A Historicist Study Of Sexism In Shah's Heer Ranjha

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Abstract

This study explores the sexist historicity embedded in the Heer Ranjha myth, examining its evolution from a peripheral religious narrative to a central literary and cultural phenomenon in 16th century Punjab. Tracing the narrative's trajectory from religious references by Hari Das Haria and Bhai Gurdas Bhalla to Bhai Vir Singh's (2000) emphasis on Ranjha's role in religious reform during the challenging 19th century, the research explores the multifaceted nature and cultural impact of the tale. Employing Judith Butler's (1993) theoretical framework, the study analyzes gender dynamics in Waris Shah's text, focusing on the concept of "censure" as a regulating mechanism. Butler's (1993) ideas guide the examination of socially acceptable and undesirable behaviors, revealing insights into the multi-vocality of gendered forms. The research adopts a qualitative content analysis approach, systematically scrutinizing textual excerpts to identify patterns and recurring themes. A comparative element enhances the analysis by examining gender representations in different sections of the text, considering variations in character dynamics, societal contexts, and narrative arcs. Ultimately, this study offers a nuanced and comprehensive exploration of gender dynamics in Shah's text, applying Butler's insights to unravel the complexities of gender enforcement within the literary work.

Keyword: culture, gender, historicism, Punjab, religion, sexism, Waris Shah.

1. Introduction

This study aims to provide an overview of the significance of the Heer Ranjha myth within the cultural and literary landscape of 16th century Punjab. The narrative, deeply rooted in the qissa tradition, initially occupied a peripheral space in the religious and spiritual sphere before transitioning into the literary realm.

During the 1520s–50s, Hari Das Haria and, later, Bhai Gurdas Bhalla in the 1550s–1635, made possible references to the Heer Ranjha myth within the Sikh tradition. It is essential to note that these references are from later manuscripts. In the nineteenth century, a period marked by intense scrutiny of religious practices due to challenges faced by the faith, Singh (2000) played a pivotal role. Singh (2000) referred to Ranjha as the ninth Guru, emphasizing Ranjha's significance in religious reform and the preservation of religious historicity. This period coincided with the Mughal Empire's threat to religious practices, highlighting the critical role played by figures like Ranjha during times of socio-religious challenges.

Beyond the religious context, the Heer Ranjha narrative had various variants predating Shah, showcasing its multifaceted nature and cultural significance. This study probes into the different dimensions of the Heer Ranjha myth, examining its evolution, cultural impact, and varied interpretations across different historical periods. This study explores the rhetorical strategies employed in the discourse surrounding Heer Ranjha, shedding light on its transformation from a peripheral religious narrative to a central literary and cultural phenomenon.

2. Literature Review

The literary exploration of the Heer Ranjha narrative reveals a rich tapestry of cultural and linguistic influences. Deol (2002) highlights that Masnavi Heer Ranjha, crafted by Hayat Jan Baqi Kolabi between 1581 and 1585, stands as the first comprehensive written representation of the narrative. Pritchett's assertion that Persian was the initial language of the qissa in Northern India reinforces the prevalence of Persian in

early renditions of the narrative. Damodar Gulati's Punjabi version, likely published during King Akbar's reign in the late fifteenth century, marked a significant transition from Persian to Punjabi expressions of the story. Ahmad Gujjar and Muqbil swiftly followed with their interpretations, contributing to the evolving linguistic landscape of the qissa.

The Sufi lyrical tradition, predating Shah's influential account in the late eighteenth century, emerges as a key context for understanding the references to Heer Ranjha. Sufi poets such as Shah Hussain, between the 1530s and 1600, and Bulleh Shah, whose kafis held sway over Punjabi culture, incorporated notable references to Har Rachh. Although the literary evidence for these references, dates to the nineteenth century, scholars widely acknowledge the qissa's depiction of love between the protagonists as a sufi metaphor.

Mir's (2010) analysis of Bulleh Shah's kafi underscores the symbolic nature of the lovers' relationship, positing it as an illustration of divine love found in Sufi poetry. This perspective aligns with the belief that the qissa serves as a sufi metaphor, emphasizing the shared objective of connection with the beloved-God between the Sufis and the characters of Heer and Ranjha.

Preceding Shah's rendition, the primary Heer Ranjha manuscripts by Damodar, Ahmad Gujjar, and Muqbil exhibit significant variances. Ahmad Gujjar's portrayal, where Heer's character becomes passive after her parents choose a wealthy suitor, sets it apart from earlier versions. Muqbil's interpretation, delving into core Sufi tenets, is seen as a critique of the Shari'ah. Shackle (2015) asserts that Muqbil's version is a "simpler eighteenth-century version" compared to Shah's more complex rendition.

Shah's narrative introduces notable deviations, particularly in the depiction of the mullah. Shackle (2015) observes a negative portrayal of the mullah in Shah's version, contrasting with Muqbil's favorable representation. The focus on Ranjha's decision to become an ascetic or yogi is intensified in Shah's rendition, highlighting character development and interactions between various characters. While the passionate dialogues

between the lovers constitute less than half of Shah's interpretation, the emphasis on character growth and narrative intricacies takes precedence in Shah's exploration of the Heer Ranjha tale.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts Butler's (1993) theoretical framework to elucidate the functioning of gender within the text, unraveling diverse gender forms and the enforcement of various norms. The utilization of Butler's (1993) key concepts plays a crucial role in this analysis, particularly the concept of "censure" as a focal point (p. 101). Shah, in his portrayal of main characters, employs a dual approach of criticism and praise. This echoes Butler's (1993) argument that socially acceptable behavior is acknowledged with praise, while undesirable conduct is subjected to discipline through what Butler (1993) terms the "police officer metaphor," a mechanism for regulating actions.

The analysis of the study extends to an examination of the characters' way of life, aiming to discern the components that contribute to the creation of a "liveable" environment (p. 102). This involves delving into the diverse behaviors depicted in the narrative and identifying those characterized as conducive to a habitable existence. Through these analytical lenses, this study gains insights into the multitude of voices that characterize gendered forms in Shah's text. Furthermore, the examination of control and censure mechanisms elucidates how these elements restrict the multi-vocality inherent in the text.

To operationalize these theoretical concepts, the study employed a qualitative content analysis approach. Textual excerpts from Shah's work were systematically analyzed, focusing on instances where gendered forms, norms, praise, and censure, are prominent. The goal is to identify patterns and recurring themes that contribute to a nuanced understanding of how gender operates within the narrative. This qualitative approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of the text's complexities, enabling the researcher to draw connections between Butler's (1993) theoretical framework and the specific instances within the literary work.

Furthermore, to enhance the robustness of the analysis, a comparative element will be introduced. This involves examining how gender functions in different sections of the text, considering variations in character dynamics, societal contexts, and narrative arcs. This comparative approach aids in capturing the nuances of gender representation and enforcement throughout the narrative. In a nutshell, this study aims to provide a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of gender dynamics in Shah's text, drawing on Butler's (1993) theoretical insights and applying them to the literary context.

4. Text Analysis

Sexism in Shah's (n.d) Heer Ranjha is manifested through the characters' behavior, personalities, and outward appearances. The book depicts a spectrum of attitudes towards different gender identities, with some being acknowledged and others controlled by diverse individuals who may not always recognize or accept these identities. Shah (n.d) illustrates the varied ways in which gender can be perceived and interpreted through his characters, though not all of these interpretations are considered appropriate. The male and female characters in Shah's work exemplify societal norms that are applied to both sexes.

You are welcome to visit and inquire about our money and land if you desire. The speech from the movie Putt Jattan De (Sons of Farmers) illustrates how important land has always been to Jat men since it shapes their culture. It portrays the instance when the brother of the male protagonist travels to set up his wedding.

In India, Banerjee (2005) argues that due to patriarchy and male supremacy, men tend to perceive masculinity as an unalterable trait. However, the construction of masculinity is shaped by historical, political, and cultural factors. Mrinalini Sinha emphasizes that masculinity is not inherently tied to any specific field. Jackson and Balaji (2014) stress the importance of assessing masculinities within their respective contexts.

As these scholars contend, understanding masculinity in human resources requires situating it within the framework of Shah's (n.d) qissa and recognizing it as a socially constructed concept.

Gill (2011) extends this argument to modern cultural creation, highlighting the integral link between a Jat's status and self-esteem with his land, imprinted on his body through farming employment.

Specifically, the Jat male, driven by the desire for a respectable life, associates his masculinity with ownership of land. Gill (2011) underscores that taking away a farmer's land is perceived as equally grievous as assaulting the women in his family, undermining his sense of manhood. The absence of "patriarchal inheritance of land" compromises the Jat caste's construction of masculinity in the Punjabi setting, shaping the "celebration of Jat caste identity."

Jat masculinity is considered the archetypal example of masculinity in the Punjabi cultural context. Men from other castes are judged based on their ability to uphold this standard, and the Jat becomes a symbol of hegemonic masculinity. Sevea (2010) contends that other caste groups are valued based on their resemblance to Jatts, with the Jat's standards determining their perceived manliness.

Returning to contemporary cinematic depictions, Sevea (2010) agrees with Gill that other caste groups are evaluated based on their similarity to Jatts, following the standard set by the Jat to determine their level of masculinity. The cultural construction of masculinity in the Punjabi context defines the characteristics of a traditional Jat landowner as the benchmark for the quintessential Punjabi male—proud, brave, and willing to take any necessary measures to protect his land and woman.

Sevea (2010) argues that while Jat masculinity is generally perceived in a specific way, it is also subject to deconstruction and alteration both within and outside the Punjab context. He emphasizes that masculinity features portrayed as preferable are not inherently male but culturally constructed. The standards for defining a ‘man’ in the Punjabi context reflect the characteristics associated with the Jatt hero, particularly his capacity for confrontation and aggressive behavior to uphold honor and achieve objectives. Despite this, Sevea (2010) acknowledges the existence of various social norms for male

behavior, indicating that Jat masculinity, while often regarded in a certain way, is not rigid and can be transformed.

Heer's father, Chuchak Siyal, serves as an embodiment of the patriarchal Jat system, as indicated by Gaur (Shah, n.d, p. 192). Chuchak Siyal held a leadership position overseeing five villages, in contrast to Ranjha's late father, who was the chief of only one village (p. 193). Maintaining this elevated status was deemed crucial, and one way to ensure it was by arranging marriages that upheld the same social standing (p. 194). Shah's narrative underscores the significance of land ownership in shaping masculinity. For instance, in a stanza depicting when Ranjha decides to leave his hometown after his older brothers deceive him out of his land, he addresses his in-laws.

> My food is gone, wailed Ranjha. What are you expecting from me? You wasted all of our father's money; you are not my family. Go hang me by the noose if you can, just like Mansoor did. Why are you afraid to declare that you are delighted that I am leaving? Waris asks. (p. 195)

Frances Pritchett suggests that qiss heroes are "nobly born," a description fitting Ranjha. However, after his father's demise, he was unjustly disinherited. As a member of the Jat clan, landownership was integral to Ranjha's identity as a man. Losing his land compelled him to leave Takht Hazara and eventually settle in Heer's hamlet. The loss of his estate led to a decline in Ranjha's social status, evident in their exchanges.

> "My dear in-law sister! Why are you calling now when I have nothing? You first hurt my feelings before coming to provide relief on them. I'm estranged from my brothers; how do I relate to you?" (p. 197).

The deprivation of his estate renders Ranjha weaker and less appealing as a potential suitor. Heer's mother, upon discovering her involvement with him, is incensed as Ranjha, the herder, does not share their social status.

> Sultan, your brother, is worried about your marriage; wait till he learns of this. You've embarrassed your father. Chuchak, why are we spoiling you, anyway?/

> You have disgraced the family and what was acquired by raising you by cutting off our noses. We do not want that servant to herd our buffaloes, so I will give the order for him to go tonight. I'm sorry. Take these jewels away; they are useless. / Oh Waris Shah, this girl wants to have 198 of her limbs amputated.

In the subsequent verse, it is elucidated how Heer's father opts to marry his daughter into the Khera family, a higher-status family with more significant territory, rather than to Ranjha. "We have never wed a Ranjha, and we have never been engaged. They are servants who are on the go and are observing Siyals' girls. All of our brothers have advised that we should wed Kheras" (p. 199).

The conversation highlights the importance of land and authority in their patriarchal society, underscoring the essential requirement for Ranjha to own land to be considered a worthy man within the Jat caste. The socio-economic dynamics of Heer and Ranjha's courtship are heavily influenced by caste and social institutions. According to Judge (1998), caste is considered the most fundamental aspect of Indian society (p. 200). It is crucial to acknowledge that caste prejudice in the Punjab setting differs from Hindu Brahmin Society, primarily focused on purity and pollution, as pointed out by Ronki Ram (2006, p. 201). In Punjab, land ownership translates to power (p. 202). Consequently, Punjab places greater emphasis on land, status, and power than on assessing whether an individual or group meets the criteria for a specific level of purity. This emphasis is evident in the encounters depicted by Shah.

When Heer and Ranjha first meet, she inquiries about his status, identity, and origins, underlining the significance of these factors in their society.

> I'll follow you and ask you to give me your origin story. / Why are you strolling around if someone ejected you from the house? Whom have you abandoned? For whom are you atoning? / What is the name of your father, where are you from, and what caste are you? (p. 203)

For Ranjha to be deemed suitable for marriage, Heer must be aware of the social structure to which they both belong, adhering to specific caste and class criteria. When Heer attempts to convince her father to Heere Ranjha to herd their buffalo, her father is also concerned about Ranjha's rank, family, and background.

> He is a son of which landowner, what is his caste, and is he regarded as educated and smart? What makes him angry with the world, and which saints offer him comfort? / He arrives here with the air of a leader and of being unique. He is the grandson of Jats; what is lacking in him? (p. 204)

Mir (2010) underscores the significance of caste by emphasizing how it fundamentally shapes "everyday experience" (p. 205) Mir (2010) points out that Ranjha is consistently referred to by his caste's name throughout the narrative, highlighting caste as the primary source of tension in the overarching plot (p. 207), showcasing the narrative's "anxiety about social classifications" (p. 208). Mir (2010) contends that one of the primary means of identification in the Heer Waris story is through caste, and the connection between an individual's caste and identity is most closely intertwined in Ranjha's character (p. 209-210). This is evident in "Heer's parents' rejection" of Ranjha due to perceived social status disparities (p. 211). Despite being a Jat by caste, Mir (2010) argues that in the Punjabi context, caste serves as a classification and social ranking system (p. 212). Given the higher social rank of Heer's blood relatives and Ranjha's lower status as a cowherd, the union is rejected (p. 213).

Supporting Mir's (2010) viewpoint, Gaur (1994) contends that the tribal structure was the primary social feature of medieval Punjab, with three villages and three prominent Muslim Jat communities (Siyals, Ranjhas, and Kheras) forming the focus of Heer Waris' complete picture (p. 215). Ranjha falls out of favor in a society dominated by "kin-dominated social relations," (p. 216) as losing his land diminishes Ranjha's status as a zamindar, impacting the political, social, economic, and cultural life of medieval India/Punjab, where land ownership symbolized social authority. Gaur (1994) suggests that Heer's family, being

of Rajput ancestry, holds a higher social status than the neighboring Jat tribes, further illustrating the influence of caste on social relationships (p. 218). In medieval Punjab, governed by customary laws, clan and caste brotherhood (biradari), as Gaur (1994) terms it, plays a crucial role in shaping the social structure (p. 219). According to Gaur (1994), this inter-clan and inter-caste camaraderie is governed by marriage, with individuals lacking the required social standing being rejected as suitors. The caste system evidently played a vital role in shaping the social structure of medieval Punjab.

Anne Murphy supports this perspective, noting that caste-based systems were prevalent in North India during this era, with Waris Shah (n.d) highlighting it as a "vivid feature" of the time. Chuchak Khan, Heer's father and the zamindar of their hamlet, rejected Ranjha, a mere herder, due to his lower social standing. In contrast, Saida Khera, with substantial land ownership, was deemed a more suitable match.

Contrasting with the qissa masculine heroes of the nineteenth century, as identified by Orsini (1992), Ranjha lacks the vitality and vigor associated with them. The renowned protagonist Mirza from the Punjab qissa Mirza Sahibaan, according to Deol (2002), exhibits a strong sense of self-worth and boasts about his prowess, a trait notably absent in Ranjha. Mirza even claims that God fears him. In contrast, Ranjha, as depicted by Shah, lacks the courage to elope with Heer and is presented as a man without ego. Unlike the typical Jat male character, Ranjha does not actively oppose Heer's impending marriage, suggesting a loss of self-worth.

Shackle (2015) identifies 'Jatness' as a quality possessed by Ranjha, along with other bold traits, which enables him to engage in confrontations, fall in love with Heer, and eventually elope. However, Ranjha undergoes significant transformations, transitioning from a desired individual in Takht Hazara to a herder for Heer's family and eventually becoming a yogi. Shackle (2002, 2015) argues that despite Heer's spirited nature, Ranjha possesses inner strength, enabling him to navigate challenges and transitions with emotional fortitude and mental bravery. Shackle (2002, 2015) praises Shah's portrayal of

Ranjha's profound inner power and the significant changes he undergoes throughout the novel.

According to Singh (2000), Ranjha lacks courage entirely (p. 231). Singh (2000) contrasts Ranjha with Heer, attributing qualities of inactivity, immaturity, dependence, timidity, and, at best, pomposity to Ranjha, while describing Heer as articulate, decisive, fearless, and clear-headed. Singh (2000) notes that Ranjha is often labeled as "insane" and "crazy" throughout the book (p. 233), asserting that Ranjha remains stuck in the role of the adorable youngest son of his father, playing the flute and brushing his hair (p. 234). Singh (2000) contends that Ranjha is portrayed as a character who fails to mature, spending most of his time with Heer, avoiding problem resolution, and seeking solace in the miraculous or the five Pirs (p. 236). According to Singh (2000), Ranjha seems to receive everything effortlessly.

While Shackle (2015) and Singh (2000) offer insightful analyses of Ranjha's personality, their arguments have shortcomings. Shackle (2002, 2015) suggests that Ranjha, despite undergoing changes, demonstrates a higher level of resilience. However, Shackle (2015) overlooks the fact that Heer, not Ranjha, was the driving force behind their elopement. Heer deftly planned for Ranjha to pose as a yogi, protected him from her family, Kaido, and the qazi, and arranged for him to become her family's herder.

Shackle (2002, 2015) prematurely praises Ranjha for his resilience, not recognizing that Ranjha always has someone to rely on during changes, as Singh observes. Singh criticizes Ranjha's character, highlighting his lack of success, absence of admirable qualities, and timid nature. Singh argues that Ranjha, despite briefly exhibiting assertiveness when debating the mullah, generally lacks the assertiveness associated with Jat masculinity. Ranjha falls short of being an ideal character due to his lack of accomplishments and ventures, according to Singh (p. 237).

> Oh, please explain what a prayer is and how she was created. ‘How many ears, noses, and people has she been sent for? What age is she, how tall and wide is

> she? How did she come to be? Oh Waris Shah, how many pegs does she have to hang on?' (p. 238)

Ranjha is depicted adopting the roles of religiously orthodox individuals. He openly confronts the mullah, accusing him of immoral conduct and hypocrisy in a community that respects and defers to those adhering to strict religious principles. Ranjha is portrayed with the audacity to question traditional practices and prayers during his dispute with the mullah. His courage to openly challenge religious authorities reveals a bold side to his character, illustrating a lack of respect for authority and a willingness to challenge it. While this bold stance showcases certain aspects of masculinity, it also results in Ranjha offending the religious establishment, leading to his ostracism from the community.

Through the creation of the character Ranjha, Shah (n.d) presents various performances of masculinity. In the context of the story, Ranjha's character possesses traits that don't significantly deviate from those of a conventional man, shedding light on Shah's (n.d) perspective and the gendered forms he ultimately upholds. While Shah (n.d) subverts gender stereotypes by portraying Ranjha differently from the typical macho "Jatness," Ranjha's societal opinions reflect chauvinistic viewpoints, aligning with the patriarchal norms of the time. Shah's criticism of female characters in this manner supports a misogynistic standpoint.

Chapman (2014) defines misogyny as the overt hatred or dislike of women, solely based on their femininity. According to Chapman (2014), misogyny takes various forms, including sexual prejudice, the commodification of women, and both physical and emotional violence, along with the fear of violence. Gilmore (2009) adds complexity to the understanding of misogyny, asserting that it involves profound feelings that men have toward women. In contrast to Chapman, Gilmore (2009) suggests that misogyny is driven by a more intricate set of factors, involving an "inner struggle" leading to constant anxiety, annoyance, and hostility towards the desired object, coupled with moral self-doubt, making the woman an easy and defenseless target for anger. In line with the descriptions

provided by Chapman (2014) and Gilmore (2009), Shah's (n.d) portrayal of Ranjha can be considered sexist.

Shah (n.d) depicts Ranjha as a chauvinistic male who, despite appearing deeply in love with Heer and serving as the story's main "hero," harbors patriarchal ideals. The subsequent instance where Ranjha chooses to disparage Sahiti and women in general serves as an example of his chauvinism and traditional male attitude.

> Women are the adversaries of good, Sahiti, and men are good by deed. You are not up to the same standard as guys, / Women are boats of wickedness, whereas men are ships of goodness'. / They damage the reputation of parents and degrade brothers' honour. They are butchers' axes, cutting into your flesh and bones. / They trim your beard and moustache with barber's scissors. / Give your head, but keep the beloved's, and guard the honour of love. What's troubling you, and what achievements have you made? / Take a look at this girl and her sister-in-law before you argue with an ascetic. / I should hit you in the face with the goodie bags, Waris Shah (p. 266).

Ranjha's persona underscores the belief that men are inherently virtuous while casting women as inherently evil in this verse. He accuses women of tarnishing men's honor and portrays them as perpetrators of immoral conduct. According to him, Sahiti and other women are held to a lower standard compared to him and all males. Given his blatant disdain for women, Ranjha's character is unmistakably engaging in overt sexism, meeting the definition of misogyny as presented by Chapman (2014). He persists in his attacks and provides insulting examples directed at women during his argument with Sahiti. Through this dialogue, Ranjha's character makes it evident that he believes genders should conform to certain stereotypes.

> Man is like a barren tree without justice, and a woman is selfish if she is unfaithful. A dancer without taste is barren, and a man without knowledge is a donkey. / A man is nothing without humanity, and a sword is

> meaningless without the victim. Yoga is pointless without perseverance and prayer, just as life is useless without air. / Food without salt, a lover without beauty, and a youth without bravery are all useless. / An army without pay, a man's beard without virtues, and a beard without respect are all pointless thing. An accountant without accounting, a priest without prayer, and a minister without sense are all useless. Oh Waris, you have no friends among a woman, a fakir, a sword, or a horse (p. 267).

In this dialogue, Shah (n.d) portrays Ranjha as subscribing to specific gender stereotypes. Ranjha is depicted as believing that women, whether they are wives, dancers, or objects of his affection, should possess physical attractiveness and the ability to seduce men; otherwise, they are deemed insufficient. In contrast, Ranjha himself is portrayed as valuing men based on qualities such as wisdom, sense, and intelligence, as if these traits are expected of their gender. This underscores the focus on women's value being primarily tied to their physical attributes. Ranjha goes further to assert that women are a characterless gender, likening them to horses, in his concluding line, further denigrating the character of women.

Shah (n.d) employs verbal abuse and derogatory remarks to depict Ranjha, leading readers to perceive him as having misogynistic inclinations. Sahiti and her friend's (n.d) argument persuasively conveys this perspective. The fact that Ranjha faces no consequences for his actions suggests to the reader that Shah (n.d) does not condemn such behavior when establishing the principles within his book.

> He struck both of them between five and seven times. They tore their blouses, pulled their cheeks, and then beat their breasts crimson. They were thrown about the yard after being grabbed by their braids. They gave them a few on the neck while pinching and scratching their checks. Beat their behinds with a stick, just like a performer would a bear. Holding them by their ankles and making them dance like monkeys while begging from within, "For God's sake Jogi Stop" (p. 268).

Ranjha is accused of engaging in sexual harassment and physically assaulting Sahiti and her friend (n.d). This treatment of women unmistakably reflects a patriarchal viewpoint. In this heated conversation with Ranjha, Shah not only exhibits patriarchal and chauvinistic ideas but also employs the persona of Ranjha to reinforce those values by subjecting Sahiti and her friend (n.d) to vicious beatings.

Shah (n.d) portrays Sahiti as aggressive and rebellious, but Singh (2000) correctly claims Shah causes the woman to fall to her knees, admitting Ranjha's dominance and feeling guilt for her actions at the end of their protracted argument (p. 269). Shah (n.d) has chosen the female character in his story to admit loss to the male, showing that no matter how assertive the female may be, the male will always prevail. The story presented by Shah (n.d) seems to depict a setting When little boys would normally be expected to be loud, tiny girls are more likely to be encouraged to be quiet and not make a disturbance (p. 270).

> I now recognise you as a genuine Pir; you have my heart and soul, and I have trust in the wonders you have performed to win us over. Sahiti folds her hands in front of you and acknowledges that she is a true disciple of yours. You own all I possess, especially Heer and all of my friends. I have never paid attention to anyone else. Waris Shah, who will never be able to repay you, and I have given up on the rest since we can never compare to your immense love, which has left us speechless (p. 271).

Even Ranjha does not escape Shah's (n.d) wrathful and derogatory remarks directed at Heer. Shah (n.d) denigrates both Heer and women in general, in addition to Sahiti. Gilmore's assertion that tension and frustration can lead to aggressiveness towards the object of desire finds support in these insults aimed at Heer. Ranjha's overt aggression towards Heer, evident in his abusive language directed at her and her sister-in-law Sahiti in the following paragraphs, is a clear manifestation of his apparent frustration at his inability to establish a connection with Heer.

Who or what are you stirring? What are you planning to do to me?

> You believe that you are on par with males, what makes you so special? When you sisters-in-law have each other, I have only God. Whoever acts righteously in God's name will receive rewards in the hereafter. Oh Waris who do terrible actions, their future is bad (p. 272).

Men's countenances radiate virtue, while women's faces purportedly reflect wickedness. What purpose do women serve when men are capable, educated, and intelligent?

Men are portrayed as rational beings, cognizant of contentment, and they maintain stability when accomplished. Conversely, women are depicted as cunning, deceitful, and shrewd, lacking moral integrity. The text suggests that men in their basic attire are considered honorable, while women adorned in silk garments are deemed vile. Shah, the analogy drawn implies that women are akin to dried fruits, while men are likened to exotic fruits (p. 273).

Shah's (n.d) portrayal of Ranjha in the narrative establishes women as evil, cunning, and hateful, while men are depicted as good, decent, and intellectual. This distinction is pronounced throughout the work, where despite Ranjha's numerous flaws, he is not shown to have any defects, and Shah refrains from having Heer label Ranjha as malevolent or cunning.

However, Shah (n.d) chooses to passively witness Ranjha's verbal assaults on women, including charging Heer with being unfaithful and uncommitted. This portrayal prompts readers to question Shah's values, as the constant insults directed at women in Ranjha are both excessive and one-sided. As Singh notes, Shah frequently associates females with terms like "deceit" and "fraud," a characterization not applied to Ranjha or male characters. This association of unfavorable traits appears reserved for women.

Shah (n.d) denies Heer any chance of escape when it comes to saving herself, and Ranjha harbors resentment towards her for marrying Saida after rejecting his proposal to elope.

Significantly, Ranjha is conveniently absolved of all accountability in this circumstance. Heer, despite her efforts to reconcile them, is punished, while Ranjha calmly accepts his destiny.

> Oh Heer, if you elope, there is no joy in love. I have heard numerous stories about how this causes major difficulties. I was duped into herding buffaloes by you; these are women who act dishonestly. Oh Waris Shah, the jewelers can spot fakes from real ones.

5. Conclusion

According to Singh (2000), Shah's patriarchal bias frequently manifests in the omniscient narrator's voice, while highlighting that Waris himself is as persuasive in criticizing women as Ranjha is. The verses above support Singh's judgment, as all the drawbacks and challenges encountered by Heer and Ranjha in their relationship are attributed to Heer's inadequacies, with Ranjha never being held accountable for his deeds. However, misogyny is present in other Sufi texts as well, and Shah's Heer is not unique in this aspect. According to Behl's (2012) discussion of ascetic Sufi narratives, a man's ability to progress in his ascetic quest is facilitated by the central role of the eroticized feminine body, as it serves as an exciting and beautiful catalyst to pull him out of himself. Women were viewed as vehicles for ideologues in Sufi narratives, enabling men to develop in their spiritual philosophy. Behl (2012) emphasizes that such poetry reveals a pervasive cultural misogyny, where the sexy bodies of women lead the seeker away from himself and onto the path to God, ultimately resulting in the women being sacrificed in the destruction of the story's cosmos. Therefore, misogynistic traits existed in Sufi stories before Shah penned Heer. However, there is a distinction between how women are portrayed in Shah's Heer and how they are utilized in earlier Sufi narratives like the Prem-khyn, where they serve as a tool for spiritual journeying, as described by Behl (2012). In Heer, both the female gender and their characters are more frequently targeted.

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