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Interdisciplinary  
Development  
Research and  
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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Tezhib (تنزيب) an Arab artform prominently used in the decorative border details on the pages of the Qur'an. The word literally means 'to gild' or 'to illuminate'. It denotes the association between beautification and knowledge. So, where one seeks knowledge, they also seek to beautify the soul through the process.

Tezhib Undergraduate Research Journal was founded in 2018 with the vision of making a diverse set of knowledges and intellectual thought more accessible. In its second volume, the journal serves as a platform for undergraduate students from various disciplinary backgrounds to publish their academic and research work. Tezhib Volume II expanded its scope and the opportunities available for students by welcoming submissions from undergraduate universities all across Pakistan as well as from abroad. In keeping with Tezhib's commitment to holistic, interdisciplinary knowledge, the published papers range from but are not confined to the areas of feminist literary analysis, philosophical thought, art history, network analysis, and the impact of Covid-19.

The articles published in this volume have gone through a rigorous selection and review process and are a product of continuous coordination between the editors and authors. We hope that following best publication practices, the Journal will proceed with publishing exceptional research and academic papers by undergraduate students in the years to come. In the past year, in addition to the journal, the team was able to introduce a number of projects under Tezhib, including the launch of its photojournalism section, Tasawwur, a podcast series, blog submissions and more.

We would like to acknowledge the dedicated efforts of our team to which we owe the publication of Tezhib Volume II. First and foremost, we thank our associate editors and content reviewers for their diligence in their tasks. We thank our design, outreach, and IT

team sustained hard work towards the promotion of the journal on a number of platforms. We thank our patron, Dr. Noman Baig for presiding over the pre-publication process, and our faculty advisory board for assisting us in the institutional networking and advertising the call for submissions in various universities and research centers in the country. The publication of this edition owes particularly to Dr. Massimo Ramaioli whose administrative support, and advice, really helped the journal thrive. And finally, we extend our gratitude to all those who submitted their work for consideration.

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## FEMINISM VERSUS CULTURAL RELATIVISM: IS THERE A UNIVERSAL MUSLIM WOMAN IN NEED OF SAVING?

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### Abstract

This paper attempts to apply a culturally-relativist lens to the question of whether or not a homogenous identity of 'the Muslim woman' exists. In doing so, it explores the various constructions of woman-centric identities, as per either First World feminism, or the idea of 'the Muslim woman' according to constructions predominantly stemming from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Within a modern context, these constructions are often pitted against one another, and fuel debates regarding the empowerment, agency, protection, and lives of the women in question. This paper posits the argument that a singular, definitive, or homogenizing identity of 'the Muslim woman' can neither exist, nor be fairly and universally representative.

Keywords: *feminism, cultural relativism, political Islam, Muslim women, identity constructions.*





## **Introduction**

In her work titled *Feminism and Islamic Feminism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (1999), Moghissi articulates the extent to which women residing in Islamist regimes often face a disproportionate degree of oppression and brutality. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on regimes referred to as Islamist within the Middle-Eastern and North African region. These are ones wherein the social and economic ramifications of politicized religion, espoused by the state, are noticeably experienced. According to Moghissi, women under such regimes are caught between the crosshairs of the modernist debate between secularism and religious fundamentalism (Moghissi, 1999). Within the context of the twentieth-century shift toward heavily-fractured identity constructions, a globally consumer-driven society, and a general tone of relativism, long-sustained ideological movements—such as political Islam—have arguably struggled to maintain legitimacy and principal authority over the challenge of representation. This paper assesses the extent to which Western, secular feminism has established a hegemonic perspective on its subject, ‘the woman’. In addition to this, it analyzes the attitude of modern Western Feminism’s hegemonic interpretive apparatus towards Islamic feminism within contemporary society. In doing so, this paper interrogates whether such a concept is valid and authentic. As an extension of this argument, it challenges the ideological basis of a feminist movement which strives for the eradication of a globally-hegemonic patriarchy. Could such a movement manage to span uniformly across different cultures, identities, and modalities?

## **First World Constructions of ‘The Woman’**

It is crucial to pose here the question whether the ‘universal woman’, or otherwise the notion of a singular, globally-encompassing identity of the Muslim woman, carries a specific implication. The representation of a particular ‘self’, involves a relational ‘other’ against which to contrast this ‘self’. This is arguably necessary not only in terms of defining the self, but also as a principal point around which to comparatively campaign and advocate for the subject. Here, the subject would manifest as ‘the woman’, against the relational ‘other’, ‘the man’. In feminist discourse, and here I particularly refer to Western feminist discourse, there is an emphasis on criticizing numerable institutions, power structures, and social relations which enable man to navigate the modern age and world in a manner

inherently different—and arguably more privileged—than the woman. The question however, remains, of the validity of the singular, monolithic woman who is the site of patriarchal oppression.

The challenge of relativity must be approached with caution. How can the very parameters of morality and human rights be clearly defined and situated within such a thoroughly information-saturated global society? With the development of innumerable identity formations, subjective discourses, and improved means through which individuals are permitted to express and elucidate their lived experiences, the presumably ‘clear’ demarcations of what constitutes liberated and un-liberated women become a matter of debate/contention.

Perhaps Cooke (2002) encapsulates this concern most aptly with her perspective on the subject of women and cultural relativism. According to Cooke, the myth of the illiterate, oppressed, and hapless ‘exotic’ woman in dire need of the corrective and modernizing application of the West can be traced to colonial occupation, related practices and reforms. As Cooke argues, the decision of the colonizing British Raj to condemn and criminalize the Hindu ritualistic act of suttee in 1829 proved to be reflective of a wider discourse or understanding of the ‘regressive’ Third World, and its many social, cultural, and religious adoptions (Cooke, 2002). Regarding the aforementioned ‘woman’, it is important to acknowledge how this subject was constructed, in that it perceived the oppression of women within the Third World as a monolithic attack against a homogenous ideal of womanhood.

Indeed, even years on, the prevalence of this monolithic construction of the universal woman by First World feminists prevails. The sharp decline in popularity that the Afghanistan’s Taliban government experienced by 1996 coincided with a general rise in the First World’s perception of such culturally and religiously grounded symbols as the burqa, as encroachments and brutalities against ‘the woman’. Consequently, Cooke states that the Afghan woman’s burqa evolved into becoming emblematic of the ‘gendered logic’ of the neo-colonialist narrative (Cooke, 2002). Therefore, the veil was no longer an expression of the Afghan woman’s personal agency fit to her socio-religious context, but rather, a rallying-point for the feminist movement in the First World to emancipate the Third World woman from the impositions of the veil, and as such, launch a neo-colonialist ‘civilizing mission’ within the Third World. As a direct consequence of such politico-militant strategies adopting the socially-conscious facet of ‘women’s empowerment’, the women requiring any degree of rescuing would be granted

their ‘inalienable human rights’, liberty, emancipation, and access to modern-existence predominantly through Western education (Cooke, 2002).

It is worth noting here, however, that the solitary inclusion of Muslim women residing within Islamist regimes, as opposed to Muslim women and men, remains reminiscent of the 1829 condemnation of the suttee ritual; ‘the woman’, despite her preference, authority, context, or condition requires indisputable saving and protection. It therefore stands that the socio-political conditions and constructions which dictated the banning of suttee in 1829 would continue to find leverage and relevance in more recent events; the self-appointed purveyors of First World feminism—and the woman, as an extension—can pick and choose any symbolic act or deed to rally against, regardless of the unique cultural and historical forces which produce it within a given context.

Cooke’s analysis is entirely valid and reasonable within the context of neo-colonialism, and the First World feminist movement’s significant usage of gendered logic. However, when assessing the issue of cultural relativism, this analysis arguably only produces a one-dimensional construction of the ongoing crisis of multiculturalism, in that it fails to adequately take cultural relativism into account. Here, the essay will reference Moghissi’s analysis on the subject matter which has been discussed previously, in order to illustrate the extent to which the debate over cultural relativism presents itself as the metaphorical double-edged sword.

## **A Muslim Woman?**

As per Moghissi’s argument, the postmodern movement’s interpretation of ‘the woman’—either as an entity existing within a specific cultural, historical context which must be respected and cautiously acknowledged, or, as Cooke has expounded, the Third World woman in prompt need of literacy and recovery—remains problematic in its homogenous singularity. Moghissi stresses the need to approach the issue of women existing or functioning within and under Islamist regimes as dialectically as possible (Moghissi, 1999). This would involve an acknowledgement of the negating and opposing forces or subjects at play within this wider discourse, that further fuel meaning to one another through the simple process of contradiction. A dialectical approach is perhaps one which Cooke

would also veer toward. However, Cooke and Moghissi primarily differ in their examination of the modern tension between First World feminism, and the question of women residing under Islamist regimes. For the former, relativism creates a specific power dynamic and rhetoric within the arena of international politics and affairs, pitting one culture's 'barbarity' against the other's 'reason' (Cooke, 2002). For the latter, a postmodern perspective on the subject would adopt a converse vein of reasoning. In its attempts to civilly engage with the multi-layered issue of multiculturalism, a culturally-relativist approach toward feminism and Middle Eastern women might systematically alienate, exclude, and 'other' the lived experiences of a Muslim woman (Moghissi, 1999).

Granted the two authors illustrate the question of cultural relativism through uniquely dissimilar lenses, however, Cooke and Moghissi's arguments situate a common ground and understanding in their exploration of the Muslim woman's identity. Here, it is important to note that both authors would argue against the construction of a homogenous Muslim identity, specifically one which fails to acknowledge, and hence ultimately eradicates, the very regional, cultural, and socio-economic differences which impact their everyday interactions and conditions as Muslim women living under Islamist regimes (Cooke, 2002; Moghissi, 1999).

To add further depth to Moghissi's perspective, Phillipson (2003) presents the exact profundity of the broader debate on the homogeneity of the Muslim woman's identity. According to her, feminism—specifically with regards to the 'sisters' residing within the Third World—must be critically approached, adopting a distinctly dialectical and intersectional tone (Phillipson, 2003). Such arguments are also ultimately crucial in understanding the sheer degree of variegation and difference which occurs between and amongst the women residing within such cultures and orders. The consistent narrative maintenance of the universal woman inevitably disregards for instance, how socio-economic differences and dynamics might result in unequal associations and relations between two women residing under a single Islamist regime.

Where Phillipson and Moghissi jointly concede to the power of subjective experience, this essay further employs Moghissi's reasoning in order to elaborate upon the writer's theorizations on the dialectical experience of the Muslim woman. For Moghissi, the measured creation of the homogenous, universal Muslim woman is rooted within a range of socially, culturally, economically, politically,

and historically bound processes (Moghissi, 1999). Moghissi expounds upon the variegated nature of the Muslim identity. She maintains that Middle Eastern women represented within a sizable majority of postmodern, academic writing are inadequately illustrated. Such women, similar to the women residing within a range of Islamist regimes, are not bound by a singular 'Islamic' meta-culture. In fact, even the politics and policies which dictate the everyday living vary from one Islamist regime to the next (Moghissi, 1999).

It is at this point where Moghissi's arguments begin to seamlessly connect with those placed forward by Volpp in *Feminism Versus Multiculturalism* (2001). As Moghissi argues, the contentiously-labelled neo-Orientalist motivations of most advocates of postmodern cultural relativism are not unlike the Orientalist portrayals presented by the imperialists of the late-eighteenth century. Whether one opts to label Islam as a religion of abject cruelty and inhumanity, or otherwise laud it as the flexible, progressive religion compatible with modern-day feminism, both ends of the spectrum—as this essay has maintained—fail to take into account the actual spaces the Muslim women in question occupy alongside their individual, dialectically-formed conclusions on the issue of feminist representation itself (Moghissi, 1999).

Of particular note is that Volpp and Cooke agree on the issue of the First World's perspective of women which seemingly require protection and empowerment. Volpp maintains how an overarching Western strand of the feminist movement, which consequently might not be as intersectional as the likes of Phillipson would hope for it to be, tends to handle the Third World (alongside an array of minority cultures and ethnic identities) as intrinsically inferior, and imperatively requiring the corrective application of postmodern influences, such as consumerism, or access to 'liberal education' and discourse (Volpp, 2001). Such articulations are reminiscent of Cooke's understanding of the First World's 'gendered logic' of emancipating oppressed women hailing from minority-ethnic or racial backgrounds through Western education and literacy (Cooke, 2002). Volpp additionally expounds on how certain factors, such as racial heritage, result in a disproportionate degree of challenge, oppression, and hindrance which women residing within the same Islamist regime have to grapple with, similar to Moghissi's arguments on the reasons about why such instances must be approached dialectically (Volpp, 2001; Moghissi, 1999).

## Negating the ‘Other’

The articulations of both Volpp and Butler (2015) are crucial in establishing this argument. Volpp maintains a stance against the reductive and restrictive binaries of pitting one homogenous half, the woman, against the other, i.e., the man, without taking systematic, structural, and symbolic forces into account when approaching the subject of First World feminism (Volpp, 2001). To add to this point, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler aims to elucidate the limitations of postmodern feminism, specifically with its insistence upon the existence of a universally-dominant patriarchy. For Butler, not only is the narrative and discursive construction of ‘the woman’ as a subject entirely paradoxical, in that this formation takes place within the vacuum of the ‘other’, what is also paradoxical is the definition of ‘the woman’ as a subject requiring the movement’s representational efforts in empowerment. Interestingly, this advocacy takes place within the very institutional structures the movement aims to ultimately dismantle and reorganize (Butler, 2015). Therefore, a number of authors have maintained the arguably weak foundational premise of this ideological movement, specifically if it fails to acknowledge the depth of intersectionality which remains an intrinsic segment of the lived experience of any woman residing under an Islamist regime.

Perhaps Abu-Lughod’s ethnographic, intersectional analysis of Muslim women and a dominant strand of Western feminism is apt in its detailing of the Muslim woman not requiring the emancipation which is their apparent humane right. Abu-Lughod approaches her text dialectically, detailing the range of bureaucratic structures, organizations, and broader discourses which construct the Muslim woman through rather sweeping generalizations and sensationalism. While Abu-Lughod concedes that women residing under Islamist militant regimes face considerable adversity and challenge, the image and representation of the Muslim woman requiring immediate assistance is, to an arguable extent, entirely misleading (Abu-Lughod, 2013). Such arguments mirror those of Cooke (2002), who maintains that an array of political, social, economic, and legal considerations and implications dictate the experience of the Muslim woman, as opposed to her geo-political position alone.

As has been mentioned at an earlier point in this essay, the current-day analysis of the Muslim woman’s identity—and her subsequent position and role as a possible

subject of the feminist movement—is intimately connected to her identity as a consumerist. As Mishra observes, publications and media based out of the First World tend to connect the emancipation of the oppressed Muslim woman with her ability to consume commodities, specifically in terms of lifestyle and fashion (Mishra, 2018). This is broadly a result of the modern intimate association with a capitalist economy, and the perception of the Muslim woman living under militant rule as one being unable to engage with consumerist structures and mediums freely. However Moghissi would arguably label this a neo-Orientalist attempt, either conscious or otherwise, to alienate the Muslim woman in question. Similarly, such postmodern discourse is often misguided in its attempts to construct a comprehensible, singular understanding of the Muslim woman to possibly empower and protect. Conversely, the cultural relativism (which just so happens to remain as a byproduct of a similar postmodern movement and era) often fails to acknowledge the genuine concerns of the women existing within legitimately oppressive regimes and structures. However, perhaps even cultural relativism cannot resist the lure of constructing the singular, homogenous Muslim woman.

## **Moving Forward: Is there a ‘Muslim woman’ in need of saving?**

The longstanding debate of a Western, non-intersectional strand of feminism, against the postmodern tendency of adopting a culturally-relativist approach, as this essay has attempted to prove, possesses an equal number of unstable, fallacious, and universally inapplicable arguments. As Moghissi maintains, perhaps the plight and condition of the Muslim woman under an Islamist regime must be approached dialectically. Abu-Lughod might go so far as to argue that such an approach might determine whether such a woman exists within a state of plight or not. Indeed, both movements largely fail to cater to the very women they claim to solely represent and advocate for, despite arguably existing at two ends of an ideological spectrum of sorts. However, both cases exhibit a similar tendency to construct an erroneous, inauthentic identity of ‘the Muslim woman’, and often one which needs to be pitted against a similarly-homogenous ‘other’— a process, this paper has argued, which presents a range of paradoxical hindrances. However, one conclusion this paper can confidently reach concerns the question of the universal woman in need of saving; she may not exist, but women do require

saving, and perhaps they can dialectically understand themselves and their own to arrange this rescue themselves.



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THE FAILED EXPECTATIONS OF BERTHA MASON  
AND MISS HAVISHAM:  
REPRESSION AND MADNESS IN VICTORIAN SOCIETY

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## Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between madness and femininity in the Victorian Era as depicted in the novels, *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre*. In nineteenth century Britain, any sign of deviance from societal norms by women was received as an indication of insanity. Changes in the female hormone cycle were misconceived as manifestations of insanity and consequently, many restrictions were imposed on feminine expression in Victorian society. Miss Havisham's and Bertha Mason's characters in *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre* respectively, are representations of the intertwined elements of madness and femininity. They reflect the repression that women had to endure under the sociocultural context of the time. This can be observed through their unsuccessful marriage prospects and their symbolic confinement to limited spaces. The imagery associated with these characters is also suggestive of the fear and destruction that was linked with deviant women. "Deviant", here, refers to those who deviated from feminine ideals of the Victorian era. The study of these characters allows a glimpse of the constraining social norms that were a regular part of women's lives in the Victorian era.

**Keywords:** *deviance, femininity, insanity, social norms*



## Introduction

It may be argued that one of the most distinctive elements of Victorian fiction is the prevalence of the ‘madwoman’. Found in many notable works of fiction, the madwoman has an ominous presence that often eludes readers. While some novels include themes of madness through subtle depictions of hysteria, others present more deliberately fashioned insane female characters. Both such manifestations of femininity and madness can be observed in Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Dickens’ character, Miss Havisham, is a wealthy recluse who refuses to change out of her wedding dress since the day she was jilted at the altar. Miss Havisham’s only satisfaction seems to come from humiliating young boys which she does vicariously through her ward, Estella. In the novel *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason is the infamous madwoman, who is of Creole origins and the wife of Mr. Rochester. Discussions of insanity in nineteenth century novels would likely be incomplete without mentions of Bertha. Having been born in the West Indies, Bertha’s ethnicity is another source of her otherization. The darkness of her skin is highlighted numerous times in the novel and her racial identity is seen as a contributor to her dangerous and threatening behavior. Throughout the novel, Bertha remains locked up on the third floor of Rochester’s house, Thornfield Hall. He asserts that this is a necessary measure since insanity runs in Bertha’s family, as is reflected through her violent outbursts.

Extensive analysis of these characters allows for several commonalities to emerge that help develop an understanding of portrayals of insanity in Victorian fiction. Though outwardly quite dissimilar, both characters exemplify the societal limitations surrounding the female role in the nineteenth century. Examining these characters from a critical lens reveals deeper insights into the systematic subjugation of Victorian women. This paper endeavors to examine how the characters of these madwomen—Bertha Mason and Miss Havisham—represent patriarchal forces of repression in Victorian society through their failed marriages, physical confinement, and their destructive nature. Each of these aspects will be analyzed subsequent to creating an understanding of female insanity in the Victorian era. In the analysis of these characters, madness is perceived as deviance from socially accepted ideals of femininity which manifests in tandem with the repression they suffer.

## Female Insanity in the Victorian Era

In order to fully understand these characters, it is crucial to first contextualize the system that mandated their existence as madwomen. In *The Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter (1985) details how cultural attitudes towards the female identity impacted ideas about insanity. She highlights that Victorian asylums housed a vast majority of female patients, whereas, almost all the superintendents charged with the care and treatment of these women were males (Showalter, 1985). The psychiatric profession was dominated by male practitioners who attributed this disparity to women's anatomy. It was believed that the female reproductive system predisposed women to mental catastrophe and insanity was "an unfortunate product of women's nature" (Showalter, 1985, p. 59). Showalter draws attention to the gaps in psychiatric discourse of that time. There is a gaping absence of the female voice from the perspectives of doctors as well as patients (Showalter, 1985). To bridge this gap, she suggests turning to novels and women's diaries which offer much richer and more resourceful narratives as opposed to the accounts of male professionals. Women's accounts present female insanity in the context of prevailing social conditions and identify it as a consequence of the constrictions imposed upon Victorian women (Showalter, 1985). Showalter suggests that, rather than the reproductive system, "mental atrophy and moral starvation" were the actual causes of hormonal behavior, that was misconstrued as insanity (1985, p. 62). It is, hence, a warranted assumption that madwomen appear so frequently in Victorian fiction because authors were greatly influenced by the societal perceptions of female insanity of the time. Their work reflects the effects of these ideas on women's lives.

Dickens was influenced by his visit to St. Luke's Hospital where he was astonished by the number of female patients. He provides vivid accounts of his interactions with the female inmates in *A Curious Dance Round a Curious Tree* (Showalter, 1985). Similarly, Brontë abhorred the effects of solitary confinement she witnessed during her visits to asylums and prisons. Her experiences are likely to have shaped her ideas regarding perceptions of female insanity that are represented in works like *Villette* and *Jane Eyre* (Showalter, 1985). Having established the position of women in the Victorian era, during which these novels were written, a more comprehensive analysis of the madwomen characters becomes possible.

## Failed Marriages

For both of these characters, much like most Victorian women, marriage is a focal point in their narratives. Miss Havisham is described to love Compeyson with “all the susceptibility she possessed” (Dickens, 2002, p. 179). It is clear that her feelings for Compeyson have brought her to her most vulnerable state and this has given him exercisable power over her. When she is abandoned at the altar, it becomes clear that Compeyson only valued her for her financial status. Miss Havisham’s identity is closely tied with her inheritance for most of her life. Herbert, her nephew, confirms this when he proclaims, “Miss Havisham was now an heiress and... looked after as a great match” (Dickens, 2002, p. 178). Especially from a marital perspective, Miss Havisham is merely an object in a marketplace, who is regarded for her monetary value. It can be conjectured that Miss Havisham’s trauma stems, in part, from the realization that her worth and identity are contrived from something as superficial as her wealth. Regarding wealth as identity for Victorian women, Raphael, in her paper *A Re-Vision of Miss Havisham: Her Expectations and Our Responses* (1989), comments, “the system... limits the ability of those not powerful enough to find a secure niche... subordinate to their profit and exchange value” (p. 403). Moreover, as an upper-class woman who has never had to be concerned with finances due to her inheritance, Miss Havisham is pampered and unprepared to face the practicalities of life (Raphael, 1989). Her failed alliance with Compeyson comes with the startling realization that her self-worth is limited to her financial status alone and this continues to haunt her for the rest of her life. The passions and desire Miss Havisham had prior to this event remain unsatiated and transform into rage. She spends the remainder of her life repressing her unmet desires. For Miss Havisham, a fall from grace coincided with a broken marriage and consequently, the stain of scandal inhibits her qualification for the female ideal. Perhaps Showalter’s (1985) analysis holds true for Miss Havisham when she remarks, “women who reject sexuality and marriage (the two were synonymous for Victorian women) are muted or even driven mad by social disapproval” (p. 63).

Bertha Mason’s marriage poses a similar predicament. In agreement with his family’s wishes, Rochester seeks only wealth from his alliance with Bertha, thus ascribing to her a monetary value, just as was done to Miss Havisham. Additionally, prior to the marriage, Rochester objectifies Bertha and refers to her beauty as if, it is the sole reason behind his desire to marry her. Throughout

Rochester's account of Bertha, her wealth and beauty are all that define her identity. Brontë demonstrates how the woman is seen to be of no additional value above her superficial attributes. Once the marriage is complete and Rochester has acquired the much-coveted wealth, Bertha gradually becomes undesirable to him. He cites her Creole origins and her expression of sexuality as a cause of revulsion. From being the "boast of Spanish Town," Bertha is soon transformed into an "impure, depraved" creature of "pigmy intellect" (Brontë, 2000, p. 261). Her racial difference and her lasciviousness do not conform to the pure Victorian female ideal. Bertha fails to live up to the traditional feminine role and is immediately ostracized by Rochester. Valerie Beattie, author of "The Mystery at Thornfield: Representations of Madness in *Jane Eyre*" states that through Bertha, "the problematic conventions of Victorian romantic courtship and the misogynist prison-like conditions of patriarchal marriages" are exposed (1996, p. 499). Glimpses into the courtships of both Bertha and Miss Havisham disclose their subjugated position in these relationships as well as the many norms of acceptability and desirability that they must meet. Any mark of deviance in either character results in severe consequences, otherization and perhaps the onset of "madness".

## Physical Confinement

Another common point between Miss Havisham and Bertha is their confinement to a single space, throughout the novels. Miss Havisham's abode, Satis House, was "dismal, and had a great many iron bars to it. Some of the windows had been walled up... all the lower were rustily barred... a court-yard in front, and that was barred" (Dickens, 2002, p. 54). Dickens' description of Satis House matching a prison could imply the state of its resident being similar to that of a prisoner. Unquestionably, Miss Havisham spends her life like one. The significance of this is twofold. Literally, Miss Havisham is shutting herself in and disconnecting from the rest of the world. Metaphorically, this could represent both her otherization from society and her state of mind. By being confined to a single space, Miss Havisham is excluded from society. Raphael (1989) suggests that if Miss Havisham did not exercise financial independence, she would have been cast into an asylum. Such a fate is not surprising for Victorian women who behave as Miss Havisham does. Moreover, isolating herself on her own volition indicates that Miss Havisham is mentally trapped. Her wedding gown and the remnants of the wedding feast that

she does not part with, force her to experience her trauma in a repeated, cyclical manner. She is stuck in her past and cannot escape that one life-altering event—her broken engagement. Clearly, the humiliation she experienced has changed the course of her life permanently. Her confinement, likewise, reflects her exclusion from society, that Victorian women would have experienced in consequence of any scandal in their courtships.

On the other hand, Bertha experiences a much different form of confinement. She resides in a room on the third floor, locked away. Her confinement, unlike Miss Havisham's, is not self-imposed. She is cast away by her husband on account of her insanity. Whether Bertha's insanity was pre-existing or is a consequence of this abuse is unclear and leaves room for various interpretations. Regardless, the conditions in which she is kept are wretched and inhumane. She is left to the care of Grace Poole of Grimsby retreat—an asylum—whose habit of excessive drinking demonstrates her inadequacy for the role. Quite like Miss Havisham, Bertha is as good as an institutionalized patient while residing in her own home. Only, Bertha does not choose this fate for herself, it is decided by society. Whether they voluntarily opt for confinement or not, confinement seems to be the ultimate end for the aberrant Victorian woman. However, interestingly, Bertha breaks free from her confinement on numerous occasions. Beattie believes this carries metaphorical significance and is an analogy for society's view of rebellious women, "at once active and passive, dangerous and containable, meaningful and meaningless" (1996, p. 496). She also remarks that in this way, Brontë protests the practice of disciplining women through confinement (Beattie, 1996, p. 495). In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar (2000) suggest that the third floor symbolizes the parts of the world that shut women out, "Heavily enigmatic, ancestral relics wall her in; inexplicable locked rooms guard a secret which may have something to do with her; distant vistas promise an inaccessible but enviable life" (p. 348). Analysis of Miss Havisham's and Bertha Mason's characters provides a nuanced view of the limitations imposed upon women in the nineteenth century. Their diminished participation in society and physical entrapment indicate how the forces of a patriarchal society have worked against them.

## **Destructive Imagery**

Analyzing the use of imagery in the novels will help us further

understand their representation of madness. Beattie (1996) explains that in Victorian times, appearance and physiognomy was taken as an extension of a person's character. These beliefs also permeate the representations of fictional characters and provide insight into the characters' natures. In light of this, it is evident that imagery used to describe both Bertha's and Miss Havisham's physical appearances do not emanate positive characteristics. Miss Havisham is "corpse-like" and deemed similar to "waxwork and skeleton" (Dickens, 2002, p. 57). Her appearance seems to have withered quite like her yellowed wedding ensemble. Not only is Miss Havisham dehumanized through her physical description, but Pip as the narrator as well as the critic deems her the villain. In his first encounter with Miss Havisham, Pip remarks that the sight of her makes him want to cry (Dickens, 2002). Even after she has sought his forgiveness for her cruelty, he catches himself morbidly fantasizing that she might die "hanging to the beam" (Dickens, 2002, p. 396). Her vindictive streak in raising Estella to humiliate men, perhaps, makes her quite culpable. Yet, taking this act of vengeance at face-value is an insensitive reading of Miss Havisham; it ignores Miss Havisham's plight as a woman suffering from trauma. Her entire life is structured around one event and her actions are entirely dictated by it. Her mad rage evokes no sympathy and only earns her the title of villain. In fact, Raphael (1989) posits that her rationale for seeking vengeance is that "it is only through dehumanizing and often brutal deceit and abuse that desire can be satisfied" (p. 410). It is unclear whether Dickens intends for Miss Havisham to be seen as a sinister figure or means to draw attention to society's unforgiving judgement of her. In either case, it is unjust to reach a verdict without paying heed to her condition.

When it comes to Bertha, the descriptions of her appearance are far more grotesque. She is a "vampire," (p. 242) "a beast," (p. 250) and a "hyena," (p. 250), capable of sucking blood and draining the heart. It is almost unfathomable that a woman known for her beauty so rapidly



takes on these unhuman forms. Rochester admits to desiring her as long as she was a docile, unmarried woman. However, as soon as they are married, he is revolted by her “unreasonable temper, or the vexations of her absurd, contradictory, exacting orders” (p. 261). When Rochester discovers her self-willed nature, he no longer sees Bertha as the beautiful woman that he coveted. She deviates from the feminine ideal and this causes her to immediately be labelled an animal. Moreover, there is repeated emphasis on the darkness of her features and how that adds to her monstrous appearance. This goes to show that her race is also a contributing aspect in her dehumanization. It is also worth noting that Bertha, despite her madness and monstrosity, does not harm Jane, the governess of Thornfield Hall and the love interest of Mr. Rochester. Her violence is always directed at Rochester and her brother Mason. Though she is painted as a threat, Bertha’s offences only target those who have had a hand in her oppression. Similar to Miss Havisham, Bertha’s oppression and suffering is overlooked. According to Gilbert and Gubar (2000), Bertha’s rage and aggression is also symbolic of the way women writers felt about the patriarchal nature of society and the male-dominated literary tradition.

In terms of imagery, another important aspect to consider is the use of fire as a symbol in the novels. The use of flames carries connotations of rage, intensity, passion and danger. In *Great Expectations* and *Jane Eyre*, fire imagery is associated with Miss Havisham and Bertha Mason, specifically in how their deaths unfold. Immediately after she has sought forgiveness from Pip and reclaimed herself as a character, Miss Havisham’s dress catches fire, which ultimately leads to her death. In a similar manner, Bertha’s life ends as she plummets to her death amidst a smoldering Thornfield Hall. As characters whose lives were colored with passion, repression and rebellion, such a spectacle of their deaths is suggestive of a highly tragic but symbolic end. Perhaps, it represents the fate of the deviant Victorian woman—the flame of rebellion at last put out and the menace subdued. Thus, the symbolism associated with

the madwoman conveys how nonconformity in women is received as a threat or danger to society and necessitates being tamed.

## **Conclusion**

It seems that from an outward perspective Miss Havisham and Bertha Mason are worlds apart. Yet, the experiences of both these women are quite alike in a number of ways. They are both victims of a system that is meant to operate entirely against them. Their passion and rage stem from the disadvantage of their womanhood. Inevitably, this raises questions about the link between femininity and hysteria or madness. It is evident that this is a cultural construct. Victorian women who deviate from the norm, show self-will and ambition, are denounced in society. Miss Havisham and Bertha offer us insight into the meaning of this otherization in the lives of women. Their presence is symbolic of the injustices in the system and the outrage brewing within women who recognize their secondary place in society. Deviance and rebellion in women, it appears, had no place but in the asylum, in Victorian society.

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ODD CONCLUSION OR PECULIAR PLOT?  
A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE IKHWĀN AL-ŞAFĀ' 'S CASE  
OF THE ANIMALS VERSUS MAN

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## Abstract

This paper is centered on *The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn*, an allegorical lawsuit authored by a group of intellectual men who operated under the pen name Ikhwān al-Şafā' (The Brethren of Purity) in Iraq in the 10th century. It is a fable that features the cattle and the beasts who are later joined by representatives from six other animal kinds, all of whom gather at the court of the King of the Jinn. They are there to complain of the oppression, injustice, and wrongdoings of humans against them and to protest the human belief about animals being their slaves. On the other hand, the human adversaries, a group of about seventy men belonging to diverse lands, religions, and cultures, try their best to substantiate their claim of authority over the animals. While the plot of the *Case* directs the support and sympathy of the readers in favor of the animals, its conclusive paragraphs interestingly resolve the court-case in favor of humans. Undoubtedly, this unforeseen, odd conclusion has perplexed its readers. In this paper, I address the disagreement between the plot and the conclusion of this fable. By demonstrating that the apparently odd conclusion is not odd at all and, in fact, is consistent with the intellectual system of the Ikhwān, I present an explanation of why they have penned the *Case* in such a manner and what they aimed at achieving by means of it.

**Keywords:** *animal fable, animal ethics, Islamic traditions, anthropocentrism, human-animal relationship*



## Introduction

The interdisciplinary compendium of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' (The Brethren of Purity) is entitled the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity (Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā')* and primarily consists of fifty-two epistles. These epistles are divided into four parts: Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Sciences of the Soul and Intellect, and Theology (El-Bizri, 2010). Of the brethren's entire corpus, *The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn*, the classic allegorical lawsuit, is undoubtedly the most popular. Its reception across cultures and translation in numerous languages bespeak the great magnitude of interest it has managed to draw over the centuries (Goodman, 2010). It occupies the major portion of the Ikhwān's twenty-second epistle, entitled "On the Species of Animals, their Marvelous Corporeal Structures and their Wondrous Peculiarities" (de Callatay, 2018, p. 358), which is the longest of the fifty-two epistles and the eighth under the category of Natural Sciences. In the epistle, preceding the *Case* is a non-allegorical, non-fictional prologue that is an equally important piece of text for our analysis.

In the *Case*, by allowing the animals to speak and engage in discourse, the Ikhwān have managed to compose an amusing and insightful rebuttal of a number of familiar justifications of human superiority over other beings. Sarra Tlili (2014) asserts that the *Case* is truly unique in its critique of the anthropocentric assumptions, not only in the Islamic civilization but in pre-modern times as a whole. However, it is interesting and quite baffling, that after making such a strong case against humans, the animals, in the end, do not only lose the case but willingly concede it in favor of humans. This end-of-the-story twist, therefore, has remained a site of extraordinary confusion, speculation, and debate.

This paper addresses the disagreement between the outcome and the plot of the *Case* by situating it within the Ikhwān's intellectual system. When analyzed in this manner it becomes apparent that, as opposed to the general view, it is not the conclusion of the fable but its plot that is peculiar. This is because the conclusion perfectly aligns with the Ikhwān's hierarchical worldview wherein humans enjoy a higher rank than animals. This, however, does not mean that the brethren intend to champion an anthropocentric worldview. Though humans occupy an elite position in this world, it is only God who is at the center of the Ikhwān's scheme. In fact, as I shall argue in this paper, the importance that the brethren attach to the existence of humans is rooted in their notion that human beings

have the unique potential to cultivate their souls. As we shall see in the Case, the brethren reject any claim of human superiority that is based on anything other than this inherent potential. I propose that by making humans recognize their inherent potential as the true basis of their nobility, the Ikhwān's goal is to encourage them to toil for realizing this potential. This, of course, is not possible without appreciating the vitality of other creatures of God on earth and treating them with justice and compassion.

## The Ikhwān and their intellectual system

The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' was a 10th-century group of anonymous intellectual men based in Basra, a city in southern Iraq, with an active branch in Baghdad, the seat of the Abbasid Caliphate (El-Bizri, 2010). In their epistles which are the only source of information about their nature and beliefs, they put forth a coherent intellectual system based on their belief that knowledge can “bring to fruition and perfection the latent faculties of [humans] so that [they] may gain salvation and spiritual freedom” (Nasr, 1978, p. 30) from the prison that this material world is.<sup>1</sup>

Since the brethren operated under the cloak of secrecy, their religious and political affiliations as well as their proper names and identities have remained a subject of debate amongst scholars. Though a number of contemporary scholars argue that the members of the Ikhwān belonged to the Ismaili branch of Shi'ism (Nasr, 1978), it would be inappropriate to restrict one's understanding of them on such basis. This is because it contradicts their “eclectic syncretism” (El Bizri, 2006, p. 10), the embracing attitude of the Ikhwān towards knowledge from diverse religious, cultural, and intellectual traditions, which is evident throughout their work. Investigating for diverse religious and

<sup>1</sup> “All the sciences they [the Ikhwān] consider—whether astronomy, angelology, or embryology—are discussed, not with the aim of a purely theoretical or intellectual interpretation or for their practical application, but to help untie the knots in the soul of the reader by making him aware, on the one hand, of the great harmony and beauty of the Universe and, on the other, of the necessity for man to go beyond material existence. And in order to reach this end they combine in their ideal education the virtues of many nations” (Nasr, 1978, p. 30).

cultural influences, Netton (1991) identifies Christian and Jewish influences in their work and argues that the Ikhwān also drew from Buddhist, Manichaeic, Persian, Sanskrit, and Zoroastrian literatures available to them. He also recognizes elements from various strands of Greek philosophical tradition in the epistles. For the Ikhwān, knowledge is not and cannot be owned by any particular culture, civilization, or religion, and, therefore, could be utilized for their purpose with necessary modifications. This indicates that the embracing attitude of the brethren towards various religious, cultural, and intellectual traditions does not translate into “uncritical acceptance” of them. Rather, they adapted what they found from these sources to develop and bolster their own philosophy (Netton, 1991).

The central piece in the brethren’s intellectual system is their emanationist scheme of creation and subsequent hierarchical view of being. Emanation is from Latin *emanare*, which means to flow out, spring out of, arise, or proceed from (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). The Ikhwān are of the view that all creation flowed or emanated from a single divine source, the Creator, in descending degrees of perfection and nobility. It is important to note that “emanation” and “hierarchy of being” are also of principal importance to the Neo-Platonists (Netton, 1991). Owing to this similarity, the Ikhwān are considered to be influenced by Neo-Platonism more than any other strand of Greek philosophy (de Callatay, 2005, Netton, 1991). Plotinus, who is regarded the father of Neo-Platonism, proposed a scheme of three levels of being above the material world<sup>2</sup>. The brethren adapt the Plotinian scheme and postulate their own “emanationist hierarchy” (Netton, 1991, p. 34) consisting of nine levels of being. Unlike Plotinus, the brethren include the material world in their scheme. Moreover, as opposed to the Plotinian scheme that regarded emanation to be a necessary but unwilled and involuntary outflow of creation, the brethren believe the act of emanation and, thus, creation to be a conscious and deliberate act of the One, the Creator.

Sarra Tlili (2014) argues that the Ikhwānian scheme of creation, wherein God creates the world “through emanation rather than *ex nihilo* creation” (p. 44), diverges from the orthodox Islamic understanding of creation. Nevertheless, it is important for the purpose of our study since it lies at the heart of the Ikhwān’s work. The first level of being, as we know, is the Creator (*al-Bārī*). The next six

2 The three-level scheme of Plotinus is as follows: the first level was the One, the transcendent God, the second level that emanated from the first was called the Intellect, and at the third level emanated the Soul (de Callatay, 2005; Netton, 1991).

successive levels are as follows: the Universal Intellect (*al-ʿAql*), the Universal Soul (*al-Nafs*), the Prime Matter (*al-Hayūlā ʿl-Ūlā*), the Nature (*al-Ṭabīʿa*), the Absolute Body (*al-Jism al-Muṭlaq*) or the Second Matter i.e. the corporeal world, the Sphere (*al-Falak*) consisting of seven planetary spheres. Below this level is the sublunary world consisting of two levels, the eighth and ninth levels in the scheme of the Ikhwān. The eighth level is the Four Elements (*al-Arkān*), namely Fire, Air, Water, and Earth, whereas, the ninth and the last level is this world, the world of generated Beings (*al-Muwalladāt*) which is divided into the successive kingdoms of mineral, plant, and animal. Every being in the ninth level possess an individual soul corresponding to the species of beings it belongs to (de Callatay, 2005; Netton, 1991).

The Ikhwān (2010) explain in the prologue of the *Case* that minerals are generated prior to all other beings and possess the mineral soul which makes them capable of coming into being and then passing away. Plants are generated next and possess the vegetal soul, which endows them with the additional faculties of nourishment and growth. Next in the chronological order are the animals who possess the animal soul and enjoy the capabilities of locomotion and sensitivity. Humans—who are also animals—come last in this scheme of generated beings in the sublunary world and share the traits of the beings that antedate them but are additionally endowed with the superior faculties of discernment and reason because they possess the heavenly rational soul.

It is important to note that for the first seven levels in the scheme of the Ikhwān, the preceding level of being is nobler than the succeeding level. For example, the Universal Intellect is nobler than the Universal Soul. In the sublunary world, however, this relationship between chronological priority and nobility is reversed. The beings that arise earlier are primitive, whereas the beings that succeed them are developed. For example, minerals precede humans chronologically but are the lowest of the generated beings, and humans, though chronologically the last of the generated beings, are the noblest (de Callatay, 2005). Also, all the other beings exist for the sake of the well-being of humans and their protection against harm (Ikhwān, 2010).<sup>3</sup>

3 The Ikhwan (2010) write in the prologue of the *Case*, “Know further, dear brother, that mineral and plant substances are all of them temporally prior to the animals. [...] They, that is, the plants, are the mother of the animals [...] [...] Know, dear brother, that all the other animals arose before man. For they all exist for his sake, and whatever exists for the sake of something else antedates it” (pp. 66-69).



The inverse relationship between chronological priority and nobility in the sublunary world is crucial to the scheme of the brethren as it validates humans to occupy the noblest rank in this world. Moreover, since humans are the only beings in this world to possess an immortal spiritual soul that is potentially capable of returning to its divine Origin in a beatific state, the Ikhwān attach immense importance to human beings in their intellectual system. In fact, in their epistles, the brethren are largely preoccupied with questions that revolve around the creation and salvation of humans (de Callatay, 2005).<sup>4</sup>

## The Case: A Synopsis

Background of the *Case* is as follows: Years after Prophet Muḥammad (pbuh) who had invited all humans and jinns to Islam, a king, Bīwarāsp the Wise, rose from the band of jinns who had become good Muslims. His capital was on the island of Ṣā'ūn wherein he ruled with justice. One day, a storm brought a ship carrying “men of commerce, industry, learning, and others of the humankind” (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', 2010, p. 101) to the island. Impressed by its riches, these men decide to settle there. Following the convention of their homelands they soon began to force the cattle and the beasts into their service. The cattle and the beasts of this island, however, recoiled and ran away. The humans set out in their pursuit, determined to bring them back for they were “convinced that the animals were their runaway and rebellious slaves” (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', 2010, p. 102). Upon discerning this human notion, the cattle and the beasts petition against them in the court of Bīwarāsp, charging them for their abusive and unjust behavior and protesting the belief that animals are slaves and humans their masters. The King summons both parties to his court. The cattle and the beasts and a group of seventy men of diverse religions and cultures appear in the court.

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4 Commenting on the theme and questions that lie at the heart of Ikhwān's work, Godefroid de Callatay (2005) writes, “Whoever sets out to read the Rasāil [epistles of the Ikhwān] must be prepared endlessly to move back and forth between, as it were, the two “poles” of a same structure, one the human being, the other the divine principle to which it hopes to return. Where does man come from? Which place does he occupy in the creation? Is it so that he may contemplate the idea of becoming one again with a divine principle? These are the questions that preoccupy the Brethren from the beginning to the end of the corpus” (p. 17).

When the case opens, a human, who is an Arab by lineage, quotes several verses from the Holy Qur'an<sup>5</sup> and argues that, since God has subjected the animals to humans, we are their masters and they our slaves. The representative of the beasts, a mule, responds to this human proclamation by explaining that the quoted verses, rather than establishing slavery of animals to humans, highlight the blessings of God bestowed upon humans for which they ought to be thankful. The human spokesperson, next, boasts the beautiful form and erect stature of humans and resorts to ridicule the stature and forms of various animals, labelling them "misproportioned". The mule, however, reminds humans that a slander to the creation is a slander to the Creator and argues that the animals are just as well-proportioned as humans are because God has provided the form of each creature according to His wisdom. The case proceeds in the following manner and soon turns towards the account of human oppression against the cattle and the beasts. The ass, the ox, the ram, the camel, the horse, the pig, all complain of heedless humans showing no mercy to them.

It is night by the time the cattle and the beasts have pleaded before the King to free them from human persecution and the case is adjourned until morning. The King, then, consults his vizier and other renowned jinns of the kingdom. The humans and the animals also hold their separate meetings that night to discuss the case and their future course of action. On the one hand, we see humans trying to anticipate how the case would unfold, "reasoning" the tactics they could use, the excuses they could present, the arguments they could use to convince the King of their higher rank and thereby, keep the animals from getting the King's sympathy and favor. On the other hand, the animals, in their meeting, decide to "send messengers to all the other animal kinds sharing the news and asking them to send delegates and orators to aid [them] in the contest that [they've] entered" (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', 2010, p. 150). Therefore, six messengers are sent to each of the six animal kinds: beasts of prey, birds of prey, the fowl, swarming creatures,

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5 " [He gave you] livestock, as beasts of burden and as food. So eat what God has provided for you and do not follow in Satan's footsteps: he is your sworn enemy" (6:142). "And livestock--He created them too. You derive warmth and other benefits from them: you get food from them; you find beauty in them when you bring them home to rest and when you drive them out to pasture. They carry your loads to lands you yourselves could not reach without great hardship -- truly your Lord is kind and merciful -- horses, mules, and donkeys for you to ride and use for show, and other things you know nothing about" (16:5-8). "[S]o that you may remember your Lord's grace when you are seated on them and say, 'Glory be to Him who has given us control over this; we could not have done it by ourselves'" (43:13). Holy Qurān (M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, Trans.). (2004). Oxford University Press.

crawling creatures, and aquatic animals—the seventh being the cattle and the beasts who were already present.

The next eight chapters of the Case, in which each kind chooses a representative to appear before the King in support of the cattle and the beasts, beautifully address the characteristics of various animals from all the six kinds mentioned above. Delegates from each of the six kinds join the cattle and the beasts in their case against humans which continues for two more days. Throughout the Case, humans try their best, presenting one argument after the other, to substantiate the claim of their superiority over the animals. The animals, however, successfully counter their arguments each time. For example, when a Persian delegate in court takes pride in the ingenious and skilled arts and crafts that humans are capable of, he is humbled by the parrot who informs the court about the skilled bees “who build their homes as round, multi-storeyed hives [...] form each apartment as a perfect equilateral and equi-angular hexagon [...] need no compass to guide them, no straight-edge to rule, [...] as human builders do” (Ikhwān al-Şafā’, 2010, p. 275). At another point, the humans boast the unity of their form to establish their mastery over animals whose forms are diverse. They argue that since “rule belong[s] to unity, and servitude to diversity,” therefore, animals are our slaves (p. 301). To this, the nightingale, representative of the birds, responds by highlighting religious differences and sectarian rivalries amongst the humans and how each group denounces and devours the other. On the contrary, the nightingale remarks, the animals, though diverse in their forms, are united in their monotheistic belief and unlike humans, “assign God’s divinity to no other and do not fall into hypocrisy and lawlessness” (p. 302).

The Ikhwān, through such arguments, confute a majority of the typical anthropocentric assumptions that champion human supremacy over other creatures. Even arguments regarding immortality of the human soul and resurrection are not spared criticism. We see that when a Hijazi mentions these as human distinctions and takes pride in the subsequent promises of paradise and eternal rewards made to humans in the Qur’ān, the nightingale reminds that every promised reward is duly juxtaposed with chastisement and warning for humans. Though the animals do not enjoy God’s promises of eternal rewards, unlike the humans, they are spared from the threat of His punishment, meaning that they stand at par with humans.

It is only when, at last, the Hijazi delegate upholds the presence of the prophets,

imams, saints, and persons of piety and insight within the ranks of humans that the animals concede the case. “Ah humans, now at last you’ve come to the truth,” (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, 2010, p. 313) acknowledge all the animal delegates and the wise jinns, as they express their curiosity to know more about these persons of piety and insight that the Hijazi had mentioned. But, all the human orators, who had been speaking and debating throughout the case, fall silent and have no answer. Finally, a pious and insightful human who embodies the embracing attitude of the Ikhwān towards various religious, cultural, and intellectual traditions across the human race speaks. He details the qualities of the persons of piety previously mentioned:

*Persian by breeding, Arabian by faith, a ḥanīf by confession, Iraqi in culture, Hebrew in lore, Christian in manners, Damascene in devotion, Greek in science, Indian in discernment, Sufi in intimations, regal in character, masterful in thought, and divine in awareness. (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, 2010, pp. 313-314)*

Of all the humans, belonging to different faiths, cultures, and schools of thought, only this human, who is truly cosmopolitan in nature and combines the highest human virtues in character, is able to describe the characteristics of the “pure and righteous figures” mentioned by the Hijazi. And with his description of them, the *Case* ends.

## What are the Ikhwān up to?

One of the most confusing features of the conclusion of the *Case of the Animals versus Man* is the fact that not all humans are saints or sages. Hence, it is absurd to use the nobility of a few humans as a pretext to discharge a majority of humans for their oppressive and unjust treatment of the cattle and the beasts. Also, of note is that the *Case* opens with two allegations against humans: 1) abuse of the cattle and the beasts at the hands of the human race and 2) humans mistaking the cattle and the beasts as their slaves because they (humans) are superior and nobler. It is, however, perplexing to find that the *Case* not only largely revolves around the latter but also concludes without any concrete word on the former. Moreover, it is not clear that how does establishing the nobility of humans make the sufferings of the cattle and the beasts any less.

Richard Foltz (2006), while appreciating the *Case* for its extensive critique of the mainstream notions of humans about themselves and the animals, expresses his discontent with the outcome in the following words:

*This unexpected, abrupt and, from an animal rights perspective, highly unsatisfying conclusion leaves one wondering just what point the Brethren were trying to make. Is their treatise intended to awaken the reader to a non-anthropocentric reality? If so, the ending is clearly unacceptable. (p. 52)*

However, it is important to fathom that the Ikhwān have written and compiled their epistles according to a sophisticated rationale. Informing the reader about “the great harmony and beauty of the Universe” (Nasr, 1978, p. 30) on the one hand and reminding them of the reality of this debased material world on the other, the Ikhwān’s chief purpose is to help the soul of the reader go beyond the imprisoning matter and embark upon the journey of return to the Origin. It can be rightly argued that the purpose of authoring the *Case* is no different.

The Ikhwānian scheme of creation champions a hierarchical order of being, wherein, in the sublunary world, humans are the noblest of all beings and it is for their wellbeing that all the other beings exist. As a result, it should not be surprising that the *Case* resolves in favor of humans since this is more consistent with the principle of human nobility in the Ikhwān’s intellectual system. The seemingly odd conclusion, thus, is not odd at all. Rather, it is the plot of the case that is peculiar. Why so convincingly make a case in favor of the animals if eventually humans are to win it?

Trying to answer this question, Tlili (2014) conjectures that the outcome of the *Case* is a product of an en route change in plan. She cogitates that, as described in their prologue, “their initial intention was simply to teach their readers about the wonders of the animal world [...] and to call for a better treatment of animals” (p. 78), however, as they progressed, their fable took a different direction. “Once they gave voices to their nonhuman characters, [...] and allowed their animals to draw from the Qur’an, the fable took a turn the authors perhaps did not foresee” (p. 78). The conclusion that they were about to reach was inconsistent with their intellectual system and would cast doubt on it. But, since they had invested so much in the *Case* and the “animals’ arguments and refutations were too provocative to deserve abortion” (p. 78), they opted to manipulate its final outcome.

Both in Tlili's hypothesis on the matter and Foltz's discontent with the conclusion of the fable, it is interesting to note that the idea of an egalitarian world for all creatures is deemed incompatible with the hierarchical worldview that the Ikhwān espoused. Tlili (2014) also wonders how the Ikhwān, so immersed in their hierarchical worldview, were even able to entertain such egalitarian views throughout the fable. Moreover, since humans occupy an elite position in the sublunary world in the hierarchical scheme of the brethren, they are assumed to purport an anthropocentric worldview, which then appears to be in stark contrast with the plot of the *Case* that staunchly advocates for non-anthropocentrism.

However, it is imperative to understand that the Ikhwān, as opposed to what appears to be the case, do not espouse anthropocentrism. For the brethren, God is the sole Master, whose scheme of creation is hierarchical, and the nature of His bounties is proportional, such that His provisions "are matched, species by species, by creaturely needs" (Goodman, 2008, p. 266). In the *Case*, for example, when the dragon, king of the crawling creatures, breaks down in tears for the "frailty and lack of device of so many of his subjects," he is reminded by the cricket that a lot of them such as "worms, grubs, and intestinal parasites are compensated for their lack of limbs and organs by the simplicity and ease of their lives, their cosseted habitats, and ready access to all that they need" (Goodman, 2008, p. 266). The brethren believe that since God treats all species according to His balance and "sustain[s] each according to its needs", His is "proportional, not arithmetic, equality" (Goodman, 2010, p. 26). According to the Ikhwān, an egalitarian worldview is not incompatible with a hierarchical one because hierarchies based on God's wisdom translate neither into inequality nor inequity. Therefore, the brethren do not entertain egalitarian and non-anthropocentric beliefs in the fable to protest God-ordained hierarchies. Likewise, the higher rank of humans in the sublunary world is not meant to champion anthropocentrism. Consequently, in the eyes of the brethren, it is not the case that animals are slaves and humans their masters since the Master is God alone.

Recalling from the first section, the Ikhwān consider humans to be noble because they believe them to possess an immortal, heavenly rational soul that is potentially capable of returning to its Origin in a beatific state. The key phrase here is "potentially capable" which suggests that humans have to endeavor to realize this potential and they cannot claim nobility for themselves without doing so. According to them, only a soul that has been cultivated to pursue higher ends would be able to return to its Lord in the state of purity and satisfaction. The Ikhwān (2010) assert in the prologue that "every human being should live thus,

so as to deserve [emphasis added] to be one of God's intimates" (p. 64). It is probably because of this that the Ikhwān do not entertain the immortality of the human soul as true basis of human nobility, for immortality of the soul is no good if it is unable to realize its potential and fails to achieve its true purpose.

In the prologue of the *Case*, the brethren also argue that "man at his best [...] is a noble angel, the finest of creatures; but at his worst, an accursed devil, the bane of creation" (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', 2010, p. 65). This implies that though humans occupy an elite position in the sublunary world, they are further graded, primarily on the basis of their actions. The prophets, imams, and sages mentioned at the end of the *Case* undoubtedly constitute the highest ranks of humans and, thus, are presented as models of what humans can become. It can be argued that by bulldozing humans' self-deceptive edifice of superiority throughout the fable, the brethren seek to call their readers' attention to the true basis of human nobility i.e., the potential of humans to cultivate themselves, pursue higher ends, attain similitude to the Divine as much as possible, and become God's intimates. Also, corresponding to the educational rationale behind the composition and dissemination of their epistles, the Ikhwān educate humans about the diversity, attributes, and vitality of the animals.

Lastly, for the Ikhwān, the nobility of humans amplifies their responsibility towards other creatures and heightens their accountability for their actions before God. As opposed to what humans had assumed in the fable, they are not allowed to be whimsical in their conduct with animals, especially the cattle and the beasts who are put in their service by God to aid them. Hence, it can be argued that by invoking human nobility at the end of the *Case*, the Ikhwān do not intend to discharge humans of their abusive treatment of the cattle and the beasts but rather it was meant to provoke a realization of their responsibility, as humans, towards them. They also do not evade the issue of animal abuse as appears to be the case, rather they regard the ethical treatment of animals to be of substantial importance for human salvation. For the Ikhwān, humans ought to follow God's precedent in looking after the earth and all the creatures in it with justice, insight, and utmost compassion.

## Conclusion

This paper has presented a contextual analysis of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's *Case of the Animals versus Man* which seemingly is a case convincingly in favor of the animal plaintiffs with an outcome that is in favor of the human perpetrators. Since, the conclusion of the *Case* seems irreconcilable with its plot, it has remained a point of speculation and debate for its readers who deem it odd, unsatisfying, and unacceptable. By situating the fable and its prologue within the context of the brethren's intellectual system, this paper demonstrated that the conclusion of this fable is not odd because it aligns with the Ikhwān's principle of human nobility. After pursuing a contextual study of the fable, I propose that the brethren allowed the animals to make a strong case against humans by reproaching them for their haughtiness and discarding their empty claims of superiority. In this way, they lead the humans to the true basis of their nobility i.e., their potential to cultivate their souls, as opposed to flaunting arrogance and acting recklessly towards the pursuit of higher and nobler ends. Moreover, the brethren have also elaborately informed humans of the extraordinary distinctions of the animals in order to make them (humans) cognizant of their (animals) value, which is not just limited to their usefulness for the wellbeing of humans. Finally, it goes without saying that the *Case*, its purpose, and its message remain essentially relevant centuries after it was originally written. At a time when a great number of animal species (and plants) are at risk of extinction due to unabated human recklessness (Leahy, 2019), it is imperative, more now than ever, to hold a mirror up to humans.



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HAYY IBN YAQZĀN:  
EXAMINING THE INTERRELATION BETWEEN REASON &  
REVELATION

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## Abstract

Ibn Tufayl's philosophical novel, *Hayy ibn Yaqzān*, is said to have had massive impact on philosophical inquiries. It has been translated into Hebrew, Latin, English, German, French, and Spanish. The novel follows Hayy's—a human born on an uninhabited island—developmental journey of independent rationalization as he learns self-preservation and the philosophy of life without the aid of any external guidance or revelation. According to one account, Hayy was born from a forbidden love affair between a ruthless king's sister and a man called Yaqzān. After his birth, Hayy was cast to the sea on a raft which arrived on an uninhabited island. According to another, Hayy was born on the island with no human involvement. In both accounts, he was discovered and nurtured by a doe, and was left to thrive solely on his innate qualities, logic and nature, from childhood to adulthood. In the end, Hayy, without the aid of prophecy and divine revelation, only through applying his faculties of observation, exploration, and intellect, finds the truth, that is, God. In recent times, the story is considered a pioneering work in autodidacticism as Hayy learns about the truths of the universe through the process of self-learning. Hayy utilizes multiple methods to learn about the world in various stages, and the text contains a blend of mystic and Platonic traditions. However, the fundamental question is whether *Hayy ibn Yaqzān* is a product of mere rational philosophy or part of a mystical discourse? While the story does conclude that reason and revelation lead to identical truths, the process of the acquisition of this knowledge through reason remains somewhat unclear. Is the process thoroughly rational and autodidactic? Or is there a hint of intuition there? This paper attempts to discuss answers to these questions by examining two significant themes in Ibn Tufayl's novel, educational philosophy and religious philosophy.

**Keywords:** *autodidacticism, reason, philosophy, revelation, spirituality*



## Introduction

Ibn Tufayl—a Muslim philosopher and theologian—wrote *Hayy ibn Yaqzān* in the 12th century. It is written in the form of a letter and follows the developmental journey of Hayy, a human born on an uninhabited island. Ibn Tufayl was eager to reconcile religion with philosophy and gave much weight to divine revelation both at literal and philosophical levels (Goodman, 2009). As a result, the text contains multiple references to the Quran and religious scriptures (Haq, 2016). *Hayy Ibn Yaqzān* has traversed languages and geographies and has profoundly impacted the fields of literature, philosophy, and science. There are multiple literary parallels between *Hayy ibn Yaqzān* and various English literature classics such as *The Jungle Book*, *Robinson Crusoe*, Shakespeare’s poem *The Seven Ages of Man* and even the Italian narrative poem, Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* (Haq, 2016). Given the extensive influence of *Hayy ibn Yaqzān*, it would be interesting to explore the extent of its impact and the consequences of this impact.

*Hayy ibn Yaqzān* is a story of human development on an uninhabited island, the journey of an individual human soul. Hayy’s development, as outlined by Ibn Tufayl, takes place in seven stages. These stages are a symbolic representation of the continuous growth in human beings. The seven phases of Hayy’s life are (1) childhood—intuition, (2) age of practical reason—action-oriented life, (3) the age of wonder—delving into metaphysics, (4) age of reason, (5) wisdom, (6) maturity, and (7) self-awareness. Hayy applies logical deductions using self-evident premises and inductive generalizations that are inferred from systematic observations to learn about the world around him (Haq, 2016). For each stage, Hayy uses a mix of these methods, where each has its process of inquiry and character (Goodman, 2009). The climax of Hayy’s journey is a representation of the highest level of awareness a human can experience—the recognition of God and His attributes. Hayy’s learning does not end with him figuring out how the world works but rather it continues with him discovering what it means to be human, i.e., having self-awareness. It is noteworthy that Hayy reaches this point not through institutions and instructions but by learning on his own (Goodman, 2009).

Towards the end, the story makes a declaration that reason and revelation lead to identical truths. What Hayy discovers, through innate capabilities and reason, about ethics, cosmology, and God, is precisely what Asal—a human from another island—has learned under the guidance of a religious teacher. It suggests that what religion teaches one through stories of prophets can be acquired from the practice of philosophy based on reason. However, this point has been a topic of much contestation, for if philosophy teaches one through reason what revelation

does, is there even a need for revelation? Moreover, Ibn Tufayl does not elaborate on how Hayy came to the same conclusion as Asal, making the issue of reason and revelation a subject of debate. Here it is integral to understand that Ibn Tufayl's own beliefs were founded upon the Islamic philosophical doctrine according to which reason and revelation lead to the same conclusion. Goodman (2006) expands on this point, "The answer is that Hayy is not alone and his nature and the realization of that nature is a gift of God, and the story is grounded in radical monotheism which believes that God's presence pervades the universe," (p. 11). But where does this belief stem from? The belief is not grounded in pure reason, and the mystical facet of this claim will be explored by delving into educational and religious philosophies in Islam and its connection to Hayy's journey.

## **Educational Philosophy & Hayy ibn Yaqzān**

The novel puts forth multiple questions regarding education, personal development, and human fulfillment and what they entail. For example, what does education mean? What is personal development? Is personal development different from education? How does human growth typically happen? Hayy's character is a reflection of mankind as his growth and development recapitulates the evolutionary history of humans (Goodman, 2009). Hayy goes from intuition to practical reason and then slowly transitions into the age of wonder, followed by reason, wisdom, maturity, and self-awareness. Each stage of this transition sees God in different ways. In the age of wonder for example, Hayy sees God in the workings of the world, and in the age of reason, God is proven to be the designer of the universe, the perfect cause of himself and creator of everything that exists (Goodman, 2009). Wisdom is achieved when Hayy begins to delve deeper. Wisdom seeks an active relationship; between knowledge and love, it identifies God not by knowledge but instead by love. According to Ibn Tufayl, Hayy's recognition of God by love is an indication of the last two phases of maturity and self-fulfillment which the novel marks as the pinnacle of man's development.

Comparing Hayy's experiences to the modern-day education system would be futile for his education is not to reproduce good social behaviors or cultural capital. Hayy's education lies somewhat outside of the present-day conception of human society. His education makes the current education system seem like an institution that only reproduces certain ideals. Moreover, Ibn Tufayl's

characterization of Hayy is integral to note. Ibn Tufayl assumes in Hayy natural capacities of boldness, curiosity, and goodness (Goodman, 2006). These qualities cannot be assumed to exist in all children by birth, at least not to the same degree as Ibn Tufayl presupposed them in Hayy's character. Therefore, it may be Hayy's *fitra* which allows him to achieve the level of self-awareness and spirituality inconceivable today.

Additionally, Ibn Tufayl's personal beliefs and conviction influenced his writing and the conclusion of the story: the notion that Hayy is never truly alone. The existence of God and the belief that his presence pervades all existence is the focal point of Ibn Tufayl's argument. This argument can further be understood by applying the Neoplatonic understanding of God's relationship to the world. The Neoplatonic understanding assumes that all that exists is an emanation of the divine, and all beings in one way or another reflect God, i.e., man is a reflection of God (Goodman, 2009). Upon further investigation of the ideas mentioned above, one recognizes that God does not merely form the *fitra* of a person but also continues to direct and energize the capacities of its beings, i.e., if God did not teach animals how to use their limbs, they would not be able to (Goodman, 2009). According to Ghazali, we see things happening in a flow and relate them to habit and concomitance, but in actuality, it's God's will, and God can stop this process upon his will (Dallal, 2010; Marmura, 2000). As a result, one can say that reason alone is not enough, for if God were not to energize Hayy's soul and allow it to perfect and activate his intellect, he would never reach the conclusions that he did. This does not mean that reason alone cannot provide one with knowledge, it can, but at one point there is an integration of reason and revelation which leads us to the Ultimate Truth: the recognition of God and his attributes through love.

Ibn Tufayl has used the Islamic doctrine to formulate his story, which emphasizes the idea that there is God's hand in everything that exists. According to the Islamic interpretation, man has free will and man's fulfilment is attributed to God; God implants the drive that brings man to fulfilment and the realization of this drive makes a man fulfilled (Goodman, 2009). Essentially, within the Islamic doctrine, even a human's exposure to their environment is understood as being purposive and controlled by God, meaning that a person's surroundings play a vital role in educating a man and activating his *fitra*, as is evident from Hayy's story. For Ibn Tufayl, education is a process of molding a person and the molder here is God himself. So, while at the surface level it does seem that Hayy is guided by reason, one can see that there is a power beyond reason too, which is what

activated Hayy's intellect and led him to the Ultimate Truth.

## Religious Philosophy and Hayy ibn Yaqzān

To understand the relevance and application of philosophy of religion in *Hayy ibn Yaqzān*, one needs to acquaint themselves with both the differences and the coinciding aspects of theology and religion. For this, it is necessary to understand that humans' approaches to seek God differ, but they are all motivated by the same drive towards a certain higher truth, and accepting this fact is an intellectual practice of toleration. For someone looking further, this statement might not be sufficient, and he might seek deeper unifying truths and realities that surpass worldly cultural and religious divisions (Goodman, 2009). According to Goodman (2009), there can be two approaches to seek such truths and answers that reveal the relationship between human beings and the greater Being—theology and religion. Theology revolves around the notion of and questions relating to God, his existence, his morality, powers, and characteristics. Philosophy of religion, however, deals with the religion itself and addresses questions like, "What is a religion and why is it there?", "For whom does it prevail?" Theology does overlap with the philosophy of religion as the former deals with man's relation to God, while the latter deals with God's relation to man (Goodman, 2009).

It is essential to note that no human after seeking the Ultimate Truth can enter a realm of ecstatic experience and surrender himself to God without generating a philosophical perspective (religious philosophy) of his own (Goodman, 2009). Here, Goodman (2009) describes the ecstatic experience as something which, "no eye has seen or ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart [i.e., mind] of man to conceive" (p. 149). So, in order to understand Ibn Tufayl's philosophical standpoint of religion (which he explains through Hayy's experiences), it is important to first distinguish among three types of religion: rational religion, mass religion and mystical religion (Goodman, 2009).

### *Rational Religion*

According to Goodman (2009), "The philosopher who holds a theory of rational religion considers religion to be the activity of the human mind imaginatively seeking to articulate a conception of the divine without idolatry" (p. 42).

Essentially, reason and intellect are the fundamental elements of rational religion, and a rationalist finds himself as a sentient, conscious being who hunts for the Ultimate Truth (Goodman, 2009). The rationalist perceives theology as the struggle to derive a concept which describes a holy being (Goodman, 2009). Therefore, according to rationalist religion, every individual on Earth is invited with his intellect to take part in the rational search of God, irrespective of their background. Rationalists consider contemplation as a rational, religious activity. For a complete rationalist, man is above all other rational creatures and contemplation is the process of assimilation of self into God (Goodman, 2009).

### ***Mass Religion***

The proponents of mass religion defy the fundamental argument of rational religion by arguing that rational religionists claim to know too much about the eternal mystery through the use of reason alone. Niebuhr (1946) critiques the rationalist religionists by arguing that reason merely cannot teach one about God's powers and His attributes, His knowledge, and His control. He explains the need of faith alongside reason by saying that there is a light that shines in the darkness and reason is not solely responsible for it. Faith can pierce through the darkness and apprehend it (Goodman, 2009). Niebuhr (1946), thus concludes that faith in revelation is essential to mass religion. However, as his statement presupposes that reason's purpose in religion is to replace revelation as a source of religious knowledge, it has led to debates regarding reason versus revelation.

### ***Mystic Religion***

Mystics not only cast-off the truths of reason and the duties of obedience but rather they become lovers of paradox and rebellion. This reminds one of Hallaj's words, "I am the Truth, I am the Truth" (Payami, 2017). In mysticism, both reason and revelation are considered irrelevant, and the mystic feels no difficulty in knowing God as He is manifest (Goodman, 2009). In other words, "a rationalist knows God as a study, a believer serves Him as a master; but for a mystic, God is a friend, a lover" (Goodman, 2009, p.50). For whom does such version of religion exist? Goodman (2009) answers this question by arguing that in mystical religion, the ecstatic union of God and man, lover and beloved, blots out the rest of the world. Only the lover remains with a singular awareness of his Beloved. And in this awareness, it is through intuition that his own identity



is absorbed.

### ***Religious Philosophy within Hayy ibn Yaqzān***

We must see how Ibn-Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzān* was written and how it relates to the categories of religion described above. The terms used to describe the birth of Hayy are very scientific and rational, but when one reads the description of the beatific vision of cosmic proportions that Hayy experiences, it feels very spiritual and mystical. According to Tufayl, Hayy achieves the utmost fullness of knowledge and ineffable felicity in mystical union with his Lord (Goodman, 2009). It is important to remember that Tufayl warned his readers not to take his words literally since the experiences that he described cannot be processed through rational thought. In a subtle manner, he also admits that the transcendental experience, where Hayy seeks the Ultimate Truth, cannot be caged into words. Thus, it can be inferred from the manner in which he describes the beatific vision of Hayy as the climax of his journey, that Ibn Tufayl may be a mystic (Goodman, 2009).

However, many questions arise regarding the mysticism within Tufayl's work. Firstly, mysticism encompasses sacrifice and paradox at the very essential level. A conventional mystic loves God enough to submit himself to Him. But does Tufayl write about this sacrifice? Does Hayy give God the ultimate sacrifice—the sacrifice of reason? According to the definition of mysticism we explored, a pure mystic would have crushed promptings of reason long ago in this journey. But Hayy never felt any element of beatific experience that contradicted the truth acquired through his use of reason. (Goodman, 2009). In the light of this argument, it is essential to understand that for Tufayl, the role of reason is very significant. According to him, reason is not an inferior way of comprehending God; it is the very first way to start thinking about Him. Hence, for him, reason paves the way for intuition (Goodman, 2009). Thus, we can find some characteristics of mystical religion in Hayy's case. But ultimately, he is not a mystic who defies the role of reason. Instead, he considers and utilizes reason as another device to understand God and his relation to Him.

### **Reason and Intuition**

The symbiotic relationship between reason and intuition in *Hayy ibn Yaqzān* can

be identified through the idea of contemplation. For Hayy, the primary source of knowledge about the Ultimate Truth was through contemplation (Goodman, 2009). He imitated animals, stars, the heavenly bodies and even God through the act of contemplation. However, no source can answer whether he contemplated God by the aid of reason or intuition. Thus, no line can be drawn between whether his vision was a product of sole reason or intuition. It appears that reason and intuition act as two sides of the same coin. Lenn Goodman (2009) summarizes Tufayl's religion beautifully:

*The religion of Ibn Tufayl is a hybrid, a synthesis of mystical and rational religion. God is known first and most safely by reason, ultimately and most intensely by intuition, but calmly and constantly by a philosophical mind that seems to find no phenomenological distinction between the two. (p. 55)*

The diversity of instruments in obtaining knowledge can be observed in Tufayl's writing at various occasions. Sometimes, he makes logical deductions from self-evident premises. Other times, he makes inductive generalizations, where we see Hayy contemplating like Plato and the Sufis. Thus, this literary piece depicts the importance of both reason and revelation in one's journey to understand the Ultimate Truth, and asserts the significance of one accompanying the other. Thus, the religion of Hayy cannot be classified solely into any single category of religion, be it mass, rational or mystical religion. It is a rather complex one as it encompasses the characteristics of both rational and mystical religion, which support each other in a way that no clear distinction can be made between the two.

## Conclusion

Ibn Tufayl, within Hayy ibn Yaqzān, utilizes multiple instruments to portray how knowledge is obtained. Knowledge which leads Hayy to the ultimate truth. Hayy uses both reason and contemplation to understand the workings of the universe, himself, and ultimately, God. This conclusion by Ibn Tufayl settles the debate of reason versus revelation by iterating that they go hand in hand and that both have significance in the process of reaching towards the Ultimate Truth. Therefore, Ibn Tufayl's work cannot be entitled as truly a product of rational thought or mysticism—it is a combination of both.

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## OSCILLATING IDEOLOGIES: KANTIAN AND HEGELIAN INFLUENCES ON ART HISTORY

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### Abstract

Kantian and Hegelian aesthetic theory has been instrumental in the development of art history as an academic discipline, particularly with regards to its function as a canon. This 'canonical' tradition within which art history occurs as a sequential, Eurocentric timeline, incorporates certain understandings of the function of art—which links further back to the Enlightenment split between knowledge-forms, i.e., the bifurcation between 'logic' (objectivity) and 'aesthetics' (subjectivity). This paper seeks to explore the Kantian/Hegelian influence on art history's trajectory in light of this aforementioned split and to scrutinize wider debates between form/content that characterize art history as a discipline.

**Keywords:** *Art History, Canons, Knowledge, Hegel, Kant.*



## Introduction

At the outset I confess that it is difficult to situate art history within a singular developmental trajectory. If we are to consider Kant and Hegel's influence on art history, this proves an even heftier task. This is in part owing to the breadth and complexity of their differential treatments of art and its function— and to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of these is certainly an uphill task. But exploring this complexity is the point. After all, art history manifests as solutions to fabricated 'problems' of how art-objects are to be understood and historicized<sup>1</sup>. This involves a tug-of-war between an 'internal' and 'external' historiography as Preziosi (2009) puts it, which we can understand more simply as the problem of objective universal versus subjective particulars. This conflict links back to the bifurcation of knowledge forms into logic and aesthetics, wherein aesthetics is 'sensory knowledge' while logic is 'rational thought' (Preziosi, 2009). In this essay, I will explore briefly how Kant and Hegel's aesthetic theories influenced oscillations between 'form' and 'content' in the development of art history as a discipline. Further, I will posit the idea that although these theories—Kant's in particular—attempted to non-hierarchize sensation and rational cognition<sup>2</sup>, art history as a discipline ultimately developed so as to reinforce difference. This I will show, manifests itself more clearly in a reading of Wolfflin and Gombrich, where the latter leans towards materialism, and the former towards a more historicist mode of comprehension.

## A Kantian Aesthetics: 'Subjective Universality' and Relativism

Preziosi situates the split between sensory and rational knowledge as a longstanding

1 'Historicized' being understood, within this context, as the systematic act whereby art-objects are placed within a historical timeline. Within this chronological trajectory posited as 'History' proper, they may also be perceived as emblematic of a certain culture or tradition.

2 This attempt at negotiating a 'non-hierarchical' or relativist viewpoint links back to the split between knowledge forms into 'logic' and 'aesthetics'. This 'split' arises from the Enlightenment tradition whereby rational or instrumental reason—i.e. objective 'logic'—was deemed superior to (subjective) sensation, which was irrational until translated into thought (Preziosi 2009). Kantian aesthetics sought to dismantle this.

notion within the European tradition. Leibniz for example, saw sensation as being subordinate and inferior to rational thought which was “lucid” as opposed to “confused” (Preziosi, 2009, p. 55). Baumgarten and Kantian theory in contrast posited a non-hierarchized view of knowledge. For Baumgarten, the argument was rooted within the ‘perception of perfection’ or ‘taste’. Kant viewed ‘taste’ as ‘common sense’ although his *modus operandi* was to analyze aesthetics in relation to ‘judgment’. According to Kant, pure judgment cannot be ‘reflective’ since it coincides with desire or that which is ‘agreeable’ to us but not necessarily ‘good’. To be ‘good’ or purposeful moreover is a deterministic judgment if informed morally. Nevertheless, judgments of what is ‘good’ in art are not always informed in such a way. In effect, Kant posits a notion of art for art’s sake or ‘purposiveness without purpose’. Beauty for Kant is meant to be analyzed in terms of an art-object’s formal value. It is therefore ultimately relative although not purely so. Ergo, although Kant’s views in the *Critique of Judgment* are inextricably complex, his aesthetic theory is built on the idea of a ‘subjective universality’. That is while a judgment of good taste is one that is universal not everyone may possess the cognitive faculties to be able to make that judgment therefore it is also, paradoxically, subjective.

The influence of Kantian aesthetics is evinced notably in the work of Heinrich Wölfflin (1915) and E.H Gombrich (1916). Traces of Kantian influence can also be found within Clement Greenberg’s espousing of form over content in American modern art. Essentially, critics such as Greenberg considered the formal attributes of an artwork—the technique—to be more significant and for that alone to speak for what the artwork meant. For Wölfflin as well, aesthetic judgment was relegated to form or—as in Gombrich’s case, to style—wherein the style of one period did not trump another in terms of its value. Wölfflin sought to classify art ‘objectively’ hence he developed a systematic framework for stylistic analysis and development. In contrast Gombrich placed an emphasis on individual style, rather than a pervasive or general style defining a certain historical period. That is to say, style should not be fixed into a specific historical context where said history unravels in a chronology of style epochs. He explains that “there is no real common gauge by which to compare the skill of Picasso with that of a conservative Chinese master. Once more, therefore, the evaluation of expressiveness will largely depend on a knowledge of choice situations” (p. 137). Hence, Gombrich makes an argument against Wölfflin’s dependence on contextual linkage or formal ‘shifts’ in ‘style’ as attributable to a historical timeline. Arguably, a Kantian perspective is also manifested in Gombrich’s dialogue on

technology. He identifies technology to influence the form of art expression. For example, as in the case of functionalism, “the conspicuous look of technological efficiency, has become a formal element of expression in architecture and, as such, sometimes influences design at least as much as genuine adaptation to a purpose” (p. 133). The utilitarian aesthetic of a technological form is, for example, apparent in Bauhaus art<sup>3</sup>. While Gombrich’s views are, in light of the above discussion, ultimately materialist, Wolfflin’s ideas on style falter to a certain Hegelian logic of the unfolding of time hence implicated by a historicist materialist worldview. I shall return to this point later in the essay for now it is better to redirect this conversation towards Hegel.

## Hegelian Aesthetics and Hierarchies of Form

Unlike Kant and Baumgarten, Hegel’s aesthetic theory rests on Platonic and Leibnezian foundations where sensory knowledge is held subordinate to logic or rationality. The artwork as art-object hence serves only as ‘vehicle’ or medium for an ‘Ideal’. Hegel’s notion of ‘Ideal’ beauty stems from his notion of human freedom and of a transcendental or divine spirit. This stands in opposition to the idea of mimesis (in the Platonic tradition) of the natural world that Vasari also espoused. The real function of art for Hegel was to depict this Ideal or divine Spirit (divinity). Although a complete summation of Hegel’s aesthetics is not possible within the limited scope of this essay it is important to point out that Hegel held a certain teleological view of history wherein each age was dominated by a *Zeitgeist*. As opposed to a strictly evolutionary view —such as that held by Vasari and Winckelmann—that a certain epoch was the apex for ‘great art’ Hegel classified art into ‘stages’ which aspired towards ‘true beauty’ although not necessarily always achieving it (Preziosi, 2009). Symbolic or ‘pre-art’, which was in his view largely non-European (for example, Turkish or Egyptian art), failed to capture ideal beauty because of its inability to capture sensuous expression fully. Classical art, while encapsulating ideal beauty in terms of its technical and expressive capacities did not express an ‘inwardness’ which Hegel located as

3 Bauhaus (1919-1933) was an art movement that sought to present a utopian aesthetic through the integration of technology, design, art and life. The ‘materiality’ of Bauhaus can be situated in the axiom ‘form follows function.’ That is to say, it is the functionality or utilitarian nature of an artwork that lends it its form. An example of such an artwork is Marianne Brandt’s Tea Infuser and Strainer, or Marcel Breuer’s various armchair ‘compositions’ (Winton 2007).

being more genuinely expressed within Romantic art. Further, Preziosi writes that Hegel's notion of aesthetics was primarily structural. Ergo, unlike Kant, Hegel conceives art as a 'signifier-form' for 'signified content'. He writes that 'defectiveness of form results from defectiveness of content' (p. 83). Preziosi explains Hegel's theodicy in this regard established a difference between Europe

and the 'Other' as encapsulated within the 'pre-art' classification:  
*"Europe's self-fashioning as not only the 'brain of the earth's body', but the apex of human spiritual evolution, is materially demonstrated by its art. ... To leave Europe would be to enter the past—the past as prologue to (Christian) European technological, cultural, aesthetic, and (above all) spiritual superiority. (p. 59)*

Not only was content—of a divine or ideal category—deemed superior to form, the teleological unfolding or human march of the spirit contextualized this content within a European center. Hegel's ideas thus contributed to the development of stylistic categories where, "stylistic change over time and place was symptomatic of broader or deeper (and generally, pre-existing) changes in meaning or significance; changes in individual or collective mentality or will" (p. 151).

## **Tracing Hegelian and Kantian Influences in Art History: Form versus Content**

Earlier I mentioned that Gombrich criticized style as rooted in periodicity, emphasizing individual—and non-hierarchized—style. With Hegel we can see that the shift is towards content or idealism as captured materially. Hence, as with Wolfflin, a certain Kantian influence in Gombrich's analysis is apparent. But 'style' and 'stylistic change' were held to be indicative of and derived from a certain Geist or Spirit of a specific, chronologically situated age. As Preziosi (2009) argues, art was hence seen as a "marker of difference" (p. 10), signifying a unique and relative position to other art-objects in history. This conversation between the pole ends of form and content, occurs throughout and is formative to the trajectory of art history. It is also emblematic of how certain styles or forms are placed hierarchically in relation to others. Alois Riegl (1893), for example, criticized stylistic distinctions, rooted within Hegelian influence and instead posited the notion of a 'Kunstwollen' or the 'apt expressions of an artistic



Will to Form'. This, it can be argued is also reminiscent of Vasari's view of artistic technique as a 'logical unfolding', although for Riegl no one artistic form or technique superseding another.

Art critics and theorists who sought a relativist perspective were similarly posited on Kantian influence—however these viewpoints are also strewn with contradiction. Farago (2002) addresses this, pointing out that the diachronic attempts at ethnography, or art as archaeology, which interprets non-European art as 'primitive' hence subject to study are essentially exclusivist and fetishistic. It subsumes a multitude of voices into "overarching, totalizing structures" (p. 197), reinforcing a certain fetishism of the 'Other'. This goes far back into European history wherein non-European art is considered to be 'not yet art', since it is 'unenlightened'—that is to say, it lacks a capacity to distinguish between "subjective desire and objective causality" (p. 110), a distinction which theories of aesthetics endeavor to accomplish. As Summers (2003) indicates, theories that fall on either end of historicism, materialism, or idealism are ultimately limiting in their attempts to distinguish artistic function within a subjective/objective split. They write that such theories are "alternative principles of the highest generality" (p. 143).

The form/content and subjective/objective splits continue to be subjects of debate. Heidegger has written prolifically on the split between instrumental reason and pure reason. Great art for Heidegger no longer exists because content is subordinate to form although unlike Hegel, Heidegger characterises the artwork's decontextualization from its 'origin' as being a limiting and oppressive form of *Gestell* or 'enframement' (Young 2001). As with museumification<sup>4</sup>, or art as archaeology, fabricated categories are imposed on the artwork—so that it ceases to be artwork proper as Agamben is wont to point out in *Archaeology of the Work of Art*. This endeavour moreover he highlights to be primarily European. It is a retrospective attempt at sense-making that separates art from work in the 'shibboleth' that is modernity, and the ethnographic lens to which art is subjected to (Agamben, 2017, p. 7).

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4 'Museumification', here, is in reference to the institutional phenomenon, typical of the modern nation-state, whereby art-objects are condemned to the "storied spaces" of museums. As Preziosi (2009) writes, museums thus function as a "disciplinary mode of knowledge-production in its own right, defining, formatting, modelling, and 're-presenting' many forms of social behavior by means of their products or relics" (p. 489).

I shall make a brief departure from the main body at this point with an example. Although, the form/content, subjective/objective oscillation is evinced in many art movements, I find that it manifests quite interestingly in works of Magic Realism—which rooted within a more literary as opposed to artistic context exemplifies the tug between content and form in interesting ways. Magic Realism, Ouyang and Hart (2005) write, has its origins in the Baroque; it exhibits a tension between ‘surface and innerness’ and paves the way for a ‘split-vision’ to emerge. Magic Realism, in effect, re-negotiates the gap between European realism and the mystified unintelligible which the non-West is deemed to be.

## **Conclusion**

Kant and Hegel’s influence can be witnessed in the form/content split that remains a consistent—albeit ‘fabricated problem’—throughout art history. As way of conclusion, I will reiterate that it is a very broad berth to navigate but I find that it interconnects interestingly with the issue of objectivity/subjectivity which has remained a primary concern in the theorising of art history as a discipline.

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## HOMOPHILY: AN EXPLORATION OF FRIENDSHIP DYNAMICS AT HABIB UNIVERSITY

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### Abstract

This paper explores the dynamics among student friendship groups at Habib University in Karachi through the lens of “homophily”. Homophily is the tendency of people to have greater social contact with people who are similar to them. This similarity can be based on many factors such as race, faith, shared ideals, social status or class. The paper first introduces homophily in general, its types and causes, then discusses some of the ways in which it is quantified. It uses network analysis as a framework to explore key drivers behind the general friendship dynamics within the Habib University student body, in particular, the social divide across the two disciplinary schools (school of engineering sciences and school of humanities). For reference, the research draws upon the results of a previous study conducted at Habib University on friendship dynamics of engineering students with students of different majors and genders (Alam & Pasta, 2014). The methodology takes a majorly quantitative approach, by conducting a survey of the student body to collect data regarding friendship preferences of students from each major. The survey results are depicted through graphical representation and statistically analyzed for existence of homophily within and in between different majors. Although results showed very limited polarization among Habib University students, there are various factors that should be considered in the explanation of this pattern. Finally, the paper lays out how its findings can be expanded upon, by setting up questions and proposing a hypothesis for future research.

**Keywords:** *homophily, othering, Habib University, friendship dynamics, small-world networks*



## Introduction

As the authors stood observing the happenings around Habib University campus one day, they joked about the student groups they saw and how they could identify the major each student belonged to, simply by observing them. The science and engineering students were likely to be found heading into a library discussion room to study together, while arts or social science majors were found to be studying alone, or relaxing at one of the campus dining facilities. This prompted a debate about whether the social dynamics on campus were truly as segregated as the authors assumed. Which then led to an extensive discussion about the possible factors that students kept in mind when choosing their friends.

This paper is a result of the aforementioned discussion. It sets out to explore the dynamics behind student friendship groups at Habib University, Karachi, through the lens of “homophily.” The word homophily is derived from two Greek words, homo meaning “same” and philia meaning “love”, and in general, it can be taken to mean “love of sameness” (Hanf, 2019, para. 8). The paper discusses how the presence of homophily has led to some observed social polarization across the two schools within the university, the Dhanani School of Science and Engineering (DSSE), and the School of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (AHSS). Specifically, the paper will compare the friendship dynamics of students belonging to the Computer Science and Social Development & Policy majors.

The paper first introduces homophily as a concept, and discusses the many different types and causes in which it is experienced across the world. Using network analysis as a formal framework, it then discusses some concepts related to the study of graphs (discrete mathematical structures) and patterns of connections between people. Many real-world networks, such as friendship groups, involve millions of people and can be too complex to analyze (Wang, 2020). Designing network models that simulate the behavior of real-world networks, allows us to analyze and perform controlled experiments on real-world situations. These help us make more sense of real-world social networks, many of which deal with millions of users, such as small-world and scale-free networks. Small-world networks have the “small-world” property, in that any two people in the world are likely to be connected through a small number of acquaintances. This also holds true for a smaller set of people, such as the student community at a university, which is where this research was conducted.

The main method used in this research was a survey, that was conducted among Habib University students to gain insights into friendship patterns by asking respondents to assess the proportions of their close friends that they shared a major, gender or batch with. Quantitative analysis of the survey results, together with the findings of the previous work done on this topic, helped provide an understanding of whether or not students had a bias towards interacting with other students based on shared factors. It also shed light on the potential reasons behind this bias. Furthermore, the research looked into whether these shared factors were strong enough to form social identities shaped by difference, and how students perceived those with different, or “other” social identities (Pompper, 2014). It aimed to understand the effect that “othering” had on people’s interactions with one another, and whether it was strong enough to create polarization at Habib University. In particular, this paper explores whether there is a long-standing social divide between students from the two schools at Habib University. Lastly, it acknowledges gaps in knowledge in the research, and sets up several alternate methods through which homophily at Habib University and other institutions could be investigated in a quantifiable manner. It concludes with several potential questions and hypotheses that could be explored based off of the findings.

## Homophily

The term “homophily” or “love of sameness” was first coined in 1954 by American sociologists Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton (Hanf, 2019, para. 8). However, the concept dates as far back as the Hellenistic Period (320 BCE - 30 BCE), when Plato noted in *Phaedrus* that “similarity begets friendship,” and Aristotle noted in his *Rhetoric* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, that people “love those who are like themselves” (McPherson et al., 2001, p. 416).

It refers to the tendency or likelihood of people having stronger non-negative ties with, or greater social contact with people who are similar to them, rather than with those, who are dissimilar to them. This similarity was initially thought of as internal preferences, however, over time, it has evolved to include opportunity, i.e. external factors as well. An internal preference would be not wanting to interact with someone based on the color of their skin, while an external factor would be the predominance of white families in a neighborhood that can result in interaction being limited to only white people. The level of homophily in a society, therefore, determines the extent to which information, whether genetic,

cultural or material, spreads through it (McPherson et al., 2001).

### *Types and Causes*

To test the relevance of homophily, academics have distinguished between baseline homophily and inbreeding homophily. While the former is simply the amount of homophily that would be expected by chance, the latter is the amount of homophily over and above this expected value (McPherson et al., 2001). Baseline homophily would be the presence of shared characteristics in a group of people with varying characteristics. For example, in a group of people with different religions, baseline homophily would be when multiple people share a religion. Inbreeding homophily is when personal preferences come into play, like choosing to interact with people belonging to your religion.

There are many types of homophily which form the basis on which humans interact with people similar to themselves. Lazarsfeld and Merton (1964) distinguished between status homophily and value homophily. The former refers to the idea of people belonging to the same socio-economic background, tending to be similar in nature, and therefore, having greater homophily between them. The latter refers to the tendency to associate with others who think in similar ways, regardless of differences in socio-economic class and status. "Status homophily" includes people having stronger relations on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, and age, along with acquired characteristics such as religion and level of education. In addition, it also takes into account the gender people identify with, especially in school, which is where students tend to have high gender homophily (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1964). On the other hand, "value homophily" may be a result of occupation, political inclination and preference for a certain sports team.

One of the causes of homophily can be summarized based on geography, as people located physically closer tend to have higher homophily. Family ties or new marriages outside of immediate family circles can also increase the homophily in an area over time. Individuals working with organizations tend to have similar ideas, and are likely to be surrounded by like-minded people. Discovering a new hobby or interest in a topic can also introduce a person to new people who share those interests.

## *Effects of Homophily*

### **The Benefits of Homophily**

Forming social connections with other students from your major can prove to be beneficial long-term. Wolff and Moser (2009) defined networking as “behaviors that are aimed at building, maintaining and using informal relationships that possess the (potential) benefit of facilitating work-related activities of individuals by voluntarily granting access to resources and maximizing common advantages” (pp. 196-197). College interactions among peers can turn into meaningful professional connections in the future, as they are likely to end up in the same professional field. While large levels of homophily can cause othering, this can sometimes prove beneficial. However, there is also potential for “bad” or harmful othering to exist.

### **Othering and Polarization.**

Othering can be described as a result or consequence of too much homophily, when people start taking their “social identities shaped by difference” extremely seriously. Interacting with people similar to yourself may result in a person becoming closed-minded and intolerant, and when an entire community shares this view, a strong bias and negative attitude towards others is created. This can result in isolation of entire groups of people, or much worse. Common examples include political situations like the case of Brexit, where the parties that were in favor of, and those against it, staunchly saw the other in the wrong (OtheringandPolarisation.org, n.d.). In extreme cases, othering can even result in racist temperaments that can lead to hate motivated movements such as ethnic cleansing.

### **Networks**

Networks provide one of the most useful analytical and theoretical frameworks for studying social interactions. Social networks, in particular, have a strong presence in our socio-economic lives, because the transfer of important information is dependent on them. They also help us understand and conceptualize the spread of diseases like the Coronavirus, the psychology behind auctions, and how political events such as election voting can be rigged (Talaga & Nowak, 2019). Small-

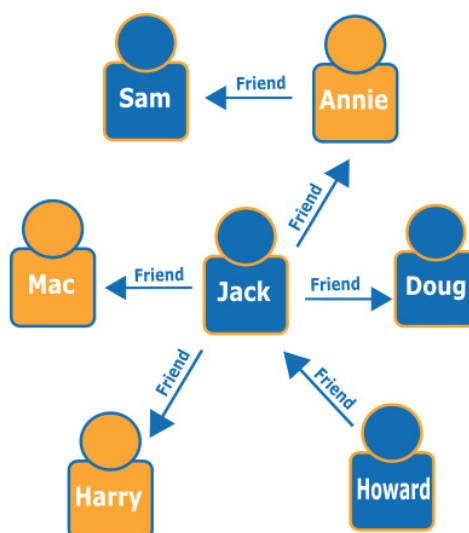


world networks best mimic the structure of social network.

It is important to note that this section only covers a few key concepts on network analysis, that the authors feel are relevant to understanding homophily and social structures, and does not cover the topic of networks exhaustively.

## Terminology

Social networks are formally modeled using graphs. A graph is a mathematical structure that comprises vertices or nodes (that represent individuals) that are connected through edges (e.g., social relations such as friendship).

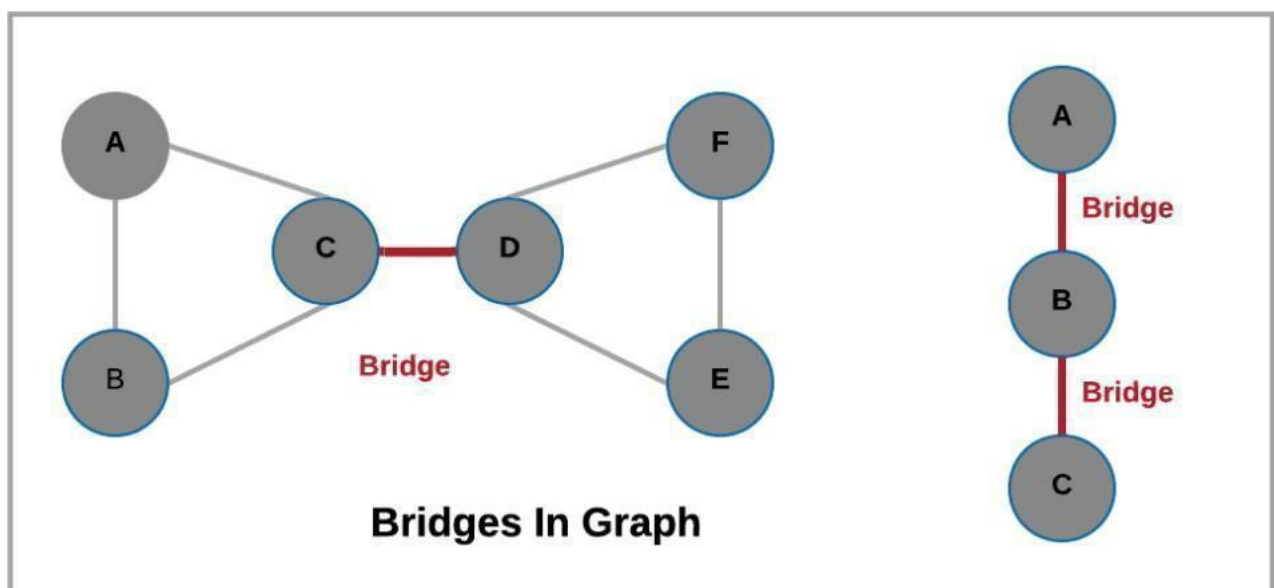


**Figure 1:** An example of a social network graph with edges between different people. Note. (Amazon, 2018).

Each edge represents the connection or relationship between two individuals. There can be two types of edges: directed and undirected. If we think about this in the context of friendships at Habib University, an undirected relationship would be when two individuals both consider each other to be their close friend. However, if Person A considers Person B to be their close friend, but the converse does not hold true, then this will be a directed relationship, as the friendship has a particular direction (from one person to another, rather than it being reciprocated).

If we think about this in the context of friendships at Habib University, an undirected relationship would be when two individuals both consider each other to be their close friend. However, if Person A considers Person B to be their close friend, but the converse does not hold true, then this will be a directed relationship, as the friendship has a particular direction (from one person to another, rather than it being reciprocated).

A bridge is an edge of a graph whose deletion will increase the number of individual components with no links to each other. In social networks, it can represent a person who is friends with members of various different social circles. That person can then act as the bridge between those different social groups (Tabassum et al., 2018). If this person is removed from the equation, it would reduce the chances of members belonging to different social groups interacting.



**Figure 2:** An example of a bridge in graphs  
Note. (Jain, 2020).

## Small-World Networks

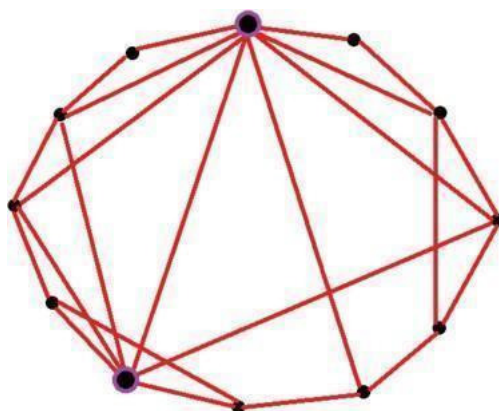
A small-world network is defined as a network where the typical distance  $L$  between two randomly chosen nodes, i.e., the number of steps required to get from one of the nodes to another grows proportionally to the logarithm of the

number of nodes  $N$  in the network, as represented in the equation below.

$$L \propto \log N \quad (1)$$

Small-world networks tend to contain cliques, meaning that every two distinct vertices are adjacent. In other words, the friends of any given person are likely to be friends with each other, i.e., the prevalence of mutual friendships, and that most nodes can be reached from every other node by a small number of hops or steps. Therefore, due to its nature, we also expect the presence of “hubs”, or individuals in our network that are connected to members of different social groups. In social networks, celebrities, politicians and sports personalities are some examples of hubs, as they have many followers and a large social reach.

The “six degrees of separation” concept is based on this network model and is a theory that states that any two people on the planet can be connected through “a chain of acquaintances that has no more than five intermediaries” (WhatIs, 2017, para. 1). This theory was verified in 1967 by American sociologist Stanley Milgram, when he randomly selected people in the Midwest and tasked them with delivering a package to a stranger in Massachusetts, whose name and general location was known. The catch was that each person could only forward the package to someone they knew personally. This person had to be someone who was likely to know the intended recipient, or know someone who was likely connected to the intended recipient. While participants expected the chain of intermediaries to be quite long, it was found that, “it only took (on average) between five and seven intermediaries for each package to be delivered successfully” (WhatIs, 2017, para. 3).



**Figure 3:** An example of a Small-World network

Note. The figure depicts the structure of a small-world network, where each node is only a few connections away from every other node (Holladay, 2017).

This popularized the “small-world concept”, whereby each individual is only a few hops or connections away from everyone else in the world. Examples of small-world networks include telephone call graphs, airport networks and social influence networks (Wang, 2020). This is the type of network that we expect to find in a setting like Habib University. The small-world network theory inspired us to search for patterns in friendship connections at Habib University. Keeping this theory in mind, and assuming that all students at the university are not more than a few acquaintances apart, we attempted to explore the friendship dynamics at play among them.

## Our Research

### *Abbreviations*

Following are some abbreviations that will prove helpful in communicating the results of this study:

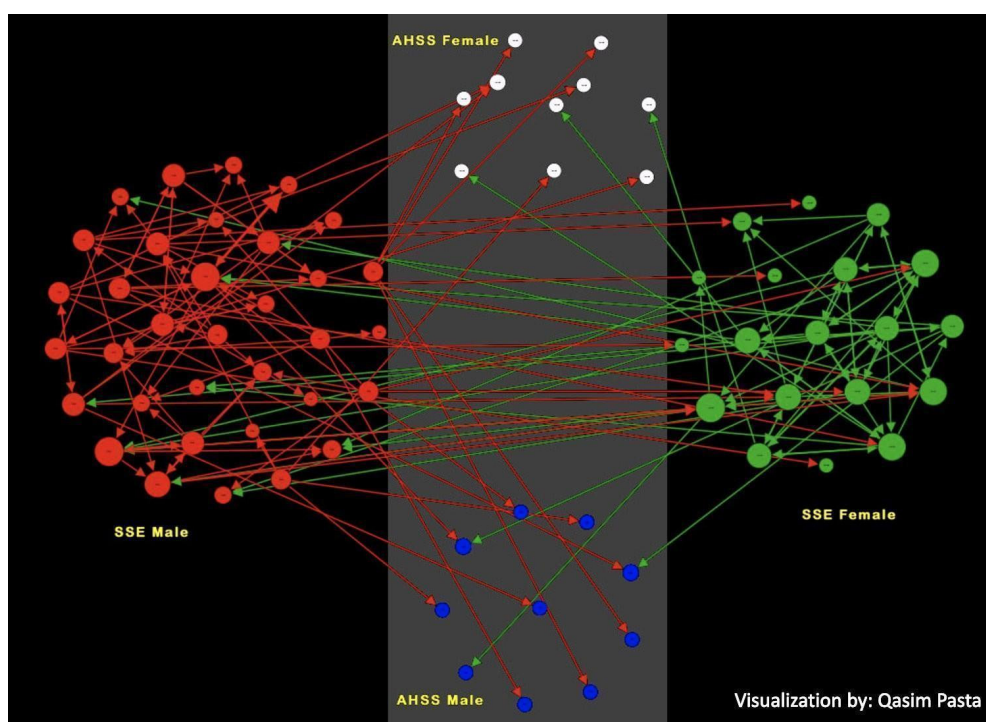
- **DSSE:** Dhanani School of Science and Engineering, one of the two schools at Habib University. Students belonging to this school will be referred to as DSSE students.
- **AHSS:** School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, the second of the two schools at Habib University. Students belonging to this school will be referred to as AHSS students.
- **CS:** Computer Science, one of the majors offered by DSSE. Students of this major will be referred to as CS students.
- **EE:** Electrical Engineering, another major offered by DSSE. Students of this major will be referred to as EE students.
- **SDP:** Social Development and Policy, one of the two majors offered by AHSS. Students of this major will be referred to as SDP students.
- **CND:** Communication and Design, another major offered by AHSS. Students of this major will be referred to as CND students.

### ***Some History on the Divide between AHSS and DSSE students***

Based on the authors' own experiences as Habib University students, it is at times, apparent that students from the two schools have trouble relating to each other because of a factor of reasons, including, but not limited to DSSE students believing they have a tougher workload than AHSS students. On the other hand, it has been observed that AHSS students feel that their education is not taken as seriously by their DSSE counterparts, and also believe them to be less aware of and educated on important social issues. There also exists, a divide by design, in the way the major requirements are structured. For the most part, students take classes with peers from their own major and have comparatively limited interaction with students from other majors as part of their academics.

A survey conducted in 2014 among DSSE students, showed results that affirm the existence of this divide between majors, at least to an extent (Alam & Pasta, 2014). The survey asked DSSE students to pick 5 people they would want to socialize with. In Figure 4, we can see that the connections between students (represented by the nodes) have a particular direction. This reflects direct relationships, in that it does not assume the friendship to be mutual, and is only looking at whether someone wants to befriend someone else, regardless of whether the feeling is reciprocated.

The results show that most DSSE males and females wanted to socialize with peers from inside their own school, with relatively few people wanting to make connections with AHSS males and females (Alam & Pasta, 2014). It can also be seen that most DSSE females appear to have predominantly listed other DSSE females as students they would want to socialize with, as there are very few links (green arrows) going to the other groups. We can see that there are a lot of connections among DSSE males, showing that a lot of them appeared to have named each other as people they would want to socialize with. However, interestingly, DSSE males also appeared to show interest in socializing with members from other groups. This is in contrast to DSSE females, who appeared to mainly want to socialize with their female DSSE peers (Alam & Pasta, 2014).



**Figure 4:** Visualization of 2014 Study Exploring the Divide between DSSE and AHSS students

Note. The four different groups of vertices show polarization between different schools and genders (Alam & Pasta, 2014).

## Method

### Sampling

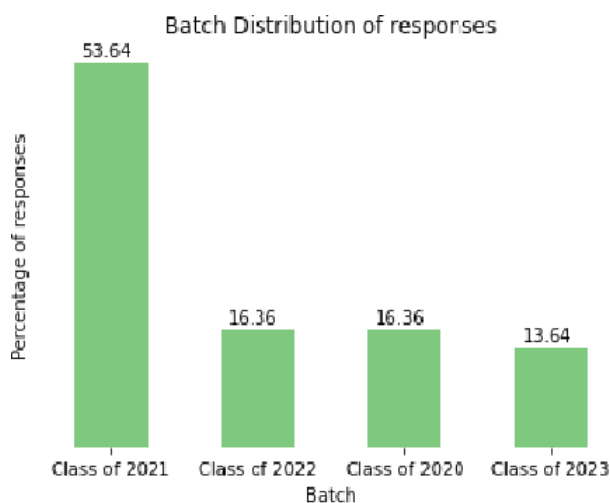
This study takes a majorly quantitative approach by conducting a survey of the student body to collect data regarding friendship preferences of students from each major. The survey results are depicted through graphical representation and analyzed for existence of homophily within and in between different majors. The survey was designed to be conducted among Habib University students to understand their friendship dynamics with each other. The sample consisted of students currently enrolled at Habib University and belonging to the batches of 2020 to 2023. Due to time constraints, convenience sampling was used, and the survey was shared online on the student forum<sup>1</sup>, as well as on the authors' personal Facebook profiles and WhatsApp. The survey was live for six days and a total of 110 responses were collected.

A statement at the beginning of the survey clarified that by “friends”, the survey was referring to those friends who respondents considered to be close, or someone with whom they would interact, outside of classes as well. The survey asked respondents their batch, gender and major. This information was required to understand the distribution of responses. It also asked respondents to approximate and choose the closest percentage (with percentages listed as multiples of 10) of their total number of friends on campus that they would say were from their own major, batch and gender, separately for each category. It then asked for an approximate percentage of people that the respondents interact with during classes, with whom they also interact with outside classes. This was to understand whether students make close friends with people they have class with, the criteria for close friendships being, those that included interactions outside of class as well. The survey was designed to gather information that could help support not only the initial hypothesis, but also lead to potential further research on the Habib University student community.

## ***Survey Participant Statistics and Distributions***

### **Batch Distribution**

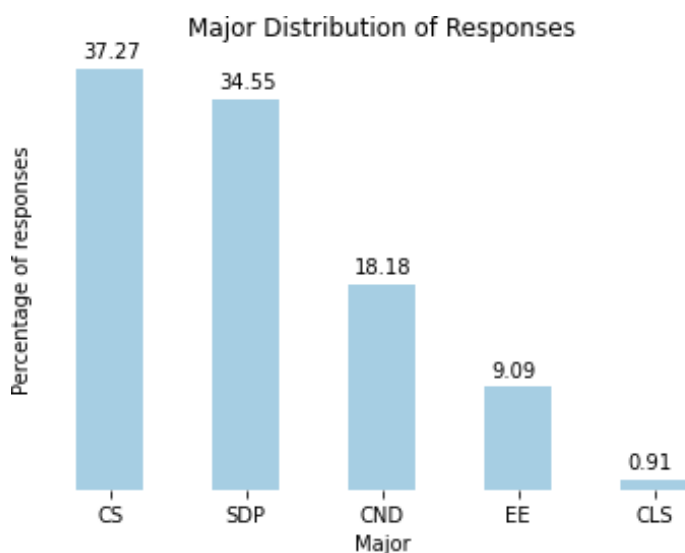
Survey results showed that 53.64 percent of respondents belonged to the batch of 2021. A likely reason for this is that since the authors of this paper belong to the batch of 2021, and the method used was convenience sampling, it was naturally easier to reach out to students of the same batch, and convince them to participate in the study.



**Figure 5:** Batch Distribution of Responses  
 Note. Batch Distribution of the 110 survey respondents.

### Major Distribution

A combined 71.82 percent of respondents were either Computer Science (37.27 percent) or Social Development and Policy (34.55 percent) majors. The two majors constitute the largest majors by number of enrolled students at Habib University, and this was reflected in the results.

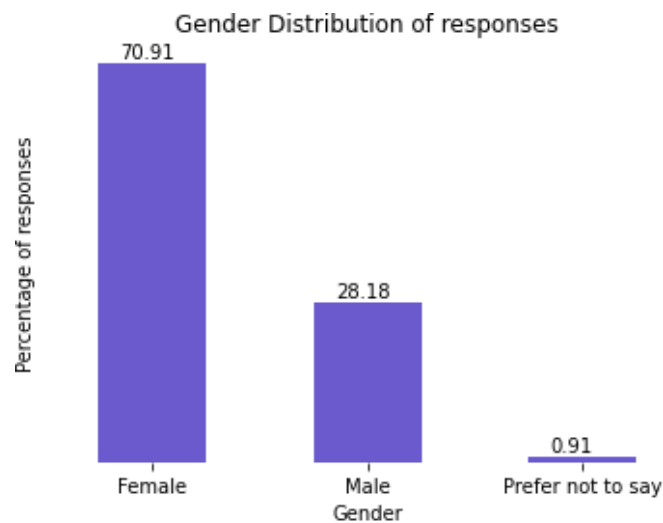


**Figure 6:** Major Distribution of Responses  
 Note. Major Distribution of the 110 survey respondents.



## Gender Distribution

70.91 percent of respondents identified as female. This can be attributed to Habib University's majorly female population (Habib University Registrar's Office, personal communication, November 23, 2021).

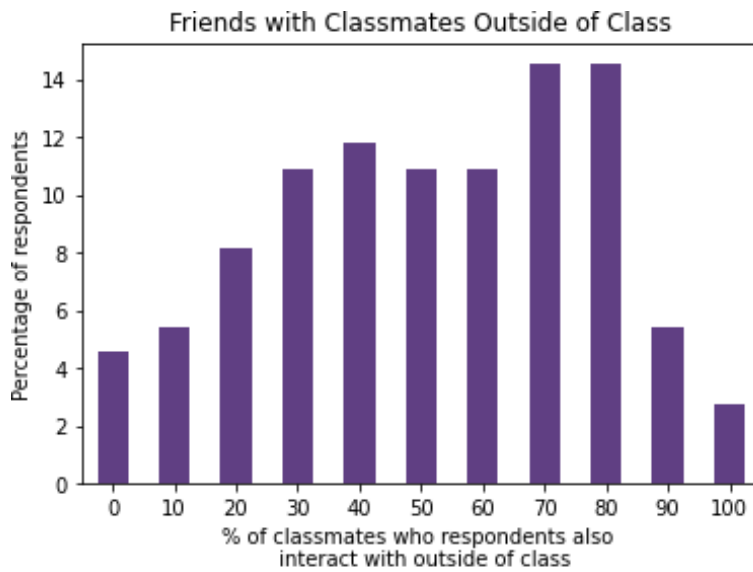


**Figure 7:** Gender Distribution of Responses

Note. Gender Distribution of the 110 survey respondents.

## Distribution of Participants who interact with their Classmates outside of Class.

The distribution is shown below (see Figure 8). The responses were relatively evenly spread out, however, there are two peaks at 80 percent and at 70 percent. Around 28.09 percent of respondents chose a value greater than 70 percent. This tells us that most respondents interacted with less than 7 out of 10 of their classmates outside of class.



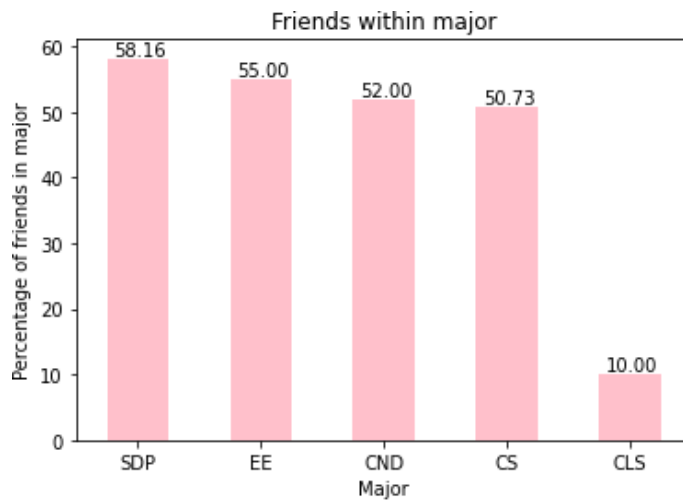
**Figure 8:** Friends with Classmates Outside of Class

Note. This figure represents that percentage of classmates that respondents claimed to interact with both inside and outside of class.

## Results

For the scope of this paper, we will mainly focus on the Computer Science and Social Development and Policy majors, because they are the largest majors at Habib University, and made up the largest percentage of respondents.

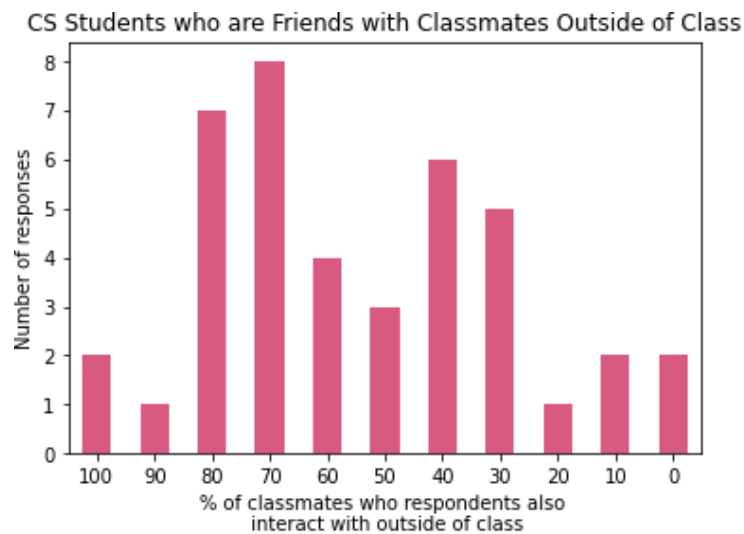
Figure 9 graphs responses from all majors, about the proportion of their total friends that are from within their own major, while Figures 10 and 11 reflect responses from CS and SDP students, respectively.



**Figure 9:** Friends Within Major

### *Existence of Homophily In CS Majors*

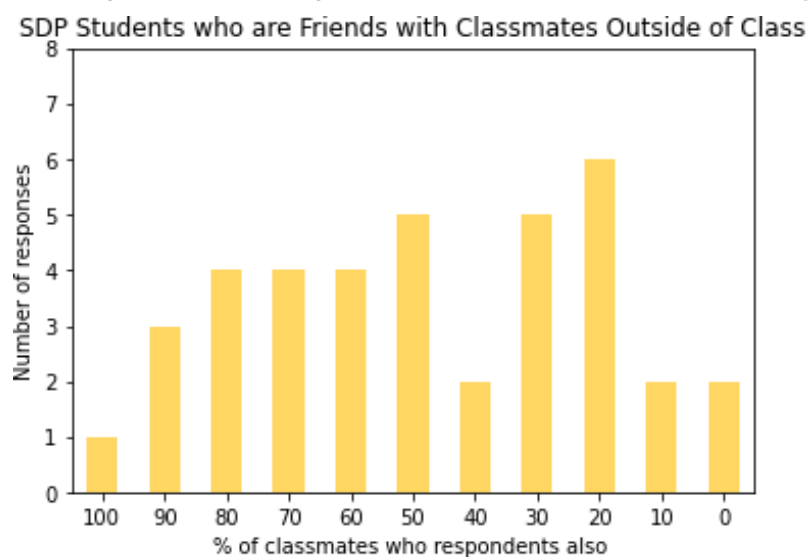
From Figures 9 and 10, it is apparent that there is a high tendency in CS students to interact with other CS students. Figure 10 shows that, on average, CS respondents claimed that 50.73 percent of their friends were from CS. Figure 10 showed us that while the most common options were 70 percent and 80 percent respectively, overall, 56.1 percent of all CS respondents claimed that they interacted with less than 70 percent of their classmates outside of class as well.



**Figure 10:** CS students who are friends with classmates outside of class  
 This figure represents the distribution of SDP students who claimed to socialize with their classmates outside of class as well.

### *Existence of Homophily in SDP Majors*

From Figures 9 and 11, it is apparent that there is also a high tendency in SDP students to interact with other SDP students. Figure 9 shows that, on average, SDP respondents claimed that 58.16 percent of their friends were SDP majors as well. This is a higher statistic than that of CS respondents (50.73 percent). Figure 11 appears to be relatively more consistent in comparison to Figure 10. There are fewer peaks or extremes, and about 68.42 percent of the total respondents belonging to SDP claimed that they interacted with less than 70 percent of their classmates outside of class as well. Again, this is a higher statistic than that of the CS respondents.

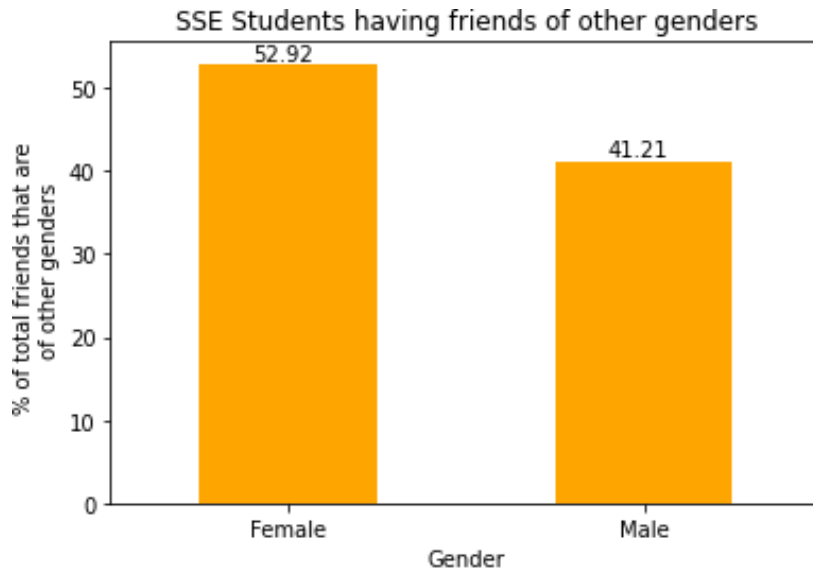


**Figure 11:** SDP students who are friends with classmates outside of class

Note. This figure represents the distribution of SDP students who claimed to socialize with their classmates outside of class as well.

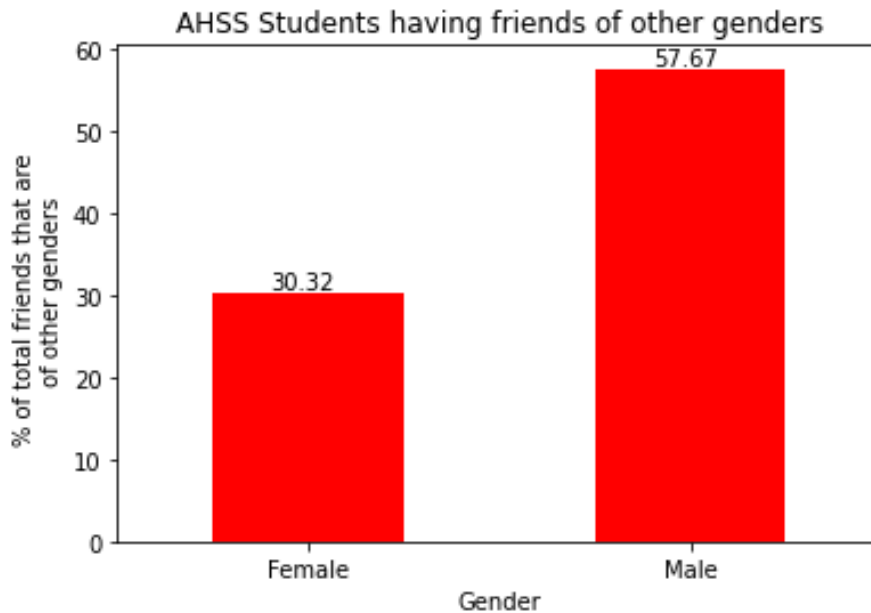
### *Existence of Gender Homophily in DSSE Students*

Figure 12 shows that on average, around 41.12 percent males and 52.92 percent females majoring in sciences or engineering claimed to have friends that identified as a gender other than their own.



**Figure 12:** DSSE students with friends identifying as another gender

Figure 13 shows that on average, around 57.67 percent of males and 30.32 percent of females majoring in arts or humanities claimed to have friends that identified as a gender other than their own. The percentage of AHSS males with friends of another gender is significantly higher than that of DSSE males.



**Figure 13:** AHSS students with friends identifying as another gender

## Discussion

There are some possible reasons for the results obtained which are apparent in differences between each major's gender demography, as well as how their course outline is designed. For instance, CS majors usually follow a relatively strict course outline in their four years of undergraduate education, from which there is usually very few deviations. This means that for most students, classes in their formative years at the university are mostly major based, and this is why they have most exposure to peers of their own major. In this way, there is a divide by design. The schedules of many of the CS core courses are often such that a lot of students do not have much free time in between classes. In the free time that they do have, many prefer to work on assignments and projects, or study for assessments, for which it is helpful to work with other CS students.

There are some possible reasons for the results obtained which are apparent in differences between each major's gender demography, as well as how their course outline is designed. For instance, CS majors usually follow a relatively strict course outline in their four years of undergraduate education, from which there is usually very few deviations. This means that for most students, classes in their formative years at the university are mostly major based, and this is why they have most exposure to peers of their own major. In this way, there is a divide by design. The schedules of many of the CS core courses are often such that a lot of students do not have much free time in between classes. In the free time that they do have, many prefer to work on assignments and projects, or study for assessments, for which it is helpful to work with other CS students.

SDP students generally have more flexibility in choosing courses, as their course plan has fewer required courses (18, compared to 27 for CS students, according to the course catalogue for the batch of 2021) (Habib University, 2014). They have creative practice and literature requirements, which are often fulfilled by electives outside of their major, and even school. Thus, when we compare Figures 10 and 11, we can see that there are fewer peaks or extremes in the graph for SDP majors, whose distribution is relatively more consistent. This could be due to the fact that a lot of the courses taken by SDP students have students from majors other than their own. Therefore, there may be mostly SDP students in core SDP courses, that are requirements for their major, but a mixture of CND, SDP, CS and EE students in non-SDP, elective courses. This does not hold true for CS students, because a lot of the required and elective CS courses require a

background in technical CS knowledge. Without meeting certain prerequisites, students of other majors are relatively less likely to take CS courses, which leads to CS students having classmates that are mostly from their own major.

Furthermore, the type of workload that exists for DSSE and AHSS students is different. Therefore, students within a major might find it easier to connect with other students in the same major, because they share the same kind of work. We tested this by picking a major from each school, and then comparing the responses of students with each major, i.e., CS and SDP students. For CS students, a majority of the course work related to their major involves examinations, projects, viva voce, and technical assessments. For SDP students, a majority of the course work related to their major involves presentations, research work, and writing papers. For this reason, there might be a natural inclination on the part of each major's students to be around other students of the same major, since they are more likely to share similar concerns about assignments and the same approaching deadlines. This could stand for all other majors in both schools.

As for gender divide, there are fewer females in DSSE (Habib University Registrar's Office, personal communication, November 23, 2021). This supports our survey results, which indicate that more than half of the DSSE female respondents claimed to have friends from the opposite gender. This could be due to having less same-gendered people to befriend within their major. However, there is a large DSSE male population at Habib University (Habib University Registrar's Office, personal communication, November 23, 2021), and this could be why many DSSE male respondents claimed to predominantly be friends with other male peers. Meanwhile, there are comparatively fewer AHSS males (Habib University Registrar's Office, personal communication, November 23, 2021), so there is a lack of same-gendered students to befriend, which could explain why many AHSS male respondents claimed to have friends of other genders. The female majority in AHSS could explain why fewer females mentioned befriendings males.

Furthermore, Figures 8 and 9 showed us that while, due to group assessment, a lot of students might be forced to interact with their classmates in class, there is a high percentage of them, who do not engage in interactions outside of class. This might be indicative of homophily based on majors not being as prevalent. It also shows that classrooms, or interactions with classmates over work, are not necessarily platforms that must lead to establishing friendships.

## Key Takeaways

As far as the scope of this research paper goes, there was no evidence found, that either proves or disproves that a high level of polarization, based on majors or genders, exists at Habib University. The data showed the existence of very limited polarization, and this can be attributed to the existence of the Liberal Core. The Liberal Core is a set of courses that attempts to provide all students, regardless of major or batch, with knowledge of various essential subjects like quantitative reasoning, philosophy, religion, historical and social thought, etc (Habib University, 2014). This allows humanities students to get exposure to the essential sciences, and vice versa. What results from this, for the most part, is an environment where open-minded discussions are encouraged, along with the idea that no particular gender, major or batch is superior to another, and so, polarization on this basis is discouraged. Furthermore, the Liberal Core courses encourage and provide a platform for students from all genders, majors and batches to interact with each other, since its classes comprise of students from all majors.

It can be concluded that while polarization leading from othering can definitely be a problem, there is not enough evidence to suggest that this problem is highly prevalent at Habib University. It is easy to acknowledge that some divide does exist between the engineering students (CS and EE), and the non-engineering students (mainly SDP and CND). The survey employed in this research, taken six years after a similar survey, showed similar trends in the divide between friendships among the different schools.

In consideration of the relatively mixed responses, as well as the lack of an equal number of responses across all batches and majors, it is important to acknowledge the gaps in this study's data and consequently, the research. While the existence of a divide between the schools is apparent, it still remains to be proven either qualitatively or quantitatively, whether it has led to any kind of polarization among the Habib student community.



## Future Plans

A possible reason for the specific results of this study could be attributed to the Liberal Core, which may be contributing to the mitigation of polarization that might otherwise be caused by the divide. This leads to a possible hypothesis that can be addressed through further research: Does the Habib Liberal Core play a role in mitigating the effect of othering and polarization at the University? This hypothesis can be taken in two directions. A similar survey can be conducted across other universities in Pakistan to understand the extent to which there exists a divide between engineering and non-engineering students in other universities. Along with this, specific questions can be added to the survey to further explore the different opinions as well as assumptions that engineering and non-engineering students across Pakistani universities hold about each other. A comparative analysis can then be performed, to see whether the opinions held about each major are more, less, or equally as polarizing as they are at Habib University. This can allow an assessment of the Liberal Core's influence on othering and polarization in Habib University. Another angle that can be explored is the effect of various meta-curricular activities—such as music classes and student clubs—on friendship dynamics.

The survey used within our research also included a checkbox question to get some added clarity on what participants look for when making friends at Habib University. This question allowed respondents to choose any number of options from a given set of choices, including shared interests, a similar social status, a similar personality to the respondent and similar morals. Participants were also allowed to manually enter their own answer statements. Although the results of this question were not included in this study, they can be replicated in future studies to explore whether status homophily or value homophily is more prevalent in friendship groups at Habib University. Yet another possible thesis could investigate the relation of female to male ratios in universities with friendships. Statistics show that Habib University has a larger female population, compared to other, predominantly engineering institutions like the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) and Ghulam Ishaq Khan Institute of Engineering Sciences and Technology (GIKI), where the male-to-female ratio is much higher, with an enrollment of 1 female for every 9 males (World University Ranking, 2021). There is also a notable number of females in the engineering school at Habib, which gives males with science and engineering majors a greater exposure to members of different genders, and increases the chances of them becoming

accustomed to working in female dominated environments. This, however, may not be the case in the above-mentioned institutions. The survey showed that on average, around 41.12 percent of males majoring in sciences claimed to have friends of the other genders, as shown in Figure 13. It would be interesting to explore whether a comparable statistic is found in other engineering institutions. There is potential in exploring how the larger female presence at Habib University has shaped engineering male students' attitudes towards women, when compared to the attitudes of male students at other universities across Pakistan who have lesser exposure to female peers within their major.

## Quantifying Homophily

While it could be assumed that a theoretical concept such as homophily can only be explored in a subjective manner, interestingly, there are several methods that allow for it to be quantified. As such, this research could be further expanded by using its findings and the methods listed below to quantify the level of homophily in a university setting.

There are differing views on how to empirically quantify and measure the level of homophily in a society. One common method is assortative mixing, which refers to the process of observing how “attributes of vertices (in this study’s case, individuals) correlate across edges (friendships, in this context)” (Clauset, 2013, p. 5). In a social network, assortative mixing is the study of how individuals’ attributes such as race, gender etc. influence the connections they make. According to Clauset (2013), assortative mixing can further be broken down into distinct attributes by either their labels or enumerative values, or even scalar values. Labels or enumerative attributes consist of all those attributes that vertices may possess in a network, that follow no particular order or hierarchy. Examples in general networks can include colors and shapes, while examples of humanistic attributes in societies can include gender and ethnicity (Clauset, 2013). Scalar attributes consist of all those attributes that vertices may possess in a network, that have a particular numerical ordering or hierarchy. In humanistic societies, these can include age, weight and income (Clauset, 2013 & Newman, 2002).

Another common method of empirically quantifying homophily is to calculate the proportion of links that exist within the community, to the total number of links (including those with members of different communities). If there are two

distinct groups, based on a social category or identity like gender, age or race, and a friendship network is constructed between them, we can measure homophily by dividing the number of friends an individual has in their own group by the total number of their friends (Alam, 2020).

## Limitations

There were certain limitations that hindered the study from reaching a conclusive outcome. Firstly, the survey results were not entirely representative. There was a definite bias as a greater number of responses was received from the Batch of 2021, and from CS and SDP students, due to which, analysis had to be limited to the two majors' responses. The EE majors in particular, were underrepresented in this study, and in any attempt to replicate the study or take this research further, EE representation should be taken into consideration. Their input would help get a better idea about the divide between engineering and non-engineering students as well as the friendships within students belonging to the same school.

Furthermore, this survey was only made available to respondents for six days, a longer time frame would have gathered more varied responses. COVID-19 and time constraints restricted the method used in the study to convenience sampling and an online survey, which impacted the number and distribution of responses collected. Moreover, the survey results were not descriptive enough to conclusively assess the attitudes of engineering and humanities majors towards each other, and the authors had to draw on a lot of their own experiences to generalize and make assumptions.

## Conclusion

This paper explored the dynamics of friendship groups at Habib University through the lens of homophily. It established that there is a divide between the engineering and non-engineering student communities. However, there was not enough evidence to conclusively suggest whether this divide was strong enough to cause polarization. It explored the various factors that contribute to this divide such as schedule restrictions, study habits, and subjects that are shared within each major. It proposed several directions the research could be built upon to further

explore homophily in university friendship networks, such as testing whether the level of polarization is equally prevalent in universities across Pakistan that do not offer Liberal Core courses, or testing for polarization based on gender in different engineering universities. The research has further scope for expansion and applicability to other institutions, as well as more factors that influence friendship networks.

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## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ACCESS TO MATERNAL & NEWBORN HEALTH SERVICES IN KARACHI

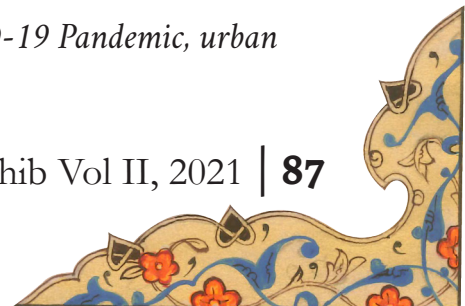
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### Abstract

This study is a qualitative exploratory research which uses Penchansky and Thomas' 'Theory of Access' and Saurman's 'Proposed Dimension of Awareness' to investigate how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected access to maternal and newborn healthcare services provided by private hospitals in Karachi. It aims to focus specifically on the lockdown (third week of March – mid August 2020) as well as the post lockdown period in Karachi. Through in-depth interviews and document analysis of the Government of Pakistan's Guidelines on Sexual, Reproductive and Maternal Health Services during COVID-19, this study aims to understand the extent to which new mothers' access to said services has been affected. It also aims to explore how successful initiatives such as helplines and online health clinics have been in bridging the access gap created by the pandemic and, how the provision of these services has been affected at hospitals. Themes such as requirement of in-person visits, scare factor, disregard for SOPs, and high-risk pregnancies, emerged from this study. The study found that majority of the new mothers were able to access maternal and newborn healthcare during COVID-19 in Karachi, but with more difficulty than usual. Online health clinics/sessions proved to be useful for the new mothers who availed them, however, most of them preferred in-person visits. Moreover, there is only a certain extent to which helplines and online health clinics can help, since patients have to visit hospitals for ultrasound and antenatal appointments as well as any other physical examinations.

**Keywords:** *access, maternal and newborn healthcare, Karachi, COVID-19 Pandemic, urban*



## **Introduction**

Pakistan has the 2nd highest maternal mortality rate in South Asia (Saharty et al., 2015). However, according to the 2019 Pakistan Maternal Mortality Survey, the country has made progress as its maternal mortality rate (MMR) decreased from 276 deaths to an average of 186 deaths per 100,000 live births (DAWN, 2020). Punjab has the lowest MMR with 157 deaths per 100,000 live births, KP stands at 165, Sindh at 224 and Balochistan at 298 (DAWN, 2020). The preceding provincial breakdown shows how this improvement has been uneven across Pakistan. The country faced difficulty in achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 and 5 (Reduce Child Mortality and Improve Maternal Health respectively) despite efforts such as the National Maternal, Neonatal, and Child Health Strategic Framework in 2005, the National MNCH Programme in 2007 and the extension of primary healthcare services through lady health workers (NIPS & ICF, 2019). Achieving the relevant areas for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being) by 2030 will require more stronger commitment compared to previous attempts to achieve MDGs. With the COVID-19 pandemic, provision and access to maternal and newborn health services is expected to worsen further.

In response to COVID-19, the Government of Pakistan imposed a nationwide lockdown in the third week of March (Sarwer et al., 2020). In Sindh, a lockdown was imposed on 22nd March 2020 and there was a ban on the movement of persons, with the exception of essential purchases and medical care (The Collective for Social Science Research & Center for Reproductive Rights, 2020). Public transport services were also suspended in Karachi. Many hospitals, especially private facilities, suspended their outpatient department services (OPDs) and elective surgeries (Sarwer et al., 2020). Sexual and reproductive health services (SRH) were deprioritized as resources were diverted to deal with the COVID-19 crisis (CSSR & CRR, 2020). It is expected that during this



time, health service departments were affected, particularly gynecology and obstetrics, which in turn could have led to an increase in maternal and child mortality rates, as well as a decline in child vaccination and immunology practices (Sarwer et al., 2020). According to a study published in *The Lancet*, it is estimated that COVID-19 might lead to a 31 percent increase in infant and maternal mortality in Pakistan in 12 months if the health services remain suspended (Bhatti, 2020). However, around May 2020, this lockdown was eventually eased by the Sindh Government when they allowed movement and reopened public places in some areas.

This study discovered that while most of the participants were able to access maternal and newborn healthcare during COVID-19 in Karachi, they still faced some difficulty in doing so, and most healthcare professionals' hospitals used federal government guidelines. Online health clinics/sessions proved to be useful for the new mothers who used them, however, most of them preferred in-person visits. Moreover, there is only a certain extent to which helplines and online health clinics can help, since patients have to visit hospitals for ultrasounds and antenatal appointments, as well as any other physical examinations. Themes such as requirement of in-person visits, other alternatives, scare factor and disregard for SOPs, high-risk pregnancies, compromised aspects of maternal and newborn health services such as family planning, contraception, routine checkups, post maternal fetal care, as well as support systems emerged from this study.

First, this study describes the theoretical framework used, and delves into the sampling and recruitment process, as well as limitations of the study. The paper lists the methods and materials used and moves on to the results and discussion section that includes thematic analysis. Finally, in the conclusion section, it puts forth recommendations on ways to improve telemedicine and online health services in Pakistan, while giving examples of initiatives taken by Brazil and Nairobi to increase access to maternal and newborn healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The study uses Penchansky and Thomas' theory of access which argues that access can be optimized by taking into account five different dimensions; accessibility, availability, acceptability, affordability and adequacy (Penchansky &

Thomas, 1981). Penchansky and Thomas define accessibility in terms of location by stating that an accessible service should be within reasonable proximity to the consumer in terms of time and distance. They define availability in terms of supply and demand, stating that an available service has sufficient services and resources to meet the volume and needs of the consumers and communities served. Acceptability is defined in terms of consumer perception and as such, an acceptable service is viewed as one which responds to the attitude of the provider and consumer regarding characteristics of the service, as well as social and cultural concerns. Affordability is defined in terms of financial and incidental costs. An affordable service is seen as one which examines the direct costs for both the service provider and the consumer. Finally, adequacy is defined in terms of organization since an efficient service has to be well-organized to accept clients, and clients should be able to use the services (Saurman, 2015).

This study will also use a sixth dimension proposed by Saurman (2015), which is awareness. Awareness is defined by Saurman in terms of communication and information, since a service maintains awareness through effective communication and information strategies with relevant users, including consideration of context and health literacy. All of these dimensions will be employed to assess whether helpline or online health clinic initiatives have been successful in bridging the access gap created by the pandemic.

## **Sampling and Recruitment**

Both direct and indirect recruitment were used for this study. Sampling was done on the basis of multiple criterion; new mothers had to be based in Karachi, should have availed maternal and newborn health services during the COVID-19 pandemic, and could have/have not availed the use of helpline or online health clinic services. Healthcare professionals had to be based in Karachi and had to be gynecologists or doctors who were working in the gynecology department during the pandemic.

Four new mothers and three healthcare professionals were recruited for this study. The mothers will be referred to by the following pseudonyms: Sarah, Zainab, Zoha and Asma. They are 32, 25, 25 and 33 years old respectively. All four new mothers reside in Karachi's District South and belong to an urban background.

All of them availed maternal and newborn health services at private hospitals. Sarah is a singer/songwriter and she had her delivery in December 2019, but was availing these services for her newborn during and after the lockdown was lifted. Zainab is a dentist and she started going for maternal appointments from January 2020. Zoha is currently a homemaker (she was a lawyer prior to becoming a mother) and her pregnancy began in January. She started availing these services from February and continued to do so during the lockdown. Asma is a teacher and availed these services in July/August 2020 during the lockdown.

The three healthcare professionals will be referred to by pseudonyms Sadia, Alina and Hafsa. Dr. Sadia is a gynecologist at a private hospital, Dr. Hafsa is a gynecologist who works in a public hospital in Karachi, as well as other urban centers all over Pakistan, and Dr. Alina was working in the gynecology department of a private hospital as part of her house job<sup>1</sup>.

Initially, in-person interviews were planned for healthcare professionals, however, due to COVID or the interviewee's busy schedule, the primary data collection method had to shift from in-person interviews to receiving answers to questionnaires via Google Docs and voice notes on WhatsApp. This was done for two of the interviews, while one was an in-person interview. Due to time constraints, convenience sampling was conducted and hence, the new mothers' sample was not sufficiently varied. The study was unable to include new mothers who availed these services from public hospitals.

## Methods and Materials

### *In-depth interviews*

In total, seven in-depth interviews were conducted for this study; four of the new mothers and three of healthcare professionals. For the latter, one of the interviews was conducted in-person, while the rest were conducted via Zoom, WhatsApp and Google Docs. Quotes taken from these interviews have been translated into English, where the answers received were either in Urdu or both languages.

1 A year-long clinical experience under supervision of senior physicians' right after graduation from a medical college.

However, special care is taken to ensure that the meaning of the answers does not change during the process of translation.

### ***Government of Pakistan's Guidelines on Sexual, Reproductive and Maternal Health Services during COVID-19***

This study conducts a document analysis of the Government of Pakistan's Guidelines on Sexual, Reproductive and Maternal Health Services during COVID-19 which were released on 7th July 2020, on the official website made by the government to communicate updates related to the COVID-19 situation in Pakistan. This document analysis is done to see whether hospitals followed these guidelines.

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### ***Results & Discussion***

The study found that new mothers did face some difficulty in accessing maternal and newborn healthcare in Karachi during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially for routine checkups, during and after the lockdown. However, most of the new mothers had no option but to physically go to the hospital and avail these services. Four new mothers (Zoha, Asma, Zainab & Sarah) were interviewed to understand how access to these services was affected during the lockdown, as well as after it was lifted. All four participants were availing these services from private hospitals. Sarah had her child's delivery in December 2019, hence all of her pregnancy appointments, and subsequently her delivery were done prior to the lockdown, but her newborn still needed to avail these services. She admits that access to these services was affected during the lockdown: *"Yeah, completely. I think just the frequency of the access was the biggest challenge, since it wasn't as easy to just get up and go with my husband and just get the checkups done."* The temporary suspension of OPD services also further affected access: *"Like I said earlier, some doctors were just not available. So we had to wait till the situation kind of settled and*

*the risk was a little lower and the doctors were available.”*

Zoha started to avail these services prior to the lockdown and continued to avail them during as well. For her, access was not really affected because of the lockdown: “...these services were still accessible during the lockdown and when the lockdown was lifted they were definitely accessible”. She recalls that lab timings were shorter during the lockdown, but this did not affect her as much. However, Zoha had contracted COVID towards the end of her pregnancy and she described how contracting the virus affected her access to these services: “...I got COVID myself... and of course because of that, I couldn’t meet any doctor and also had to change my doctor at the very last minute, for which I also used online services because if you have COVID, the hospital will only see you online).” She mentioned that her doctor was reluctant to deliver her baby and she had to find another doctor last minute: “... but when I got COVID he was a little reluctant to do my delivery, because I contracted COVID in my 39<sup>th</sup> week and even though he had done COVID deliveries, I don’t know he just seemed skeptical”.

Asma did not really face any difficulty in accessing these services during the lockdown. She mentioned that her lab tests were not affected and all of her maternal appointments were in-person. Zainab was going for maternal appointments since January 2020; she had a few appointments before COVID, but most of them were during the pandemic. After the lockdown was imposed in Karachi, she still had to go to the hospital for appointments, but her doctor tried to limit her visits.

### ***Helplines and Online Health Clinics***

One of the main objectives of this research is to see whether helplines and online health clinics were successful in bridging the access gap created by the pandemic. The pandemic encouraged and sped up the development of the tele-health sector. The suspension of outpatient services in many hospitals in Sindh led frontline healthcare providers to use WhatsApp and Zoom for online consultations, including antenatal appointments (CSSR & CRR, 2020). Organizations such as Sehat Kahani, Aman Foundation and the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Pakistan’s (SOGP) tele-health initiatives were essential during this time. However, frontline healthcare providers mention that many patients did not own smartphones or have access to internet, highlighting the need for digital literacy and better access to technology and digital communications (CSSR & CRR, 2020). Female doctors have reported that they experienced harassment,

and this has discouraged many of them from providing their services through such platforms. Pakistan does not have a proper legal framework or government regulations for telemedicine which hinders the provision of these services by healthcare providers (CSSR & CRR, 2020).

Out of the three healthcare professionals that were interviewed, Dr. Hafsa explains how her hospital had set up telemedicine desks because of COVID-19. Her hospital had set up three lines/telephone numbers; WhatsApp, landline and another line. One is 24/7, while the other two operate for 12 hours. She explained how these lines worked: *“We had these manned by PG (post graduate) year 3 or 4 and she also had the consultant of the day on call. So, if the PG couldn’t solve her problem, the case was referred to consultant...”* Dr. Alina explains that at her hospital the gynecology department did not hold tele-clinics, whereas, the pediatric department continued to extend its services through tele-clinics and video calls- not to last for very long. Dr. Sadia mentioned that her hospital had established tele-clinics during the lockdown. These tele-clinics and helplines proved to be effective during the pandemic.

New mothers were asked multiple questions regarding their use of helplines and online health clinics. The questions aimed to understand the five dimensions of access put forth by Penchansky and Thomas which are: accessibility, availability, acceptability, affordability and adequacy, as well as the sixth dimension of awareness proposed by Saurman (2015), to observe whether these helplines and online health clinics were accessible. Zoha used three tele-clinics on Zoom after the lockdown; two were with a gynecologist and one was with an infectious diseases doctor and Zainab used one online health clinic on Zoom. Looking at the aspect of accessibility, both Zoha and Zainab maintained that these online health clinics were accessible. However, Zoha mentioned that she faced connectivity issues during one of her tele-clinics with a gynecologist and Zainab also faced the same problem during her online health clinic. Asma had not used a helpline or online health clinic, but she availed online prenatal classes from a private hospital. She mentioned that these classes were accessible, but she could not attend her first class as the required information was not conveyed to her and she faced difficulty with navigating through the Skype software.

For the availability dimension, Zoha said that the online health clinics did have the required resources to meet her needs. Asma mentioned that for her prenatal classes, they did have the required resources, except that they used

outdated resources such as old light projectors for the online sessions and the material presented was not clearly visible. In regards to the acceptability dimension, Zainab said that the online health clinic did satisfy her perception since it did not require her to go physically, while Zoha also said that they satisfied her perception. Asma mentioned that she faced internet issues and it was hard for her to hear in the online sessions when multiple people would ask questions simultaneously and there was no moderator. However she was happy that the online option was available.

Considering the dimension of affordability, Zoha, Zainab and Asma said that the online health clinics/sessions that they used were affordable. Zoha recalls that one of the online health clinics costed 3,000 (PKR), while the other was 3,300 (PKR), while Zainab mentioned that in her experience, it was much cheaper than physically going to the hospital and costed her 2,000 (PKR). Asma recalls that it was Rs.3500 for 3-4 prenatal classes. For the adequacy dimension, both Zainab and Zoha said that the online health clinics were well-organized to accommodate their concerns. Zainab added that she was informed that the gynecologist was available on those days for teleclinics. Asma also said they were well-organized, but once again mentioned that she struggled a little with the online classes.

In regards to Saurman's sixth dimension of awareness, Zoha, Zainab and Asma were aware that there were other alternatives to the hospital that were providing these services. Zoha was already aware that a private hospital was offering these tele-clinics and her husband had also used it once. Asma found out about the prenatal classes during her first doctor's visit where the nurse had briefed her about them and she was able to find further information from the hospital. Furthermore, all three of them mentioned that they would recommend these

*“So I would recommend it, if for some reason someone cannot go and they do not need to show something that can only be diagnosed by going to the hospital and just want to discuss something, then they can just take the appointment online.”*

This theory cannot be applied to understand Sarah's data because she did not avail helplines or online health clinics/sessions for her newborn. However, if the dimension of awareness proposed by Saurman is considered, Sarah may not have used a helpline or online health clinic for her newborn because she was unaware that these facilities were being offered.

A challenge faced by almost all of the new mothers was internet connectivity issues. Zoha faced connectivity issues in one of the online health clinics with a gynecologist: *“...we tried for half an hour, but none of us could hear each other and eventually it just got cancelled.”* Zainab also said that connectivity issues were a problem and Asma mentioned that she would face difficulty in communicating her questions during class at times since her internet would not work.

When the healthcare professionals were asked about the strengths and weaknesses of helplines and online health clinics, all of them maintained that they avoided in-person visits. Dr. Hafsa stated that if there were simple symptoms such as aches and pains, then those would preferably be addressed online. Dr. Alina also gave a similar response: *“if it’s a small worry, they can just speak to their doctor [online] and get that sorted and they can be in communication even if they’re in some remote part of the country.”* Dr. Sadia mentioned that patients’ problems are listened to and solved, and they receive more knowledge which they can convey to their family and friends. Dr. Hafsa relayed that if it is a video call, they can see the patient’s symptoms and reassure them. However, all of them say that these services get compromised when a physical examination is needed. Dr. Sadia added that for these facilities to work, the patient should have good internet services.

Dr. Hafsa said that telemedicine was accessible for anyone from any background because everyone has a mobile phone. Dr. Sadia mentioned that accessibility wise it was not the same for everyone, but majority did benefit from tele-clinics and helplines. Dr. Alina, on the contrary, said that her hospital receives patients from various backgrounds and telehealth was not accessible for anyone. She mentioned how there are some patients who have no knowledge of technologies and did not have access to it or did not understand it so they could not avail these tele-clinics.

Dr. Hafsa mentioned that the helplines were advertised, but they receive only around 20 to 25 calls per day from women which is less compared to the usual number of patients. However, she feels that this will increase as word-of-mouth spreads. When asked what changes could be made to tailor these facilities to our population, Dr. Sadia answered that internet availability and population awareness would help, while Dr. Hafsa stated that advertising these facilities more and making them more easily available would help in this regard. However, Dr. Alina believes that online health clinics in Pakistan have a long way to go: *“I don’t think this country has the infrastructure, the computers, or internet in all parts of the country to have online health clinics. That’s why our OPDs are full and bustling*



right now,” she explained.

Overall, there were mixed responses to whether these initiatives were as effective as in-person visits. Zoha mentioned how the two online appointments she took were very important:

*“Those appointments were really important, such as the gynecologist one because I had to get my delivery done from somewhere and I wanted a second opinion really badly because my 40th week was about to begin. The other one was important because they were the ones who would tell the gynae department if I needed to be in isolation or not... they weren’t treating me as a COVID patient during my delivery because of this appointment ...”*

However, she said she would still prefer going in-person. Zainab and Asma mentioned that these online health clinics/sessions were helpful, but they would also prefer going in-person

### ***Requirement of In-Person Visits***

Many participants were of the view that helplines and online health clinic initiatives can only help to a certain extent. Zainab said that before the lockdown, she had to go to the hospital because ultrasound appointments can only take place in-person. She stated there are some appointments for which going to the clinic can be avoided and feels that these initiatives were effective until a certain point, but were not effective when she had to go for ultrasounds, as those cannot happen via an online health clinic or helpline. Zoha also mentioned the same concern.

Dr. Hafsa explained that for a pelvic examination or antenatal evaluation, patients have to come to the hospital, since they cannot be done online. Dr. Alina explains that as a doctor you cannot properly diagnose anything via helpline or online health clinic, and that medicine requires you to examine the patient. Moreover, she mentioned that even for radiological investigations, the patient needs to come to the hospital. She further added that these initiatives do not really benefit departments such as gynecology:

*“...because for a field like medicine, both peds and gynae especially, of course, telehealth is very difficult to do because you need to examine the pregnant mother, you need to see an ultrasound so the woman has to come to get her ultrasound done.”*

## **Alternatives**

Besides helplines and online health clinics/sessions, new mothers were also using other alternatives. Both Asma and Sarah mention that they spoke to doctors who they knew and asked them for advice during the lockdown. Asma said that she spoke to her family gynecologist on the phone and also met her in-person once. Sarah also mentioned that she had friends who were doctors abroad and she asked them for advice:

*“Otherwise, you know, our friends are doctors abroad so the only thing we could do is maybe ask them that today there is this symptom, this rash, this is what he is suffering from, what should we do and then they would just give their advice that maybe get something from the pharmacy over the counter...”*

Besides this, Asma also added that she would research from various resources online. Sarah adds that one platform that really helped her was a group on Facebook called “The Mummy Group” where she could get suggestions and recommendations from other mothers: *“In that sense, it helps us during emergency circumstances where we don’t have anywhere else to go so we have that outlet and venue available.”*

## **Scare Factor & Disregard for SOPs**

When COVID cases were discovered in Karachi, Sarah mentioned that she did not take this very seriously: “So when it was found in Pakistan, I think initially for a month or so we also did not take this very seriously.” Her newborn was diagnosed with clubfoot and she had to take him to the hospital for treatment, but she avoided frequently taking him during the lockdown because she did not want to expose him to the virus:

*“the child would face a lot of exposure if we took him to the hospital and then exposed him to the doctors and people... so in the lockdown initially we were not able to take him, I think for one or two months we did not take him to the hospital.”*

The new mothers who were availing these services during lockdown as well as after it was lifted, mentioned that they were anxious or scared when they had to visit the hospital. Zainab said that there was a scare factor as she still had to go to the hospital for appointments during lockdown. She expressed how she would not want to personally visit the hospital, but would have to since she did

not have an option. She mentioned how in the waiting room there would be a 1-meter gap, but she would try her best to avoid sitting there and just stand. She also said that she deliberately missed appointments because of this fear. This also affected Asma as she was concerned about the virus and felt unsafe when she was physically present at the hospital, to the extent that it had a physical effect on her because SOPs were not being followed. Zoha also felt the same way:

*“But if I had to go and get my ultrasound done at the hospital then I myself would be a little reluctant, because what if there are COVID patients, and you know there is this scare factor when going to hospitals because I could get the virus from there.”*

A common theme found in almost all of the interviews of new mothers and healthcare professionals was the public’s disregard for Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to prevent the spread of COVID. Zoha felt that people were not following SOPs, especially once the lockdown was lifted and Asma reflected upon her shock at the fact that a lot of the SOPs were not being followed in August—people were wearing masks but there was no social distancing. She was not comfortable accessing these services at the hospital because SOPs were not appropriately followed. Dr. Hafsa also discusses the public’s disregard for SOPs and feels that this is due to a lack of awareness:

*“...people would try to evade and you know all these people are not very educated and because of the dearth of primary healthcare in our setting, we would receive many patients who would defy the rules and would just walk in and insist on being seen.”*

Despite their hospital making separate waiting areas and putting up pictorial precautions in the local dialect as well as English, not everyone would abide by the rules.

### ***High-Risk Pregnancies***

One theme that emerged from the data was that of high-risk pregnancies. Dr. Hafsa and Dr. Alina mention that there was an increase in high-risk pregnancies during the lockdown. Dr. Alina explains that despite the fact that her hospital resumed out-patient clinics earlier than others, people tend to stay at home out of fright of contracting the virus:

*“...but they were delaying their checkups both for newborns and children as well as for mothers and this did lead to some problems because a lot*

*of high-risk pregnancies were neglected as the patients would just not come. They were too scared or they had blood pressure, for example, eclampsia or something during their pregnancy that wasn't monitored well."*

Dr. Hafsa also points out that the curve for high-risk patients increased tremendously:

*"During the COVID season, we saw a surge in high-risk patients. Previously, we used to have a mix, like low-risk patients delivering at the hospital facility as well as the high-risk patients trying to seek treatment and management plans. But now, these low-risk patients delivered in the nearby clinics or at home..."*

She explains that the cases that could not be catered to by the local doctor or the dai (midwife), came to their hospital and therefore, this resulted in an increase in the hospital's rates of caesarian section deliveries.

## ***Compromised Aspects of Maternal and Newborn Health Services***

Healthcare professionals were asked about aspects of maternal and newborn health services that were compromised due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Hafsa mentioned that family planning and contraception services were definitely affected during as well as after lockdown, and there were also unsafe abortions:

*"...people were not coming in and they thought they [the visits] are not very necessary, although with the lockdown imposed and with husbands, wives and everybody together, there were a lot of unplanned and unwanted pregnancies and people did not have access to safe abortion services. So a lot of criminal activities went along with it and we are delivering a lot of unplanned pregnancies now."*

Routine checkups were also affected during the pandemic. Sarah mentioned that routine checkups were highly affected by the lockdown for her newborn as she would not take him to the hospital frequently: *"Till now my newborn's weight and growth was only checked once after the lockdown, but other than that we would not frequently go for consultations and regular checkups [during the pandemic]."* Zainab was advised to check her weight and blood pressure at home. However, she mentioned that this did not make much of a difference for her but if her husband

husband had not been a doctor, then checking blood pressure would have been difficult. Zoha was going for her routine checkups and she mentioned that this monitoring cannot be done at home via online health clinics.

Dr. Alina explains that with the suspension of OPDs, maternal and newborn health services were greatly affected, including routine checkups:

*“So, while they were closed, of course services were affected greatly...they need to come for their monthly or weekly checkup if they are at the end of their pregnancy. They have to get their vaccinations, they have to present their blood test (results), they need to be counselled, the fetus needs to be evaluated, and ultrasounds need to be done.”*

Dr. Hafsa mentioned that routine checkups were affected tremendously, but their hospital planned accordingly, and Dr. Sadia mentioned that they were affected by approximately 50%. She also adds that during the lockdown antenatal appointments were compromised, as well as post maternal fetal care because they had to be discharged early.

## ***Support Systems***

During pregnancy, new mothers require extensive support and skills to ensure that their physical and mental well-being is in optimal condition, so that the baby does well too. Physiological and emotional health are factors that can influence the experience of childbirth. Patient-centered care, presence of a supportive companion, access to competent healthcare providers, and a safe child birth environment, all contribute to having a good childbirth experience (Dosani et al., 2020). With the COVID-19 outbreak, such support systems are usually unavailable due to SOPs, such as restrictions on visitors in healthcare facilities and following social distancing guidelines. Social distancing can have an impact on the psychological health of the mother as they are separated from their loved ones who are typically present to support them (Ali et al., 2020). All these factors can affect the mother's childbirth experience.

In Pakistan's context, the presence of a support system is very important. Dr. Hafsa explains how new mothers would bring their families along and considering

COVID protocols, it would be difficult to accommodate them: “*So ladies brought a mother-in-law and accompanying children, sometimes an accompanying aunt so if one patient had to be seen, we needed 5 seats for them and that really crowded our outpatients.*” Attendant policies were also revised during the pandemic, since most hospitals would only allow a maximum of one attendant with the patient. Dr. Alina mentioned how at the time of lockdown for admitted patients, including the laboring ones, only one attendant (the husband) would be allowed, and families were not given entry even as visitors. However, after the lockdown she said that this had gone back to multiple attendants and therefore, OPDs are now full and bustling. Zainab recounted that prior to the lockdown, only one attendant was allowed but after the lockdown was imposed, even her husband was not allowed. Furthermore, during delivery no visitors were allowed. Zoha said that when she took her husband with her for her ultrasound appointment during the lockdown, they did not let him come inside. She mentioned how this did not really affect her, but it did affect her husband.

### ***Government of Pakistan’s (GoP) Guidelines on Sexual, Reproductive and Maternal Health Services during COVID-19***

The Government of Pakistan; Ministry of Health National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination released a document with guidelines on sexual, reproductive and maternal health services during COVID-19 on 07th July 2020. The guidelines are addressed to providers (i.e., hospitals and other health facilities), community health workers, healthcare staff, and new mothers. The document was created to set in place Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus to the relevant health workers and patients alike. The document acknowledges that Sexual, Reproductive and Maternal Health service delivery in Pakistan could be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the main message it conveys is that essential services related to Sexual, Reproductive and Maternal Health should not be stopped or disrupted. For this, the document provides guidelines and certain precautions that should be followed by those who provide these services.

The document lists guidelines for various sexual, reproductive and maternal health services during COVID-19. For the provision of routine sexual, reproductive and maternal health services, the document states they should not be affected by COVID-19. In this section, it discusses the way antenatal clinics, labor rooms—G/O operation theatre, post-natal clinics—mothers and newborns, family planning

clinics, comprehensive abortion care and post abortion care services, referral for specialized care, and community outreach services should operate during the COVID-19 pandemic. Guidelines for breast feeding and newborn care have also been laid out.

The document then discusses how pregnant women with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should be cared for at hospitals where it says that every hospital must have a pre-designated isolated area and a specified area for emergency delivery and provide neonatal care for pregnant/postpartum women and newborns who could have or are diagnosed with COVID-19. The section also lists SOPs for general advice and patient flow, antenatal clinics, labor rooms, post-natal clinics (maternal and newborn), family planning and post abortion care clinics, breastfeeding and newborn care for suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 as well as guidelines for other auxiliary services.

The guidelines encourage the use of telemedicine for antenatal clinics, provided that there is no need for physical examinations or tests. It also states that family planning clinics should continue without any hindrance and that telemedicine should be used for this. It encourages the use of telemedicine for maternal and newborn postnatal clinics, and comprehensive abortion care and post abortion care services. The document has a section on general infection prevention measures under which service arrangements at health facility, guidelines for the healthcare staff, applying droplet precautions and applying contact precautions are discussed in detail. The document concludes by stating that it is important to ensure that sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs are met while the health system confronts the COVID-19 pandemic. It says that the availability of all critical services and supplies of SRH must continue, including intrapartum care for all births, emergency obstetric and newborn care, post-abortion care, safe abortion care to the full extent of the law, contraception, clinical care for rape survivors, and prevention and treatment for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Out of the healthcare professionals interviewed, Dr. Sadia mentioned that they were following the Federal Government/GoP National Institute of Health (NIH) guidelines. Dr. Hafsa said that her hospital had their own guidelines, but they were not very different from the NIH guidelines. She elaborates on how these guidelines favored the implementation of screening protocols, the establishment of telemedicine desks as well as doing only emergency and urgent cases. She also mentioned that they made separate areas for COVID indeterminate patients,

since OBGYN is a specialty which sees a lot of emergencies. Dr. Alina was unsure regarding which guidelines (Federal or Sindh) were being used in her hospital, however, she explains that when the lockdown started outpatient clinics were suspended for a short time and only one attendant, the husband, was allowed. For COVID positive mothers who were ready for delivery or C-sections, they would be put at the end of the day's surgery list and UV light would be put in the OT for a few hours post-procedure. The mother and the baby would be shifted to an isolation ward both before and after the procedure. Dr. Sadia said that her hospital is following the Federal Government (NIH) guidelines. Therefore, as evident, most of the healthcare professionals' hospitals were using the GoP/NIH guidelines or similar guidelines.

### ***Limitations***

The study uses a qualitative exploratory research design. Perhaps a study of a larger scale could also make use of quantitative research methods to analyze and triangulate findings, bringing forth new dimensions of studying the subject. Furthermore, all of the new mothers come from an urban background and were availing these services at private hospitals. Therefore, the rural setting was not covered by this study. The healthcare professionals came from both, private and public hospitals. However, a comprehensive picture of public hospitals and their services could not be obtained as no participant within the new mothers sample had availed maternal and newborn health services from a public healthcare setup.

### **Conclusion**

This study uses a qualitative exploratory research design, therefore, the findings may lead to further questions which could be studied in depth. New mothers, who were participants of my research, were able to access maternal and newborn healthcare during COVID-19 in Karachi. However, they did face some difficulty in the process. Online health clinics proved to be useful who used them, however, there was a general preference for in-person visits. Moreover, there is only a certain extent to which helplines and online health clinics can be serviceable, otherwise patients have to visit hospitals for purposes such as ultrasound, antenatal appointments, and other physical examinations.



Brazil's Ministry of Health authorized particular forms of telemedicine for the provision of care during the COVID-19 pandemic and developed a legal framework for its use (The Library of Congress, 2020). The country also has a non-profit service called "Fale com a parteira" (Talk to the Midwife) which connects pregnant women and healthcare professionals via Whatsapp (Benova et al., 2020). Although there are organizations in Sindh that offer telehealth and online clinic services, there is a need to develop a legal framework for service delivery to address issues on ethics and patient confidentiality in Pakistan. This will help improve the experience of service providers and consumers alike. In Nairobi, the "Wheels for Life" project was started by Dr. Jemimah Kariuki for pregnancy-related medical emergencies at night during curfew hours, which were imposed by the Government of Kenya because of COVID (Benova et al., 2020, KHF, n.d. & Mersie, 2020). A team of organizations run this program and it ensures that pregnant women are able to call on a toll-free number to talk to a doctor and if required, get free emergency transport to a suitable health facility to deliver safely (KHF, n.d.). This kind of initiative addressed the mobility restrictions created by the curfew. Mobility was not a major concern for the new mothers who were interviewed for this study and were availing private services, however, such an initiative could have been useful for new mothers from a lower-income background who were availing public services during the lockdown in Karachi.

For helplines and online health clinics to be successful, required infrastructure needs to be made readily available, especially good internet services. Awareness campaign for such initiatives is necessary to educate the population on how to use such services. Hospital administrations should strategize to make these helplines and online health clinics as effective as possible. A mix of these facilities as well as in-person visits (when required) should be used so that patients avoid making unnecessary visits to the hospital. Furthermore, healthcare professionals will need to adapt to the new normal of extending health services through such initiatives. Expanding upon the findings of this research and conducting further inquiry into the area of maternal facilities can help answer other questions highlighted within this paper. Namely, how access to maternal and newborn healthcare has been affected in the rural settings, and to what extent the absence of a support system during a pandemic affects the mental health of new mothers.

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## TRUST DEFICIT IN GOVERNANCE RELATED TO COVID-19 RISK COMMUNICATION IN PAKISTAN

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### Abstract

This study aims to explore the reasons for the trust deficit in risk communication mediums designed by the government of Pakistan. Effective risk communication is vital to prevent the emergence of more COVID-19 cases and for the government to ensure that the people trust it and follow the set guidelines. The study highlights the gaps between the general public and the risk communication and community engagement platforms designed by the government. This study was conducted using primary and secondary methods of research. Primary data was collected using an online group discussion on Facebook. A group was specially created to discuss matters related to COVID-19 risk communication in Pakistan, and the collected data was then analyzed using discourse analysis. Moreover, as part of secondary research, documents and content including the National Action Plan designed by the government of Pakistan and Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) material was reviewed. Risk communication mediums such as the government's official online portal ([covid.gov.pk](http://covid.gov.pk)), WhatsApp chatbot, and the COVID-19 helpline were used to triangulate the research results. The study concludes that the reasons for trust deficit are an overabundance of information, the government's weak policy implementation structure, lack of health-education, and stigmatization of the disease. Effective modes of risk communication can prevent the virus from spreading further and lower the incidence of cases, while decreasing the burden on healthcare facilities. To prevent the disease from spreading, it is integral for the government to gain public trust and get people to follow the issued guidelines.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Risk Communication, Trust Deficit, Governance, Pakistan



## **Introduction**

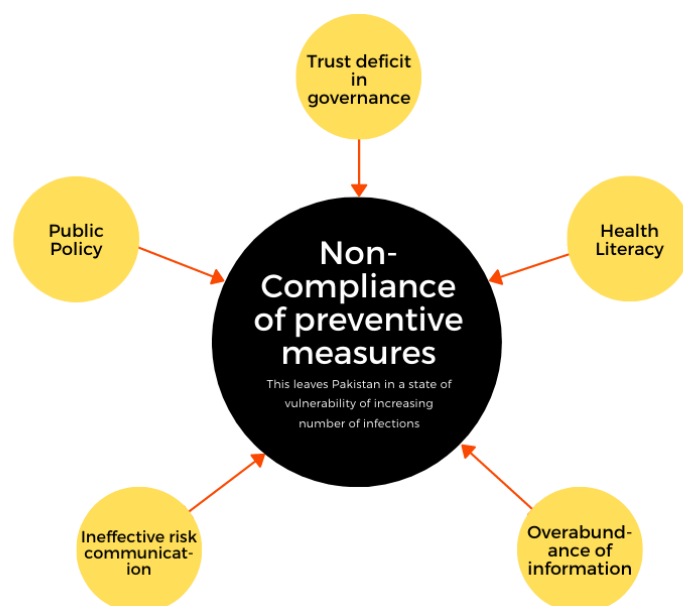
The COVID-19 pandemic, accompanied by an infodemic, has adversely impacted both world citizenry and governing institutions at varying magnitudes. An infodemic is “an over-abundance of information- some accurate and some not- that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance when they need it” (PAHO and WHO, 2020). The overabundance of information and misinformation makes it hard for people to differentiate between what is true or false, leading them to a state of vulnerability. Lack of (accurate) information during a health crisis causes chaos which can be avoided with better planning if people know the correct facts and figures (UNICEF, 2020). It also spreads fear and causes stigmatization of the disease. Rumors and misinformation accompanied by a lack of information from public health officials have caused an infodemic in Pakistan.

Trust deficit means that the level of trust is lower than it should be. Trust is a “scarce societal resource” (Graves, 2013). Its deficit in governance implies that people are skeptical of the government’s abilities and intentions (Ahmed, 2020). According to Gallup Pakistan, one in three Pakistanis continues to be skeptical of the number of cases of COVID-19 being reported by the government (Gallup and Gilani Research Foundation, 2020).

Pakistan’s healthcare apparatus is a mixed system of large and small primary healthcare facilities in urban cities and small clinics in rural areas. Private healthcare sector along with NGO’s and philanthropic agencies work together with the system in order to support Pakistan’s healthcare requirements (WHO, 2018). The public health system is reportedly facing challenges because of low accountability within the government, inadequate staff and skilled professionals, and poor resource allocation across different levels of healthcare (WHO, 2018). The inherent problems of corruption, undue political involvement, and trust deficit, combined with the COVID-19 infodemic, inadequate health-literacy, and an underdeveloped public health system have made the country vulnerable to second and third waves of the pandemic. Pakistan’s healthcare system ranks 154th out of 195 countries (Fullman, Lozano, & Murray, 2018). The healthcare system alone cannot withstand the stress of a pandemic. Therefore, it is integral for the population to follow preventive measures to protect themselves from the disease. Improving public health via education, policymaking and scientific research for disease prevention can reduce the burden on Pakistan’s healthcare industry.

Health education is an essential tool that can be used to improve public health (Porat, Nyrup, Calvo, Paudyal, & Ford, 2020). Public health focuses on the prevention, detection and response of diseases and health conditions, and not the treatment of populations (CDC Foundation, 2020). This can be done via promoting healthy lifestyles and encouraging research of disease and injury prevention. During the Ebola epidemic of 2014-2016, Sri Lanka practiced Health Education combined with Behavior Change Communication according to the cultural and ethnic values of the citizens. The Sri Lankan government adopted a community participatory approach to bring about behavior change to focus on prevention rather than cure. Public health experts introduced culturally appropriate communication strategies by understanding the information ecosystem of the country. They built trust with informal leaders of communities to bridge the trust gap between the public and government (Rupasinghe, 2020).

There is a lack of data related to pandemic preparedness and the importance of public health in containing communicable disease outbreaks in Pakistan. Pakistan is one of the only two countries where the poliovirus is still an endemic because of the misconceptions about the vaccine, insecurity within the country, and a frail healthcare system (Shah, et al., 2016). One of the reasons for failure of polio eradication from Pakistan is the limited involvement of local communities and no measures to educate them according to their cultural values and concerns. Instead of following the programs set up by international organizations the government of Pakistan needs to adopt a bottoms-up approach and take ownership of the issue (Asghar, 2020).



**Figure 1:** The conceptual framework forming in this study is that the current infodemic (overabundance of information), trust deficit in governance, current standard of health literacy, the policy framework in place and ineffective risk communication from the government's end, all lead to non-compliance of preventive measures to control COVID-19. This leaves Pakistan in a place of vulnerability to increased rates of infections. Public policy related to pandemic preparedness and management should include health literacy and behavior change communication to make risk communication more effective. This improvement in the policy will train people to verify information, filter out misinformation and incorporate the preventive measures required to prevent the disease.

This study explores the reasons behind the trust deficit in risk communication mediums designed by the government of Pakistan. Its theoretical framework draws on the Foucauldian framework of discourse. According to Foucault, a French philosopher associated with the structuralist and post-structuralist movements, discourse is a mediating lens that allows reality to be viewed in context to its effect on culture. Discourse builds knowledge, knowledge builds power, hence discourse produces and reproduces knowledge and power simultaneously (Thomson, 2011). In Foucault's words, discourse analysis is the same as unearthing "the history of the present" (Kupe, 2012). In this situation, the power relationship between the government and the general public will be viewed using discourse analysis. This study uses Foucault's theory of discourse as the lens to assess the dynamics of language and trust between government and people in light of the current standing of health literacy and policy framework for risk communication in Pakistan. Discourse relates language to texts and their contexts. Discourse analysis is used to explore how language shapes certain phenomena.

## Literature Review

### Trust Deficit in Governance

Trust deficit in governance is not new in Pakistan. It exists in most sectors such as public health (Irfan & Ijaz, 2011), education (Talpur, 2018), law enforcement (Shah S. Q., 2016), and the economy (Ahmed, 2020). A few reasons for the trust deficit in the economic context are poor governance, unnecessary political intervention, corruption, and weak implementation structures. This lack of trust has resulted in rampant tax evasion ensuing the country's tax payment rate lowest



in the world (Rehman & Usama, 2019). According to the 2020 report published by Transparency International, Pakistan's Corruption Perception Index (CPI) was 32 (0 being highly corrupt and 100 being highly clean) and the country ranks at 120 among 197 countries for the level of corruption (Transparency.org, 2020). Powerbrokers in the country use their political influence to by-pass the law for personal gains (Faisal & Jafri, 2017). Therefore, law enforcement is inefficient. Patterns similar to by-passing tax laws can be observed in following the standard operating procedures (SOPs) of the COVID-19 response, and the government's failure in getting the public to conform to them (Dawn News, 2020).

This theme covers literature related to the importance of citizen's trust, the significance of effective risk communication, and incidences of deliberate data tampering. Lessons from the failure of eradication of the poliovirus can be used to come up with a stronger and more effective response for COVID-19 (Asghar, 2020). Trust deficit in governance is one of the reasons why poliovirus is still prevalent in Pakistan (Asghar, 2020). Asghar (2020) argues that because of a top-down approach where communities were simply expected to get vaccinated for polio, people were not receptive to the urgency and importance of it. He recommends that real partnerships with local input should be used instead, as was done in South Waziristan (Asghar, 2020). The literature includes the examples of developed countries such as New Zealand that used effective risk communication to contain the virus using good governance and smart leadership. Their key premise was to build citizens' trust through providing transparency about government decision making (Wilson, 2020). However, the same solution cannot be adopted by Pakistan since it is a developing country and is notorious for corruption. There was a literature gap related to the impact of effective risk communication and the level of trust related to COVID-19 in developing countries with lower resources.

## **The overabundance of information, misinformation and status of health literacy**

### ***In-depth interviews***

The reviewed literature highlights the importance of scientific thought and reasoning, health literacy, the influence of religious conservatism, and the politicization of the pandemic. COVID-19 is a global outbreak that has affected 220

countries all of which have some common grounds helping to relay information across borders (Zainul, 2020). This influx in the volume of information amplified via social media has led the world towards an infodemic (Pan American Health Organization, 2020).

While in Pakistan's context, misinformation and rumors involve socio-political and religious influence which needs to be addressed accordingly, the existing literature mainly talks about the infodemic in a global context. Health literacy is defined as, "the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, understand, communicate and apply basic health information and services needed to improve one's health" (Jabeen, Rehman, Masood, Mahmood, & Mashhadi, 2018).

Religious conservatism also played a strong hand in spreading disinformation in Pakistan. Molana Fazal-ur-Rehman, a Pakistani politician and president of Jamiat-e-Ulema (a sunni Deobandi religious political party), claimed that just as an infected person sleeps, the virus also sleeps (Dekhtay Raho TV Official, 2020). Other religious personalities publicly refused to avoid congregational prayers in mosques (ur-Rehman, Abi-Habib, & Mehsud, 2020).

Such statements shared by religious leaders on national television undermine what public health experts demand in the given context. While the country was in lockdown and people were being encouraged to stay at home by the government, politically motivated and factually unchecked statements downplayed the situation causing more confusion among them. The implication of such rumors is that people who follow these leaders do not comply with the SOPs, in this case it was to avoid public gatherings at mosques. Pakistan was the only country that did not ban public gatherings at mosques during the first pandemic wave in the country (ur-Rehman, Abi-Habib, & Mehsud, 2020). This problem being exclusive to Pakistan was not discussed in the reviewed literature, therefore it is important to highlight it and come up with alternate effective risk communication strategies.

### ***Importance of effective risk communication***

A 2016-17 quantitative study conducted in Pakistan on the effectiveness of public messaging with regards to polio vaccination, family planning, HIV Aids, and breast cancer awareness highlighted the importance of public health awareness campaigns as drivers of behavior change for the public. (Hanan, Saleem, Khawar,

& Arshad, 2019). The same study concluded televised campaigns as more convincing means for public behavior change in comparison to print media. Effective means of public health awareness other than mass media outreach include on-ground mobilization and digital media platforms (ICRC, 2019).

Sri Lanka's experience with Ebola using community participatory approaches were reviewed, Incorporating community dialogue and involving informal community leaders to communicate with the public in order to deal with misinformation proved successful in Sri Lanka (Rupasinghe, 2020).

Moreover, to control the infodemic, citizens should be encouraged to verify information before sharing it (Zainul, 2020). Zainul (2020) also suggests that proportionate punishment should also be decided for those who spread disinformation with the intent of creating panic. The existing literature only talks about recommendations to address the infodemic due to the new nature of the problem. These are only policy recommendations at the moment. As part of this research study, the guidelines for controlling misinformation and effective risk communication will be analyzed from the official document of National Action Plan for Corona Virus (Covid-19) Diseases.

New Zealand was able to curb the virus because of its effective planning and ability to communicate clear consistent messages while empathizing with its citizens (McGuire, Cunnigham, Reynolds, & Mathews-Smith, 2020). Crisis leadership and communication by the New Zealand Prime Minister played a critical role in increasing public trust, therefore getting them to abide by the prescribed preventive measures. It is important to highlight here that in Pakistan's context the general level of trust is already low, thus these measures alone cannot be expected to be effective.

Effective risk communication is crucial for containing public health emergencies (Zhang, Li, & Chen, 2020) Taking poliovirus as an example, Pakistan is one of the only two countries that has failed to eliminate poliovirus because of the misinformation and rumors about the vaccine, poor health systems, lack of health literacy, and resistance from religious parties such as Tehreek-e-Taliban (Shah, et al., 2016).

It is integral that Pakistan improves its risk communication for COVID-19 for two reasons:

1. To prevent the resurgence of any more waves. Unless people follow precautionary measures, the country will remain vulnerable to more cases of the disease. Since the disease is contagious, it is imperative that the virus is contained. The country will remain vulnerable until everyone gets vaccinated.
2. Developing trust now will also help with handling future health crises. South Korea had the MERS epidemic in 2015 and COVID-19 in 2020. South Korea learned from its mistakes in risk communication in 2015 and improved its risk communication for COVID-19 and was successfully able to contain the pandemic (Bautista, 2020).

## Design And Methods

An exploratory study is most appropriate for topics that are new and not studied comprehensively in the past (Singh, 2007). I chose this design as it complements the research question, the kind of resources available, and the limited timeframe of the study.

I used a combination of primary and secondary research methods for data collection. Online group discussions were used for primary research, and content and document analysis for secondary research. Primary data was collected through group discussions conducted online. This ensured that the regulated health guidelines are not violated in the research process. As Facebook is the most commonly used social media platform in Pakistan, with 39 million users (Social, DataReportal, Hootsuite, & Facebook, 2020), participants were recruited from advertising the research on Facebook groups centered on COVID-19 emergency updates. The primary data collection continued from October to November 2020.

A closed private group was created on Facebook with the name 'Risk Communication related to COVID-19 in Pakistan'. The group was advertised with the tagline *Your Thoughts Matter*. The group along with the purpose of the study was advertised on two Facebook groups designed for COVID-19 emergency updates. The first group had 56000 members and the other had 331000 members. Each group has hundreds of new posts, therefore the ad initially perished in the multitude of other posts. Then special assistance was sought from the group admins to promote the ad for this research.

The group was moderated by the lead researcher. The participants were recruited via purposeful sampling. There were twenty-six participants, all of them older than 18 years of age and residing in Pakistan during the first wave of COVID-19. It was important to select people who were living in Pakistan during the first wave because they needed to be present in the country ensuring that they had actively observed the situation around them. The data collected was coded thematically using MaxQDA and then analyzed to answer the research question.

Initially, around 40–45 people were requested to join the research group. The group had membership questions which asked the potential participants if they would be willing to be part of the research. Those who said yes were allowed and those who refused were denied. This brought down the number of members to 26. These members were asked to read and sign the consent form. The consent form was in English and included a video with Urdu translation of the form. All 26 members signed the form and agreed to be a part of the study but only 18 responded to the prompts posted on the group and the remaining 8 made zero responses.

One question was posted per day and the participants were notified via WhatsApp, in case they missed the Facebook notification. Participants were reminded once after twelve hours to respond to the question again.

Since people's responses were already in a textual form, therefore transcriptions were not required. Participants used a combination of lower case and upper-case alphabets in their responses to express their emotions. Some participants also used emoticons instead of words to share their responses. For a few questions, people also reacted to other people's comments through the likes and wow reacts signifying that they agree with what the other person is saying or a piece of information was new for them.

The most helpful feature of using an online Facebook group discussion was that each comment was there for other participants to see. Therefore, the comments were open for discussion throughout the data collection timeframe. However, after posting the first three questions it was observed that the participants' level of enthusiasm had reduced. It is projected that the observation is based in the lack of personal connection between the researcher and the participants. Participants' information was protected by restricting access to the Facebook group. Once the data collection was completed, all participants were removed

from the group. The data for content and document analysis was publicly available, therefore protecting it was not a major concern. However, all data was protected on the main researcher's password-protected device.

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For the purpose of triangulation, content analysis was done to analyze the official online portal for COVID-19 and other services such as their WhatsApp chatbot and the public awareness dialer tune. Lastly, the Risk Communication and Community Engagement section in the National Action Plan for COVID-19 designed by the Government of Pakistan and the Ministry of National Health Services was analyzed. The purpose of doing primary and secondary research was to triangulate data and ensure the reliability of results.

Content analysis of the national COVID-19 website and the WhatsApp chatbot was fairly simple and straightforward. Analyzing the website and the WhatsApp chatbot service gave information about the strengths and weaknesses of the already existing risk communication and public awareness mediums. Lastly, pages 104 to 108 from the National Action Plan for COVID-19, authored by the Government of Pakistan were analyzed. These pages included the Risk Communication and Community Engagement plan for COVID-19 and the IEC (Information, Education, and Communication) Materials for COVID-19. This was done to find out what was the government's plan for risk communication and public awareness when Pakistan was only anticipating the health crisis. Content and document analysis of the aforementioned resources was essentially done to triangulate the acquired primary data (See Appendix B for list of questions).

## **Presentation And Analysis Of Data**

Foucault describes power as an instrument that enables certain knowledge to be produced and known and the same power also controls how much knowledge is accessible by people (Given, 2008). The collected data was analyzed using Foucauldian discourse analysis, to explore reasons for trust deficit in governance

related to COVID-19. One of the key aspects to consider here are the power relations between the government and the public to understand how this effects the discourse related to COVID-19.

According to the World Health Organization, Risk Communication is defined as: The exchange of real-time information, advice, and opinions between experts and people facing threats to their health, economic or social well-being. The ultimate purpose of risk communication is to enable people at risk to make informed decisions to protect themselves and their loved ones (WHO, 2020).

The relevant details from the National Action Plan (NAP) for COVID-19 to help answer this research question were found in the Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Section.

Pakistan had already started preparing for the virus before the first case was diagnosed in the country. The main objective of the NAP was to “ensure the current outbreak is contained,” and “to strengthen country and community engagement response to potential events due to COVID-19” (Government of Pakistan; Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, 2020). The last strategic development goal quoted in the same document is to “expand scope of community ownership and understanding in the population through risk communication and engagement.”

In the annexure, a detailed plan for RCCE is given and its core objectives are to “educate on COVID-19 and its prevention, to address misconceptions, to build trust in GOP’s preparedness and responseto COVID-19.” Prevention comes from raising public awareness and effective risk communication. Transparency in matters related to COVID-19 epidemiology will build trust in governance and address misconceptions.

To implement the directives of the NAP, a helpline was introduced along with a WhatsApp chatbot and a website. The helpline directs people to healthcare personnel who are trained to answer questions people may have related to the pandemic. The WhatsApp chatbot has a variety of features and is an automated service that functions in multiple languages. It is simple to use, and its multiple features include basic information and preventive measures related to COVID-19; guidelines to self-assess for COVID, links to public awareness videos, daily epidemiological updates, and connectivity to a doctor. While most of these features work, few of them such as epidemiological updates and connect

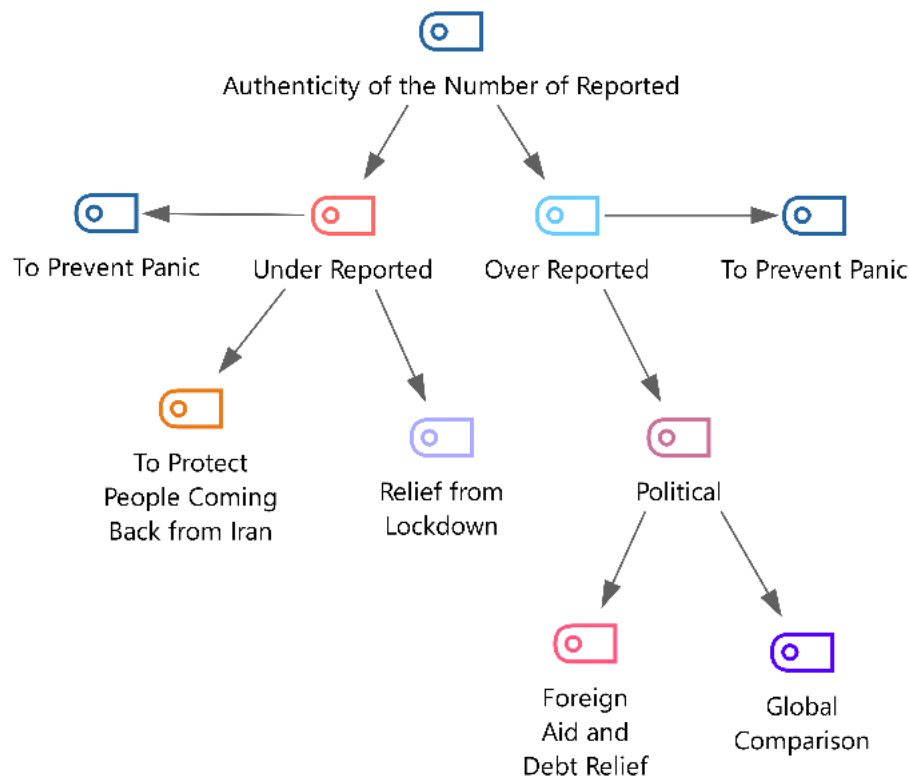
to a doctor are unresponsive.

The data available on the COVID-19 Website is summarized in Table 1.



<b>Material for Risk Communication</b>	<b>Checklist</b>	<b>Material available</b>	<b>Frequency of updating information</b>	<b>Language</b>
<b>Real-time information</b>	✓	Number of cases, deaths, recoveries, tests (daily and cumulative). Data visualized using bar graphs and line graphs. Provincial data only. City wise data unavailable.	Data is updated every day once between 8 am and 10 am.	English only
<b>Material for Health Awareness</b>	✓	Common symptoms. Myths and facts about the disease. Frequently asked questions Transmission and Prevention Videos about COVID-19	Occasionally updated. Most data was updated in March only.	Everything in English other than the public awareness message videos that were recorded in Urdu. 3 posters in Urdu also. (attached in the appendices)
<b>Material for Economic Well-being</b>	✓	Video messages of the Prime Minister's Press Conferences that briefly talk about the current economic standing.	Updated in March 2020 only.	Urdu
<b>Material for Social Well-being</b>	✓	Guidelines for different protocols such as social distancing, wearing masks, reopening, Ramadan, and Eid.	Updated Monthly	In English and Urdu both.

**Table 1:** A summary of data available on the COVID-19 website (Government of Pakistan)



**Figure 2**

As part of the primary research to explore reasons behind trust deficiency in governance related to risk communication related to COVID-19 in Pakistan during the first wave, the participants from the online group discussions were asked a few questions about the different risk communication mediums initiated by the GoP as part of their RCCE plan.

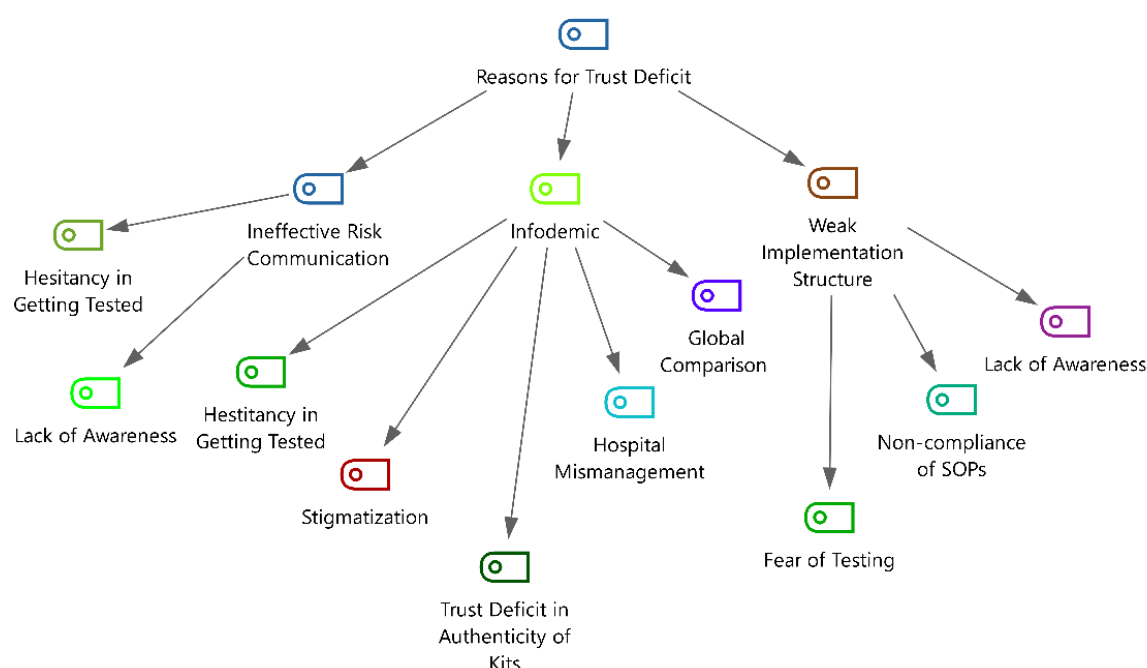
When asked about the authenticity of the daily epidemiological updates, none of the participants believed that the numbers being reported were accurate. Some participants said that the numbers were under-reported while others said that they were over-reported (see Figure 2). The reasons for doubts in the accuracy of the numbers of cases are summarized in Figure 3. All responses showed underlying reasons behind of the lack of trust.

A participant said, *“I think the numbers have always been underestimated. It may not be deliberate at first but the government hasn’t taken any measures to make their reporting efficient. The COVID testing is not easily accessible to everyone. Having seen the situation of SOPs in Karachi, I highly doubt that Pakistan has successfully contained*

the COVID disaster.”

The collected responses suggested that situation of implementing precautionary measures and following SOPs was not supporting the number of cases being reported.

Another participant said, “I thought that the numbers released by the government are inflated to gain access to maximum public funds (taxes) which would then be misused due to widespread corruption.”

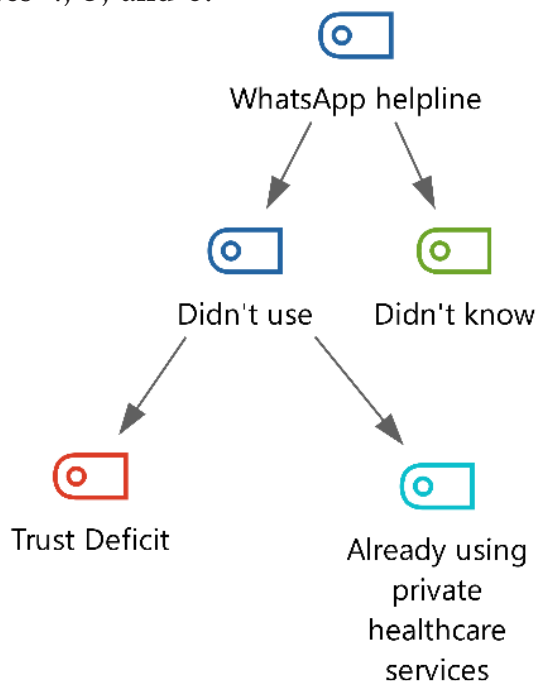


**Figure 3:** Reasons for trust deficit in accuracy in the number of reported cases.

The reasons for the trust deficit were thematically divided into three categories. Ineffective risk communication, infodemic, and weak implementation structures. Participants reported that they did not trust the number of cases being reported to be accurate because enough tests were not being conducted due to fear of testing, rumors about inauthentic testing kits, stigmatization, and a general lack of awareness.

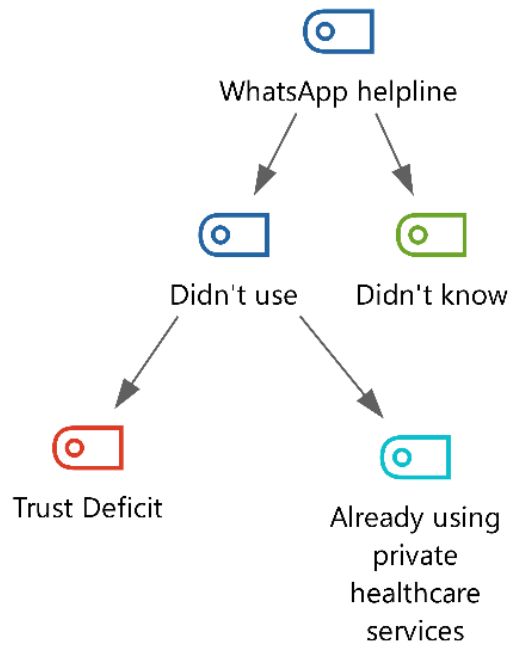
One of the participants said, “The number of cases in developed countries was high and it was hard to believe that a developing country where people rarely follow rules and safety precautions, would have lower cases.”

Participants were asked if they ever had the chance to use the COVID-19 Helpline, the WhatsApp chat service, and the COVID-19 online portal. The responses are summarized in Figures 4, 5, and 6.



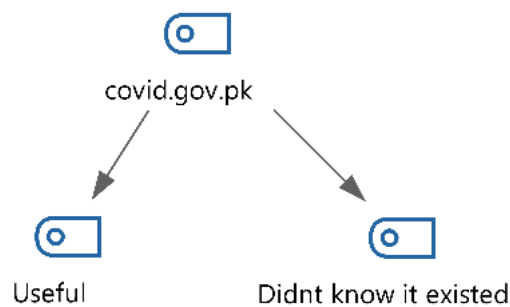
**Figure 4:** Participants were asked if they ever used the COVID-19 Helpline

Few participants used it and found it helpful, and one did not receive any response from the helpline. This helpline was contacted multiple times for the purpose of this research and all those times it was unresponsive as well. Most participants did not know about this helpline which highlights that the problem is not with the medium but with the marketing strategy. One of the participants commented, “*I was unaware of the existence of a functional COVID helpline.*” Other participants knew about it but did not use it as they had access to private healthcare.



**Figure 5:** Participant responses when they were asked if they ever used the WhatsApp Helpline

Participants were asked if they used the WhatsApp helpline and their responses showed traces of trust deficit. One of them said, “*Nope...the government does very good with its awareness policies (sarcasm).*”



**Figure 6:** Participant responses when they were asked about their experience using the COVID-19 Website.

Most participants found the website very useful and had positive feedback to give. A participant said, “*It’s my go-to website for checking the numbers daily. I guess it entails all the necessary information.*”

Lastly, the dialer tune was the single medium of risk communication which was appreciated by all participants (see Appendix D). One of the participants said, *“I think the caller tune played the best part in raising awareness. It prevented people from just skipping over the news. The other modes for increasing awareness were effective to some extent but not as effective as this.”*

Another participant commended the usage of dialer tunes and said, *“I believe that dial tune was the most effective awareness technique because it ensured that the message was delivered regardless of the socio-economic background of any individual. The message was also precise and unskippable which made it further effective.”*

## Discussion

COVID-19 is a communicable disease and as long as it is not completely eradicated or an effective vaccine becomes available, Pakistan will remain vulnerable to more outbreaks of the disease. It is very important that along with providing primary healthcare services, risks of the virus are also communicated effectively with the public. Considering Pakistan’s political and socio-economic landscape, trust deficit in governance is very common. With problems such as belief in religious conservatism (Saleem, 2020), low health education, and lack of scientific knowledge the people of Pakistan are more vulnerable to being misguided by an overabundance of information (Shah S. B., 2020). In addition to that, Pakistan is notorious for corruption and its citizens are aware of its reputation (Transparency.org, 2020). Hence, the trust deficit. One of the identifying markers of trust deficit are that people do not follow the directives of the government (Lord, 2019). This was reflected in the situation in Pakistan during the first wave of COVID19, when people were not following the standard preventive measures released by the government. Lockdowns were enforced, however people were rarely observed wearing masks or following any other SOPs like social distancing.

After analyzing the collected data for reasons for trust deficit in governance related to COVID-19 risk communication during the first wave, the following themes emerged:

To answer the research question of reasons for trust deficit in governance related to COVID-19 risk communication during the first wave, the following themes emerged.

## ***Overabundance of information (infodemic)***

Participants from the online group discussions had the opinion that the government under-reported the numbers of cases to show that they had the situation under control while the numbers were much higher. More reasons for under-reporting were to protect the pilgrims coming back from Iran. As one of the participants said, *“I think the government definitely underreported. But then I think people were scared of getting tested also so that might be a contributing factor. Deaths that were actually [due to] COVID weren’t reported as that..... someone I know really well told me about how it’d spread quite a bit amongst the Shia community especially amongst their house help/drivers etc. and the government was actively keeping it hush hush right after Ziarat.”*

It is important to note that there is a lot of speculation here. This indicates that there is a definite lack of trust in governance. The fear of testing mentioned above can also be connected to the fear of stigmatization. These misconceptions need to be cleared using effective means of risk communication.

Another participant was of the opinion that, *“I think the government tampers with numbers of cases according to its economic needs.”*

Some participants thought that the numbers were being over-reported, *“Looking at the high increasing rate during the months of March & April I felt as if the numbers are being overstated...It could be because of the financial assistance & debt service relief offered to the developing countries by the IMF.”* All these comments show traces of political reasons for misreporting the number of cases.

## ***Ineffective risk communication and health education***

The main reason for believing that the number of reported cases is incorrect is because the number of daily tests being conducted were insufficient. The issue with tests as quoted by the participants was lack of awareness, inaccessibility because of high costs, trust deficit in authenticity of free testing kits being provided by public healthcare providers, fear of testing and isolation and fear of stigmatization. One of the participants commented, *“I think number was underestimated, maybe because most cases go unreported, people didn’t care to go for tests or maybe only one person of a family got tested and rest believed they also got corona and took same medicine. Social labelling was another factor which restraint people to report COVID cases.”*

## ***Weak implementation structures***

One of the major reasons why people found it hard to believe that the cases were decreasing was the observation of SOP non-compliance in their surroundings. The real situation out in the streets when the lockdown was eased was not being reflected in the number of cases. One of the participants said, *“I think the numbers have always been underestimated. It may not be deliberate at first but the government hasn’t taken any measures to make their reporting efficient. The COVID testing is*

*not easily accessible to everyone. Having seen the situation of SOPs in Karachi, I highly doubt that Pakistan has successfully contained the COVID disaster.”*

The Ministry of Health, Regulation and Coordination along with the Government of Pakistan started working on risk communication for COVID-19 well before the first case was diagnosed in Pakistan. They published their first poster (see Figure 8) in January and the NAP on February 11th, 2020. They started digital marketing for RCCE and launched a website. The website had multiple features such as daily epidemiological updates, healthcare information, frequently asked questions, official guidelines, and public service messages. Most information on the website is only in English, because of which the accessibility of the website is very low. Only a few video public messages were in Urdu, which were short video clips of the Prime Minister’s press conferences. The content also included discussions on the country’s economic conditions and the looming hunger crisis of the working-class. In one of the videos the Prime Minister has been recorded saying that COVID-19 is like an ordinary flu and nothing to worry about (covid.gov.pk, 2020). This is something that was noticed and remembered by a lot of people. A participant commented on one of the clips from the press conference and said,

*“It was always an Average opinion of a common man not the statement of any state’s prime minister with correct numbers, facts and figures, it was completely based on assumptions and unreasonable suggestions. Like a confused common citizen.”*

The website had the link to one video by WHO which described what Coronavirus is but that video was also in English and required some level of background in secondary level biology to understand. All in all, the website is a great platform,



but it is accessible only to people who have access to internet and technology, understand English, and have basic knowledge of science and math to be able to interpret graphs. The government had been proactive in developing this tool, but it can be modified to cater to more people for raising public awareness.

The 1166 helpline and WhatsApp ChatBot designed for RCCE were mostly not used by participants of this study because preferred private healthcare over public facilities. However, the most interesting thing about the WhatsApp ChatBot is that it is available in all regional languages, which makes it very accessible for a larger pool of people.

The most appreciated tool was the dialer tune which was described in the online group discussion as *“inclusive, precise and un-skippable”*. It lists down all the required preventive measures except for highlighting the importance of wearing a face mask when a person is around other people. Moreover, a participant pointed out, *“The caller tunes played a pivotal role. However, like every other factor it was only effective for a short period of time because then you keep on hearing it and it has little to no importance.”* Hearing the same speech and the same tone repeatedly makes it redundant and ineffective in the long run, so it is important that the dialer tunes keep changing.

Lastly, in all the RCCE tools a common factor observed was that none of them emphasized on wearing a face mask. The guidelines section on the online COVID-19 Health Advisory Platform had one document for mandatory use of face mask, which was also dumped down along with numerous other documents, lost in the clutter. A Public service message poster was published in March (see Figure 9) which says that a mask is only to be worn when taking care of a COVID patient, when one contracts the virus, or in case of symptoms of flu. It is understandable that back then, this was all the information the Ministry of Health had, and they had to prevent people from hoarding supplies and leave PPE for health professionals. Soon the WHO declared that wearing a mask is extremely important and recommended using materials other than the regular surgical masks (WHO, 2020). The Ministry of Health, however did not update this information. The website still shows the same posters that were designed back in March 2020. With latest scientific research and findings, the people responsible for these RCCE tools need to update them so people can have access to the latest information.

## **Conclusion**

The study attempted to explore the reasons behind the trust deficit in governance related to COVID-19 risk communication in Pakistan. Weak implementation structures, excessive politicization of the pandemic, and the government's reputation as a corrupt entity were major factors for trust deficit in governance related to COVID-19. Lack of scientific knowledge, religious superstition, and the infodemic made people more susceptible to falling prey to misinformation.

Effective risk communication is integral for the social, physical, and economic well-being of the citizens of a country. It is their fundamental right to be informed about what is going on and be shown a clear picture. The findings of this research concluded that while the government of Pakistan was seemingly proactive in handling the pandemic, there is significant room for improvement. Although initiatives like installing a helpline and preparing IEC material even before the diagnosis of the first case in Pakistan are commendable, effectiveness of these tools are questionable.

Firstly, the IEC and RCCE material needs to be marketed properly. Analysis from the data collected indicated that most of the study participants were not aware of the existence of these services. Secondly, the website needs to be translated into Urdu and other regional languages to make the material more inclusive and accessible. The material also needs to be updated according to the new directives of WHO and CDC while emphasizing more on preventive measures such as the use of facemasks. They should also encourage the use of fabric masks and give clear directions on how to make masks on your own (WHO, 2020).

Thirdly, the research participants found the COVID-19 awareness dialer tune to be very useful. The government should look into multiple dialer tunes that keep changing regularly to prevent people from getting desensitized to it. Lastly, it is highly important that whatever information is disseminated as part of the RCCE, it should be fact-checked, backed by scientific reasoning, and should be updated regularly. Politicians and religious preachers need to be brought on the same page and sensitized about COVID-19 so that they can be examples for the general public to follow. Following the example of Sri Lanka, as discussed in the literature above, it would be helpful to train informal community leaders to encourage people to follow SOPs and help with contact tracing. These leaders can also help with combating misinformation by directly guiding their communities

with scientific research findings.

To conclude, Pakistan has the right platforms for risk communication. It just needs to work on its objective of “building trust in GoP’s preparedness and response to COVID-19” (Government of Pakistan; Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, 2020). One approach to bridge this trust gap is to make the existing sources of communication more accessible and inclusive by introducing regional languages for information dissemination, simplifying the content, and regularly updating it. There is a need to effectively market the official communication platforms to help increase the number of service users while regulating the reliability of these information sources.

Risk communication is an important part of healthcare provision. Effective modes of risk communication can help contain the virus and lower the incidence of cases, eventually reducing the burden on healthcare facilities.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Acronyms

**RCCE:** Risk Communication and Community Engagement

**IEC:** Information, Education and Communication Material

**NAP:** National Action Plan

**PAHO:** Pan American Health Organization

**WHO:** World Health Organization

**SOPs:** Standard Operating Procedures

**MERS:** Middle East Respiratory Syndrome

**GOP:** Government of Pakistan

**CDC:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

### Appendix B: Material Used

#### Documents used:

1. National Action Plan for Corona Virus (Covid-19) Disease Pakistan.

#### Content used:

1. Covid-19 Website
2. Covid-19 WhatsApp Helpline 03001111166
3. Dialer Tune
- 4.



## نوول کورونا وائرس سے متعلق افواہوں سے پریشان نہ ہوں

پاکستان میں تاحال (30 جنوری 2020) کورونا وائرس کا کوئی کنفرم مریض نہیں آیا۔ لہذا کورونا وائرس سے متعلق پھیلی افواہوں پر یقین نہ کریں۔

اگر آپ پچھلے 14 دن کے اندر چین کے شہر وہان سے واپس آئے ہیں اور آپ کو کھانسی، بخار اور سانس لینے میں شدید دشواری ہے، تو ہی ڈاکٹر سے رابطہ کریں۔

اور اگر آپ پچھلے 14 دن سے پاکستان میں ہیں تو فی الحال آپ کو کورونا وائرس سے کوئی خطرہ نہیں ہے۔

مزید معلومات کے لئے ہماری ویب سائٹ وزٹ کریں <https://www.nih.org.pk/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov/>



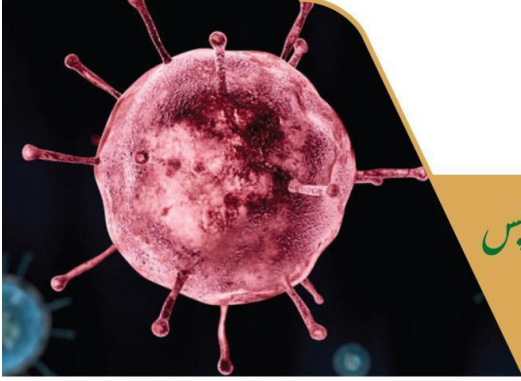
فیسلڈ ایپیڈیمیاالوجی اینڈ ڈیزیز سرویلینس ڈویژن

قومی ادارہ صحت، حکومت پاکستان





5.



Government of Pakistan  
Ministry of National Health Services,  
Regulations & Coordination

## بیرون ملک باخصوص چین اور ایران سے واپس آنے والے مسافروں کے لئے ہدایات

آپ کو صحت کا جو فارم (ہیلتھ فارم) دیا جائے، اسے لازمی پر کریں اور داخلی راستے پر تعینات صحت کے عملے کے حوالے کریں۔ اس ہدایت کی خلاف ورزی پر آپ کو ملک میں داخلے سے روکا جاسکتا ہے۔  
چین اور ایران میں سفر کے چودہ دن کے اندر بخار، کھانسی، سانس میں تکلیف یا جسم میں شدید درد کی شکایات ظاہر ہوں تو:

ہیلپ لائن 1166 پر رہنمائی کے لئے رابطہ کریں	
کرونا وائرس کے علاج کے لئے مخصوص کئے گئے بڑے ہسپتال میں کرونا سیکشن سے رجوع کریں۔	
ڈاکٹر کو اپنے چین اور ایران کے سفر اور بیماری کی علامات کے بارے میں ضرور بتائیں۔	
ہدایات کے مطابق ہسپتال میں ہی رہیں اور دوسرے لوگوں سے میل جول بند رکھیں۔	
اپنے منہ اور ناک کو ماسک سے ڈھانپ کر رکھیں۔	
کھانسنے اور چھینکتے ہوئے منہ کو ٹشو یا آستین سے ڈھانپیں (ہاتھوں سے نہیں)۔	
ہاتھوں کو صابن سے اکثر ہیں سیکنڈ تک دھوئیں۔ صابن یا پانی نہ ہونے کی صورت میں ہینڈ سینڈیٹائزر کا استعمال کریں۔	

مزید معلومات کے لئے:



صحت مند پاکستان

1166 پر رابطہ کریں

corona.info@nhsr.gov.pk

www.nhsr.gov.pk



ہیلپ لائن



ای میل



ویب سائٹ

6



### ماسک صرف مندرجہ ذیل لوگوں کو پہننا چاہئے

جو کرونا وائرس انفیکشن کا شکار ہوں	
جو کرونا وائرس میں مبتلا مریضوں کی دیکھ بھال کرتے ہیں (مثلاً ہیلتھ ورکرز)	
جو عام نوعیت کے نزلہ زکام اور فلو کا شکار ہوں	

ایک سپیشل ماسک ہے اور صرف ان لوگوں کو استعمال کرنا چاہیے جو کرونا وائرس کے مریضوں کی دیکھ بھال کرتے ہیں۔

**N95 ماسک**

مزید معلومات کے لئے:



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ہیلپ لائن

ای میل

ویب

صحت مند پاکستان



# گلزار





AMBEDKARITE PROTEST MUSIC AND THE  
CREATION OF A SUBALTERN COUNTERPUBLIC:  
AN ANALYSIS OF KABIR KALA MANCH'S 'AYE BHAGAT SINGH  
TU ZINDA HAI'

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## Abstract

The problem with caste systems, that Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar had identified more than eighty years ago, persists in South Asia in various forms and iterations to this day. To combat novel manifestations of the caste system and its evil, Ambedkarites—those who believe in the ideology of Ambedkar, the famed social reformist who campaigned against Dalit discrimination seek newer tools for dissent, one of which is music. Kabir Kala Manch (KKM) is a troupe of Dalit singers and poets that was formed after the Gujrat riots in 2002. Their music targets fascism, imperialism, casteism and classism, and the patriarchy. Employing Nancy Fraser's theory of a "subaltern counterpublic", this essay explores how Kabir Kala Manch has achieved the creation of such a counterpublic through their music. In particular, it studies their song, *Aye Bhagat Singh Tu Zinda Hai* (*Oh Bhagat Singh, You Are Alive*), focusing on the form it takes, and the themes prevalent in the song.

**Keywords:** *protest music, subversion, caste, subaltern counterpublic, Ambedkar*



## Introduction

The problem with caste systems, that Babasaheb Dr. Ambedkar (1936) identified more than eighty years ago, persists in South Asia in various forms and iterations to this day. To combat novel manifestations of the caste system and its evil, Ambedkarites—those who believe in the ideology of Ambedkar, the famed social reformist who campaigned against Dalit discrimination—seek new tools of dissent, one of which is music. One such band, which has adopted and promoted Ambedkarite music is Kabir Kala Manch or KKM, a troupe of Dalit singers and poets that was formed after the Gujrat riots in 2002. Their music targets fascism, imperialism, casteism and classism, and the patriarchy. Employing Nancy Fraser’s (1990) theory of a “subaltern counterpublic”, this essay will explore how Kabir Kala Manch has achieved the creation of such a counterpublic through its music. It will expound upon this through the analysis of one of KKM’s popular songs, *Aye Bhagat Singh Tu Zinda Hai (Oh Bhagat Singh, You Are Alive)*, focusing on its form and prevalent themes.

In 2011, Kabir Kala Manch was forced into hiding when, alongside other poets and musicians, the state labelled them as the publicly disfavored Naxalites—far-left supporters of Maoism. After coming out of hiding in April 2013, the lead vocalist of the band, Sheetal Sathe declared their appearance before the police an expression of satyagraha (holding onto truth). Rather than surrendering, they fought against state charges, finally receiving bail in June 2013 on humanitarian grounds. Following an atmosphere of state repression and surveillance, it was doubly necessary for the band to form a counter-discourse. This was only possible through the existence of what Nancy Fraser refers to as a “subaltern counterpublic”. This is a “parallel discursive arena where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourse, which in turn permits them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs” (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). These spaces serve dual functions, as “spaces of withdrawal,”

and as “bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics” (p. 68). These spaces hence, work as counter-spaces to “dominant publics”, which are majoritarian and mainstream in nature. The band, since its inception, has created a space where it can reshape its identity and perform the dual functions of withdrawing from, as well as engaging in agitation, and this has led to the formation of a “subaltern counterpublic”.

This counterpublic has been possible because of the medium the band uses and the message its content propagates. This will be explained in light of their song *Aye Bhagat Singh Tu Zinda Hai*, which is written, composed, and sung by Sheetal Sathe. It is a song full of zeal and promise. Sathe begins by calling upon Bhagat Singh, whose memory still fuels the revolutionary fervor today. She comments on the despotic conditions of Indian politics and the falsity of freedom that the masses are offered by the bourgeoisie, who exploit the peasantry and youth, going as far as killing citizens for the sanctity of religion, gender, caste, and creed. She ends by envisioning a different future—one that brings about an end to oppression. In the following sections I will take the example of this song, studying its form and themes to elucidate how protest music has allowed Kabir Kala Manch to create a subaltern counterpublic.

## The Form

### *Use of Anger*

Counterpublics are often characterized by their use of emotive rhetoric, or as Ryder (2007) calls it “rhetoric of anger” (p. 521). In fact, the yardstick for how invested one is in the subject they are talking about is the anger demonstrated. In a counterpublic, one’s anger is taken as a mark of their passion, eagerness, and/or attachment to the issue, which is starkly different from a dominant public space, where use of anger is discouraged. Hence, the norms of decorum and “respectful” etiquette become a tool of suppression in the dominant public space to quench voices of dissent, whereas, in subaltern counterpublics these norms are subverted, and emotions are openly employed to gain attention (Weisser, 2008, p. 613). In this context, where the use of etiquette become a tool of suppression in the dominant public space to quench voices of dissent, whereas, in subaltern counterpublics these norms are subverted, and emotions are openly employed to

gain attention (Weisser, 2008, p. 613). In this context, where the use of anger is not only encouraged, but seen as a necessity for the existence of a counterpublic, the choice of medium is crucial. The form the messages take must be malleable to the incorporation of emotion and frenzy in order to aid its function as a vessel of anger.

Regarding the uses of anger, Audre Lorde (1984) says, “Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought the anger into being. Focused with precision, it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change” (p.127). The anger experienced by KKM’s Dalit students is fashioned into a tool which they can use for the creative process of turning emotions into poetry and music that can reach greater masses. It is important to note that this anger is not genderless as it arises from a place of patriarchal oppression. This is better represented in another KKM song written and sung by Sheetal Sathe called ‘Ek Maitra Raangadya’ (So It Goes, My Dear Friend), which calls attention to the perils of the caste system. The song also draws parallels between the killings in Khailanji and the stories of the Sati and Ramabai, thereby commenting on institutional violence carried out against women. Hence, the anger underlying the lyrics in the music of KKM is a product of class, caste, and gender oppression. As per Lorde (1984), when used with precision, anger can be used to subvert oppressive institutions, thus it becomes an agent of its own as it is channeled through a creative force such as music.

Therefore, the use of poetry and music is necessary due to two reasons: firstly, they allow room for powerful emotions to exist and interact with one another, and secondly, they allow the creative transformation necessary to make anger useful against its perpetrators. A counterpublic is cultivated through this undiluted use of anger.

### ***Poetry, language, and class***

The form this creative energy takes, however, is not devoid of its own politics. According to Lorde (1984), it can become a class issue as poetry is the most economical, since:



*It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labor, the least material and the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper.*  
(p. 116)

Thus, KKM's protest music is political not merely because of its content, that calls out the patriarchy, casteism, racism, imperialism, and social inequalities, but also because of the medium it occupies. At the time of conception, KKM comprised of Dalit students belonging to the working class. The most accessible creative form available to them was lyrical poems, which they then composed into simple music using a tambourine and ghungroo.

In addition to the practicality and ease that protest music production offers to working class individuals of KKM, the pro-democracy and anti-fascist messages of the troupe take the musical form because of their audience, which is comprised of the working class as well. Songs are also generally easier to consume in terms of physical and mental effort required. Consumption also takes less time and can be accessed by anyone despite age, education, class, etc. Additionally, the songs by KKM are often sung in Marathi. In fact, at a performance in New Delhi at Press Club in 2016, Sathe added a few verses in Marathi to the song *Aye Bhagat Singh Tu Zinda Hai*. While increasing the accessibility and appeal of the music to Marathi speakers, this also grounds the politics of the band into the local context and history of the Maharashtra region. This aids in the creation of a counterpublic, as the use of Marathi performs the function of excluding the bourgeoisie public from interacting with the music produced. At the same time, it provides a safe space for Marathi speakers by using a universal medium, i.e., music. This medium can be integrated into the dominant sphere, thus fulfilling the dual function of semi-separatism and engagement. This means that while the music subverts dominant publics, it allows interaction with them as well since it makes use of the same mediums as they do.

## Gender

Lastly, it is essential to note that the mastermind behind *Aye Bhagat Singh Tu Zinda Hai* is a woman. Not only is the song written and composed by Sheetal Sathe, it is also performed by her. Being a Dalit working class woman, the act of owning one's own voice by lending it to the creation of purposive art like protest music,

is quite powerful. In the documentary *Jai Bhim Comrade* (Long Live Comrade Bhim), before singing *Maji Mai* (My Mother), Sathe comments on how within the anti-caste movement, there still persists a lack of women in leadership positions. In such communities, where people support female liberation only as long as the women of their own families do not participate, taking a leading role is still equal to defying norms (Patwardhan, 2011). In fact, later in the documentary, Sathe's mother comments on how her daughter's political work is the reason for the rift between them, saying that she is the world's, not her family's. In a world where familial expectations and restrictions govern the decisions a woman makes, the decision to become the face of a movement is met with suspicion and discouragement from those close to her personally and the larger society. In the face of all this, Sathe taking up the role of lead singer becomes a subversive act that helps formulate a counter-strand to gender norms in both, the dominant public where Dalit women are rendered invisible as well as the counterpublic where gendered preconceptions still dominate, albeit in different ways.

Thus, the form that Kabir Kala Manch's art takes, aids in the creation of a subaltern counterpublic. This is done through the assertion of their own identity as working class Dalit activists, and the use of anger, language, as well as gendered expressions, to create spaces that provide refuge from the dominant public sphere. This aids in the construction and dissemination of anti-hegemonic discourse that exists outside of the mainstream, but also sometimes engages with it. It is this dialectic between the two functions of a subaltern counterpublic—the distance and the proximity with the dominant public space—that creates “emancipatory potential” (Fraser, 1990, p. 68) and allows for various institutions of oppression to be contended with.

## The Content

### *The Past and the Future*

The song *Aye Bhagat Singh Tu Zinda Hai* brings together the various representations of Bhagat Singh that exist in popular memory: namely that of a revolutionary freedom fighter, a martyr-bridegroom, and a warrior against caste.

Bhagat Singh was an Indian socialist revolutionary whose acts of spectral violence against the British in India led to his execution at the age of twenty-three and

turned him into a folk hero of the Indian independence movement. He is referred to by Ishwar Diyal Gaur (2008) as a martyr-bridegroom in the following words, “Bhagat Singh’s martyrdom begot the motif of ‘wedding with death’ in the literary culture of Punjab. The image of Bhagat Singh, as constructed in Punjabi literature, is a form of literary resistance to imperialist hegemony” (p. xiv). Gaur places Bhagat Singh in the greater literary-cultural landscape of Punjab where non-conformists such as Baba Farid and Guru Nanak are hailed as heroes, specifically for their fight against the dominant strands in society. The song, *Aye Bhagat Singh Tu Zinda Hai* remembers him in a similar fashion. Instead of being regarded as a regional hero, however, Bhagat Singh is known as a martyr belonging to the culture of revolution, hence sharing the vision of all those who shed blood for the cause or rose against fascist socio-political regimes with the chants of “Long Live Revolution”. His death is regarded as martyrdom and respected as such, and is taken as a source of inspiration for all those who walk his path.

Moreover, it is imperative to explore the role of caste in the choice of Bhagat Singh as the champion of rights for a group of Dalit activists. By doing so, Ambedkarites are paying reverence to his anti-untouchability stance and laying claim to a history not explored comprehensively in popular discourse. Bhagat Singh (1923), in his essay, ‘*Achoot Samasya*’ (Problem of Untouchability) writes, “It should be decided that all human beings are equal and neither a different one was born from birth nor by division of work” (para. 10). He identifies the capitalist bureaucracy as the oppressor of the low castes and urges them to organize themselves for the purpose of achieving liberation. He refers to the untouchables as the “real proletariat” (para. 15), calling upon them to bring the revolution. An incident that can shed light upon Bhagat Singh’s views regarding the caste system took place during his time at Central Jail, Lahore. Bhagat Singh developed a relationship with the sweeper of his death-cell, Bogha, whom he started referring to as *bebey* (mother). When Bogha asked him not to refer to him as a mother-equivalent due to his own lowly status, Bhagat Singh responded by saying that only two people in his life had ever cleaned his excreta—his mother and Bogha; hence, he referred to him as *bebey*. Before his execution, he asked Bogha to make him roti prepared by his hands. However, when Bogha reached the cell with it, Bhagat Singh had already been executed (Gaur, 2008). This story further underscores Bhagat Singh’s views on purity and its relation to caste.

The invocation of these conceptualizations of Bhagat is an act of constructing and rewriting one’s own history and identity. *Aye Bhagat Singh Tu Zinda Hai* calls upon the memory of Bhagat Singh alongside the memories of deception

faced by people in the name of freedom and the atrocities carried out against the powerless. To paraphrase hooks (1989), the struggle of these people is also a struggle of memory against forgetting. By laying claim to Bhagat Singh in all his varied representations as well as the horrors their own ancestors have faced, KKM is declaring ownership of not merely a revolutionary inheritance, but also one full of pain, humiliation, and degradation. However, while there is an acknowledgement of this past, there is also admonition of it, i.e., there is a simultaneous acceptance of one's own history and rejection of said history as fate. The song regards the present as a site of hopelessness, destitution, and clamors for a future where things are different.

As detailed earlier, a counterpublic is essential for identity-formulation. The Marathi Dalit troupe reimagines their own history and future by creating associations between their own struggles against caste, class, patriarchy, and the struggles of Bhagat Singh. In writing their past, they are taking ownership of their own present and future, refusing to let the dominant groups of society narrate their tales. Moreover, by using a figure that resonates with many groups in the society—even some that are in power—the song fulfils the function of broaching an engagement with the dominant public in order to disrupt the hegemonic ideologies and discourse, interspersing it with subversive interpretations. By employing Bhagat Singh's memory as an anti-caste revolutionary, KKM is adding more layers to the popular image of Bhagat Singh above that of merely a militant or anti-imperialist fighter.

## Politics

*Aye Bhagat Singh Tu Zinda Hai* makes use of communist ideologues and revolutionary sentiments. The song remembers how Bhagat Singh had rejected the freedom which people are deluded by today. The same, false notion of freedom that cages peasants and the youth, under the guise of which the reign of marginalization and exploitation continues. By recounting the injustices faced till date by the subaltern, the song establishes KKM as oppositional to bourgeoisie politics, as well as the Hindu right-wing that kills under the name of Raam. The end of the song is hopeful—with Sathé wishing to join the line of martyrs who vowed to bring the 'laal subah' (red morning), a new beginning that promises a communist utopia. There is a shift from lamenting the failed vision of freedom to making a vow for its

achievement.

Thus, through its lyrics and openly anti-fascist and communist symbols, the KKM establishes its own progressive politics. This is essential in the creation of a counterpublic as the purpose of such a space is first and foremost the formation of an identity set on one's own terms rather than based on dominant ideologies and interpretations. Especially in a political atmosphere writhing with elements that are quick to label dissent as anti-state, this elaboration of KKM's own political outlook is necessary in defining themselves and averting false associations.

## **Conclusion**

Therefore, through its themes of invoking the past to establish one's future and clear political stances, KKM's music enables it to establish its own values and identities. However, these are not set in isolation from the dominant public. Both, their politics, and the use of symbols speak to a larger discourse surrounding bourgeoisie political activity in the country. They do not adhere to the dominant framework, but rather try to establish ground from where they can speak against it.

In conclusion, *Aye Bhagat Singh Tu Zinda Hai* is a piece of art that merges the memory of a revolutionary past with a disdainful present to produce hope for an emancipatory future. It is one of the many songs written and performed by Kabir Kala Manch that opens up "spaces of radical openness" put forward by bell hooks (1989), retooling the margin from a locus of victimization to a site of resistance and collective reckoning (p. 19). These sites take the shape of counterpublics and offer opportunities for the assertion of self-identity as well as interacting with and shaping dominant discourse in stratified societies. Such forms and themes that can be used as part of subversive movements are especially necessary in today's time, when fascist regimes are on the rise and marginalized voices are under threat of erasure.

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## PARTITION IN INDIAN LITERATURE: PINJAR AND TRAIN TO PAKISTAN

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### Abstract

Amrita Pritam's novel *Pinjar* and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* remain two of the most hard-hitting literary works that describe the horror, the frenzy, and the sectarian tensions that ripped apart the lives of so many during the 1947 split of the subcontinent into the new countries of India and Pakistan. This paper will address the sectarian divide that the two novels convey in their plot as well as other major themes of sexual violence, communal tensions, and the manner in which this cataclysmic event shaped the lives of people on either side of the Radcliffe line.

**Keywords:** *Partition, communal violence, sexual violence, Khushwant Singh, Amrita Pritam*



## Introduction

The Partition of 1947 opened a deep fissure between the various sectarian, religious and ethnic communities in the Indian Subcontinent. The magnitude of this event is such that we are still living through its fallout today, in the form of jingoism and communal violence on either side of the Indo-Pak border. One glaring instance of this is the rising tide of belligerent nationalism—especially in the form of the right-wing BJP government with its Hindutva agenda in India. However, in Pakistan as well, minorities are treated as second-class citizens by the State on account of Islamic nationalism, espoused by the Pakistani state as the dominant ideology (Qasmi & Robb, 2017). It would not be wrong to say that the events leading up to the Partition are responsible for unleashing the ugly forces of communal hatred and racism, in both India and Pakistan. Amrita Pritam's novel *Pinjar* and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* remain two of the most hard-hitting literary works that describe the horror, frenzy, and sectarian tensions that ripped apart the lives of so many during the 1947 split of the subcontinent into the new countries of India and Pakistan. This paper will address the sectarian divide that the two novels convey in their plot as well as other major themes of sexual violence, communal tensions, and the manner in which this cataclysmic event shaped the lives of people on either side of the Radcliffe line.

## The Partition as Rupture

The carnage that followed the announcement of the impending partition of the Punjab, and with it the creation of two new nation-states, unfolded on an unprecedented scale. Such is the trauma borne by those who lived to witness that you can seldom find someone who is willing or able to recount the events of the August of 1947 without choking up, or becoming overcome with emotion. It is an event permanently etched into the memory of those who lived to see it. In the words of William Dalrymple, it is “central to modern identity in the Indian subcontinent as the Holocaust is to identity amongst Jews, branded painfully onto the regional consciousness by memories of an almost unimaginable violence” (Dalrymple, 2015). The communal rioting that unfolded both prior to and in the wake of the partition claimed the lives of millions of Indians. In the words of Khushwant Singh: “The fact



is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped. By the summer of 1947...ten million people – Hindus and Muslims – were in flight. Almost a million of them were dead” (Singh, 1988, p. 8).

Thus, the Partition was an event that prompted unfathomable bloodlust and newly-awakened hostility amongst ordinary people who committed acts of extreme depravity against their fellow man. Both Pritam and Singh’s novels show us that their characters face a moral dilemma when they know they are acting unjustly, and the weight of their conscience bears down heavily upon them. The two authors show us that man has a proclivity for both good and evil, which explains the moral dilemma faced by Rasheed in *Pinjar* and Hukum Chand in *Train to Pakistan*, two characters central to the two stories that concern us in this paper.

First, let us look towards Amrita Pritam and the plight of women that is described so viscerally in *Pinjar*. I have guided the inquiry in this direction because as Pritam shows, the female body was used, by both sides as fair game. Pooro, a young Hindu girl, is kidnapped by Rasheed, a Muslim man from a family that has had a longstanding feud with Pooro’s family over their kidnapping of Rasheed’s aunt, many years ago. Pooro’s kidnapping precedes the Partition by a few years. Rasheed kidnaps her to settle scores with Pooro’s family and the dishonor they brought upon his own family. It bears mentioning here that while the entire enterprise of “independence” was built upon staking a claim to territory on nationalist and sectarian grounds, so were women, on both sides, seen as human bounty to be claimed, and made off with, like lootfound on a battlefield. The impact of the scale of gendered violence that took place cannot be ignored, nor can we go without addressing it in this paper. The sexual violence against women remains a shameful stain on the already blood-spattered year of 1947.

Literature has articulated the pain of living through Partition, when it cannot be articulated through speeches or real-life accounts. Many writers have since then put pen to paper and proceeded to write stories that, although fictionalized, communicate the reality of Partition —Manto, Intizar Hussain, Urvashi Butalia, and Qurratulain Haider, to name a few apart from the two discussed in this paper. Bound up with the exploitation of the female body, a central theme in

stories related to the Partition that reflect its reality, there is also the question of the shame associated with having defiled daughters returned alive to their parents. In such a scenario, death is a more merciful fate than being left alive after being brutally violated.

This is evidenced by the refusal in the novel of Pooro's parents to take their own daughter back, both out of fear of retaliation from Rasheed's family, as well as the shame and stigma of letting a defiled daughter back into their home (Pritam, 2009). Pooro becomes a "skeleton". Hollow inside, having lost her home and her identity, her name is changed to Hamida, as she is given a Muslim name after marriage, which Rasheed has tattooed on her arm, to serve always as a stark reminder of her kidnapping. The tattooing of Pooro's new Muslim name on her arm is reminiscent of the identification numbers that Jewish prisoners in Nazi concentration camps were tattooed and branded with during the Holocaust. Holocaust survivors continued to bear those tattoos, which served as a grim reminder of one of the worst genocides of the 20th century.

Not quite Hamida, and no longer Pooro, she comes to exist in a liminal space between the two; a shadow of her former self, hollow and listless inside: "In her dreams, when she met her old friends and played in her parents' home, everyone still called her Pooro. At other times she was Hamida. It was a double life: Hamida by day, Pooro by night. In reality, she was neither one nor the other, she was just a skeleton, without a shape or a name" (Pritam, 2009, p. 20).

Pritam's novel tells a tale of more than just one incident of sexual violence against women. Later into the novel, after Hamida has already been married for quite some time, a 'mad' woman who aimlessly roams her village is raped, and eventually bears a son, dying in childbirth herself. Hamida rescues the infant and brings him up as her own. The atmosphere that Pritam builds in her novel is so intense and so harrowing, that personally, as a female reader of Pritam's book, I found that I could only read *Pinjar* in small doses. The constant threat that women face serves as a reminder of the value of the lives of women, and for Hamida/Pooro it serves as a reminder of her own predicament. Each instance of kidnapping or violation of a woman by a man takes her back to the time of her own kidnapping by her now-husband, Rasheed. She imagines what it would have been like had she lost her senses and gone mad after Rasheed's kidnapping. The mad woman's terrible fate thus hits far too close to home for Puro, and strikes a raw nerve.

Although the Partition has not yet come to pass, the air is already rife with communal tensions and mutual suspicion between the Hindu and Muslim communities. The Hindu community begin to question the selflessness of Hamida's actions. I will remind the reader here that at this juncture, Pooro is now Hamida, a Muslim woman who now has a Muslim son by the name of Javed and is maintaining a household with her Muslim husband, Rasheed. She is not welcomed by, nor does she fraternize with, the Hindu community in Rasheed's village. The Hindu villagers accuse Hamida and Rasheed of bringing up the child of a Hindu woman as a Muslim, thereby asserting their dominance over the Hindu community. This hostility over the simple, selfless, charitable act of rescuing an orphaned infant shows us a fractured community at odds with one another over religion.

While we read the novel as a work of fiction, it is also important to think historically and put the events that are narrated into the context of the social situation at the time. By doing this, we see that Rasheed's character has far more shades of grey instead of being just black or white, and we cannot be so simplistic as to dismiss him as a monster who was utterly unfazed in kidnapping a defenseless young girl. We see him instead as a product of his time. Pritam gives us ample evidence that Rasheed struggles to reconcile his conscience with his actions. He is apologetic throughout the novel towards Pooro, is often found in deep contemplation, mulling with disbelief over what he has done. He also does not sully Pooro's honor by violating her against her will or taking advantage of her helplessness. Following his own beliefs of what is justifiable, he waits for her to be married to him before proceeding to consummate with her. He cares for her, and is careful not to upset her. After he makes her his wife, she is the mistress of the house, and not a captive. By his own admission he finds it difficult to come to terms with what he has done, as though some inexplicable force overpowered his conscience to induce him to kidnap a young Hindu girl. By arguing this, I do not mean to absolve Rasheed of his crimes, rather, I wish to point out that Pritam herself is showing us that the circumstances in which one is brought up and socialized can normalize things that otherwise should not be normalized. In much the same manner, one could say that expressing jingoistic sentiments, or harboring stereotypical views about Muslims in India – being beef-eaters, taking many wives, being backward and ignorant – are things that are normalized by the ruling party in an effort to re-imagine India and rid the country of all traces of its pluralist and inclusive ideals, which were once upheld so proudly by its citizens.

In *Train to Pakistan*, the setting of the novel is the fictional village of Mano Majra on the banks of the Sutlej, which Khushwant Singh said was inspired by the real-

life village of Miya Mir. The location of the village in the Punjab is important as Punjab was the province that was physically partitioned, with the eastern part going to India and the western part becoming part of Pakistan. The novel begins with the murder of Ram Lal, a Hindu money lender in Mano Majra. His murder serves as the impetus that stokes communal tensions in the village as the dacoits who murder him throw bangles stolen from Ram Lal's house into the courtyard of the house of Jugga, the Sikh protagonist, to implicate him in the crime. The murder thus serves as an event that foreshadows the impending communal tensions that will seize not only Mano Majra but also the rest of the subcontinent as the partition takes place.

The arrests of Iqbal (an educated Sikh man who has returned from Britain) and Jugga for Ram Lal's murder are initially viewed by Hukum Chand (magistrate and deputy commissioner of the Mano Majra district, a wealthy man, and the Muslim protagonist of the novel) as a political tool that can be used to give the Sikhs a pretext to evacuate the Muslim inhabitants of Mano Majra from the village. However, this changes when Hukum Chand finds out that Iqbal and Jugga are not, in fact, Muslim, after he enquires as to the religious affiliation of the real culprits of Ram Lal's murder. When told they are Sikh, he feels disappointed, as now Ram Lal's death cannot be used to ratchet up hatred against the Muslims of Mano Majra. It is important to note here that Hukum Chand's motive is actually to evacuate the Muslim residents to save them from a future massacre, as he realizes the implication of the Partition. Already the Sikh inhabitants of the village are incensed by the train arriving with the bodies of dead Sikhs, which inflames them against the Muslim community. Later in the novel, as the Mano Majrans awaken to find the river Sutlej strewn with the floating bodies of murdered men, women, and children, the reality of what is happening finally dawns on the villagers. They realize the bodies have been the victims of a massacre when they notice the stab wounds on them.

Jugga's arc in the book is what interested me the most as a reader of the novel. He is very much an outlier when it comes to comparing him with the rest of his community, as he cannot care less about partaking in communal enmity against Muslims. His lover, Nooran, is the Muslim daughter of the village weaver. Jugga's disposition shows us that an ignorant man, who does not care much for the high politics of the Partition, is oblivious to religious hatred. This tells us that this religious hatred is a manufactured hatred, not one that comes naturally to people who had been coexisting in harmony until this moment. In the final scene, where he cuts the rope intended to derail the train carrying Muslims to

Pakistan, thus sacrificing his life to save the Muslims, he redeems himself for his lifetime of criminal deeds and petty crime. Jugga thus becomes an unlikely hero, a protagonist fit for a novel centered on the Partition, where both heroes and villains are characters with a proclivity to do both good and bad.

## Conclusion

Out of the many ruptures that the South Asian subcontinent faced during 300 years of colonial rule, the final act in the play – the 1947 Partition – remains the one that has inflicted the deepest scar on the consciousness of its people. In the two novels I discussed above, we are reminded of the capability in ordinary human beings to do things which are *extraordinarily* depraved, *extraordinarily* evil – a far more frightening scenario. There exists a spate of literary fiction that addresses the horrors endured by humanity on both sides. Several of Manto's short stories, which he wrote after the Partition, such as *Khol Do*, *Thanda Gosht* and *Siyah Hashye*, specifically address the issue of gendered violence. I have noted Manto's stories here because within them, none of the perpetrators of sexual crimes, save one in *Siyah Hashye*, are identified by their religious affiliation. This is a deliberate decision, in my view, on Manto's part, to show that it was men from all quarters and all sects who were guilty of committing unspeakable acts of violence, and sexual violence against women, as I have tried to argue throughout this paper. Men who, reassured that there would be no atoning for their crimes, felt free to act with impunity, not only by violating the bodies of the 'Other's' women, but also by murdering the Other with whom they had coexisted until that moment.

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