to cure psychological disorders. Britain in 1800s saw clitoridectomy widely advocated as a cure for insanity, epilepsy, masturbation, lesbianism, hysteria and nymphomania.

Except these health concerns, there are also aesthetic motives which lead to FGM. One of the important reasons that make circumcision practiced even in Europe and America is the idea that a normal vagina is too ugly to see or touch and it needs a cosmetic operation, “a flat, smooth area of skin, without the fleshy encumbrances appears to these groups more pleasing to the sight and touch” (Koso-Thomas 7). Also, in some societies it is believed that female genitalia “have the potential to grow as do the male genitalia with the development from childhood to adulthood” (Koso-Thomas 7).

All of these FGM reasons related to religion, society, sexual life, health and aesthetics illustrate the condition of women in the places where FGM is practiced. Many African females do not know what normal genitalia should look like or a few of them has seen it. They just know that it is the part of their body responsible for reproduction but “what this has to do with physical pleasure is beyond them; it is a



part to be possessed by their husbands” (Koso-Thomas 12). Even touching it is a kind of taboo for those African women. They are aware of the fact that it must be kept clean but this is achieved by minimal contact. Even the illnesses about their sexual organs are taboos that should not be mentioned. These women have to suffer quietly and if the pain goes beyond their endurance, the supernatural powers are seen as the cause of the illness and women try to treat themselves. That is, even if they suffer women prefer to keep silent and “this has made them unaware of what a feeling of ‘wellness’ is” (Koso-Thomas 13).

In other words, female genitalia and sexuality are the notions that are ignored by both men and women. It is clear that in a society where touching the genitalia is a taboo, sexual life is a notion about which even talking is seen as a crime,

The belief that female response to sexual stimuli should be suppressed, has discouraged interest in feminine sexuality. Sex is never to be discussed even with one’s husband (Koso-Thomas 13).

Therefore, female sexuality is bound to remain as a taboo and circumcision is not a subject that is open to discussion.

Also, in most societies performing FGM, it is seen as a ritual that is related to religion and supernatural powers;

For the majority of people, there is usually fear of the consequences of not conforming to a system that is controlled by supernatural powers (Koso-Thomas 13).

Women are convinced to believe that if they reject being circumcised, they will be ill, have misfortune or die whereas being mutilated will make them spiritually better.

**B. AN ANALYSIS OF *POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY*  
IN TERMS OF ITS POINT OF VIEW ABOUT FEMALE  
GENITAL MUTILATION**

*Possessing the Secret of Joy*, published in 1992, is a novel about race and gender written by Alice Walker. Walker is an American feminist author who has written books on gender, women, race and colonialism and has won Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her *The Color Purple*. Tashi who had a minor part in *The Color Purple* is the main protagonist in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Tashi's story shows the individual and cultural motivation that led women to get genitally mutilated and the effects of it on the women and the society as a whole. The story, told by Tashi, her husband Adam, her best friend Olivia, her psychiatrists Mzee and Raye, her son Bennie, Adam's son Pierre and the circumciser woman M'Lissa, begins with her childhood and the reader traces her until her execution, for she commits murder. Meanwhile, Walker makes the reader feel how painful it can be for a woman to be mutilated, why she chooses to be so, and the life before and after FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) and how men benefit from the mutilation of women both sexually and socially.

The beginning of novel gives rise to great curiosity and interest on behalf of the reader. Walker writes, "This book is dedicated with tenderness and respect to the blameless vulva" (2). Even the dedication sentence gives the reader the clue that the book is assigned to depict how great her sexual life and what FGM's effect on a woman's life can be. The feminine sexual life is accepted as the source of the evil in

the societies where FGM is performed and from the beginning the book stresses that it is entirely blameless.

In fact, Tashi was not mutilated when she was a little girl. Her mother, Catherine, was a converted Christian and she did not let Tashi be circumcised though the society insisted on it, “She had argued with Catherine, Tashi’s mother, to have the operation done for Tashi when she was at the proper age” (Walker 63). However, Tashi’s sister Dura was not as lucky as Tashi. Dura bled to death when she was being circumcised and Tashi witnessed the process. However, all she knows is that her sister bled and died; she has no idea about why Dura was in such a condition, “Her name was Dura and she bled to death. That was all Tashi was told; all she knew” (Walker 8). The effect of Dura’s death on Tashi was so enormous that she was afraid of bleeding very much, “while we were playing she pricked her finger on a thorn or scraped her knee and glimpsed the sight of her own blood, she fell into panic” (Walker 8).

The first impression of FGM on Tashi, which makes her suffer is the insensitivity of women to the horrible result of FGM, Dura’s death. Tashi cannot understand how these women can be so ignorant about her sister’s death. As a child who was not aware of the fact why her sister died, Tashi feels very sorry about Dura and cries. Nevertheless, it is time for the foreigners to come the country and Tashi is warned by other women not to cry any more. Tashi cannot understand how they can be that insensitive to a little girl’s death that they had known for years,

How could I believe these were the same women  
who’d known Dura? And whom Dura had known?  
She’d gone to buy matches or snuff for them nearly

every day. She'd carried their water jugs on her head (Walker 15).

Tashi is shocked to observe that people behave as if her sister had never existed and she feels desperate, "It was a nightmare. Suddenly it was not acceptable to speak of my sister" (Walker 15).

Despite the first negative impression of FGM on her and not being obliged to have the operation as her mother was a converted Christian, Tashi wants to be mutilated. She prefers to have it, firstly, because their great Leader demands them to do it and it is the way to react against the colonialism; it is to way to tell the colonialists that they have their own culture and traditions which they will continue to perform. Tashi decides to get circumcised, thinking her people who

had once owned their village and hectares and hectares of land now owned nothing. We were reduced to the position of beggars-except that there was no one near enough to beg from" (Walker 23).

Her best friend Olivia, who is an American, tries to stop her; Tashi, however, is very determined and that Olivia's being a foreigner also frustrates Tashi as she thinks that Olivia cannot understand how Tashi feels. For Olivia, it seems ridiculous to get circumcised willingly whereas Tashi is angry about the fact that the colonialists try to change them, "Who are you and your people never to accept us as we are? Never to imitate any of our ways? It is always we who have to change" (Walker 23). For Tashi, it has a different meaning, "All I care about now is the struggle for our people" (Walker 22). To show that she wants to keep her country and her people free, Tashi goes to a camp and gets circumcised.

After the operation, she feels that she has got what she wanted; she felt herself "Completely woman. Completely African. Completely

Olinkan” (Walker 63). The other women in the camp are powerful, unbeatable and the operation she has had makes it possible for her to join that group; she is a strong African woman who cannot be beaten by the colonial forces. Unless she is circumcised, she is not a normal member of the Olinkan society; she is even regarded as a traitor who does not defend her own values. That is, circumcision is seen as a symbol of their love for their country which they will not hand over to the colonialists, “Otherwise I was a thing. Worse, because of my friendship with Adam’s family and my special relationship to him, I was never trusted, considered a potential traitor, even” (Walker 120). Their great Leader imposes it on the Olinka people that they mustn’t leave their old beliefs and traditions; keep them as a way to struggle with colonialism and “No Olinka man would even think of marrying a woman who was not circumcised” (Walker 120).

Apart from reacting to the colonial forces, getting circumcised means being a member of the society and being seen normal by them. Tashi tells that although she has experienced orgasm before she is mutilated she gives it up “To be accepted as a real woman by the Olinka people; to stop the jeering” (Walker 120). A story told by Pierre shows how great the pressure of the society about FGM. A man called, Torabe marries a girl who runs away from him and drowns herself in water that doesn’t even reach her knees. Torabe’s new wife goes to her family and tells them how painful it is, “he had cut her open with a hunting knife on their wedding night, and gave her no opportunity to heal” (Walker 136). Even her father, however, does not understand her and wants her mother to tell their daughter that it is her duty to endure the pain and please her husband. In “A Child’s Big Letters: Orality, Literacy and Female Genital Mutilation”, Lauret tells,

“In Olinka culture, mothers tell their daughters that they should comply with tradition” (25) just like the family in the story does. They send her to her husband but she prefers to drown herself rather than going back to him. Torabe is isolated from the society as “he lost control of his wife, a very evil thing to do in that society because it threatened the fabric of life” (Walker 137). The family is isolated, too and the girl is taken out of the river and left to get rotten. There can be no empathy for the women who suffer because of circumcision; even their parents are concerned about their traditions and society’s negative attitude for the ones who break the rules. The punishment can be very severe as it is seen in the story; people can not dare to break the rule and find a solution about it as the society does not give them the chance to survive. In other words, Tashi is the daughter of a converted Christian who does not force her daughter to get circumcised; however, the community rules are obvious and Tashi is affected by them. Therefore, she prefers to get mutilated feeling that she is more acceptable in this way.

Nevertheless, Tashi cannot remain that happy after the effects of the operation are seen. Firstly, her sexual life is completely destroyed. The only problem is not with her sexual life, indeed. It causes irreversible damage both physically and psychologically for her. Physically, she has problems in peeing and in her menstruation as the left hole is too small. Adam tells the effects of FGM on Tashi:

It now took a quarter of an hour for her to pee. Her menstrual periods lasted ten days she was incapacitated by cramps nearly half the month. There were premenstrual cramps: cramps caused by the near impossibility of flow passing through so tiny an aperture as M’Lissa had left, after fastening together the raw sides of Tashi’s vagina with a couple of thorns

and inserting a straw so that in healing, the traumatized flesh might not grow together, shutting the opening completely; cramps caused by the residual flow that could not find its way out, was not reabsorbed into her body, and had nowhere to go. There was the odour, too, of soured blood, which no amount of scrubbing, until we got to America, ever washed off (Walker 65).

Olivia describes how Tashi changes after the circumcision physically, too, and that Tashi begins to walk in a way that all Olinka women do because of the scar they have, “The scar gave her the classic Olinka woman’s walk, in which the feet appear to slide forward and rarely raised above the ground” (Walker 65).

FGM influences Tashi psychologically, as well. *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is often read as Walker’s critique of female genital mutilation and her examination of the threat it might pose to the individual psyche” (Richards 144) claims Richards. In the novel, Olivia’s speech indicating that Tashi seems to have changed psychologically is the part where the supports for this idea can be found. Olivia says Tashi has lost all her liveliness:

It was heartbreaking to see, on their return, how passive Tashi had become. No longer cheerful, or impish. Her movements, which had always been graceful, and quick with the liveliness of her personality, now became merely graceful. Slow. Studied. This was true even of her smile; which she never seemed to offer you without considering it first (Walker 65).

Tina Mcelroy Ansa describes the situation Tashi is in as, “She not only has a scar between her legs, but one as deep on her psyche as well. The circumcision has not only cut away her clitoris and the possibility of lovemaking that is not painful and humiliating. It has also eradicated her sense of self and ability to feel” (32). The harm in

her soul is so deep that Olivia describes it as a “mortal blow” (Walker 65) which can be seen by everyone. The FGM’s influence on Tashi continues for long years. During this period, probably because he does not have a proper sexual relationship and Tashi is psychologically not well to be a good wife, Adam has a relationship with another woman called, Lisette. Tashi accepts that she can not take care of her husband and son Benny,

I watched Benny struggle with all his might to be close to me, to melt into my body, to inhale my scent; and I was like a crow flapping my wings unceasingly in my own head, cawing mutely across an empty sky (Walker 217).

The circumcision devastated all her life in every way.

What she goes through psychologically and how she sees sexuality, men and circumcision become clear, when she faints while watching a film on TV with Adam and her psychiatrist. She loses her conscious when she sees a large fighting cock on TV, “The picture of a fighting cock, taken twenty-five years ago, completely terrorized me” (Walker 71). The terror she lives is a great one, Adam describes her, “her body rigid as death, her teeth clenched in a fierce grimace and, most strange of all, her eyes open. So of course we thought for a moment she’d died” (Walker 75). The next day, Tashi begins to draw a picture of the cock and a foot in the corner of her pointing. The cock is probably the symbol of the penis whereas the foot represents the “tsunga” as Tashi states “The foot above which I painted this pattern was a woman’s, and that I was painting the lower folds of one of M’Lissas’s tattered wraps” (Walker 72). Tashi tells that there is something between the toes of the foot and the cock is waiting for it, “It was for this small thing that the giant cock waited, crowing impatiently, extending its



neck, ruffling its feathers, and strutting about” (Walker 71). The small thing here is the women’s vagina that a “tsunga” brings to give it to a man. The stress on the bigness of the cock and the smallness of the thing shows how Tashi feels about sexual intercourse. Women’s vagina is made too tight and small for a penis to penetrate making it very painful for women. However, men do not care about it as Tashi’s using the word “impatiently” indicates. The description of the cock and the small thing in this sentence entirely demonstrates Tashi’s image of sexuality after the circumcision. The bigger the cock gets, the more frightening it becomes for Tashi,

How nauseous; as the cock continued to grow in size,  
and the bare foot with its little insignificant morsel  
approached steadily toward what I felt would be the  
crisis, the unbearable moment for me (Walker 72).

Tashi utters that the cock which she named as “The Beast” seems to be the her real fear, “Indeed, I felt as if I were seeing the cause of my anxiety itself for the first time, exactly as it was” (Walker 78).

The symbol that her painting represents is not just the sexual relationship between an impatient man and a circumcised woman; it also shows that Tashi thinks that her sister Dura was murdered and the murderer was the “tsunga”. After she has a rest, Tashi talks to her psychiatrist, Mzee. He asks him what she feels after having completed the painting. Tashi states that she is feeling better and she remembers her sister Dura. Before, she can not say the word “murder”; she just says “Dura’s... My sister Dura’s...” and can not get further. However, Tashi, says, she has found the reason for it. It is not a coincidence that she becomes aware of this fact after she draws that painting; the foot in the painting which is like the foot of M’Lissa, who circumcised Dura, makes her remember what happened to her sister

and who did it. In the past, she could only say that her sister had died simply, she had bled and died; nevertheless, she, now, can state that Dura was murdered and there was somebody who was responsible for this. Tashi asserts, “No longer would my weeping be separate from what I knew” (Walker 81) implying that from now on, she would not accept Dura’s death as destiny and would find the one who is responsible for it.

The pain she goes through makes her completely reject what the society imposes on her and the ideal for what she sacrificed herself. At first, she believes that FGM is an important part of her people’s traditions and that it is a way to protect her country; however, her physical and psychological sufferings lead her to think that it is not a tradition that is essential for the good of the country; it is a way of murdering young girls such as Dura. This way of thinking makes her question the tradition, why and how it continues and how it is seen in social life and she sees that what she has sacrificed herself for is a tradition that goes on being rooted in religion and myths, being a taboo unspoken, and making men get its benefit in all ways.

At the beginning of the story, when Tashi is a child, she gets disturbed by the attitude of women who behave as if Dura never existed. Later, Tashi understands that the reason behind these women’s behaviour is the fact that mentioning FGM and its results are definitely forbidden in the Olinka society; it is a taboo, “How did your mother die? It is a taboo question in Olinka” (Walker 157). They prevent it from being discussed as it can shake all their beliefs. Taboo is certainly the right word to describe the FGM as Maria Lauret claims, “that authority cannot be questioned from within African culture, for to question it equals to the betrayal of the heritage” (Lauret 166).

However, it is worth discussing that what makes this tradition go on if it is not mentioned; what protects it from being forgotten by people. The answer is that there are myths that people always tell and keeping the taboo unquestioned is related to the myths and religion. There are myths about how FGM occurred and why it should be performed and these are made up to make it go on.

The religion composed of myths in favour of FGM is “an elaborate excuse for what man has done to women” (Walker 229) says one of Tashi’s friends while the other one says “nobody even knows why they do this thing” (Walker 229). However, they go on preventing FGM from being discussed critically, but talking about the myths and telling stories about it and saving their tradition although “nobody knows why they do this thing” (Walker 229). These mythical stories are accepted by everyone in the society even though nobody has ever seen any of them coming true. They believe the myths as if they have witnessed them. One of the most known is that women’s genitalia is to grow like men’s penis unless they are cut and will prevent the men from penetrating:

Everyone knew that if a woman was not circumcised her unclean parts would grow so long that they’d soon touch her thighs; she’d become masculine and arouse herself. No man could enter her because her own erection would be in this way (Walker 119).

This is acknowledged so strongly that Tashi is seen as a strange creature by her mutilated friends when she is not mutilated. Tashi describes the situation:

Certainly, to all my friends who’d been circumcised, my uncircumcised vagina was thought of a monstrosity. They laughed at me. Jeered at me for having a tail. I think they meant my labia majora.

After all, none of them had vaginal lips; none of them had a clitoris; they had no idea what these things looked like; to them I was bound to look odd. There were a few other girls who had not been circumcised. The girls had been would sometimes actually run from us, as if we were demons. Laughing, though. Always laughing (Walker 120).

Women who are not circumcised are believed to have vaginas like a penis, because it is believed that there is a womanly part in every man and a manly part in every woman:

Thus it came about that each human being form the first was endowed with two souls of different sex, or rather with two principles corresponding to two distinct persons. In the man the female soul was located in the prepuce; in the woman the male soul was in the clitoris (Walker 171).

Men thought that sunna (circumcision) was the way to get rid of their womanly part for them and this was also performed for women; for men cutting the prepuce made them a whole man and for women the part that symbolized the manliness was the clitoris and it was cut, “the man is circumcised to rid of his femininity; the woman is excised to rid her of her masculinity” (Walker 171).

Another myth that has the same implication is the story between God and the earth. The earth is like a body lying and it is feminine. God wants to have an intercourse with her and approaches her. The earth, however, has a clitoris which is, surely, not circumcised and rises up showing her masculinity and preventing God from penetrating, “It was as strong as the organ of the stranger, and intercourse, could not take place” (Walker 169). God thought it was masculine and “since it was masculine for a clitoris to rise, God could be excused for cutting it down. Which he did” (Walker 229). Then, God had an intercourse with the Earth. In the narrative, it is clear that

men are associated with God and women are related to Earth and the terms that described God, men, is important. God which is the symbol for men is said to be “all powerful” (Walker 169). It carries the assumption that men have the control on women and they have the right to do anything with women to please themselves as the owners of power in the world.

As Constance S. Richards argues, “The discourse which Walker constructs is antipatriarchy” (136) and Walker elaborates on the idea of God-men relationship; how men see themselves as the representatives of God on the Earth and women as their properties on whom they can impose their power and wills. As “God struck the blow that made her (the Earth) Queen”, men cut women’s clitoris to make women suitable for men; God gets satisfied after cutting the earth’s clitoris that prevented him and the representatives of God in the world, men cut women’s clitoris to get satisfied sexually. It is, also, not just about cutting the clitoris that would grow and be an obstacle for them to penetrate; it is about getting more pleasure making the vagina as tight as possible while making women suffer instead of being satisfied,

God liked it tight. God liked to remember what he had done, and how it felt before it got loose. God is wise. That is why He created the “tsunga”. With sharpened stone and bag of thorns. With her needle and thread. Because he liked it tight. God likes to feel big (Walker 223).

Men are considered to be the transmitters of God’s seeds, “Man is God’s cock. It drops the seeds” (Walker 230). Men, however, are not able to identify their offspring; women can only know whose child it is. Circumcision is believed to avoid women having sexual relationships and they do not get involved in a relationship apart from their husbands as they do not have any pleasure in it and suffer; thus,

men claim that they have the right to circumcise women to be able to know their children, “the tsunga’s stitch helps the cock know his crop.” (Walker 231). That is, circumcision is an issue about inheritance for men as Richards states,

An approach to *Possessing the Secret of Joy* forces us to see the practice as one of many ways in which the sex/gender system under patriarchy attempts to control female sexuality and maintain lines of kinship and inheritance” (137).

Also, as the “gifts from God to men” (Walker 231), women, for whom “self-possession will always be impossible to claim” (Walker 271), are there to produce the children of men. Both being the gift and the producer of the children are ways to express that women are merely men’s commodities as well as agents who deprive them of all the pleasure they can have. Men are insistent on mutilating women and avoiding their pleasure as their idea is that “If left to herself the Queen would fly” (Walker 231) and to prevent it “He clips her wings” (Walker 231). In other words, if she is not mutilated and she learns what it is like to have a real sexual experience is, she will be able to choose to be with another man who is more able to satisfy her desires.

Although the myths about it are told among people, the Olinkan people prevent FGM being discussed. The society’s approach to the matter and their effort to keep it private are obvious in the court while Tashi is being tried because of having murdered the “tsunga” M’Lissa. There, Adam asserts that Tashi is a tortured woman by the ritual. The word “ritual” disturbs the audience who are Olinkan people. They react to his speech, “as soon as he utters the word “ritual” there is a furor in the court. Male voices, and female voices, call for Adam’s silence:

Shut up, shut up, you disgraceful American! The voices cry. This is our business you would put into stress! We cannot publicly discuss this taboo” (Walker 158).

They are so strict about the issue that they cannot tolerate it is being mentioned in a court, among people. But why are they so rigid on the subject? Adam asks himself the question:

They do not want to hear what their children suffer. They’ve made the telling of the suffering itself taboo. [...] When they say the word “taboo” I try to catch their eye. Are they saying something is sacred and therefore not be publicly examined for fear of disturbing the mystery; or are they saying it is so profane it must not be exposed, for fear of corrupting the young? Or are they saying simply that they can not be bothered to listen to what is said about an accepted tradition of which they are a part that has gone on, as far as they know forever? (Walker 161)

It is not only the procedure that people were banned from talking. Nobody can discuss the matter and women are not allowed to say anything about the pain it causes, about how they feel, their sexual life; they are even told not to touch their genitalia. Touching the genitalia is such a taboo that the small figures with genitalia or touching it are forbidden as Tashi tells,

She found me playing with it, and boxed my ears, claiming the thing I held- a small figure playing with her genitals- was indecent” (Walker 109).

The statue and taboo connection is clear in Catherine’s way of keeping a statue that had a whole genitalia; she kept it in a secret place. Tashi tells,

I saw her enter a blighted forest where no one ever went, walk up to a hole in a rotting tree, and take something out of it. She unwrapped it, looked upon it,

kissed it, and replaced it all in a single motion  
(Walker 213).

A normal vagina and its appearance are such taboos that even to see it as a part of a statue is prohibited and women have to hide the statues having vaginas.

The statues and their story is the main point that shows that Tashi is not in favour of FGM. The prohibition of these statues provokes Tashi against FGM as she thinks that it is a way to enslave women. Tashi states, “I recognized the connection between mutilation and enslavement” (Walker 137). She makes a direct connection between these small figures and enslavement of women. She suggests that these small figures which are called dolls derive their names from the term “idol” as they are the symbols of the Goddesses or a Creator; the female figure is so noble that it is thought as the life forced at that time. After all, they are all “sent literally underground, painted on the walls of caves and sheltered enclosures of rock” (Walker 197). When women were enslaved as Tashi indicates “many of the figures were destroyed. Especially those that show both a woman’s vagina and her contended face” (Walker 197). With men’s establishing power on women, even the dolls have changed and women’s sexuality has become the main tool of the oppression, Tashi means.

Tashi’s ideas that toys have all been changed in order to hide women’s sexuality is supported by Amy, an American woman who has been mutilated and has a place in the novel as Walker “refuses to allow the U.S reader to distance himself or herself from the practice as one that affects only women of other cultures” (Richards 139). Amy experiences circumcision when she is six years old as her parents want her to be, being disturbed by the fact that Amy always touches her



genital organ; Amy tells Tashi that, “even in America a rich white child could not touch herself sexually” (Walker 185). All over the world, the little girls are brought up in a way to be completely unaware of their own body and sexuality,

Now of course every little girl is given a doll to drag around. A little figure of woman as a toy, with the most vacuous face imaginable, and no vagina at all” (Walker 198).

In other words, like Tashi, Amy implies that even toys are in service of men’s interests and the main idea behind this attitude is to alienate women from their bodies, “My own body was a mystery to me, as was female body, beyond the function of the breasts, to almost everyone I knew” (Walker 119). If they do not know their bodies and sexuality, they do not know what to demand from their men. Tashi believes that it is the first step to enslave women; women’s only aim becomes to please their husbands. That is, firstly, women are alienated from their bodies and not being able to discover themselves makes them the objects of men.

Tashi criticizes FGM, which is described as “the cultural intent of such mutilation absolutely clear: the denial of pleasure for women from all sexual activity” (28) by Charles R. Larson, as it is a way to please men both psychologically and physically. It pleases men psychologically making them sure that their wives to be are virgins and physically as the vagina is tight and it means more sexual pleasure for men. Tashi describes the situation as,

A proper woman must be cut and sewn to fit only to her husband, whose pleasure depends on an opening it might take months, even years, to enlarge. Men love and enjoy the struggle. (Walker 217).

However, women and their sexual lives are not taken into consideration, “But you never said anything about the woman, did you, M,Lissa? About the pleasure she might have. Or the suffering” (Walker 217).

There is nothing good for women; however, they, also, want to get mutilated, even again and again sometimes,

And the women, even today, after giving birth, they come back to the “tsunga” to be resewn, tighter than before. Because if it is loose, he won’t receive enough pleasure” (Walker 216).

Women are so oppressed and enslaved by men that they do not care about themselves, their own joy or suffering; they prefer to suffer more to men’s receiving more pleasure. Women are not aware of the fact that sexuality can be pleasant for them, too; their only aim is to please their husbands. From the moment they begin to grow up, women are circumcised and are told that their priority in life is to serve their men. They don’t have the control even on their own bodies; it is under the control of patriarchy.

Like Tashi, her husband Adam also criticizes FGM. Men, who enjoy having the advantage being the superior ones, however, do not do any sacrifice and they can not understand what women go through. What if they had the same operation and have their penis cut? Adam questions the situation in the court,

If every man in this courtroom had had his penis removed, what then? Would they understand better that that condition is similar to that of all the women in this room? That, even as we sit here, the women are suffering from the unnatural constrictions of flesh their bodies have been whittled and refashioned into? (Walker 162).

As Adam suggests, women carry their suffering everywhere, every time; men, nevertheless, are never aware of this fact. It might only be possible to understand what women have to experience for men if they went through the same process and lost their sexual power and pleasure for which they have confined women to pain for centuries. This pain has continued for centuries as nobody has listened to and understood women. Adam tells that every woman who has experienced FGM is the little child, the symbol for which his father said if there was only one crying child it meant that the society is unhappy, and he argues that women are unable to tell their misery and they remain silent “screaming her terror eternally into her own ear” (Walker 162) and men remain deaf to women’s pain, go on living their own lives and the inequality never ends. Even the great Leader, who provoked the women in the country to get circumcised as a reaction to the colonial forces showing how they are loyal to their own traditions, is incapable of figuring women’s problems out as he did not have any operation that would change his life,

Did our leader not keep his penis? Is there evidence that even one testicle was removed? The man had eleven children by three wives. I think this means the fellow’s parts were intact (Walker 238).

In other words, after so much suffering, all members of the family and especially Tashi become aware of the fact that all the myths and religious stories are made up by people to make FGM go on and it does nothing but harm women. For that reason, Tashi considers that FGM is a way of murdering women not only physically but also psychologically and she decides to kill M’Lissa who circumcised her claiming that the murderer of her sister and many other Olinka girls is M’Lissa, who has been recognized as a heroine by every faction of the

government, including the National Liberation Front. Tashi goes to the place where M'Lissa lives and is visited by a lot of people as she has become a famous traditional figure. For Tashi, M'Lissa is a cruel woman who caused deaths of little girls. However, Tashi later learns that M'Lissa is also a victim as well as being a murderer. M'Lissa was also circumcised when she was a child and it left a damage on her leg as well as her vagina,

not only her clitoris, outer and inner labia, and every other scrap of flesh been removed, but a deep gash travelled right through the tendon of her inner thigh” (Walker 211).

It is clear that M'Lissa suffered, too, nevertheless, she tells Tashi that she forgot about her childhood experiences, “The child who went to the initiation hut. You know I left her there bleeding on the floor, and I came out. She was crying. She felt so betrayed. By everyone. I couldn't think about her any more. I would have died” (Walker 218) and she went on doing what the society wants her to do. She also considers herself as a killer, “But who are we but torturers of children?” (Walker 219). The fact that M'Lissa suffered, too, does not change Tashi's belief that she is a killer and that she deserves to be killed. However, it is never clear in the book whether Tashi killed M'Lissa or she didn't. The only known fact is that M'Lissa died.

Tashi begins to undergo trials in America. Although, she tells Olivia that she didn't kill M'Lissa, she never rejects it in the trials thinking that she has suffered enough and it is time to go. She is sentenced to death and passes away at the end of the novel.

Although it is not apparent, Tashi seems to have killed M'Lissa. Walker puts forward a character who sees circumcision as a way to protect her own traditions but soon realizes that even the Leader, who

advises circumcision as a way to prevent colonialism, is not affected by it and decides to protest against it killing the “tsunga” whom she sees responsible for a lot of children’s death and she never rejects having committed the crime. Tashi’s admitting the crime is her effort to protest against FGM. Rejecting killing M’Lissa means rejecting protesting against and resisting FGM because Tashi claims that she killed M’Lissa because of the circumcisions she performed. Tashi’s attitude shows Walker’s effort to draw attention to the idea is that it is vital to react to these traditions humiliating women and devastating their lives, and collective resistance has a great role in the process as at the end of the novel it suggests, “Resistance is the secret of joy!”

## CHAPTER II

### A. TÖRE AND HONOUR CRIMES

*Töre* is the name given to the general rules that are accepted and obeyed by everyone in some particular communities. *Töre* regulates people's lives in that society and is composed by the factors such as social habits, the country's economical situation, beliefs and natural properties. It is still important in societies where social change is slow and continues to govern people's lives. *Töre* determines what can't be done instead of what can be done and how people who do not obey the rules will be punished (Bozkurt 108). It composes the hierarchical structure in which the social relationships of the members are determined strictly. Although men's positions can change in terms of governing or being governed, women's positions are always the same in a society in which *töre* is the determining force; women are always seen as the inferior ones and this is the reason why women are the primary victims of *töre*.

In Turkey, *töre* is one of the most important problems that should be discussed and found a solution for. It is the dominant force especially in Eastern parts of Turkey. The main problem it generates in Turkey is "honour crimes" which is the term used when a man kills a woman in his family because *töre* wants him to do so when the woman is found guilty of not being able to protect the family's honour. Although people from every social status can commit honour crime, it

is generally seen in Eastern parts of Turkey, where Kurdish people live generally. Dr. Aydin Findikci claims that “The researches show that honour crimes are a part of Kurdish culture and unwritten laws” (Özcan). Also, Ertugrul Özkok writes “Honour crime, mostly is a cultural element belonging to people from Southeast regions in Turkey” in his column, in Hurriyet newspaper.

Honour crime means “a complex and brutal action within a family against someone who is perceived to have brought shame upon relatives” (Rainsford). It is believed to purify the family’s honour that has been tarnished by a female member. It is important that honour crime is committed when a female member’s honour is in question; in societies where honour crime is considered as a tradition, men are not judged because of their behaviours; their duty is to protect women’s honour as Clementine Van Eck suggests in her book in which she analyzes the Turkish people living in Netherlands,

For women and girls, “namus” (honour) means chastity, while for men it means having chaste female family members. A man is therefore dependent for his “namus” on the conduct of the womenfolk in his family (Van Eck 9).

In other words, men are not responsible for any of their own actions and the only thing they will be judged for is not punishing the woman who has harmed the family honour; not committing honour crime.

The reasons leading to a man to commit honour crime are variable; it can be wearing clothes or choosing a career which the family disapproves of, marrying somebody whom the family does not want, going to the cinema without the family’s permission or socialising with boys. Van Eck argues:

This means in effect that women and girls must no illicit contact with a member of the opposite sex and must avoid becoming the subject of gossip, since gossip alone can impugn “namus”. Girls must adhere to the “namus” code of behaviour, which differs from region to region” (Van Eck 9).

If they do not obey these unwritten rules, there occurs the “question of honour” (namus meselesi) the remedy of which is to purify it by blood shedding. Van Eck states that Turkish people are very reserved about this matter and their answer, when they are asked why an honour crime was committed, is “It was a question of honour” (Van Eck 10).

Honour crimes are more cultural rather than being religious; no major religion allows men to kill women. The murderers think that it is culturally acceptable for them to kill. Dicle Kogacioglu, also, claims:

Various actors including the media , political parties, activist circles of various sorts, state institutions, and international bodies of governance see honour crimes as primarily caused by tradition, alternately called ‘codes of honour,’ or more broadly ‘culture’ (Kogacioglu 118-152).

The socio-cultural structure imposes that it is men’s duty to kill women if they are disobedient. A father who killed his daughter for going out with boys declares that “I fulfilled my duty” (Moore). What is more tragic is that it is not just men who think women should be killed; some women also believe in this idea. The girl’s sister-in-law defends the father saying “He did it all for his dignity” (Moore). Another killer claims that he is sorry for what he has done; he, however, thinks it should have been done, “This is our tradition. Tradition has to be followed” (Moore). Another father who killed his daughter tells he will not forgive her even in the other world; his anger for her hasn’t been diminished even by killing her (Aydın). The



members of the community are insistent that what *töre* orders should be done and *töre* always orders the men to be the killers and women to be the victims.

Since the murders in the name of *töre* illustrate women's subordination, it can be claimed that *töre* is sexist, indeed. It is on men's side; it is patriarchal as Kogacioglu argues, "to frame such practices as tradition is to ignore the structures of power and inequality at play" (Kogacioglu 119). To limit the term "honour crime" to the concept of tradition causes deficiency in analyzing the problem; it is vital to see that the patriarchal structure in tradition and the hierarchical power relations it sets are the driving force of honour crimes.

The continuation of patriarchal power requires establishment of an ideal of harshness and an exaggerated masculinity to govern, for men (Connell 120). Such a glorification of men by the patriarchal structure; the idealization of men as the superior and stronger part of the community having the right to govern whereas women compose the inferior part as commodities belonging to men is one of the main motives of honour crimes. The socio-cultural structure in Turkey suggests that men are the protectors of women; women are weak and the way to get out of weakness is to belong to men. This idea makes women lose their stand as individuals in social life. Women do not have freedom; they live under the rules that are set by men to protect women. Lawyer Senal Sarihan indicates, "Traditions make it generally accepted that the protected is the dependent one, in other words, it is the slave" (Sarihan 60) in her announcement in "Honour crimes Panel" held in Ankara, in 1999. In other words, women are to be governed

and protected by men and their punishment is death sentence if they refuse to obey the rules or to be protected by men.

In Turkey, especially in Eastern parts of the country where honour crimes are a part of their tradition, *töre*, girls do not have a right to say anything about their own lives. They are not allowed to go to school or to socialise and they are forced to get married to men that their families have chosen. They are not permitted to reject the families' decisions; if they do, they are killed. Mehmet Farac, in his book "*Töre Kiskacında Kadın*" in which he tells the stories of women who became the victims of *töre*, gives an example from Urfa. A girl called Gonul gets married to her cousin as her family wants her to do so. Gonul, however, is in love with another man and she leaves her husband to be with the man she loves. After a while, her family finds her. Farac narrates the dialogues between the family members in the meeting where they decide to kill Gonul and how to do it in cold blood. There is no disagreement on Gonul's being killed; her father, uncles, cousins and husband all believe that she deserves it. The only one who opposes the idea is her little cousin who is assigned to kill Gonul. He says he cannot kill anybody; however, his father blames him being crooked and asks him, "You crooked, what are you living for?" (Farac 108). Their belief in their right to commit honour crime and kill a girl is very strong for them, it is the aim of living; men's duty on earth is to use women however they want and to kill them is the most natural thing when women reject obeying men's orders.

The other important factor causing honour crimes is the pressure of the society on the family members whose honour has been tarnished by a female member's disobedience. Van Eck asserts that "A family whose "namus" is attacked is subject to pressure from members of

their community” (Van Eck 185). Honour crimes are still performed as a tradition in closed and collectivist societies where the kinship ties are very strong. In such a collectivist society an important part of individuals’ identities is determined by their relations to the group. The group presents the criteria for identity descriptions and gives the feeling of belonging. Almost nobody can dare to oppose group decisions; because, if they do, they have to risk a lot of things, sometimes even their own lives. If a family’s members refuse to kill their daughter rebelling against *töre*, they are considered to share their daughter’s dishonourable behaviour and excluded from the society. It is, however, unbearable for people who have lived in that closed society and haven’t had any other connection to the outside world. It means losing their chance of living as they believe it is nearly impossible to cut their ties with their relatives and the place they live because all their income is generally common with the relatives and is earned by farming. As Van Eck states, “Turks find it intolerable to be socially excluded” (185). Being dependent on the other members of the family and the land is the reason why social pressure is very important for and has an enormous effect on people; they can not leave either of them and choose to do what is wanted by the society.

In the article about *töre* and honour crimes published by Social Service Experts Organization Sanliurfa Agency Office, it is also pointed out that even if educated family members having important social status did not, sometimes, do anything to stop the murder in their family and the one of the most important factors leading to this fact is the “society’s pressure” on people. Some people think that honour can only be repaired by killing the person who has damaged it and unless the girl is killed “the family members in that society will be

accused of being dishonourable and will be humiliated. Also, they will be isolated and left alone”(Töre Cinayetlerinin Nedenleri, Çözüm Önerileri) The pressure on the family can be so strong that generally families submit to the rules and have to kill their own daughters even if they don't want to. In Mehmet Farac's book, for example, there is a story in which the father claims that the family members decided that his daughter should be killed although the father opposed it and tells, “While I was telling them that my daughter was virgin and did not experience anything bad, all of them said “Our honour has been damaged. It would be bashful for us, we have to kill her” (Farac 43). He tells that his daughter Hacer was murdered by her brother as the family members wanted it so.

While rejecting to kill the women who are accused of bringing shame on the family is considered to have a part in this dishonourable behaviour, the killers are respected in the community. Mazhar Bagli tells “Murderers who committed tore-honour crimes are respected by the other prisoners in the prison” (Aydın). The other members of the community see them as honourable people who have fulfilled their duty. In Turkey where approximately 200 girls and women are murdered by their families, it is thought that a woman cheating on her husband deserves to die. In a survey conducted in Diyarbakir, 430 people, mostly men, were asked what the appropriate punishment was for a woman who has committed adultery. 37% said she should be killed and 21% replied her nose or ears should be cut off (Rainsford). Obviously, honour crime has significant support in some parts of Turkey. As far as men concerned, however, way of thinking completely changes. In a research done by Mazhar Bagli, a dialogue between a researcher and a prisoner is:

Researcher: What is honour for a man?  
Prisoner: To earn money and take care of the household.  
Researcher: If he doesn't carry out his duties, do you think he should be killed?  
Prisoner: No.  
Researcher: What is honour for a woman?  
Prisoner: To keep her chastity.  
Researcher: Should she be killed, if she doesn't keep it?  
Prisoner: Of course. Nothing but killing can purify it (Aydın).

Honour crime is a very old part of *töre* and it has been practiced for hundred of years for various reasons. In modern times, however, one of the most important factors as well as women's position in society and society's pressure is the effect of immigration taking place in great scale in Turkey, from the East to the West. Molly Moore argues in her article published in Washington Post:

It was an honour crime, a practice steeped in village traditions that is occurring with increasing frequency in cities across Turkey and other developing countries where massive migrations to urban areas have left families struggling to reconcile modern lifestyles and liberties with generations-old rural customs" (Moore).

In the families that have migrated there occurs a great problem of integration. In eastern regions of Turkey, honour crime is common whereas in the West, it is not a part of the tradition.

In the West women are freer than the women living in the East; girls in the West go to school, go out and socialise with boys and get married to whoever they want. If the girls, whose families have migrated to a western city, have been brought up in their hometowns according to the traditions; being oppressed by men and not having a right to meet with boys and have a love affair, they tend to have a boyfriend objecting to *töre* after moving to the West. These girls grow up in a community where they are seen inferior and their families and

that especially fathers do not show love for them causes these girls to believe any man who says he loves her and they go away with these men opposing their families as they consider they will be happy,

It can be seen that a young girl who has been brought up in a traditional oppressive family and whose mental, social and physical needs have been ignored can go away with a young boy or an adult man who really loves her or who she believes loves her (Social Service Experts Organization Sanliurfa Agency Office).

In other words, the new community they have joined is a very different one and generally they consider the first man they have an affair as the way to get rid of the old tradition entirely and begin a new life. The family, however, does not let it and their desire to be free results in her death. In other words, girls find it easy to integrate the new city life which seems to be more advantageous for them whereas the families are stuck in their old, brutal traditions which lead to the honour crimes even in Western cities.

The short-time sentences given to the honour killers were one of the important factors encouraging these people to kill their daughters, sisters, wives or mothers, before the law was changed. In Turkey, criminals who committed crimes against women could benefit from the deficiencies in law and were given shorter prison terms. Sentences for rape were eased if the woman who was murdered was not a virgin or if a judge ruled that there was provocation for the killing- such as question of honour- the penalty could be reduced. Moreover, if the criminal was under the age of eighteen and showed good behaviour, the penalty could be reduced to two years or less. Farac tells the story of a young boy, Muhammet, who killed his sister, Hatice, because she left the house. Muhammet was tried; his penalty was not, however, a

long one. He was sentenced to two years for killing his sister as the judge ruled:

The defendant Muhammet, killed his sister on purpose; however, as his sister left the house, the society put a great pressure on the family because of the community's moral values, traditions, and the defendant committed this crime under provocation" (Farac 46).

In 2004, however, there was a change in the Turkish Criminal Code in terms of honour crimes. New Turkish Criminal Code suggests life sentence in solitary confinement and with no possibility of parole for the honour crimes. If the person soliciting the murderer is the girl's father or brother, the sentence can be increased. In other words, for the new law, honour motive as the reason for the murder is accepted as a reason to increase the penalty time whereas it was seen as a motive to reduce the time to spend in prison before the new law.

Dr. Mazhar Bagli, nevertheless, argues that the change in law cannot be the only solution. According to Bagli, the problem is not forensic; it is social. No matter how harsh the punishments are, honour crimes will continue. The primal concern for the people who have committed honour crimes is what the members of the community will think about them; function of the society's pressure on them is the leading force. As Bagli declares:

The punishments with no possibility of parole are not dissuasive. What is important for them is to purify their honour. These murders are committed as a result of social pressure. People who have committed honour crimes are respected both in and outside the prison. (Aydın).

Shortly, honour crimes are a very important part of the traditions followed in especially eastern parts of Turkey. It is mostly performed

in south-eastern and eastern parts of the country but there are also some cases in the West as a result of the immigration from the rural regions to the urban ones in the West. Honour crimes result from women's behaviours which are considered as dishonourable. Men, who are under social pressure, as the protectors of the family honour, believe that they have the right to kill anybody who brings shame upon the family honour.



## **B. AN ANALYSIS OF *BLISS* IN TERMS OF ITS POINT OF VIEW ABOUT *TÖRE* AND HONOUR CRIMES**

Zülfü Livaneli's noteworthy work *Bliss* was first published in 2002, in Turkey. The novel is based on the story of three people from different cultural backgrounds. These three characters- Meryem, Cemal and Irfan- show the reader the inner worlds of different people from different regions of Turkey where the writer, Zülfü Livaneli is from. Livaneli is a great journalist, composer, singer, writer and a former member of Parliament in Turkey. He is a great artist and a politician; and in *Bliss*, he deals with the important problems of his country: violence against women and honour crimes. The novel depicts how their protagonists' lives are shaped during their efforts to escape from *töre*. This thesis will concentrate on the novel starting from the trip taken to İstanbul by Cemal and Meryem following the rape. Right after Meryem is raped, she is sentenced to death by her family according to the rules imposed by the traditional *töre* of the region. This chapter of the thesis will focus on the fact that in the novel Livaneli examines and reflects many aspects of *töre* through the point of view of women, their position in the society, the relationship between men and women, social and religious restrictions in the society that lead people to commit honour crimes. In other words, via the novel *Bliss*, this chapter will focus on the type of society, social relations among people in the society and the rules imposed by *töre*. A detailed analysis will be made so as to be able to understand these rules which oppress and influence people, control their lives and push, especially men, to commit crimes basing themselves on the tradition

of *töre* in order to justify their crimes. Apart from the uncle, the main characters in *Bliss* are Cemal, Meryem and İrfan. Cemal and Meryem live in the eastern part of Turkey while İrfan is a professor from Istanbul. They have got very different life styles; nevertheless, their paths cross after Meryem is accused of dishonouring the family and is sent to Istanbul together with her cousin Cemal who is commissioned to kill her. Livaneli examines the way the honour crimes take place in eastern Turkey and shows us how a woman and a man go through this sad process.

In *Bliss*, Livaneli shows clearly the community's discrimination against women, which is the result of *töre* rules. Meryem is raped and she is injured; however, throughout the novel, she is the one mentioned as "sinner, indecent, corrupt, and filthy" and "was guilty of a grave sin" (Livaneli 79) by the other characters living in the same village. This is the result of the double standard *töre* offers. In a society where the punishment for a girl having sexual relationship is equivalent to death, for the same action, men are not even punished lightly. In a research it was observed that,

Of a sample of 61 societies compared by Fraser, 18 percent sanctioned premarital sexual activity for male but not for females. In contrast, not even a single society permitted females to be engaged in premarital sex (Hicks 186).

In both family and social life, women have the inferior position according to *töre* rules. The roles are defined by gender and this role division is not a just one as Susan Moller Okin states,

the typical practices of family life, structured to a large extent by gender are not just a cycle of power relations and decisions, pervades both family and workplace, each reinforcing the inequalities between the sexes that already exist within the other. (Okin 4).

Gender discrimination is already a tool to put women in an inferior position in a family, and if *töre* exists as well in that society, the discrimination reaches its peak. Women are not accepted equal to men; they do not have the right to say a word to or eat with them. “Women have traditionally been legally subservient to men in the family.”(Howard 15). Women are seen as the servants of men; men are the superior ones, whereas women exist in the world to serve men in every possible way; yet, they are the ones who are accused in all negative situations caused by men. Livaneli tells the life of women in the village as:

In the village, women were not allowed to talk in the presence of men or eat with them. They had to hide their natural needs and conceal their pregnancies. When a new bride became pregnant, she tried to keep it as a secret, though her mother-in-law would probably guess her condition from growing appetite for pickles or pomegranate syrup. The girl had to continue working until the last day of her pregnancy without crying or complaining (Livaneli 123).

The main character who defends this discrimination most and gets benefit from *töre* is Meryem’s uncle who raped her. He is the head of the family and *töre* gives such privileges to him that he sees himself above all the powers in the community and gives all decisions by himself and nobody can oppose to him as he is the executer of the rules *töre* imposes. The uncle rapes Meryem and throughout the novel, there is no hint that he feels guilty about it. He does not have the least doubt that he has committed a sin and a crime although, deep inside he is aware that he is the one who has to be punished. That is probably because it is a universal truth that through rape, men try to show their authority and power on women. In other words, the uncle does not have any sense of guilt because of raping Meryem as he is the

most powerful man who has the power of authority and raping her is just a sign showing that he has the right to do anything to a woman. As Linda Lindsey puts it, “Rape is an act of violence to show dominance of the rapist and achieve submission by the victim” (Lindsey 172). Men think what they do is entirely masculine,

Being aggressive is masculine; being sexually aggressive is masculine; rape is a sexually aggressive behaviour; therefore rape is masculine behaviour (Russel and Vande Ven 261).

Apart from the universal thought that rape is an action of violence practiced by men to prove superiority, *töre* is another factor that leads the uncle to think that raping Meryem is his right as a man. He strongly believes in the idea what *töre* puts forward; that men and women are not equal and if there is a sexual crime the woman is guilty not the man. Therefore, he accuses her of staining the family honour although he himself is blameworthy. He sees himself as the authority over everybody and everything which cannot be harmed by anything, even by his own actions, as *töre* glorifies men while it humiliates women. According to the uncle, possibly, men have the power to do anything they want and women can only obey it; they can be raped and killed. That is, men have the right to use women to satisfy their sexual desires even if women do not want to have a relationship with them; because, women are just commodities to be used by them, to be penetrated and then killed. Jean Stockard claims, “Men’s devaluation of women may be most clearly expressed through sexual harassment” (Stockard 12). Especially in a community, where *töre* exists, a woman must be killed if she has a sexual relationship with anybody apart from her husband whether voluntarily or involuntarily; the sexual harassment is clearly the way to show how valueless the woman is.

Men themselves commit the crime in these communities and punish women who are the victims, in fact, just like what the uncle does.

The uncle does not suffer from what he has done; instead, he constantly accuses Meryem and calls for her death. He claims, “That girl-may she go to hell-as she ruined our honour!” (Livaneli 82) and tells Cemal that he has to kill Meryem right away. The uncle’s self-confidence in this matter and his attitude are the result of the way he and other men have been brought up in that society. The social structure all over the world suggests that there are certain roles for men and women; these assumed roles are called “gender stereotypes”, which state that men and women are different, both physically and psychologically, and these differences make them have different social positions. Judith A. Howard and Jocelyn A. Hollander assert that:

Gender stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics of women and men, including their physical characteristics, typical behaviours, occupational positions or personality traits. Reflecting the assumption that sex is dichotomous, stereotypes for women and men often involve polar opposites (16).

These polar opposites assumption is more effective in *töre* and it brings forth the belief that men are the powerful and aggressive ones whereas, women are the powerless and passive ones. This discrimination is totally in favour of men because “The definition of men as aggressive and women as passive reinforces men’s power over women and women’s dependence on men” (Howard and Hollander 18). The uncle’s attitude towards Meryem is the consequence of the social construction of ideals of women and men in the community he lives by *töre*. He believes that as a man, he has the full right to exert pressure on the woman who is by the rules of the society.

For the uncle, women are the source of evil, they invite men to sin, “If the bitch doesn’t wag its tail, the dog doesn’t follow.” (Livaneli 82)

He claims that women are the sinful creatures in the world:

According to Meryem’s uncle, all human beings were sinners but women were especially accursed. To be born a woman was punishment enough in itself. Women were devils, dirt and dangerous. Like their forerunner, Eve, all of them got men into trouble (Livaneli 8).

It is not just the uncle who sees himself superior to Meryem; this social constructed idea of the inequality between men and women is accepted by all members of the community. Not only men, who get the advantage of this discrimination, but also women, who suffer because of it, acknowledge it as a rule; because its roots are very deep and even women, who have been in trouble throughout the history, cannot think of opposing to it as Jean Lipmen-Bluemen suggests, “The gender power relationship is sustained by strong existential and institutional bases” (19). Also, interestingly enough, women generally support the current situation. John Stuart Mill states,

The rule of men over women differs from all these others in not being a rule of force: it’s accepted voluntarily; women make no complaint, and are consenting parties to it (Mill 19).

In village life, women are in a degraded position. How *töre* humiliates women is not just about the sexual matters. Almost everything is free for boys and men while they are forbidden for girls and women. Meryem tells Cemal,

You were forgiven- as always- and I ended up in the barn, I’ve been locked in that hole so many times! I was blamed for everything I did: Don’t laugh loudly, Meryem; don’t flirt, Meryem; you’re grown up now, Meryem; don’t play with boys (Livaneli 98).

Nearly everything is sinful for women and banned; they cannot talk or eat in the presence of men, they have to conceal their pregnancies and their whole bodies and wear scarves.

Meryem has grown up in a society where women have been oppressed and found guilty even for the crimes that men have committed. They never have the right to say a word about their own lives; they get married to men who are previously arranged by the families, they give birth to a lot of children without getting help from a doctor, they work in the fields, they work at home, and they serve men. However, they do not have the fundamental rights that a human being should have in return of this service they give throughout their lives; they cannot speak or eat in front of men because men are the ones who are capable of making decisions and the superior ones who can eat the food served by women. Livaneli describes this type of women as, “Meryem was one of the millions of girls who became old without really enjoying life. They never had the chance to change their fate” (Livaneli 129).

Women’s lack of consciousness of the matter is clear throughout the novel. Almost all female figures in the novel think that being killed is what a woman deserves if she is raped. Meryem’s stepmother Döne, always reminds her that she will be killed and says that it is what Meryem deserves,

Once or twice, Meryem had plucked up the courage to ask Döne, who was near to her in age, about this matter, but always received the same malevolent reply, ‘You know the punishment for what you did’ (Livaneli 6).

Also, she looks at Meryem as if she were saying, ‘You will get what you deserve my girl’ (Livaneli 7). Meryem’s aunt does not think that Meryem should be protected, either. She does not open the door when

Meryem comes to see her before going to İstanbul where she will be killed and Meryem “had been expelled from the house where she was born without anyone bidding her farewell or wishing her luck” (Livaneli 84). The other women in the village do not care about Meryem either. They are so insensitive to Meryem’s situation that they can make jokes and snigger:

The other women wished Meryem a safe journey, telling her how lucky she was to go to Istanbul. ‘Life must be good there,’ they said. ‘If it weren’t, the other girls wouldn’t have stayed.’ In spite of their words, their tone made her feel she was being deceived as though she were a child. A few of them giggled, and so did the men nearby (Livaneli 85).

Meryem also agrees that she is inferior to men and it makes her believe that she is a damned creature whereas men are human beings. From her puberty period she has accepted that she is different from her male cousins Cemal and Memo:

When her chest sprouted twin buds and her body found its curves, when the bleeding started between her legs, she knew she was different from Cemal and Memo. They were human, and she was a transgressor it was considered proper for her to cover herself and hide away, to serve others, and to be punished. This was the way things were. She was now one of those creatures called women, for whose transgression the world was doomed (Livaneli 9).

This way of thinking leads Meryem to have a sense of conformity, at first, about what has happened to her. That is because as a woman who is the inferior one, she has always thought that the role that women have is all because of their sex. She believes that men are “human” while she is “evil” as a woman and she also accuses herself of what has happened to her, “Since childhood, it has been this sinful part of her body that had always caused Meryem trouble” (Livaneli



124). She has been conditioned to see her body and her vagina as doomed and now she believes that she suffers because of the doom she has to carry with her:

Now Meryem herself was enduring the punishment of being a woman. It must be that place of sin that was responsible for all the trouble women had to go through and all that happened to them. Meryem knew this must be true. It was which caused sin. It was for this that punishment was given (Livaneli 9).

Throughout her life, Meryem experiences this feeling of inferiority which, she believes, is the result of her having a vagina and being a woman; hence, she wants to get rid of it when she is a child,

She had prayed to God so many times to take that aperture away, hoping to find on waking up one morning it was closed shut and gone forever. Yet, every morning, her hopes were dashed when she realized that the ugly hole was still there” (Livaneli 9).

Being raped is the last and the peak point that makes her think that she is doomed and leads her to undergo a trauma. In other words, all her life she is made to believe that she is cursed for having a vagina and now her vagina is the cause of what happens to her and she tries to forget that she is a woman and that she has been raped. However, she cannot escape from the memories and even her dreams are about it. She dreams of a bird which plunges its beak between her thighs, “into that disgusting and accursed place of sin” (Livaneli 3). She tries to push the bird away, the bird is too strong for her to struggle and it goes on digging into her. Suddenly, “the bird’s head became human, and she saw a man’s face covered with a dark growth. Meryem recognized her uncle with his black beard” (Livaneli 3). As it is seen clearly, she cannot forget the incident; however, she tries to escape from it and it is revealed in her dreams.

She suffers even in her dreams yet she does not want to wake up, “Her dream frightened her, but the reality was more horrifying” (Livaneli 3) She clasps “the place between her thighs so tightly with both hands that it hurts” (Livaneli 4), making it clear that it is the starting place of the problem for her. Meryem is in a really hard situation psychologically as the sinful place that she has to have all her life causes her a great problem which can only be solved by her death. However, it is not death what causes her to undergo a trauma; it is the fear of what she has experienced and she prefers to bury the entire incident deep in her mind and escape from it:

She no longer remembered the hut by the vineyard at the edge of the village where she had gone to take her uncle his food. She no longer recollected how the man had thrown himself on her and violated her; nor how she had fainted; nor even later, when she had come to her senses, how she had rushed out of the hut and ran madly down the road (Livaneli 4).

She is so badly influenced by the event that she cannot decide whether it is real or a dream. Probably because she would like it to be a dream, she prefers to have a blurred image in her memory,

In fact, she began to doubt it had ever happened. Perhaps, it had just been a dream. Her memory was blurred, and she could not remember what she had done after regaining her senses. It was all so confused, so impossible to think of, though she could not imagine ever saying “uncle” to him again (Livaneli 4).

However, what she has gone through is known by everybody in the village as two men find her after she is raped and it is obvious that something bad has happened to her, “Two young men had found her near the graveyard, her skin scratched by thorn bushes, dried blood on her legs. Delirious with fright, she had fluttered like a wounded bird. They carried her through the village marketplace and brought her

home” (Livaneli 4). From the fear she is in, it is quite clear that she has been attacked; however, the community blames her of what has happened as *töre* rules impose that women are the ones to be punished.

What the community waits for and what the punishment to be given are clear; nevertheless, Meryem is in a dilemma. Firstly, they lock her in a barn and wait for her to commit suicide which would be the best solution for them; the sinner would be removed before anybody would have to become a murderer. For this reason, we see Döne, Meryem’s stepmother, leave a rope in the barn implying Meryem could kill herself using it, “So this is what her family had decided her punishment should be. Meryem was to hang herself in the barn quietly, without fuss, and soon all would be forgotten”(Livaneli 7). At first Meryem thinks that nobody will care about and worry about her death,

Who would in this place think of inquiring into a young girl’s death or suicide? When, previously, two young girls had hanged themselves, everyone, assuming the false mask of grief, had gossiped about it endlessly in every detail (Livaneli 7).

Also, supposing that death is just like a dream and even better than a dream as, possibly, she will not have the image of the phoenix bird any more, she attempts to tie the rope. However, she refuses to kill herself and decides that she wants to go to İstanbul, where many other girls have been sent, being completely unaware of the reason why she is sent there.

After they see that Meryem does not kill herself, the family members decide to send her to İstanbul with Cemal, her cousin, who has just completed his military service and who is assigned to kill her in. This journey is the way for her to get rid of *töre* rules and to step into a new life without being ashamed of her sex and body. On their

way to the city by train and during the days they spend with İrfan, Meryem meets a new world, new people, and new types of women who surprise her a lot. Meryem is saved from being one of the victims of *töre*, and she begins to live in the western part of Turkey.

Firstly, all her reactions to what is happening around her are shaped by *töre* rules, from which she could never have escaped. She takes the first steps towards her new life. As a girl who has been forced to lead a life shaped by *töre* and by men, she is really amazed at women living in İstanbul, who are exempt from all *töre* rules,

Before she had fallen asleep, Meryem thought about all the women she had seen on the train mulling over each and every detail she had observed: their painted fingernails, rings, tight-fitting pants, or slit skirts through which their white thighs were visible, their unrestricted behaviour, and the way they tossed their hair (Livaneli 122).

Such women are interesting for Meryem, and their presence makes her feel miserable; her dress is old and different, she wears a scarf that no young girl wears on the bus she is travelling by:

Only the rather elderly women on the bus had their heads covered; in fact, not only did the young girls have their hair loose, they also wore hip-hugging blue jeans. Their sleeveless pink, blue, or orange blouses were tight across their breasts, of which glimpses were revealed when they bent forward, yet they didn't seem to mind (Livaneli 207).

Meryem is the one who has been taught to cover every part of her body including her hair; everything that would express her womanliness is a sin, and it is the sexuality of men which has been free to experience and express. Therefore, these city girls' fearless expressions of their womanhood attract Meryem's attention.

The lifestyles of women living in the city as well as their appearance are really different from what Meryem has witnessed in the

village throughout her life. She is amazed at seeing a woman who reads a magazine on the cover of which there is the picture of a naked woman. A girl travelling on the same train, Seher's harsh reaction to the men who assaults her and her family is another case that leads Meryem to think that lives of women in this big city is completely different from the one in the village. Meryem is surprised by the reaction of these men to these women as well as by the women's attitude. In the village, women cannot dare to behave in this way because if they overstep the line, they are punished severely. However, here no men attempt to hit these women and it is the most surprising part for Meryem:

Seher's bold and furious response to the young man, who had insulted her parents, impressed Meryem. When, in the presence of her father and mother, Seher had shouted at the man, whom she had certainly never met before, Meryem had been astonished. Although the man, on hearing her words, had shouted back in Seher's face, he hadn't raised his hand to her or attempted to shove her to the floor (Livaneli 122).

Meryem is so accustomed to women beaten by men under all circumstances. The new world she has witnessed seems to be totally unfamiliar to her. Even reading a magazine having a cover with the picture of a naked woman is something that requires the woman to be punished by her husband as Meryem thinks, "How could the woman read such a magazine? He didn't seem at all worried about his wife's choice of reading material" (Livaneli 134).

The conditions are not strange for other women but for Meryem. She is now away from where *töre* is practiced, and she experiences a new life where people treat her in a different way:

Meryem realized that, for the first time in her life, people were speaking to her politely. It seemed like a miracle to her that a woman who could so openly read

a magazine with a naked woman on the cover as well as a woman who argued with men should treat her like a human being” (Livaneli 135).

Meryem has grown up in a place where she is regarded as sinful, filthy and like an inhuman creature that does not have the right to do anything that the society does not allow her to do. She has always been assaulted by the society and made to believe that she was guilty in some way. Nevertheless, now the situation is completely different. People treat her in a helpful way and she feels for the first time in her life that she is a human being. She gets used to being served meal by a man while, in the village, even eating something in front of a man was a sign of disrespect and a cause for being punished; therefore, it has been a great change for her:

Meryem had become accustomed to eating in front of men, but now she was faced with the realization that she was about to be served by a man, with food he had cooked himself. Not only was he a man, he was an older man from the city, an educated man- a professor, in fact. She stirred restlessly in her seat and did not know what to do as the man leaned forward to put food on her plate. This was the first time in her life such a thing had happened to her, and she was too covered with confusion even to look at what was being served (Livaneli 213).

Meryem is confused and she begins to judge herself. She does not have any idea what her life would be like when she was in the village; nonetheless, now she is aware of the fact that there is another life which is much more attractive and which helps her feel better. At first, she is disturbed by the feeling that she is very ignorant and that she does not know anything about the world when compared to the girls in the city. Then, she begins to keep pace with her new life although Cemal seems to constitute a great obstacle. Throughout most of the novel, Cemal keeps being the controlling power on Meryem. He is still

under the influence of *töre* and the lifestyle it has imposed on him. Therefore, Meryem cannot escape the rules of *töre* for a while. She begins to feel in a different way about her own body and the men she sees. She wants to get dressed like the girls she comes across; however, Cemal is the impediment on her way. Even getting rid of the scarf which she doesn't want to wear any more is a difficult process for her,

She would feel much better if she could get rid of the scarf around her head, but she did not dare take it off. Cemal would probably hit her head with his hammer of a hand (Livaneli 209).

However, Cemal cannot prevent the transformation Meryem undergoes. Meryem falls in love with a boy, and she decides to live on her own like a modern girl and leaves Cemal.

Cemal begs Meryem not to leave him alone at the end of the novel when Meryem decides to live her own life. However, at the beginning of the story, a completely different Cemal figure is drawn; Cemal is a harsh character who has just come back from the army. When he returns he is told that Meryem has committed a grave sin and he has to kill her to save the family's honour. Cemal, like any other member of the family, feels the pressure on himself because as a *töre* rule, nobody, including men, can oppose the decision taken by the head of the family. In other words, *töre* limits men, as well. This boundary is definitely not as painful as women's. The only boundary they come across is not to reject what *töre* and the head of the family wants claiming their being male gives that responsibility to them. As Dürrin Alpakin Martinez- Caro states in her academic paper "The Efforts of Marianna in Italian Writer Dacia Maraini's *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* and of Meryem in Zülfü Livaneli's *Bliss to Realize Themselves*":

However, men as victims of *töre* are not under as harsh conditions as women are. For example, Cemal is a *töre* victim. He is ordered to kill the girl he loves secretly, possibly without being unaware of his love and he is in a dilemma of killing not killing. [...] Nevertheless, he is in a better condition compared to Meryem as his life is not in danger.

The social pressure makes Cemal feel that he has to carry out the duty given to him. The attitude of the people in the village shows that it is almost impossible for Cemal to refuse to do what is expected from him. They call him 'hero' both as he has come back from combating against the PKK terrorists and also as he is the one who will restore the family honour. Everybody is proud of him and they show they support him while Cemal and Meryem are on their way to İstanbul where Cemal is planning to kill Meryem,

His friends all laughed. There was something carnal in their grins. Everyone in the marketplace had stopped their work. Men with big bellies and moustaches all gathered around them. They patted Cemal on the back (Livaneli 85).

Because of both family and community pressure and the way he was raised according to *töre* rules, Cemal considers he has to do it, "However much it might cost him, he had to fulfil his duty. Emine was right, but the matter was beyond his control. He had no choice" (Livaneli 106).

Cemal cannot risk himself by rejecting to kill Meryem because it means refusing to obey and it means disregarding *töre*. In a community where *töre* is the source of the rules obeyed by everybody, not fulfilling the duty causes the person to be excluded from the very same society. The community members consider the person as a traitor to *töre* and to their traditions, and these rules give no chance to men



apart from killing women. Adam Podgorecki defines the situation of people under oppression as:

Under the stress of oppression, either perceived as objective or even subjectively generated, an individual has three options. One is to withdraw from social life and its activities, to become socially “invisible” The second is to engage in hyper conformist social interactions to become “lost inside the human crowd” The third is to go underground (Podgorecki 82).

Cemal chooses the second one conforming to what his father, the community and *töre* demand from him. He believes or forces himself to believe that Meryem should be killed because of his fear of his father and the community’s demands on him. Therefore, he conditions himself that she has to die, When Cemal realized that his wall of resistance was starting to cave in, he immediately focused his thoughts on Meryem’s sin. Now, the girl in front of him was not the girl he knew as a child but a soiled, sinful woman, who had discredited his family” (Livaneli 176).

Although Cemal is not eager to kill her, he believes that *töre* should be respected no matter what it wants you to do:

He pitied the girl for a minute, but everyone knew the customs are customs and had to be followed. Meryem had no chance to survive. Even if her father forgave her, and the sheikh didn’t interfere, she still could not live. Even if everyone in the village came together to forgive her, she couldn’t be saved (Livaneli 83).

Apart from, the social pressure, the hierarchical structure in the family is an important factor leading Cemal to think that it is inevitable for him to kill Meryem. The head of the family decides what is to be done when something that *töre* forbids happens and everybody has to obey the command. In Meryem’s family, the head of the family is the uncle who has secretly raped her, and he decides that Meryem should

be killed. The whole decision is up to the uncle and Meryem's own father does not interfere in the matter. He respects his brother a lot. He cannot even smoke in front of him. Nobody, including Meryem's father and Cemal, but the uncle has the right to have a word about what will eventually happen to Meryem:

Meryem had not seen her father since the incident when the sinful part of her body had been violated. Her father was quiet and withdrawn, and her uncle dominated the family. No one, not even Meryem's father dared to speak freely in front of him. He was highly regarded (Livaneli 6).

The most powerful claim that strengthens the uncle's authority in the society and in the eyes of Cemal is the ideal that he is the representative of God in that society. This representation of God ideal puts forward the way of thinking that his decisions are rooted in religion and opposing him means opposing God and his will. The uncle says, "This girl is guilty in the sight of both God and man" (Livaneli 82) while informing Cemal about Meryem's guilt and his responsibility. The uncle implies that God also wants Meryem to be killed; hence, what he performs is the rule of God and cannot be opposed. Cemal "could not oppose his father's will and defy his family" (Livaneli 105) because as his brother states he is "as much in awe of him as if he were God" (Livaneli 161).

Believing that his father decides according to God's rules does not only make Cemal be afraid of his father, it also makes him believe firmly that his father is right and that Meryem deserves to be killed. Cemal believes that Meryem really deserves to die for the reason that he believes the root of *töre* is religion; what *töre* wants is what God wants,

For centuries, this crime had been dealt with and punished in the same way. This was God's will. It was his father's will. No one could defy God's rules (Livaneli 176).

Although, he strictly believes that it is the rule that is set by God and that he has to kill Meryem, Cemal cannot kill her although he attempts to do it. It is clear that he is in between a dilemma; he believes that it is his holy duty to kill her, whereas it is too difficult to kill his childhood friend Meryem. The dilemma he experiences causes him to be even more angry and to be ashamed of himself, "Cemal stood there, wordless, looking away, as though ashamed of something" (Livaneli 112) thinks Meryem after Cemal.

Livaneli raises the question whether *töre* is based on Islam through the conversation between Cemal and his friend Selahattin. Selahattin is a religious man and he tells Cemal that Islam does not order men to kill who have sinned. Cemal, however, insists that Islamic Law is harsh about the issue and says his father told him that until Atatürk came to power, adulteress women were stoned. Selahattin claims there is no such punishment in Quran; that way of punishment is an incorrect one applied in some Arab states, defends Selahattin and adds,

Besides, it is very difficult to prove adultery. Islamic law requires that the sword be seen in its sheath by three witnesses [...] How can you kill a human being just on hearsay? (Livaneli 187)

To prove what he says is true, Selahattin invites Cemal to a religious meeting and introduces Cemal to the sheikh. The sheikh also tells Cemal that Islam does not order Muslims to kill human beings; the belief that it does so is the result of politics misusing Islam and that Muslims do not understand their religion properly. The sheikh states,

Islam is a religion of peace. If you want to understand Islam, don't respect anything other than the holy Quran, the hadiths, and the sunna of the prophet because Islam is a manifested religion (Livaneli 190).

It is shown that Livaneli opposes the idea that Islam is the source of *töre* and honour crimes through the examples he gives from Quran:

Whoever kills a person guiltless of killing others or of setting people against each other will be seen as the killer of all humanity. Whoever lets that person live or saves him from death will be seen as the saviour of humanity. (The thirty-second verse of the Al-Mai'dah Sura of Quran)

The response to evil is an equal amount of evil. However, whosoever forgives and brings about peace will be rewarded by God (The fortieth verse of the As-Shura Sura of Quran) (Livaneli 190).

As the examples from Quran given by Livaneli put forward the idea that Quran, the holy book which is the basis of Islamic Law, does not bring forward a punishment of killing; this belief occurs because of misunderstanding the religion appropriately.

The sheikh persuades Cemal that what he has been convinced of so far is a wrong belief. The situation is, nevertheless, more complicated now for Cemal. They cannot stay in İstanbul together nor can they go back to the village. Although Cemal wants to go back and to get married to the girl he loves, he does not leave Meryem, and Selahattin sends them to a village where he has a fish farm. They stay there for a few weeks and have to leave it as the security guard of the farm comes back from his holiday leave. Then, they meet İrfan, a professor travelling by his yacht, and they both begin working on the yacht. İrfan is travelling alone and he wants Meryem and Cemal to work on the yacht as the crew.

Meryem is changing gradually but Cemal is not happy with the situation. With the help of İrfan, Meryem can get rid of the scarf, and she begins to

let the desires of spring possess her body. Even the sinful place between her legs did not seem so dreadful, because she realized that the girls here were not ashamed of their sinful places (Livaneli 210).

This transformation becomes to be more apparent day by day, and the more Meryem changes the more disturbed Cemal gets; because Meryem's change is completely against the rules according to which they have lived for all their lives. For all those years they spent in the village, *töre* told them that men were superior to women who did not have any intelligence nor talent to achieve anything in life. Nevertheless, Meryem begins to prove that she is more intelligent than Cemal and she is faster in understanding and learning. This renders Cemal furious,

The fact that she was obviously streets ahead of him in intelligence and understanding was something he could not accept. How could this snot-nosed girl, this feeble creature whose life he had spared, have changed so much. In the village, it would have been her duty to serve him, and there she would not even have been allowed to eat or talk in the presence of men. On this boat on the Aegean shore, it seemed as if she were the superior being (Livaneli 226).

As it is clearly seen, the words Cemal uses to describe Meryem such as “snot-nosed” and “creature” and the way he chooses to describe the relationship between them – that he saved her life- are the signs that according to Cemal, he must be the superior one as a man; hence, he cannot accept Meryem's qualities. However, Cemal cannot prevent the transformation Meryem undergoes. Meryem falls in love

with a boy, and she decides to live on her own like a modern girl and abandons Cemal.

*Bliss* is a striking novel that displays the harsh conditions that the girls in the east of Turkey are subjected to. The novel is a great one that shows the reader eastern people's perception of men and women's position in the society which is shaped by *töre*. Reading the novel makes one understand how women are exploited by men. Livaneli shows the reader that this exploitation is the result of both men's and women's acceptance of their status in the community life in that region which is ruled by the local authority following the rules set by *töre*.

*Bliss* puts forward the fact that men seem to be happy with having the part of the superior ones in the society while women are conditioned to believe that they are inferior to men. As the superior and powerful ones, men have all the advantages, and they can make use of everything they own including women while not letting women even to eat with men. In a society where men have such privileged status, it is seen normal to blame women for everything. Women are seen guilty even because they have a sexual identity and accustomed to hiding it as well as they can because for girls the punishment of having a sexual relationship without being married is equivalent to death. Girls are seen guilty and sentenced to death even if they are raped. The sexuality they have experienced is seen as the stain on the family honour, and the way to clean it is to kill the girl as *töre* orders. *Bliss* examines all these arguments that occur as a result of the practice of *töre* while telling the story of Meryem who is made to believe that she is an ill-fated creature and is sent to İstanbul to be killed by Cemal but is saved from being a *töre* victim and re-establishes her own life.

## CHAPTER III

### A. SATI

The word *sati* has different meanings in Hindu terminology. It is both the name of a goddess in Hinduism and the name of the ritual that is practised by widows. For the Westerners the second meaning, which refers to the ritual of a Hindu wife committing suicide after her husband's death by ascending his funeral pyre, is dominant. The Hobson-Jobson, the great Anglo-Indian dictionary describes *sati* as:

the rite of widow-burning, the burning of the living widow along with the corpse of her husband, as practiced by the people of certain castes among the Hindus, and eminently by the Rajputs (Cole 878).

Also, the usage of the term in English language by adding the verb *commit* before *sati*, gives the impression that *sati* is a crime or a form of suicide. However, contrary to its dominant Western understanding, in the Sanskrit and Hindu terminology, *sati* literally means “a good woman”.

Where and when widows began to commit *sati* is not clear exactly. However, it is considered to have been performed in ancient times in Europe, Central and Western Asia, Far East, Russia and Greece (Gaur 45). There are nearly no reliable records that prove the practice occurred before the time of the Gupta Empire, about 400 AD. Before the Gupta Empire, voluntary death at funerals existed but it was not the same thing with *sati*. That practice called *anumarana* was a way of showing grief for the loss and it was uncommon. Also, it was not only

for widows; anyone, male or female, could commit suicide at a loved one's funeral. Today, the sati practice is known to begin being common after the Gupta Empire. There are memorial stones of sati belonging to this period. These stones called "devil" or "sati stones" have become shrines as the women who committed sati are accepted as semi-goddesses.

Approximately 10<sup>th</sup> century was the period when sati was known across India. It continued to exist until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and as it was seen as a social and religious obligation every widow, "willingly or unwillingly, had to submit herself to this practice" (Sharma G. N.127). The practice of being a sati is a process that goes through three stages: pavitrata, sativrata and satimata, which provide the woman's virtue and goodness.

Pavitrata is a term that is used for married women. Hindu people think that pavitrata is not a property that is seen by other people, it is a part of Hindu women's characteristic that they have developed throughout their lives and shows up when their husband die. All her life, a woman should be devoted to her husband and it should continue even after the husband passes away. Before the husband's death, the wife's devotion shows itself as protecting him in two basic ways. The first way is to provide his all personal needs and encourage him to fulfil his duties. By this way, she both helps him in his worldly responsibilities and prepares him for his other world. The second way is to carry out some religious rituals like fasting and to please Gods who will protect her husband in return. As it is women's task to protect their husbands, if a man dies his wife is seen responsible by the society. To break free from this accusation, the wife takes a vow to die



as a sati and changes her stage; she is not a pavitrata any more and has become a sativrata.

While a pavitrata is a woman who has taken a vow to protect her husband, a sativrata is the one that has taken a vow to join her husband in the afterlife. That is, sativrata is the name given to the wife who is on the line between life and death. During this period, a sativrata is believed to be too hot to touch as the moral heat begins to consume her body. When a sativrata climbs up to her husband's funeral pyre,

The ashes of the two bodies become intermingled, which symbolically affirms the unity of husband and wife that was established at their wedding fire (Harlan 79-91).

The vow she has taken and her death is the symbol of her goodness, so the process of dying is the beginning of the new stage which is satimata.

A sativrata climbs her husband's funeral pyre that has already been lit or will be lit soon. The fire that consumes her body is thought to be the fire of *sati* inside her and not the fire on the funeral pyre. A satimata is considered to be a transcendent being that shares her husband's fate and continues to protect her earthly household. Her death is a way to protect the household because if she does not commit sati, it will be a shame on her and her family, so sati is the only way to preserve their honour. Also, it is claimed that unless a widow commit sati, there will be a curse on her and her family and after committing sati, satimata can appear in dreams and show them the right way. As Lindsay Harlan puts it:

She protects by warding off or curing family sickness and financial misfortune. Often, however, she intervenes in family life by issuing warnings to

women that, unless they faithfully and sincerely perform domestic and religious rituals- rituals she knows they have been slighting- they and their families will suffer great misfortune (79-91).

Shortly, the fundamental idea is that a woman is responsible for protecting her husband and her household. The way to protect them is to serve them in a good way when they are alive and during this period, she develops a characteristic that is called pavitrata. Pavitrata is the source of her courage to decide to commit *sati* and become a sativrata. Being sativrata is the process of transition from pavitrata to satimata which is the end of the process. Satimata is the term given to women who kill themselves with their husbands. A satimata is supposed to be a divine being that has proved her devotion to her family, and her devotion does not only glorifies her and her husband, but it also prevents the household living with a great shame and misfortune till the end of their lives.

After studying these three stages of becoming a sati, one can wonder why a woman could choose to die after the death of his husband, so we should analyze the motives that lead to commit sati in detail. To start with the sociological reasons, the position of a widow in the society is not a good one. For a widow there are two ways: to live as a widow or to die as a sati. However, the society's attitude towards the widow who chooses to live or to commit sati is not equal:

Whereas the Hindus looked down on the widow, they have a diametrically opposite attitude towards the sati” (Sharma A. 76). It seems that they gave the right to live to the widow but she was barred from remarriage, devoid of social amenities of life restricted even in thought and movement (Upreti 6).

The Hindus believe that widowhood is a kind of curse both on the widow and the society. The widow is now deprived of her husband's

protection and she is incapable of living alone. In other words, being a widow means that she needs help to survive and it makes her a burden on the society as well as making her an object of exploitation of heartless and powerful people. Therefore, the origin of the sati is the ideal that there is a better way for the widows. It is to burn themselves with their death husbands and become a sati, a virtuous woman, instead of continuing to live as a curse, as Ainslie T. Eby indicates,

Indian culture, however, with its marvellous capacity for logical solutions to intractable social problems, devised a practice that enabled a woman whose husband had died to avoid the horrid status of widowhood. Instead, she could choose to become a sati, to attain a transformed condition as an alternative to widowhood (149-159).

The ritual of sati creates a division between the good and bad women: on the one hand there is the nurturer woman while the other side there is the devourer. Therefore, the society imposes the ideal of being a good wife and committing sati on women. The centre of the sati is the good wife who cares for her husband under all circumstances. In traditional society, “as a carrier of the ultimate principle of nature and the cosmic feminine principle, a woman was conceived to be the natural protector of her man” (Nandy 131-149). If her husband dies before her, it is her responsibility as it is the sign of her incapability of her taking care of her husband,

She felt that she was responsible if her husband died before her. She thought that she was lacking in her dharmic quality, her goodness if her husband was deprived of life (Sharma 77).

The Hindu women have to prove that they are good wives by taking good care of them when their husbands are alive and when the

husbands die, they commit sati to show that they are still good wives for their husbands and are loyal to them.

Except from these sociological reasons, there is also a religious ideal lying under the commitment of sati. The Hindu religion is a one the believers of which accept that,

The lives travel from incarnation to incarnation, and self sacrificial actions have effect that go beyond the immediate circumstances that they are produced (Courtright 27-53).

Hence, the sati which is a great example of self-sacrifice is seen as an ideal heroic and sacred action. Being a sati is the line between being a semi-goddess and being a cursed widow. John Stratton Hawley states that:

Sati has been experienced as blessing and curse: to its partisans, a noble thing that has the power to ennoble the others; to its enemies, an infamy that ought to have been erased long ago (3-26).

Its supporters see it as the woman's proof of how virtuous she is as well as a way to avoid widowhood. They believe that the virtue of the woman exists before she commits sati but the moment she puts herself on fire is the exact time it becomes manifest. During all her life she devotes her life to her husband and even death cannot be an obstacle to it. She shows her devotion to her husband both in life and death. It is the sign of her virtue and this virtue is a way to give her the chance of being a semi-goddess. Paul B Courtright expresses:

If there have been women who entered the fire out of pure devotion and a compelling confidence in the reality of rebirth and the effectiveness of self-sacrifice, these women must indeed be goddesses, worthy to be venerated by the witnessing community (27-53).

As well as becoming a semi-goddess herself, a sati also saves her husband. She is responsible for looking after her husband both in this world and the other one. Firstly, the good wife who is to commit sati when her husband dies performs all her religious duties and encourages her husband to perform his and by this way, she saves him from being a sinner. Then, when he dies she commits sati and demonstrates that he has not died as she couldn't carry out her duties properly. The case is just the opposite as Karen McCarthy Brown asserts, "he did not die because her sat was insufficient. On the contrary, they both burned because her virtue was so great" (91) and by accompanying him on his way to the other world, they will be able to be together in heaven, "ladies had firm belief that they would accompany their husbands to heaven by going through a horrible but sacred rite of burning" (Gaur 49). That is, a sati both becomes a semi-goddess herself and makes her husband to go to Heaven with her.

Although the sati was the result of some sociological and religious beliefs that were entirely about the society and their way of life, after the colonialism and the British interference with their beliefs, people went on committing sati as a way to react to colonialist power and their intrusion in their lives. The attempts of the British rulers to abolish it caused an increase in the number of the sati, "it was felt that the official cognizance of the rite through the presence of a police officer tended to support the practice" (Gaur 52). It cannot be claimed that there was no sati before the British intrusion; however, it is clear that the number increased and the meaning it symbolized changed completely. It was not the symbol for virtue any more, it was the symbol for protesting the British rule, and it was the result of "pathology of colonialism, not of Hinduism" (Ebree 149-59).

Consequently, for Indians colonization process formed an instinct of protecting culture, and committing sati was a way of preserving the tradition against the colonial power, so during the colonization process reaction against the oppressing culture was more dominant than religious and sociological reasons in the commitment of sati.

Putting aside all the underlying reasons of sati, there remains an ethical question whether sati is voluntary or obligatory. It is generally claimed that sati is entirely voluntary and the result of the virtue of the widow; however, it is disputable whether the sati can be accepted as a murder or not. In their *The Myth of Sati*, H.C. Upreti and Nandini Upreti state that “there is, however, evidence also that it was not entirely a matter of courage and a strong element of compulsion persisted in such events” (6). As it is a very difficult decision, it is claimed that the widows are forced to take some opium and commit it. Also, a widow’s not committing sati is blame on her family and the families coerce the widows to commit sati to protect their position in the society. As Ashis Nandy suggests “nearly all cases of sati for which the data are recorded suggested direct or indirect coercion” (131-49) during the early years of the British rule. Nearly all the records show the opposite idea and argue that there is no pressure. However, it can be the result of the traditional society’s effort to maintain their traditions and keep the colonial powers away from their values and customs. In other words, it is believed that widows are forced to commit sati however, “it is a situation in which the violence cannot be proved and therefore continues to occur” (Kishwar 42-43).

There is an important case analyze which can result in believing the role of coerce in sati. In 4 September 1987, an eighteen year old widow, Roop Kanwar, committed sati in India. After her death, there

was conflicting information in the reports. Some claimed that there was no coercion, she did not take any opium and it was her free will to die after her husband. However, there were people who claimed that she was made to commit sati. Nandy asserts,

The large majority of the journalists were fully convinced that Roop's death was a clear case of cold-blooded murder. One newspaper gave lurid details of how she had run away and hid in a barn and was pulled out from there to be burnt (131-49).

Nevertheless, even if there have been no physical coercion factors in the *sati* committed throughout the history, it can be claimed that there has been a psychological pressure on the widows. They are aware of the fact that they will be seen as a burden and a cursed being by the society. Also, their families will be degraded as the widows will be seen as bad wives who cause their husband's death and prevent them from going to Heaven by not joining their husbands. Thus, in some cases there is evidence that direct physical force was used to make the widow commit sati whereas in some cases it is impossible to claim that there was a coercion and it seemed that the widow committed the sati willingly. However, it will always be debatable whether the widows have behaved according to their free wills and committed suicide, or they have committed sati as they have felt pressure on themselves and have been the victims of murder.

Whether it is murder or suicide, this doesn't change the fact that sati has always been in question and throughout history there have always been efforts to abolish sati. Among those, the Muslim rulers were the first to oppose the sati. Humayun wanted to ban it for the widows who had passed the child bearing age. However, this could not be enough. Another Muslim governor, Akbar, appointed inspectors to see that

widows were not forced to commit sati and there was no coercion. The following Muslim governors also tried to abolish it and sati could not be performed without the explicit permission of the emperor. Another precaution taken was not allowing widows with children to burn themselves and want the Hindus to take permission from the local Government Officer. Nevertheless, none of these measures were enough to ban the practice and the widows went on committing suicides on their husbands' funeral pyres (Gaur 50).

The Rajput rulers also attempted to abolish the sati. However, like the Muslim leaders the Rajput leaders were not successful in putting an end to the practice. As Meena Gaur states,

Due to lack of arrangements, this custom continued up to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its prohibition remained merely a show-piece of the goodwill and the enlightened attitude of the executive authorities, for nothing was even attempted to let the masses know such a proclamation being enforced (50).

Before the British rule established itself in Rajasthan, there had been measures to do away with sati but it was completely abolished after years of struggle. British rule became stronger after the Kirkee war in 1817 and “opened an era of peace which inaugurated a series of reforms of which the most vital and controversial was the abolition of sati” (Gaur 51). British rulers struggled for more than thirty years to abolish sati. In 1812 the widows were allowed to commit sati if it was a religious ritual and the others were not allowed if it was not the requirement of their religion. Also, girls under sixteen, pregnant women and women having infant children were banned from committing sati. Police officers were assigned to check it and mild punishments were given to ones who broke the rules. However, there was no decline in the number of sati. The attempt to check it with a



police officer created a reaction to it and people did not want to give up their traditions. There was the impression that the British rule is taking over the country both politically and socially and the society tried to protect their culture in this way. In other words, the British interference in the matter caused the increase in the number of sati as Ainslie T. Embree asserts “sati occurs because of attacks on traditional value systems by new forces from outside” (149-59). It is impossible to say that there was no sati before the British rule but it is definite that the British rule was a factor of increasing its number, “the hundreds of cases of sati in Bengal were responses to foreign rule. There were sati events before the British intrusion, but in the premodern period they had a very different symbolic meaning within the society” (149-59). Therefore, the British decided to take less notice of the matter for a few years.

In December 4, 1829, the practice of sati and burning the widows alive were declared illegal and punishable. However, this was not a real solution, either. The British Government guaranteed the independence in internal matters of the Rajasthan States for whom the abolition of sati was not even open to discussion. Hence, the British Government could not do anything to prevent the Rajputs from committing sati. Nevertheless, the British never gave up dealing with this matter and finally in 1860, they achieved to make it illegal throughout all the country threatening the states that opposed the idea. Although there have been some cases of sati, this was the last time when a law was passed about its abolition and since then no sati has been committed in the royal families.

## **B. AN ANALYSIS OF RAISE THE LANTERNS HIGH IN TERMS OF ITS POINT OF VIEW ABOUT SATI**

*Raise the Lanterns High* by Lakshmi Persaud is a novel about a girl called Vasti who finds out that she will get married to the rapist that she sees years ago and three Queens who are supposed to commit *sati* after the King dies in a war. Vasti lives in 1960s while the Queens' story takes place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the first part of the book, Vasti decides to get married to a man and then she understands that the man is the rapist whom she had seen when she was a little student and she does not know what to do. In the second part of the book, she goes to the 18<sup>th</sup> century India and witnesses what the three queens of the city of Jyotika go through after the death of the King; how they were forced to burn themselves, how they had got stuck between committing *sati* and escaping from the country and how the Queens and people had felt and thought during this period. In this chapter, the second part of the book is analysed; through the story of the three Queens the emphasis will be put on the reasons which drive the widows towards committing *sati* and how the community feels about the subject. The tradition seems to be glorifying these women granting them divine features; it is practiced just because it is advantageous for men and his entire family.

King Paresh, the King of Jyotika city, dies in a war leaving three wives behind. When they receive the news of the King's death, the Queens' and the *sati* become the main issue both for the palace people and the public. The two Queens, Queen Meena and Queen Dayita are from the north of the country where committing *sati* is accepted as a tradition, "The bonds of marriage for the two Northern Queens must

hold, not only in times of sickness or in health but in death, too” (Persaud 94) whereas Queen Renu, is from the south where *sati* is not practiced. Hence, Queen Meena and Queen Dayita accept committing *sati* at first, accepting it as the natural outcome of their loyalty to the King and to their traditions,

Queen Meena and Queen Dayita had always known and accepted that one day their affection and loyalty to the King had to be sanctified by their becoming *sati*. This had been the culture of their birth (Persaud 94).

However, Queen Renu does not accept it as a tradition and as she is a different queen brought up like a boy with a good education; she questions the sense of the tradition and states:

My years of learning and scholarly observation, as well as my father’s encouragement that I should participate in debates with young and old philosophers have directed me to use reason as the main ingredient of belief, and so I say with all honesty that I feel none of the inspiration deemed necessary to the sanctity of this sacrifice (Persaud 114).

Queen Renu wants to prevent the other two queens commit *sati* as well, and she asks them to reject burning themselves being the first in the country and to save the following widows’ lives and to open a school where they would educate young girls. Queen Meena and Queen Dayita like the idea and agree to carry on the Queen Renu’s plan; nevertheless, they face a lot of problems and have to give up the idea.

Queen Renu is sorry about the other two Queens;

it devastated her to think that the courtly, gentle Queen Meena and the creative Queen Dayita would soon be overcome by flames, suffer indescribable pain and then perish in agony with the dead (Persaud 94).

Therefore, she decides to help the other two Queens and save them from becoming *sati* and she initiates a meeting. However, being completely under the influence of the customs, Queen Meena and Queen Dayita declare that they will commit *sati*. Queen Meena tells her:

Sacrificing our lives is what is expected of us. Our sacrifices offer us worth, dignity and respect which form the breath of life. We are born to serve and it is only through our thoughts and the way we live and die that we are able to bring God's blessing to our lives unborn, lives yet to come" (Persaud 96).

Also, they warn Queen Renu not to make Pundit Krishna irritate as he is a holy man whose words and blessings are of importance for them while they commit *sati*.

Nevertheless, Queen Renu does not give up the idea of saving Queen Meena and Queen Dayita and she tries to convince them that they do not have to commit *sati* as it is not a requirement of the religion but a deformed one saying,

It was a symbolic acknowledgement that what had once been brought together in marriage had now come apart by the death of the one. The Gods were called upon to acknowledge and bless the separation. Well before it was lit, however, the widow was wisely raised from the pyre by a male relative of her husband (Persaud 131).

Queen Renu tells that the origin of the tradition is not a cruel one. She suggests that when the tradition first occurred, the widows climbed the funeral pyre only to be blessed by the religious men who called for Gods to witness the separation of the married couple and then she was taken from there from the pyre with the help of one of the male members of the family (Persaud 131). Nevertheless, after a while

the custom turned into something, claims Queen Renu. The reason for this change is that:

No man in the Kingdom would wish to exchange his life for that of his wife. It is no mystery why this should be so. He sees her life, her very existence engineered by custom to serve his. Is it ordained by men or by God? A married woman's entire life is one of daily duties and sacrifices. She brings comfort to all around her: her children, her husband, her husband's family and before marriage, her own family (Persaud 131).

Queen Renu, therefore, believes that the custom is irrelevant to what God wants; because, she says God who created everything cannot be so cruel:

When her husband dies do you think that the Supreme Being, the Creator of All Things, would ask that she be put to death in that most cruel of horrors- burned alive on pyre –pinned down by logs while the priest, her children and family watch and listen to her shrieks and cries for help before she is painfully consumed? What manner of God is this when a human, a lesser being, can have more compassion, more affection for the powerless, the disadvantaged? What manner of God would accept such a cruel sacrifice? (Persaud 131-32)

Queen Renu believes that *sati* is not a religious obligation and tells the Queens that she has a plan; she considers opening a school for girls. She believes that this school can be the starting point of the change in the society and the Queens can be saved from *sati* without being considered betraying the King, their families and the society.

Queen Renu's efforts to convince the other two Queens bring their inner conflicts into light. The Queens also become very enthusiastic about it but they cannot overcome their hesitation. They think of the results of rejecting committing *sati*, "In a room with no company or diversions we would be like caged birds with little water or food. Is

this life? Why should we save ourselves for this when on the pyre we gain dignity, respect, honour, our name sanctified for all times” (Persaud 136). However, they also think what will happen if they achieve their aim, “But if we succeed our lives and those of others, would be transformed just as you have said” (Persaud 136). Trying to overcome the dilemma, the Queens decide to talk to the Pundit, “So it is most crucial that we manage to persuade the Royal Court Pundit” (Persaud 136).

Nonetheless, the religious and social structures of Jyotika do not allow the Queens to escape from committing *sati*. Avoiding committing *sati* is not an easy procedure because people are conditioned the necessity and divinity of it so much that they believe in many reasons that require the widows to commit *sati*. To begin with, the belief that it is God’s will and it has religious reasons and consequences is one of the most important factors leading women to commit *sati*. The *sati* tradition’s “value in India’s traditional past and current rural areas has been tied to the Hindu belief in reincarnation and the need of deceased men to be served in the afterlife” (Lopata 23). As people who believe in the afterlife and incarnation, the hope that they will be in a good place after they die and that they will return to the world in a better position is the main motive in religion that is used to make widows be willing to commit *sati*. Otherwise, it would not be possible to persuade people to be burnt them alive as Fisch claims:

If the deceased has dissolved into nothingness, a reference to this person is no longer possible. The custom then degenerates into a mere (self) killing, even into a suicide, and is unable to maintain itself in the long run as a public ritual, legitimized by society. A marked belief in the hereafter on the other hand provides an unambiguous justification for society.

The annihilation of a life is partly compensated for by the belief that the person killed has not been destroyed, but has merely been sent to another world, where his/her position cannot be any worse, and indeed may be better than in this world and will be able to lighten his burden or improve his life. The loss suffered by this world constitutes a gain in the hereafter (10).

To strengthen and stress this idea, the Pundit (the name given to the religious men in the palace) suggests:

She that goes with her husband to the other world purifies three generations, that is the generations of her mother's side, her father's side and husband's side; and so she, being reckoned the purest and the best in fame amongst women, becomes to dear to the husband, and continues to divert herself with him for a period equal to the reign of fourteen Indras or three and a half coottee (thirty-five million years) which is equal to the number of hairs on a human body (Persaud 145).

The position devoted to the widows who are to commit *sati* is so high that people see them as heavenly creatures. While some people in the public are talking about the *sati* ceremony which took place before, they tell:

Then, the beauty of the Queens they said, in that knowing way, almost rivalled the gods, so blessed by Brahma were they; the unveiled faces glowed with happiness and devotion to the King. 'It was a privilege to have seen the Queens' royal sedans lifted high, slowly moving along the main venue,' they stressed, 'and to witness their public offerings of jewels and other ornaments. So much purity, innocence and feminine grace' they continued. 'It was a heavenly sight, an intense devotion, unrivalled – not of this world' was their pronouncement. 'They sat like goddesses and awaited Paradise to open to them; all the while fierce flames raged upon them (Persaud 107).

The Hindu people believe that these widows who have taken an oath are able to bless and condemn people. It is believed that it is an opportunity to meet these holy widows,

She bowed low before the Queen and asked to be blessed, conscious of the privilege, of being so close to a body that would soon be ash, would soon walk with the King in the Heavens and see the Gods in all their magnificence (Persaud 276).

Thus, the Jyotika people waiting for Queens to commit *sati* hope to see them and be blessed by them:

‘Silence!’ an old man reprimanded. ‘How will I hear the blessings of the *Sati* Queens? My own ear must hold that sound. The strain of a *suttee* voice was a unique privilege to receive, for her blessing is the last mortal sound before her ash will mingle with her husband’s.

There began a silent pushing and shoving. Mothers with ailing children wanted the shadow of the *suttees* to fall upon them, for this would bring if not a cure, substantial relief. In many instances, they were hoping to be able to take home flowers jewels, other personal adornments, grains of rice, or anything the royal *suttees* had touched. Such a relic would bring good luck. The more daring were trying to come close enough to the *sati* sedan steps, to touch it and so gain a more favourable outcome to their lives (Persaud 308).

The religious aspect of the matter influences the widow Queens like everybody else. The dead bodies of the *sati* widows which have become ashes are believed to “break through into the world of infinite possibilities, far beyond the limitations of human thought and it is observed realities” (Persaud 109). Even the Gods witness the ceremony, they believe, and after they join together with the fire and the ceremony, the wife and the husband are blessed and in return for the woman’s sacrifice they have awards such as living in Heaven and



having a better status after incarnation. Although they are eager to escape from *sati*, Queen Meena, being greatly affected by the awards promised, tells,

Do not take it lightly, Queen Renu, that promise of thirty-five million years of bliss in a place where there is no want, no pain, no ugliness, where we may even see the gods in person. And in addition, having become *sati* we would become male in our next birth (Persaud 136).

She is in such a dilemma that although she is afraid of burning herself and tries to find a way to avoid it, she cannot help questioning herself and thinking that it is her duty to do it:

We are born to serve [...] and it is only through our thoughts and the way we live and die that we are able to bring God's blessings to lives unborn, lives yet to come goes looks favourably on those who gladly make large sacrifices to please Him. He will not be satisfied with the symbols sacrifice by the cunning and the sophisticated to protect them from pain (Persaud 96).

Worse than missing the chance to get the awards, the Queens are afraid of being punished by God if they reject committing *sati*. If something is accepted as religious and awards are promised, there is always the opposite side; there are punishments when the duty is not carried out. As an award for *sati* widows are promised to go to Heaven with their husbands, to return to the world in a high caste and to save generations of both her own family and her husband's families. Refusing to commit *sati* has its own regulations, however. When Queen Meena feels herself growing afraid of executing the task she is supposed to, she thinks she is sinning,

Later her own puja room, the eldest Queen prayed silently, asking that the King should forgive her growing inner weakness and that the spirit of

Saraswatee, the Goddess of Knowledge, should bless her with the wisdom to prepare herself for what was already so close (Persaud 112).

Even hesitating about it seems to be a sin; not committing it is a greater one. It is considered that the Gods will be angry with the widow refusing to burn herself on her husband's funeral pyre, "The anger of the gods will fall upon her as a thunderbolt." (Persaud 304) The punishment of not being a *sati* is not limited to the widow herself; it also affects her husband's afterlife and incarnation,

The consequences for husbands, were serious, for in the advent of wives failing to become *satis*, this would adversely affect their husbands' future rebirth (Persaud 145).

Apart from the religious motives, being a *sati* is considered to be a way for showing the wife's loyalty to her husband to save him in the afterlife. The loyalty is not just about the afterlife of the husband; it is also the way to save his honour in the world. The widow's becoming *sati* shows that she is loyal to her husband as much as rejecting to live without him and accepting to die with him which is a sign of how honourable the dead husband was. If the dead husband is a King like in *Raise the Lanterns High*, it becomes more important to save his honour; both because it is essential to protect the Royal Family's power and honour and also because the widow's climbing the funeral pyre means to pay him back for the services he has done for his subjects. When the Queens tell Pundit Krishna that they will not commit *sati*, the pundit asks them,

What does it say about the King of Jyotika, who has given his very life to protect us, if his wives will not accompany him on his last journey?" (Persaud 153)

It is improper to leave him alone on the funeral pyre because it is the duty of the widows to “honour him in death, as he favoured you in life” (Persaud 152) says Pundit Krishna.

Moreover, there can be times when many people climb the funeral pyre to show their loyalty and gratitude to the King and his services he has done when it is a King who has died, “Were there not accounts of hundreds of lives – wives, concubines and slaves- upon the pyres of some kings and rulers?”(Persaud 120) That is, committing *sati* is the way to honour the King and if he is left alone on his funeral, he will be accepted to have been dishonoured, “If the King were to be seen unaccompanied, he would be severely compromised in the eyes of his subjects” (Persaud 171). Being a *sati* is the most honourable and prestigious position that a woman can have; in *Raise the Lanterns High*, “Oh, to have been asked to sit with the King on the pyre, alone! What could she have done to deserve this?”(Persaud 188) says the slave Kala, the woman who has been asked to climb the pyre of King Paresh instead of the Queens. Kala believes that as a slave, being the *sati* of the King is the opportunity of her life and when she has to reject it because another pundit made her promise to reject the offer that the Queens will do, before she knows what the offer is, she feels that, “she and her daughter have been denied the positions of great honour and worth which she couldn’t possibly have earned in many a lifetime”(Persaud 187). While it is prestigious to commit *sati* even for women who are not the wives of the King, the King’s honour is damaged when his wife does not commit *sati* as,

It was looked upon as a highly honourable proof of wife’s attachment and love which enhanced the glory of the families of these wretched victims of blind zeal. Should a widow, by reason of a natural fondness for life or through lack of courage, endeavour to avoid the

honour of being burnt alive on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband, she was considered to be offering a gross insult to his memory (Dubois 357).

It is not problematic just for the King and the Queen, if the Queen does not become a *sati*, The Queen's family's honour is also at stake if she does not become a *sati* after her husband's death. The widow's being *sati* saves her and her family's honour,

Her own family's esteem would also be magnified, her honour would become above suspicion. They would take pride and comfort in her memory (Persaud 96).

If she commits *sati*, she saves her relatives' after life as well as protecting their honour in the world,

Today, once again, our concept of unsullied honour and the divine relationship sealed by marriage, is being publicly renewed. Your becoming *satis* is the ultimate act of devotion and loyalty which cannot be rendered even by the elements. I, with the people of the Kingdom of Jyotika, salute you. I, as well as the hundreds of your subjects anxiously awaiting you, am blessed to have lived to witness this glorious day of the salvation you will bring to all those intimately related to you (Persaud 144).

The Jyotika people put such an importance on *sati* and the widows that who wait for the Queens' self-immolation ceremony eagerly,

The people of Jyotika were in awe of the grand spectacle that awaited them. Many were leaving their homes and workshops to ensure a close view of the Queens, of whom they heard much but never seen (Persaud 107).

The public's expectation is so big that everybody goes to the area where the ceremony will be held,

Along the route to the Mahasati, the place of burning, were thousands of people jostling for a better view of the procession. The villages were empty, the fields too (Persaud 306).

What they want to witness is the burning of the Queens and they do not show a sign of humanity,

At no time did these elders reflect on the vulnerability of a live human body on a flaming pyre. At no time did they say ‘I heard piercing cries of agony. Undisguised by ghee and sandalwood I smelled the terrible stench of burning flesh (Persaud 108).

The enthusiasm the public shows about the Queen’s *sati* ceremony put pressure on the widow Queens to commit *sati* as Pundit Krishna claims,

The people’s expectations were growing. Many were sleeping out in the open so as not to miss the colourful funerary procession that should accompany the King and the Queens” (Persaud 171),

and he asks, “How could expectations of that magnitude not be fulfilled?” (Persaud 171) In other words, the pundit implies that the opinion of the public is important and their expectations must be fulfilled as it will damage the position and the power of the Royal family in the country if the Queens do not carry out their task to be *sati*; if they reject to obey the rules that have been determined by the society.

While committing *sati* is a sign of loyalty, chastity and honour, escaping from it is accepted as the indication of how dishonourable and disloyal the widow is and “their reputation is in shreds and their family’s name dishonoured for all time” (Persaud 129). This belief is so deep that the Northern Queens cannot give up questioning themselves and their decision even after they decide to reject becoming *sati*. They are aware of the fact that the public and the people in the palace will no longer respect them as the Queens cannot prove their chastity by being *sati*. Therefore, Queen Meena laments:

We are now wicked in their eyes-our behaviour that of dishonest women. Are we? Are we? Look at what we have done to the good name of our family, the Royal Family of Jyotika, but most to ourselves. What will become of us? I was so ashamed, I wished the Earth could have taken pity and swallowed me up. I want you to know that there and then I decided I will go on the pyre. It is the only honourable path now open to us (Persaud 212).

What concerns the Queens so much is another fact which they will have to face: life as a widow who has lost her honour and respectability. Because,

An Indian widow, who -as seen from the outside- burnt herself to death willingly, was a victim of various compulsion. Often what was in store for her was a life of poverty, devoid of all social contact, and of being regarded as lesser being. Her decision to burn herself to death was taken immediately after the death of her husband-taken therefore in a state of shock (Fisch 16).

The widows cannot remarry as Sandhya states, “The condition of widow sows the social inequality and injustice in the society because widowers could marry many times but in the case of widows it meant that either she had to end her life or remain a widow throughout” (Sandhya 18). The boundaries set in front of the widows are not limited with the ban of the remarriage. Their life changes completely, “Those women, who saved themselves from sati, somehow had to live a life which was more miserable than self immolation. Self-immolation was momental suffering but widowhood was a life long” (Sandhya 17). For that reason, the answer of the question: “What freedom did a widow have?” (Persaud 45) is “Nothing!” As Micheals puts it, the widow just seems to be alive but she does not survive any more; she is excluded from everything:

Physically, the widow lives on, but ritually and often socially, she dies with the husband. She loses authority and prestige in the extended family, becomes a problem to be taken care of, is sometimes harassed by male relatives, has no rights to a large extent, and is dependent on her oldest son. She must let herself be blamed for her husband's death and may not remarry. The life of a widow is full of privations: She must be chaste -, cut her hair short, and wear only white garments and no jewellery. If she is still a young widow, she may face the treatment of being called a witch, being disowned, or ending as a beggar or prostitute (Micheals 152).

Queen Dayita is aware of this fact and she tells, "Here, a widow life is a living death. I will be shunned and placed at the rear of the palace. We, who were once someone's daughter, sister, mother, servers to all, by custom moulded, are ill equipped for a self-propelled life"(Persaud 101). The reason that the Queen thinks as stated above is that they are unable to live on their own as widows is more evident when the Queens describe the situation a widow has to live in. Queen Meena tells:

I can hear already hear and feel their hostility, their anger: 'The King has given his life to save the people and the Kingdom of Jyotika, while the Queens of Jyotika are dictating that this same King should for the first time in our history to leave his palace his Kingdom alone –unaccompanied, as if he were a commoner lowly subject.' Would be able to live with silent taunts, with being made to feel unclean, unfit to be Queens? [...] We would be shunned by the newly crowned King and his wives [...] When Prince Mahendra is crowned, our lives will be miserable. If there happens to be any wife who sympathises with us, she would be foolish to make this known (Persaud 133-34).

That is, each widow is excluded from the social life, she is isolated being forced to mourn for her husband during her whole life as she is

considered evil and is believed to bring bad luck to the people around.

Abbe J. A. Dubois tells that,

A widow has to be in mourning till her death. Furthermore, she is forbidden to take part in any amusement or to attend family festivals, such as marriage feasts, the ceremony of *upanayana*, and others; for her very presence would be considered an evil omen (Dubois 353).

Another reason why the widows are pushed out of the society is that they are considered to be a threat for other women as the widows are thought to have the potential to have sexual relationship with men. This situation can be evaluated in two ways; both the women may be disturbed by the fear of sharing their husbands with a widow and the widows who do not want to have a relationship with another man may be disturbed by the men considering the widows as potential partners. Pundit Krishna warns the Queens about the issue saying,

Your beauty, fine form and grave would greatly endanger you. Implore you Most Gracious Queens of Jyotika to reconsider your position (Persaud 153).

All these factors that make a widow's life miserable are discussed among the Queens. Queen Dayita summarizes the situation as, "In a room with no company or diversions we would be like caged birds with little water or food. Is this life?" (Persaud 136) Living as a widow seems so hard that Queen Meena says, "It would be like being buried alive. I may lose my mind" (Persaud 135). In other words, the social and the religious structures present such a life and death that women are forced to choose death and bury themselves; they prefer to be a divine dead rather than to be a cursed alive. Although it is claimed that it is women's free will to choose whatever they would like to do, women have no chance other than being a *sati* doing what "their honour, duty and obligation to the King, to their family, to custom"



(Persaud 128) necessitates; as the other way, living as a widow, requires a too hard way of living to put up with.

Psychological coercion is not the only way to make the widows commit *sati*. They are forced to burn themselves physically, too. If the widow does not want to be a *sati*, she is numbed by some kind of opium and put in the fire no matter whether she agrees it or not; Dubois claims that,

At times they go so far as to administer drugs, which so far deprive her of her senses that under their influence she yields to their wishes (Dubois 359).

In the novel, Pundit Krishna thinks of offering the Queens to take some opium before the ceremony when the Queens declare that they will not commit *sati*,

I will offer opium, and will ensure that cloves and cardamom, the soothing of the one and the comforting scent of the other, are added. This compound of my making may prevent their complete unravelling before the pyre is lit (Persaud 151).

He tries to convince the Queens that they should take the opium and climb on to the funeral pyre and they will not feel anything and won't suffer,

I shall ensure that you will be in too deep a sleep to feel the flames as they engulf your mortal remains, your immortal spirit having already left its casement (Persaud 153).

At this point the hypocrisy of the system is clear. The rule is that "She must give her consent" (Persaud 119) to get the awards promised; otherwise, what she does is not being a *sati* but to commit suicide. However, the usage of opium demonstrates that it is not important whether the woman does what her religion asks her to do and she is rewarded for it; what is important is the continuation of the custom that is formed for men's benefit.

It is obvious that men profit from every stage of the custom. While he is alive, he takes the advantage of the *sati* tradition which orders women to serve their husband and finds the wife guilty if something bad happens to the husband. Women, who believe in this tradition, do their best to serve and protect their husband from all the evils around; because, the *sati* tradition presents an idea that suggests, “the death of the husband is the fault of the wife-if not due to her present sins” (Lopata 23).

To conclude, *Raise the Lanterns High* shows the reader the *sati* process that three Queens of the Jyotika city in the 18<sup>th</sup> century go through after the King passes away in a war. The novel deals with the problems a widow can come across if she refuses to become a *sati*. *Raise the Lanterns High* has a language flowing sweetly while showing the reader all the aspects of the *sati* tradition. It is effective both in explaining how the religious and social constructions force the widows to commit *sati* and in showing the inner conflicts that a widow can go through. The novel shows the reader how the Queens feel that they are bounded to perform it, how they get excited about escaping from it and how they question themselves. Persaud very successfully tells the inner conflict that a widow whose husband has died experiences drawing the portrait of the Queens who first want to obey the rules but later try to escape from them. The author also tells the society’s attitude towards the Queens and how the men of religion force them to perform *sati*. All these issues which are pointed out in the novel make the reader understand what difficulties a widow comes across in a society where *sati* is a rule. The novel also makes it clear that a widow first has to convince herself breaking the chains of the social and religious rules that she has learned throughout her life and

then she has to persuade the public that she prefers to live as a widow  
to be able to escape from *sati*.

### C. AN ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL *RICH LIKE US* IN TERMS OF ITS POINT OF VIEW ABOUT *SATI*

*Rich Like Us* is one of the important works of Nayantara Sahgal, a prominent Indian-English writer. Her works, which are generally about political issues and Emancipation of India, have received many awards worldwide. *Rich Like Us* is set in the Emergency Period (1975-77) and it is also about politics; it deals with the controversial period in Indian history and puts forward an opposing point of view to the capitalist invasion of India. The *sati* issue, too, is mentioned in the novel. The custom which is referred to as a “murder” by Sahgal is the main topic of one chapter in the novel and is declared as a past tradition. There is not a whole story about *sati* in the chapter; it mainly narrates the discussions about the *sati* tradition between an English man called Mr Timmson and Sonali’s father. The examples of *sati* given show that the tradition is a savage one practiced by force to maintain the men’s powerful position in the social structure.

The chapter that is about *sati* includes the dialogues of Sonali’s father and an English man Mr. Timmson, at the beginning and these dialogues come into light when Sonali begins to read the diary of his father. These dialogues, which are also one of the ways that Sahgal uses to show the Indian and English point of views on the matter, begin with the abolition topic.

The abolition of *sati* is a controversial issue. Although *sati* has always been a disputed issue, no certain solution can be found to prevent it. Some sects have always defended it whereas Muslims, Christians and even some Hindus have tried to abolish it. The British

government also attempted to bring it to an end. However, they could not be successful, at first. Sahgal firstly deals with this issue; Sonali's father tells in his diary that his father remembered when the first Regulation about *sati* was done and the law permitting the widows to remarry was passed. This law was thought to protect the widows being burned with their dead husbands as "society would have no excuse to immolate widows alive any more" (Sahgal 119). However, in the novel, Sonali's father does not agree that this law will do any good for the widows although the British Governors probably think that they have solved the problem:

The first legal act against *sati* had caused a sensation and the Governor General, Lord William Cavendish Bentick, who had put his signature to the statue, must have gone back to England with the praise of our countrymen ringing in his ears, but my father held the view that this was a wishful reform and would not be worth the paper it was written (Sahgal 119).

Some other people in the room think that there has been a beginning, at least; it has been accepted as a crime and people can be punished for it. However, Sonali's father insists that this law means nothing as the *sati* tradition goes back to mythological times and has a strong basis; it cannot be eliminated just because some English men want it to be.

The way that the government claims that it has abolished *sati* is also criticized by him as the abolition of *sati* in India could not be effective in all parts of the country. In some regions, there were Princes governing the region and the British Government promised them independency in their domestic affairs. The British could not interfere in the subject of *sati* in those regions and it caused an inconsistency in the abolishment of the custom. Therefore, the father defends that it is

just a way of salving “the Government’s conscience” (Sahgal 120). He claims that there should be equal circumstances in all the regions of the country:

If a custom so atrocious were to be stopped in every part of British India, as well as the states ruled by Princes, in one which we then lived, it must be ruthlessly prevented and publicly punished. Those who perpetrated must be hanged in the marketplace, or it would go on into the next century (Sahgal 120).

In other words, Sahgal is in favour of abolishment of *sati*, which she describes as “ending a system demoralizing in its effects on the living, a revolting system of suicide and murder” (Sahgal 121), in every part of the country regardless of who it is governed by.

Sahgal defends the abolishment of *sati* and accepts that it is a difficult task to carry on; because, the laws are not enough to eliminate something that is rooted in the religion people believe in. *Sati* has its roots in religion and therefore has been an influential part of the social life. Religion and the Hindu belief give hope to people about after life and incarnation and *sati* is the main way for widows to have a good life in heaven after death or to be born in a high caste when they incarnate. As Joerg Fisch suggests in his work *Burning Women- A Global History of Widow-Sacrifice from Ancient Times to the Present*, the *sati* act which would be a mere suicide without a religious motive is considered a way to heaven with beloved husband and returning to the world in a better situation:

If the deceased has dissolved into nothingness, a reference to this person is no longer possible. The custom then degenerates into a mere (self) killing, even into a suicide, and is unable to maintain itself in the long run as a public ritual, legitimized by society. A marked belief in the hereafter on the other hand

provides an unambiguous justification for society. The annihilation of a life is partly compensated for by the belief that the person killed has not been destroyed, but has merely been sent to another world, where his/her position cannot be any worse, and indeed may be better than in this world and will be able to lighten his burden or improve his life. The loss suffered by this world constitutes a gain in the hereafter (10).

Sahgal also stresses this point while the belief of a widow who committed *sati* is narrated. The widow believes that she has been *sati* two times before in her other lives and that she will be awarded for it:

It may be deemed worthy of remark, that this victim of superstition appeared firmly impressed with the idea of the present being the third time of her soul's incarnation. In answer to the magistrate's remonstrance and entreaties, she assured him that self-cremation was not at all terrible, or even new to her, as she had performed that rite before at Benares and as Canonge; and added that she knew perfectly well what would be her sufferings on the pile, and in what manner she would be recompensed for them thereafter (Sahgal 126).

Religion is the most prominent way of manipulating women and making them commit *sati* as the promises given to women seemed to be great ones under those circumstances. Sahgal narrates that a religious man tells her father that,

The *sati* lives with her husband in the unbroken felicity of swarga for thirty-three millions of years at the end of which period she is reborn into a noble family, and reunited to same well-beloved lord (Sahgal 128).

In fact, *sati* is a tradition that occurred as a result of Indian men's greed and arrogance; they wanted to keep their wives for themselves and also to prevent being killed by their wives for their inheritance and

this custom developed. In other words, men wanted to take their lives for granted without facing any murder threat and also were afraid of sharing their wives with another man and they made women believe that burning themselves on the husband's funeral pyre brought them the divine features of even a goddess has and a higher caste after incarnation. In other words, women were given hope about having something in both the other world and this one; however, the only thing they get is the suffering they experience burning alive while they are strengthening the men's dominant position in the society.

Burning herself alive is not enough to get the rewards she has been promised, however. The widow must be pure wholly while climbing the funeral pyre. Axel Micheals states in his book, *Hinduism Past and Present*, "The Brahmans mainly sought to safeguard the "purity" of it, to make widow-burning appropriate to the goddess Sati" (150). That is, if the widow purely aims at having a divine award, she can get a position like a goddess; nevertheless, if she has anything about world or any other worldly benefit she hopes to get, she cannot become a *sati* and she is accepted as having committed suicide. If she is not pure, not wholly devoted, she is supposed to wait until she reaches that stage and burn herself after her husband's funeral with something belonging to her husband. Sonali's father tells Mr. Timmons that,

And if she's unclean as they say, at the time, she must wait until afterward, and be sacrificed along with some possession or part of her husband's body, his turban, his sword, his bones (Sahgal 124).

Nonetheless, this purity concept is one of the examples of the hypocrisy women experience all their lives. Although the rules suppose that the widow must be willing to perform it and be pure



minded, the widows who do not want to burn themselves alive are forced to do it by their families and the community. As forcing women to commit *sati* becomes illegal and committing *sati* is allowed if the woman wants it herself, people use sedatives and opium to calm the widow down and make it seem that as if they were committing *sati* eagerly. Sonali's father tells Mr. Timmons,

I hear of cases of sati still because there are ways of getting around abolition outside the major towns. They give intoxicating drinks and sedatives to the poor wretched women and drag them into the funeral (Sahgal 123).

Opium is not the only way, Sonali's father discusses. People force widows physically to burn themselves; they even put women who escape from the fire back in it, says Sonali's father. He tells the story of a widow who tries to get away from the funeral pyre that she has climbed as she could not endure the pain it causes. The widow throws herself from the flames and falls down. She refuses to go in the flames again and as Sonali's father states:

When the inhuman relatives saw this, they took her by the head and heels and threw her into the fire, and held her there till they were driven away by the heat; they also took large blocks of wood with which they struck her, in order to deprive her of senses (Sahgal 124).

The relatives' savageness does not finish at this point because she again makes her escape only to be caught again in the river where she has run to and be drowned there by the relatives. In other words, committing *sati* with a pure heart is said to be for women's own good and for their eternal life and it is suggested that if they are unwilling to have a divine feature, it would be just a suicide. However, women are murdered and nobody thinks whether their heart and deed are pure or

not; it is not important whether they have a divine reward being burnt on the pyre; what is important is the continuation of the tradition without damaging the men's patriarchal power in the community.

The coercion that women are subjected to is a clear proof that the *sati* tradition does not mainly aim at doing women any good. Although, the spiritual reasons are shown the major causes of the tradition, it cannot be denied that the causes lying underneath are materialistic ones. As it is mentioned before, *sati* is the result of men's fear of sharing their wives with any other man after they die; it is the reason why it started. Another reason for it is that, the families do not want the widows to be a burden and the men in the family would like to have the inheritance left by the dead husband without having any problem. Fisch suggests that there many reasons why a widow is forced to commit *sati*;

These include ensuring the power of ruling groups, enabling the appropriation of the victim's property by family members and a strengthening and deepening of inequality between the sexes (10).

This is the last point that Sahgal attracts attention to about *sati* tradition in *Rich Like Us*.

Sonali's father writes in his diary how his mother committed "sati." After her husband dies, Sonali's grandmother commits *sati*. She burns herself after sending her son to school. When he returns from the school, he finds the house empty and silent. He guesses that his mother commits *sati* and runs to river to see the pyre where his mother burned herself alive. He loses his conscious there and finds himself in Mr. Timmons' house. There, they tell him that his mother "insisted on it as a part of bargain that would ensure his inheritance and even before he came into it, his education abroad" (Sahgal 135). Nonetheless, he does

not believe what is told him as the reason why his father committed sati; because, he thinks,

I have no reason to believe he spoke the truth, for how could she have imagined that I would begin a new life in a new world with that knowledge locked in me? How could I arise a phoenix from her ashes? But of course it is a lie (Sahgal 135).

He does not believe that his mother committed *sati* willingly as she had the same intellect as his father did. He believes the uncle who he describes as “the power of darkness” (Sahgal 134) forced her to be a *sati*. He believes that because the mother was forced to burn herself to be left out of the uncle’s way of managing the inheritance of the father, to separate the inheritance into two between the uncle and Sonali’s father, the son of the dead man. Making it clear that the men of the family share the inheritance and *sati* is a way to make the practice go on without any problem caused by women, the son tells,

He (the uncle) was afraid of me, and it was obvious that he did not feel equal to sorting out the business of my father’s estate, yet (Sahgal 134).

To conclude, the chapter about *sati* in the novel, *Rich Like Us* tells the stories of different widows who committed *sati* via the discussions between Mr. Timmons and Sonali’s father, written in Sonali’s father’s diary. Sonali’s father is against *sati* and wants it to be abolished; however, he says, it is impossible to eliminate it by passing laws. To abolish the custom permanently can only be achieved by changing the minds of people about it; because, it has very strong roots in the society which cannot be affected by any laws. It is told in the chapter that religion seems to be the root of the *sati* tradition and women are assured a holy position and a higher caste when they are incarnated if

they become *sati* and a pure heart and deed are required to reach that divine position according to the religious rules. Nevertheless, nobody seems to be worried about the women's pure heartedness and their divinity as the women are put in the fire by force if they do not have the courage and eagerness to do it. What is desired is to make the tradition go on being practiced and giving the men all the opportunities provided by it.

## CONCLUSION

The place of women in the society has always been a hot debate. Men have always been seen as the main element of a society and women have always been forced to stay leg behind. Not also in the past or among primitive groups but also in the present and even in the so-called advanced nations this huge gap between the places of men and women exists.

In the course of history, women have been evaluated in relation to men almost all the time. That is to say, the 'virtue' of a female has been seen as being bound to the amount of happiness or peace that she can provide for her spouse. She has always been there to make him happy; to make his private life better, to raise children for him, to motivate him for life and so on. Surprisingly enough, men have always been at the centre but no one, including himself, has thought about the feelings of the being that stays behind the scene of this centre; the woman. In other words, it has been so internalized that women are always serving men's needs, women's own needs haven't been given any value.

The facts stated above are products of long-term applications of societies and these practises turn into traditions in time which are very significant elements dominating a nation. In almost all nations' traditions women are the disadvantaged part in terms of relations between the two sexes. Traditional practices make women stay behind and serve men whereas the same traditions require men to expect to be served and obeyed.

In this thesis, these aspects of discrimination have been held in the framework of certain books focusing on the traditional practises that

ruin women's lives. These practises are; genital mutilation, honour crimes, and 'sati'. In the first chapter, female genital mutilation is looked through by the help of Alice Walker's book, '*Possessing the Secret of Joy*'. In this book, she depicts a lively picture of the impacts of genital mutilation on a woman named Tashi who has sex with her boyfriend and then gets mutilated since her society is one that requires women to be mutilated. Genital mutilation is a tradition which is performed in order to increase the sexual satisfaction men get. It is known that this practice may be very dangerous, even result in the death of the woman since it is not always done according to health rules. In addition to this role of the tradition, it is seen as a way to control women's sexual life. By the help of this mutilation it is guaranteed that the vagina is opened only before marriage. It has opposite effects on opposite sexes; it reduces the pleasure women get during sexual intercourse whereas it increases the one of men. Experiencing both kinds of sex, before and after the mutilation, Tashi does not get the same satisfaction after it. The novel ends with Tashi's killing the woman who mutilated her and lots of others. Throughout this chapter, the unimportance of women in the society by making use of Tashi's story has been examined. Women in these societies are so forced to have this mutilation that they do not think of any way other than obeying the rules. It is clearly seen both in the related literature and the novel that these kinds of traditions make the lives of women worse. The worst point is that all these difficulties are faced only for giving more pleasure to men.

After talking about the FGM, Turkey and another custom that has devastating negative effects on female life; honour crime has been dealt with. Honour crimes which are results of extra marital sexual affairs are committed especially in the eastern regions of Turkey. The

surprising point is that these crimes are not only committed on occasions when a woman has sex with a man on her will but also when she is raped. Therefore, it can be deduced that honour crimes are only seemingly punishments for 'virtueless' women but in reality they are committed even when the woman is completely innocent and has been violated by men. To throw light on this issue, Zülfü Livaneli's book named '*Bliss*' and the main character of the story, Meryem who is raped by her uncle and decided to be killed by him but in the end manages to escape from the end that is determined by her family for her. Again there is a miserable situation of women which is created by men.

The third chapter is depicting another tradition from a different part of the world; 'sati' from India. This is an old Indian tradition which followed by widow women in the way that they kill themselves in the fire that her husband is burned. This practice is seen as such precious that it is named 'sati' which means virtuous woman in their language. In consistence with the customs mentioned before, 'sati' is also one that is shaped by tremendous sacrifice of women. Despite having no fault in her husband's death, a woman has to put an end to her life only for the sake of showing her great respect to him. However, men do not have to do the same thing when his wife dies.

Two novels that are focusing on the practise and effects of 'sati' have been looked through in the third chapter. The books that have been studied are; *Raise the Lanterns High* by Lakshmi Persaud, *Rich Like Us* by Nayantara Sahgal. Both of these books are about how this traditional practise may influence the lives of women in India. In contrast with the idea behind this custom which is expressing the gratitude of the wife to her husband, it is committed reluctantly by the women. In other words, they are made obligated by the society's

unwritten rules to practice 'sati' which may be regarded as another name for suicide.

In conclusion, it is clear from all these three chapters examining traditions that are related to women, that societies have rules that are placing women to an inferior position. Even though females are not willing to practice them, they are forced to obey the rules of the society they are living in. Lives of many women are being ruined by these which are practiced under the veil of tradition. Something has to be done to put an end to these practises and make the world better for women.



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