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'DS Paragraph' is an academic activity in which students, researchers and faculty are encouraged to write critical reviews of books based on the Development discourse. The topical range may include academic debates on issues such as poverty, inequality, gender, conflict and human security. The topic of the book reviewed in fifth DS Paragraph is **'Honour Unmasked: Gender Violence, Law and Power in Pakistan'** authored by Nafisa Shah. The book is reviewed by Ms. Ramsha Masood Ahmed

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Honour Unmasked: Gender Violence, Law and Power in Pakistan

Author: Nafisa Shah

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Nafisa Shah's book titled "**Honour Unmasked: Gender Violence, Law and Power in Pakistan**" is an elaborate ethnography depicting myriad dimensions of honour killing in the Upper Sindh region of Pakistan. The book chronicles her observations and research findings imbibed in a period spanning over two decades. She has described the real life stories and afflictions of women condemned by the society for indulging in alleged acts of sexual misdemeanor, as well as anguish suffered by their family members because of such accusations, whether substantiated or not. Hailing from an influential political family of the Upper Sindh, she carried out research on the theme of *karo kari*, initially as a social activist and subsequently in connection with her doctoral research work. Having a profound understanding of the socio-cultural norms and values, she has adroitly encompassed some of the pivotal issues relevant to the practice of honour killing.

Karo kari in upper Sindh is generally construed as a phenomenon whereby male relatives of a woman consider themselves well within their right if they kill the woman and her lover for allegedly indulging in extramarital relationship thus breaching the honour of their family. While deliberating on the numerous phases of *karo kari*, the author has been able to evolve her considered view that honour serves as a strategy as well as an ethical mask to shroud and legitimize violence perpetrated against women. Dr. Shah argues that the very act of honour killing serves as a means for appropriating power as it is invariably exploited by the powerful sections of the society that thrives on status-quo.

The author has divided the book into three parts. **First part** underscores the prevalence of honour killing in the Upper Sindh and elaborates the notions of honour and *karo kari* and discusses them against the backdrop of a widely pervasive tradition of violence perpetrated against women, legal inadequacies, and the notion of moral power during the colonial Sindh. This sets the stage for the author to highlight the enormity of the issue of honour killing in the contemporary times. Based on her research findings and analysis, the author vehemently disputes the perception that *karo kari* is an ageless and eternal phenomenon.

Chapter 1 describes the interplay of *ghairat* or honour and *karo kari* and suggests that women are victimized not because of sexual transgressions but due to their presumed social transgressions. Hence even those women who seek to assert their right to marriage or dare refuse the marriage arrangements are castigated as *kari* and condemned to death in the name of honour. **Chapter 2** presents some historical data to demonstrate how violence perpetrated in the name of customs, could be legalized when law is used as an instrument by the powerful sections of the society. The author has explored the evolution of concepts of honour, violence, law and moral power both in the Colonial Sindh as well as in the Postcolonial Upper Sindh, and concluded that the very insertion of clauses like 'grave and sudden provocation' in the law has allowed the violence to be committed in the name of honour.

Second part of the treatise has been devoted to exploring the interplay of honour, customs, moral power and jurisprudence. The author has relied upon some real life case studies to augment her view that "It is not honour that causes violence, but it is violence that seeks legitimacy in honour" (p. 153). She has also highlighted how the judicial system tacitly endorses the atrocious act by acting as a silent bystander

as the “the system of justice inside the courtroom reinforces through the route of the formal legal system itself, informal mediations outside of the courts” (p. 197). **Chapter 3** documents some real life scenarios to depict the horror and injustice permitted under the social norms or the customary laws. **Chapter 4** elaborates how the tribal and family feuds are fomented by the sporadic episodes of honour killings and how they are eventually settled to contain further bloodshed. The author has chronicled three case studies of Ghumro, Ulro and Kandhro-Maitlow conflicts to establish how power relations between different groups as well as between those groups and the state play a defining role in the incidence of honour killing settlements thereafter. The author laments the situation of law and order in the region and observes that due to the inability of the state in dispensing justice, locals of the region claim to have their own mechanisms of enforcing justice. “Each person in Upper Sindh embodies law, and theoretically is an enforcer of the law as he sees it” (p. 192).

Third part elaborates customary justice, convention ridden narratives and strategies of runaway/missing women of Upper Sindh. In **Chapter 5**, the author has critically examined various mediation mechanisms adopted to rein in violence in the aftermath of the incidence of *karo kari* for normalizing situation between opposite parties and tribes. According to the author, Upper Sindh has accepted the inevitability of *faisla* as the institution that settles violent disputes (p. 235) through mediation sometimes even facilitated by the courts of law. In **Chapter 6**, she also highlights the plight of women bracing objectification in the violence triggered in the name of honour. Furthermore, she critically scrutinizes the varied roles played by the litigants, mediators, tribal heads, police, the accused couples and the women in refuge and then hypothesizes as to how all these human agencies invariably strive for influence, status and honour, duly supported by the contemporary legal framework and political dispensation.

The book while highlighting the atrocities committed in the name of honour killing, examines the overarching implications sprouting from the abuse of law, lopsided relations between male and female protagonists and urge for power among the elites. Based on her scholarly research, the author has been able to evolve the central argument that the phenomenon of honour killing is perpetrated to camouflage a multitude of sinister moves employed by the landed aristocrats and political elites for the sole purpose of grabbing more socio-economic and political supremacy. Hence Nafisa Shah emphasizes the need of reviewing the prevalent judicial system, and power structure that has miserably failed to dispense justice in the research locale.

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