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The Sacred Cage: Exploring Emotional Incest and Family Dynamics in *The Holy Woman* by Qaisra Shahraz

Hafsa Saif¹ Kashifa Khalid²

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Abstract

This research probes the diverse dynamics of the family system and emotional incest in *The Holy Woman* by Qaisra Shahraz through the theoretical framework of Murray Bowen's Family System Theory. It examines Habib's emotional dependency on Zarri, which makes her a victim of emotional incest. His emotive reliance on Zarri is analyzed through the Bowen concepts of differentiation of self, emotional fusion, family projection, multigenerational transmission, and triangulation. These dynamics transform Zarri into a vessel for her father's emotional security and unsettled anxieties. This paper studies the way Habib constitutes emotional incest by manipulating her in the name of honor and religion, such as marrying her to the Quran. It is a non-sexual violence, but it blurs the boundary between a parent and a child in which the guardian uses a child as an emotional surrogate. Habib justifies his decision by using religion and culture as a cover to hide his insecurities, but it also uncovers the way a patriarchal-structured society serves as an internal mechanism of the family system. This study also highlights that females are not only submissive because of external pressure, but family dynamics also play a crucial role in female self-sacrifice and silence. In a nutshell, *The Holy Woman* shifts the focus from societal oppression to family intrapsychic oppression. The psychological reading exposes the way cultural norms destroy women's identity and create a sacred cage for them through emotional violence in the name of honor and religion.

Keywords: Emotional Incest, Differentiation of Self, Sacred Cage, Family Dynamics, Honor and Religion.

¹ Lecturer, Green International University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

² Principal Lecturer, University of Central Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: Hafsa Saif, **Correspondence through:** hafsa.saif@giu.edu.pk



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Introduction

The Holy Woman novel by Qaisra Shahraz presents the themes of tradition, gender inequalities and resistance within a patriarchal society. The novel is set in contemporary Pakistan and its narrative centers on Zarri Bano, an educated, privileged woman who becomes a victim of an old feudal custom. She is married to the Qur'an, a practice designed to preserve family wealth by preventing her from marrying. Shahraz through Zarri's transformation not only critiques oppressive gender norms but also highlights the way faith and tradition are used as tools for female oppression. The novel shed light on the themes of love, duty, resistance and identity. The setting of the novel is across the landscapes of Sindh, Karachi, and London.

This research intends to analyze the family dynamics of Zarri Bano and the way she becomes the victim of emotional incest. In psychology emotional incest is also called covert incest. Emotional incest is a term in which a parent or caregiver uses a child for the fulfillment of their emotional needs that their adult romantic partner should fulfil. Parents put themselves first, and this process affects the well-being of a child. It means a child has to fulfil the emotional desire of the parent first by neglecting their own sentiments. Emotional incest sometimes blurs the boundaries between a parent and child. A child should depend on a parent, but in emotional incest the parent depends on their child for emotional longings.

The significance of this paper is to enlighten society about the way family emotionally manipulates women by suppressing their desires in the name of honor and religion. This issue will be addressed by having a deep insight into the novel *The Holy Woman* by Qaisra Shahraz, which portrays Zarri Bano as a victim of emotional incest. The above stated problem will be analyzed through the lens of Murray Bowen family system theory, particularly by implementing the concepts of family projection process, triangulation, multigenerational transmission and differentiation of self to understand Zarri father's emotional dependency on her that leads to a distorted family dynamic. She sacrificed her identity because of her father's unresolved emotional anxiety and for the sake of family's feudal honor.

Literature Review

In “*A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Qaisra Shahraz's the Holy Woman in the Backdrop of Subalternity*”, Hadia Khan applies the theoretical framework of Lazar's feminist critical discourse analysis and Gayatri Spivak's concept of subalternity to explore how the patriarchal structure of society marginalizes the protagonist of the novel Zarri Bano. The article discusses how religion is used to manipulate Zarri, and on the other hand it is also used in favour of male dominance until Zarri realizes her rights after gaining the knowledge of religion. It also highlights how societal discourse plays a significant role in othering female identity.

The paper “*Female Angst and Cultural Confinement: An Existential Reading of the Holy Woman*” by Humaira Yousaf, Abdul Hamid Khan, Rabeca Rafi, and Noreen Shah investigates Zarri's psychological conflict within a feudal and religious framework through the lens of existential philosophy by Camus, Kierkegaard, Sartre and Nietzsche. It examines the transformation of Zarri into the “Holy Woman” which represents her existential crisis, slave morality and bad faith. This compels her to neglect her desires. The authors emphasis the moments of self-reflection where Zarri starts to gain her original identity and begins resisting the identity imposed on her.

In “*Deconstructing Material Commodification: A Feminist Critique of Objectification in Qaisra Shahraz’s Holy Woman*” Omera Saeed, Aneela Ilyas, Shiza Zulfiqar and Muhammad Ajmal use Simon de Beauvoir’s theory to investigate the commodification of Zarri Bano through the patriarchal structure. It also examines how chastity norms, property rights and honor culture turn her body into a transactional object within the family. The article exposes the way religion and oppressive discourse play a role in female subordination and in suppressing their individuality.

The article” *An Analysis of Qaisra Shahraz’s the Holy Woman from Islamic Feminism Perspective*” by Dr. Marriam Bashir, Dr. Barirah Nazir and Bilal Asmat Cheema is about how Zarri Bano was unaware of her rights. She surrendered the right of her marriage and inheritance due to her father's pressure and due to a lack of moral support. The novel is analyzed from the Islamic perspective. Zarri Bano, after becoming the Holy Woman gets the knowledge about her rights that is given to her in religion. Before that, she was kept deprived of her rights by the male-dominant society.

In “*The Holy Veil: Hijab as a Fluid Signifier of Agency and Oppression in The Holy woman*” Ch Muhammad Uzair Chohan and Syed Anas Jan explore the veil or hijab as a dynamic symbol in the novel. It emerges as a man's control over women, but it evolves into a site of agency. The theoretical framework of this article is based on Butler’s gender performativity and Islamic feminist theory. The main argument of this article is Zarri reappropriates veiling that challenges the fixed narrative of oppression and represents the hidden meanings through choice, context and resistance.

Thus, numerous studies have explored the emotional trajectory of Zarri Bano through the lens of Islamic feminism, patriarchy and cultural confinement but none of the existing research explores the theme of emotional incest, emotional enmeshment or Bowen family systems theory in relation to *The Holy Woman*. This work will bridge a gap in existing research by shedding light on clinical psychological dimensions through Bowen concepts of family projection, fusion, differentiation of self, and triangulation. Current researches only focuses on external oppression such as religion, commodification and patriarchy. The approach of this research is to emphasize on individuals intrapsychic and familial dynamics that perpetuate female silence and sacrifice.

Discussion

This chapter examines the way Zarri father's emotional dependence subtly entangles her in an emotionally incestuous and enmeshed family dynamic through the application of Murray Bowen’s Family Systems Theory. This discussion explores the way Habib unconsciously projects his social insecurities, emotional anxieties and unresolved ego onto his daughter by transforming her from an individual with agency into a vessel for family honor and spiritual idealism. This emotional role reversal, fused identity, and suppression of personal boundaries reflect deeper psychological dysfunctions that are typically described in family therapy literature as emotional incest. This discussion aims to reveal how internal family dynamics operate as covert yet powerful force of emotional control and gender sacrifice.

3.1 Differentiation of Self

Murray Bowen in his book *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* describes that differentiation of self refers to an individual’s capacity to maintain a clear and stable sense of personal identity while remaining emotionally connected to their family members. It is an ability in which a person learns

to separate their intellectual thinking and emotional responses from others, especially in high-pressure circumstances. A well-differentiated person can have intimate relationships with other people without losing their individuality. They don't merge their identities with people around them, even if they are facing extreme societal or family pressure. These types of people are emotionally mature as they can separate their emotions from others and avoid emotional fusion.

Differentiation of self is categorized into two types: low-level differentiation of self and high-level differentiation of self. A person with a low level of differentiation struggles to distinguish his emotional response from his intellectual reasoning. They react to situations instantly. Their reactions and responses are controlled by their emotions or society instead of their rational thinking. In contrast, individuals with a high level of differentiation has the ability to clearly distinguish between emotions and intellect. They are able to acknowledge and express their feelings openly. They have the capacity to think critically and they respond thoughtfully. These individuals do not suppress emotions but regulate them in a way that supports balanced decision making and authentic interpersonal relationships (Bowen 403-408). In the novel *The Holy Woman* Zarri becomes a victim of emotional incest, and this condition is imposed upon her by her family. She is portrayed as a modern and educated woman. She is relishing her life, but it drastically changes after the death of her brother Jafar and this event becomes the turning point of her life. According to Bowen theory, within a family an individual cannot be viewed as a separate emotional unit. Family member's emotions are interlinked with each other. A shift in one member of the family will emotionally impacts the entire family (Bowen 219) Jafar death emotionally destabilizes the family and places an immense pressure on Zarri to become an heir to her father's land.

Habib has always shown particular affection for Zarri by valuing her above his other children. His love, however has crosses the healthy emotional boundaries. Zarri once exclaimed that he would sell the world for her "the daughter he would reputedly 'sell the world for'" (Shahraz 56) this intense possessiveness of Habib towards Zarri destroyed her identity and life. Zarri Bano is not free to live as an independent individual. She is constrained by her position within the family system. In the novel, Zarri Bano is given a symbolic role such as the jewel of the family, her father's pride and the honor of her family. These designations reveal that her worth is relational and representative. She is an anchor for her whole family's honor, rather than having individual personal rights. Habib as patriarch exerts control over his property as well as over the destinies of his children. His son Jafar represents continuity of the family line, while Zarri represents purity and virtue. They both are the two emotional poles through which Habib's own anxieties are stabilized basically it seems like Habib is suffering from chronic anxiety. In chronic anxiety a person reacts according to the reaction of society and fears what might happen if he doesn't take a certain decision. It is transferred from one generation to another and a person learns from their elders how to react in a specific situation. Siraj Din transferred the concept of holy woman in Habib's mind and what decision society expects him to make after the death of his son. Habib struggling with chronic anxiety reacts according to the desires of others instead of thinking rationally. He decides to make Zarri a holy woman and marries her to the Quran to retain family property and prioritizes societal approval over her wellbeing. In the name of holy woman, he sacredly caged her emotionally and physically. His actions reflect that he has low level differentiation of self because instead of considering his moral responsibility as a father, he submits to the external pressure. Habib sometimes feels guilty because he suppresses his emotions and

conforms to the inherited norms. Once he confronts his father “I thought I had done the right thing, but I am so unhappy. I have lost my family. I walk all alone in my home..... I am plagued by guilt, wondering whether we’ve done the right thing” (Shahraz 162) he made the decision to please the society but from inside guilt is eating him up. Habib is emotionally dependent on Zarri which blurs the boundaries between a child and parent. Habib relies on Zarri to fulfill his psychological needs instead of providing her emotional support. This reversal of roles severely impacts Zarri’s emotional and personal freedom.

Zarri receives several marriage proposals before Jafar’s death but she declines all of them with her father’s support. Zarri later encounters Sikander at a village mela and falls in love with him. On the same day, Sikander family visits her home with a formal marriage proposal and Zarri instantly accepts it but Habib doesn’t seem pleased with her decision. Initially his dislike is not visible but after the death of Jafar it becomes clear. He disapproves their marriage and caged Zarri emotionally and physically in the name of honor and religion. Bowen argues that anxiety in family systems often leads to rigid roles, where one child becomes the carrier of the family’s unresolved issues (Bowen 378). Zarri precisely becomes a carrier of family heritage after the Jafar’s funeral. His death leaves the family without a male heir and due to this Habib’s anxieties about legacy and honor intensifies. Instead of allowing Zarri to pursue her marriage to Sikandar, he redirects the burden of family continuity onto her symbolic status by making her a holy woman. Habib transforms her into the embodiment of the family’s emotional stability.

The Habib family does not function as a collection of individuals but more as an interdependent emotional entity. Zarri cannot act freely without destabilizing her family unit. Her father cannot tolerate her independence without feeling personally threatened. This interconnection between the family members is the soil in which Habib’s unconscious incestuous desire grows because the boundaries between self and other are blurred. His paternal love shades possessive control. He believes that as her father he has right over Zarri life decisions. Shahzada once confronts Habib that he doesn’t want Zarri to marry anyone.

“All I know is that you have won. You have finally achieved what you have always craved in your heart for your daughter. Your son’s death gave you the ideal excuse..... Is it fair to forcefully prevent your daughter from marrying? You never really meant to marry her off to any man, did you? Especially not to Sikander. Oh, no. You love her too much. She is your treasure, your possession, and you couldn’t stomach the thought of another man” (Shahraz 137)

This conversation depicts how possessive Habib is for Zarri that he cannot share her love with anyone else. He is emotionally dependent on her daughter due to his low differentiation of self. He should be a guardian of Zarri but he is fulfilling his emotional needs through Zarri which should be fulfilled by his romantic partner. In the name of tradition, religion and honor he sacrificed her desires and right to marry. He sacredly caged Zarri by emotionally manipulating her and makes her the victim of emotional incest. Habib and Zarri Bano relationship is a great illustration of emotional fusion. Habib does not perceive Zarri as an independent woman but as an extension of himself. Zarri’s beauty, purity, and intelligence is a source of his pride. Habib’s decision to prevent her marriage to Sikandar reveals his inability to tolerate her separation from him. Instead of providing her right of individuality, he collapses the boundary between his identity and hers by treating her body and choices as though they are his own possessions. When Sikandar proposes

Zarri he refuses it not because Sikandar is unworthy but due to the thought of losing her to another man is unbearable. He thinks she is no longer any man's woman and her life should only be dedicated to God. This proclamation sanctifies his refusal to release her and by making her holy woman he ensures that no other man can claim her so he can keep her for himself.

Bowen's insight that fusion reduces individuality and it is starkly visible in Habib and Zarri relationship. Habib cannot allow Zarri to differentiate from him because doing so would require him to face his own anxieties about his son loss, mortality, and honor. He clings to Zarri as an emotional extension. Majority of the emotional incest scholars describe this condition as "The child is responsible to meet the emotional needs of the parent; thus he becomes a surrogate spouse in the emotional system" (Adams 14). Habib never crosses the physical boundary that a parent and child should have, but his extreme emotional dependence on her serves the same function. He refuses to give her the right of marriage or motherhood and keeps her as his symbolic partner. The intensity of his possessiveness suggests that his bond with her crosses from paternal love into emotional incest. What makes the collapse of differentiation tragic is that they both are trapped. Habib cannot let go Zarri and she cannot break herself free from the chains of tradition and family custom. Zarri's lack of differentiation manifests in her own self-sacrifice "I have decided to devote my life totally to religious studies and to teaching. I have no wish to marry" (Shahzada 226) although she initially resists to become a holy woman but her father emotionally manipulates her by saying "If you don't want the company of a man," he amended, "or desire it, then why are you so against becoming a *Shahzadi Ibadat*? As a normal woman, as a wife, you will be tied to one man. That life in no way can compare to the *izzat*, the honour and the fame that your new role will bring to you and your family" (Shahraz 74-75) after sometime she eventually accepts her father's desires with grace. This acceptance is not evidence of strong selfhood but it represents emotional fusion. Zarri suppresses all her desires to keep her family system stable. Bowen says that "A person with less differentiation relies more on approval and acceptance of others" (Bowen 403). Zarri pays the cause of emotional fusion with her father by losing her identity and autonomy.

3.2 Family Projection, Multigenerational Transmission of Control and Triangulation

Bowen family projection process highlights Habib's behavior. He says, "it is a mechanism through which parents transfer their anxiety and immaturity to a child, and shapes his development according to their unresolved issues" (Bowen 233,344). In simpler words, parents impose their emotional struggle on a child, and he bears the weight of their emotional anxieties. Habib projects his unresolved anxieties onto Zarri, such as anxiety of purity, honor, and control onto her. He placed his unresolved patriarchal need for dominance on Zarri's destiny because he wants to avoid social shame and dread that he might lose his family prestige after Jafar's death. Instead of confronting his grief over Jafar's death and feudal decline, he uses Zarri to stabilize himself. As a result, she becomes a living sacrifice for her father's unresolved fears and acts as an emotional regulator for him. She acts as an emotional shield for her father, and this projection is deeply psychological. Through the projection process, Habib's unconscious incestuous desires become legible. He uses Zarri to stabilize his emotional needs and regulate his need for control over her. The projection process transforms her into a carrier of Habib's anxieties, which allows him to avoid confronting them directly. *Healing the Shame that Binds You* is a work on family dynamics that describes "In emotional incest parents turns a child into a partner and a source of emotional security and robs the child from his own separate identity" (Bradshaw 69). Habib forces Zarri to become his emotional regulator, and in this process she is robbed of her individuality. Her marriage

to Quran is an act of paternal projection, not an act of divine devotion. Habib thinks no dishonor will come to his home because no man will come near Zarri Bano, and her purity will bring pride and honor for his family. His usage of words like purity and honor reveals that he is projecting his fear of dishonor onto his daughter's physique. He linked his honor with her virginity and celibacy. It acts as a shield for him against societal shame. This transference of the anxiety is the major essence of the family projection process.

One of the major insights of Bowen theory is that family patterns are not constrained; they transfer from one generation to another and often from parents to children with little variation. These patterns form a cycle that is difficult to break. He says in "*Family Therapy Clinical Practice* that "The multigenerational transmission process describes there are very small differences in the level of differentiation between parents and their offspring, and lead over generations, marked by slight differences in functioning" (Bowen 472). In the novel, Habib's treatment of Zarri is not an individual act of cruelty, but it's a continuation of the patriarchal culture or lineage. Marrying a woman to the Quran exists in his ancestral family. Zarri even says she can hear the whispers of women in her family lineage who were condemned as great aunts because they sacrificed their youth and desires in the name of honor and property. They lived a life of purity behind the veil but suffered from loneliness. Habib's repetition of this tradition describes Bowen's concept of lack of differentiation of self across generations. Instead of breaking the old oppressive tradition of his ancestors, Habib reproduces it by cloaking his unconscious desires in the name of custom. He legitimizes his need to control Zarri instead of breaking the ancestral tradition, presenting it as a continuity rather than a pathology. The multigenerational process reveals the cultural practices that normalize emotional incest because the ancestral patriarch had blurred the line between fatherly authority and ownership of the daughter's sexuality. Habib does not think that his act is inappropriate, but on the contrary he thinks he is doing something virtuous, which connects him with the old tradition. Bowen says this is how destructive patterns endure in individuals and confuse inherited management strategies with moral imperatives. Zarri's tragedy has historical links as she carries the burden of past generations' women and becomes the latest vessel of her family tradition. Habib is trapped in the chains of tradition and custom, as he has low differentiation of self, which results in him becoming a mode of transmission of unresolved patriarchal anxieties to the next generation in the name of honor.

Another important element of Bowen's theory is triangulation. According to Bowen, "A triangle is the smallest stable relationship system. When anxiety arises between two people, they involve a third person to resolve the tension between them" (Bowen 200). Although triangulation helps to stabilize relationships but it often prevents the resolution of the main conflict. Habib's internal conflict after Jafar's death is dual: His one part is in grief due to his son death and the other is anxious of losing control over Zarri. Instead of confronting these feelings directly Habib draws in a third element religion and tradition by declaring Zarri a holy woman. He creates a socially sanctioned triangle that contains Habib, Zarri and Tradition. The triangle process reduces his personal anxiety as well as his desire to possess Zarri, which is no longer a private pathology but a cultural practice that is admired in his community. Habib possessiveness towards Zarri is masked under the disguise of tradition and religion that act as a mediator to stabilize his relationship with Zarri and prevents him from open acknowledgment of his unconscious desire. Triangulation does not end here as Zarri mother Shahzada adds another layer to it. She is bold, outspoken, and unwilling to bow to patriarchal authority. Shahzada confronts her husband directly that decision

of making Zarri holy woman is tremendously cruel. Her defiance destabilizes the triangle of Habib, Zarri and tradition by creating a more complex triangle system of Habib, Zarri and Shahzada.

Zarri becomes a point of conflict between her father's control and her mother's resistance in this new triangle. Shahzada interprets Zarri's submission as a tragedy, and Habib thinks of it as an act of obedience. Bowen says, "Once a triangulation system is established, it is hard to break because each member gets equilibrium from its existence" (Bowen 226-228). Zarri finds temporary peace in obeying her father, and Habib finds equilibrium in Zarri's submission, while Shahzada has her own identity through resistance, but the cost of this peace is Zarri's loss of individuality. Shahzada's involvement also highlights the way the family system plays contrasting roles as she embodies rebellion and Zarri embodies compliance. In a family, collective anxiety can be managed through this polarity.

Bowen describes that in triangulation when anxiety between two persons increases the individual who feels more uncomfortable draws in a third person to diffuse the tension. Third person involvement may relieve the conflict temporarily but it will undermine the intimacy of their relationship on interpersonal level even when the core issue is resolved. In the novel, Habib and Shahzada marital life illustrates this dynamic. The conflict arises amid them when Habib decides to make Zarri a holy woman while Shahzada asserts that their daughter should marry Sikander. Habib feels unable to resolve the disagreement with his wife involves Siraj Din to persuade Shahzada. His involvement silences Shahzada because she cannot oppose her father in law that's why she submits to their decision. It appears like conflict between their relationship is resolved after Shahzada consent but triangulation inflicts deep damage on their marital bond. Habib loses respect in the eyes of his wife after she recognizes his failure to honor her opinion in Zarri's matter. She stops addressing him with the title "Sahib" by stripping him away from the dignity that was once attached to his role as her husband. After the ceremony of Zarri becoming a holy woman the damage to their marital bond becomes more prominent when Shahzada enters her room she deliberately ignores her husband's presence. Although their daughter conflict is settled but the intimacy and trust among their marriage have been permanently eroded.

"The moonlight from the window streaming into their room cast shadows on the wall. 'Have they all gone to sleep?' she didn't reply nor turn round to face him. Instead, she walked into the bathroom adjoining their room.... When Shahzada returned to the room and climbed quietly into her own bed, he waited for her to speak. She said nothing. He gasped in surprise. It was never like this before! (Shahzada 136)

They both begins avoiding each other which intensify the complication of their relationship as Bowen says in marital conflict spouse avoids each other. They emotionally and physically distance themselves and give each other silent treatment. In this way, triangulation not only stabilizes Habib's unconscious desire but also distributes family roles in a way that perpetuates dysfunction.

3.3 Emotional Incest and Habib's Unconscious Desires

The term "emotional incest" or "covert incest" was introduced by John Bradshaw and later elaborated by Kenneth Adams. Emotional incest does not involve sexual violation but it blurs the roles between the guardian and a child. Emotional incest involves inappropriate intimacy and psychological possession. Habib choice of words and language for Zarri clearly indicates that Zarri is the emotional punching bag for Habib. He fulfils all his emotional needs through her instead of

his wife Shahzada. He associates his honor with Zarri and insists that Zarri is the only light left in his life. These words expose his possessiveness that surpasses ordinary fatherly love cloaked in paternal affection. Habib transforms Zarri into a holy figure so he can keep her deprived from having a romantic relationship. The reason for making Zarri a holy woman is to make her an heir of the property, but in reality, Habib's extreme possessiveness, unconscious desires, and emotional dependency towards Zarri lead him to make this cruel decision. In the text even Habib has admitted that he is possessive for his daughter "Don't be silly! I am just very possessive of my daughter and want the best for her" (Shahraz 17) and Shahzada warns him on several occasions that his possessiveness is not healthy "That is just it – you are too possessive! That's the problem. It is not healthy, Habib Sahib." Shahzada's gaze had pinned his accusingly" (Shahraz 17). He wants her undivided attention and cannot bear that Zarri gives more love and importance to anyone else. This can be only possible if he makes her a holy personality because it is the only way not marrying her to anyone else can be justified to a society. Although his feelings towards Zarri are not sexual but his emotional abuse makes her a victim of emotional incest. Habib treats her as his property and thinks of her as an irreplaceable emotional companion that he cannot imagine to lose.

In *Silently Seduced* Kenneth Adams writes "In covert incest, the parent's message is clear: 'You are special to me, but only as long as you are mine' (Adams 32). This quote captures the essence of Habib's dynamic with Zarri. She is dignified as special among her siblings but on one condition that she will wholly remain devoted to the family. This is an emotional incest not physical incest, but it is no less damaging. Habib monopolizes Zarri's identity and deprives her to live life according to her desires. Patrick Carnes in *Betrayal Bond* Patrick says, "the central feature is the breakdown of generational boundaries where children act as adults and function as a stabilizer for their parents' dysfunction (Carnes 76). Zarri, as a holy woman, acts as a regulator for Habib's anxieties. She is his safeguard against dishonor, an emotional support, and a substitute for his son's continuity. She is sacredly caged and loses her identity as an individual. Habib's actions are framed as religious devotion, which is why this dynamic is invisible to others. His actions are not only tolerated but admired by the whole community. Habib's emotional incest towards Zarri wears a mask of sanctity, and psychological violation is hidden beneath the norms and rituals of honor. Zarri is also unable to comprehend it as abuse. She thinks her obedience is a sign of grace rather than submission. This analysis does not diminish the role of culture and patriarchy in the novel, but it recommends that patriarchal practices like the holy woman tradition function as a socially acceptable norm for deeper psychological patterns. Emotional incest is hidden beneath the veil of religious devotion. What makes Habib's actions so insidious is that they are cloaked in the name of honor and sanctity. These actions reflect his unresolved emotional needs that he projects onto his daughter and make her a victim of emotional incest.

The consequences of emotional incest for Zarri are insightful. It appears like she gracefully accepted her fate because she informs her father that your wish is my honor. Zarri obedience does not reflect strength but it depicts her low differentiation of self because she is unable to discrete her desires from her father's wishes. Bowen describes "The person with low differentiation sacrifices individuality for the sake of togetherness, and in doing so, lives a life directed more by anxiety than by principle" (Bowen 403). This quote exemplifies that Zarri refusal to marry Sikandar is not based on conviction but it is based on her overwhelming anxiety of breaking a bond with her father. She internalizes his projection so intensely that she confused his honor with her own.

The cost of Zarri sacrifice is not only emotional but existential too. She becomes a symbolic figure by denying her personal desires. The extreme consequence of emotional incest is that the child sacrifices her life to stabilize the parent's anxiety. Moreover, the other members of the family do not raise their voice against this violence due to respect, fear and traditional norms. Bowen's discusses this collective complicity in his book *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* that family system act as a one unit that's why Zarris tragedy is not only affected her but it malfunctions her whole family unit.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, through the lens of Murray Bowen's family system theory Habib relationship with Zarri emerges as a profound study of emotional incest. Habib unconscious desire to keep Zarri exhibits in a systematic process of emotional fusion, multigenerational transmission, projection and triangulation. What appears as a tradition and religious devotion is actually a paternal control of a daughter's life? Habib's decision is not only the result of patriarchal system but it is also a part of family system where anxiety is managed through one-person sacrifice. Zarri acceptance of holy woman role is due to her low differentiation of self. This symbolic role represents how family dynamic overwhelms Zarri individuality. Habib doesn't have sexual desires towards Zarri but he makes her a victim of emotional incest. He has control over her life and emotions that he is not ready to give away. Zarri is the carrier of her father's unresolved anxieties. Her fate is sealed by her father in the name of family honor and she has paid the price of it by sacrificing her identity and individuality. Bowen theory uncovers the systematic family patterns that produce such tragedies but it also uncovers the hidden psychological desires that make them so enduring. In this way, *The Holy Woman* novel not only critique the feudal system but it also showcases the devastating effects of emotional enmeshment. Zarri fate demonstrates that patriarchal culture and family dynamics are the root cause of creating sacred cage for women in the name of family honor. The tragedy of Zarri and other women's in the novel is not only based on their father's decision but it is also a cause of dysfunctional family system and society because this system enable's woman to free themselves from the pattern of emotional incest that are portrayed as tradition.

Conflict of Interest

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