

Sassui the Divine Feminine Metaphor: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's *Shah Jo Risalo*

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Abstract

The legend of Sassui Punhoon (سُسی پونہن), echoing through the ages in Sindhi oral tradition, has its textual basis in Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's verse compendium Shah Jo Risalo (شہ جو ریساں); a tale where Sassui, one of the nine principal heroines, is identified with an understanding of divine and female efforts towards transcendence. Set in the framework of the five Surs (سر), her tale gradually unfolds with intense suffering she endures from Bhambore (بہمپور) up to Kech (کچ) while searching for her beloved Punhoon, elevating physical agony to a sort of metaphor metonymizing spiritual awakening and revolt. This research uses a combined framework of the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) and Ideational Conceptual Metaphor (ICM) theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) to unravel how Bhittai's representation of Sassui reconceptualizes gender, love and power within patriarchal constraints. Metaphors that are found in more than one Sur are located and decoded based on the InVivo method, and they are compared in terms of their cognitive structure as well as ideological function. The results locate Sassui at the nexus between Sufi mysticism, oral tradition and feminist discourse, as her journey is one of a woman's quest for self-actualization and self-agency within cultural and spiritual limitations. Her suffering, silence, and resilience are recalibrated as acts of discursive resistance and moral endurance, projecting her away from the figure of the romantic heroine and towards the locus of feminine spiritual subjectivity. By placing Sassui in the native epistemology of Sufi humanism, the research presents a decolonial and localized feminist interpretation that moves beyond Western feminist theories. It shows how Sufi metaphors act as tools for intellectual and ideological resistance, uncovering Shah Jo Risalo as a rich site wherein mysticism and feminism meet to voice new forms of gender, spirituality, and power in South Asian thought.

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Introduction

Sassui Punhoon is the legendary folk tale that is right at the heart of Sindhi and Punjabi folklore. Poets and Sufi mystics have turned this story into a symbol of resistance that still echoes through stories of struggle against society and fate. Sorley (2018). And the epicenter is Sassui: fragile, yet fiercely resilient, she charges across a harsh landscape, chasing her beloved, willing to lay down her life for love.

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, the revered Sufi saint. Shackles (2018), proclaims that some even call him the Rumi of Sindh, wove Sassui's story, along with those of other folk heroines, into his masterpiece, Shah Jo Risalo. People often describe this book as the Quran of Sindhi literature. Sorley (2018) even say Shah Latif drew inspiration from Rumi's Masnavi. This gem's first published version came out in 1866, by a German scholar Ernest Trumpp in Leipzig. Numerous scholars wrote translations and the more translations the more nuances have been discovered. scholars such as Gurbakhshani and Nabi Bakhsh Baloch, Sorley, Mrs. Elsa Kazi, Ghulam Ali Allana, Surajul Haq Memon, Amina Khamisani, Agha Muhammad Yaqoob, and Mushtaq Ali Shah. (Khalid, 1991)

Women take center stage in Shah Latif's poetry. Sayyid, G. (1996). He celebrates them as vessels of divine love, each navigating the spiritual journey through the chapters of the Risalo. Khan (2011) admires Shhah Latif's heroines—often called the Seven Queens of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai in his magnum opus:Shah Jo Risalo . Despite hardships, sorrow, and the tangled mess of relationships, these women show unbelievable strength and dignity. Marvi, for example: Shah Latif paints her longing for home as unwavering, untouched by Umar's wealth and luxury. One by one he recalls folk romances: Sassui and Punnhun, Suhni and Mehar, Umar and Marvi, Leela and Chanesar, Moomal and Rano, Nuri and Jam Tamachi, Sorath and Rai Dyach, Bijal, turning each heroine of the folk lore, a metaphor for the spiritual journey toward God. All seven women whom he takes as his heroines are the Divine Feminines—stand above the rest, shining through every story he mentions. There is a message of universalism in his poetry and acceptance for all religions. (Kalhoro

August 28, 2020) observed that women find a higher order place in Shah Latif's Risalo. The whole of the Risalo seems to be based on the throes, pain, agony and struggles of women as if he has written an ode to women for their bravery for their perseverance.

Being a great connoisseur of music, Shah Latif arranges verses in Shah JO Risalo under thirty Surs or Chapters. Some themes are in a musical note but some are named by Shah according to the situation and intensity of the story. These Sur جو act as headings of chapters which relate stories including, sur Sassui-Punnhun and Suhini-Sahar. Some speak of love in general but God's love is endemic in all the stories.

Sassui, was the daughter of a Hindu lord but who gave her up after listening to a forecast that she would marry a Muslim. She is adopted by a Muslim Washer an in Bhambor who is issueless. He found her floating in the river and calls her a gift of God and keeps her with him with the name Sasuui, meaning beautiful. Punnhun, on the other hand, was the son of a Baloch chief. For Sassui, Punnhun gave up his tribe, his palace, all his comforts. He became a washerman, and after passing a tough test set by Sassui's father, he married her. But Punnhun's brothers tricked him—they got him drunk, kidnapped him, and took him back to Kech on camels while Sassui slept. When she woke up and found him gone, she raced into the Thar desert to find him. She never made it. Sassui died in the desert, searching. Punnhun did come back for her, but when he found her grave, he collapsed and died too.

This study digs into the ordeals of Sassui, as told in the Sufi folk literature of Shah Latif Bhittai. Out of all Shah's heroines, Sassui stands out. In her journey, in her struggles, we find every woman's fight—her battles with time, with society, with the way things are. Shah paints Sassui as the ultimate feminine force, using powerful metaphors from Shah Jo Risalo. These aren't just poetic flourishes; they turn her actions into something almost sacred, deeply connected to her world (Khamisani 2003).

No one has really defined feminism for Pakistan using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis before. That's what makes this study so different. Instead of bringing in personal bias, the research lets the unique shape of Pakistani feminism reveal itself through the country's old folk traditions.

Review of the Literature

In Pakistan, people still push the idea that women fighting for their rights are “Westernized”—out of touch with their own culture (Shaheed 2017). The question of whether to “allow” women or not has been a favorite tool for rulers for ages, fueling what Douglas (1994) calls “cultural schizophrenia”: that split between how women appear in the media versus real life. And with global Islamophobia on the rise, society has become even more divided, stuck between moral/religious and secular/immoral camps.

Saigol (2003) points out that Pakistan’s founding two-nation theory ties honor—and especially religious honor—directly to women. The state then steps in to police morality, all to stop supposed “corruption” by women (Khan 2019, 59). After the backlash against the March 8 women’s marches, people started to notice something: local folk stories actually celebrate bold, resilient, self-made women—think Sassui, Heer, Sohni, and others (Syeda Mujeeba and Malik, Aisha Anees, 2021).

Shah Latif, in particular, paints Sassui as brave and determined, pushing her to keep searching for her love no matter how tough the journey. Any hesitation means she risks losing him forever. The real tragedy isn’t her love dying, it’s Sassui herself who pays the price. Sindhi culture is built on optimism; as Shah Latif says, keep working, summer or winter (Hussain, 1996). That’s why he romanticizes Sassui, turning her into a symbol that still inspires women in Sindh and beyond. The story of Sassui and Punhun isn’t just a romance—it’s about a woman’s struggle for true love. Sassui faces every kind of hardship—moral, physical, mental—but her determination, faith, and loyalty never break.

❖ Divine Feminine and “Sufeminism”

Women’s souls play a big role in Sufi thought, thanks to major figures like the Andalusian Sufi Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) and Moulana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273). Both of them had their own, sometimes controversial, takes on the feminine in Sufism. Ibn Arabi dug deep into the meaning of words like nafs (self, soul) and zat (essence)—both feminine in Arabic—and realized that God has feminine qualities, too. He even devoted the last chapter of his book on prophetology, *Fusus al-hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom) (Chittik, 2000), to talking about the Prophet Muhammad’s saying: “God has made dear to me from your world perfume and women, and my consolation is in prayer.” That led him to explore the spiritual importance of women

for humanity. After meeting a highly educated, cultured Persian woman during an umrah in Mecca, he wrote a long poem, using feminine words that, on the surface, sound straightforward but actually have much deeper, hidden meanings. That's where he brings out his famous verse: "A woman who walks in Love is not a woman but a man".

In the writings of Ibn Arabi and Rumi—this idea of the divine feminine, is not just an aspect of God, but is something the female embodies in its most perfect form (Taheri 2011, pp. 141–46). Sufi stories play with gender in a way that feels almost fluid. Sufis step beyond the boundaries their cultures and communities set for men and women. They have a single aim: to meet the Beloved. Nothing tops that. Sassui, loses Punnhun and spends the rest of her days searching for him, giving up everything, even her body, for her Divine Love. The feminine soul, in Sufi thought, doesn't stick to the old model of femininity. Instead, it breaks free from patriarchy and cultural limits, even taking on qualities seen as masculine by tradition.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, scholars like Nicholson (1926) and Massignon (1998) started looking at the relationship between Islam and Sufism in a whole new way, moving away from the old, classical interpretations. Then Smith came along and really shook things up. Her groundbreaking book, "Rabi'a the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam" (1928), blazed a trail for future research on female Sufi saints. Smith didn't just introduce Rabia of Basra; she brought other Sufi women from the early seventh century into the story of Muslim history. She argued that Sufism leaves no room for distinctions between the sexes—spiritually, there's "neither male nor female" (Smith, 1928: 19). Farid-u-Din al-Attar, when describing Rabia al-Adawiya (714–801 CE), even ranks her among the men.

One of the most eye-opening contributions to Sufi studies comes from Rkia Cornell (2019). She translated as-Sulami's collection on early Sufi women—"Dhikr a Nisswa al-Muta 'abbidat as-Sufiyyat"—as "Early Sufi Women," and that translation sparked new debates about Sufism, Islam, and gender. Thanks to her work, the global conversation on the path to Divine love—and who can walk it—opened up. Sufi thinkers started asking: Is the female soul better suited for the journey, or the male? Sachiko Murata (1992) explores this idea of duality in Sufi thought and sees Taoism as a useful tool for understanding the love of God. For Murata, the feminine is essential to the quest for the Divine. Schimmel (1975) points out that Islam has its own yin and yang: man and woman, each essential to the other. The Quran even

calls men and women “raiment for each other.” Dakake (2002) agrees that the feminine soul is the perfect symbol for the lover seeking God.

Shaikh (2009) says spiritual refinement is at the heart of Sufism, and really, the whole point of life. When you mix feminist insights with spiritual cleansing—freeing yourself from gender bias and segregation—you get a society that’s less rigid and more equal. Sara Haq (2018) calls this blend of Sufism and feminism “Sufiminism” in her study of South Asian pop culture. Sufis use everyday language to describe their love for the Divine. They want regular people to understand eternal love, so they speak in terms the locals use. Sharify-Funk et al. (2017) say Sufism gives women the power to choose their own path, to take ownership of their journey. Ernst (2003) sees a surge of interest in Sufism because it’s open to women making their own decisions—it’s a feminist reading of Sufism, really. The lover’s path is full of hardship and risk, something peasant women already know well from their own lives. That’s why they relate so deeply to figures like Sassui, Heer, Marwi, and Sohni, singing their stories as Sufis once did. Sufi poets wove these common lives and landscapes into their lore, using local language and the vocabulary of daily work. But they packed those words with layers of mystic meaning.

Fateh Mohammad Mallik (2021) points out that in South Asia, especially Pakistan, folklore has always carried a Sufi spirit. The stories and heroines have become symbols of Sufi love, and the resistance they face in their struggles stands in for the challenges of seeking the Divine.

❖ Shah Latif Bhittai and Shah Jo Risalo

His poetry didn’t just tell stories—it built a whole way of seeing the world, a kind of moral code shaped by Sufi ideas. Khamisani (1994) points out that his Sufi teachings reach far beyond any one group. They touch everyone. When Sassui searches for Punhoon in every corner of Kech, she finally cries out that she has become Punhoon herself. It’s all about unity—the idea that wherever you look, there’s really just one soul, and in the end, everyone returns to Allah.

Sayyid (1996) says that love asks for sacrifice, and Bhittai insists you must be ready to give up everything for it. Saleem (1985) admires Shah’s deep respect for Sassui and her relentless quest for love. Every woman in Shah Jo Risalo—Noori, Suhani, Marvi—shows extraordinary courage and grace. They stand by their choices and make the world accept them. Through Sufi symbols, these poets pushed for a freer

life for women (Saeed, Hasan, & Ajmal, 2021). Soofi (2013) points out that women fill our folklore, and Sufi poetry is no different. Both traditions come together, showing women in love, in pain, facing tough odds. Hassan (2023) believes these Sufi women broke free from old patriarchal rules.

❖ Lore of Sassui, In Shah Jo Risalo as Sassui

The lore of Sassui in Shah Jo Risalo, starts with the Sur or chapter called Sassui, Abri, it opens with a woman's longing. She wants nothing more than to reach her beloved's home in Kech. She blames herself for not paying attention, for falling asleep while the people of Kech took her beloved away from Bhambhore.

All through the story, Sufi themes pop up—a constant praise for Sassui's courage as she sets out on a hard, lonely journey to find her love. She knows if she doesn't hurry, nature itself won't help her (Jatoi 2019). But even with every obstacle in her way, she pushes forward, and that's where her real strength shines.

He appreciates her bravery and strength in overcoming every obstacle which stands between her and her beloved Punhoon پنهون .

ئېي ڪندين ڪوہ ! ڏونگر ! ڏکوين کي،
تو جي ڀڻ پڻ جا، ته لگ منهنجا لوه،
ڪنهن جو ڪونهي ڏو، امر مون سين اين ڪيو.

“What will you do with your heat, to the already distressed woman, O mountain?
If you are the stone of Pub
My body is also of iron.
It is no fault of anyone, except my own destiny

سپريان ! سين سوپ، نندون ڪندي نه ٿئي.

“By giving up avarice, greed and clothing, set out for the desired goal,
Success with the beloved cannot be achieved merely by sleeping.”
Moreover, Bhitai advises Sassui how to cope in adverse circumstances:

مهندی محتاجی ڪري، پئيء پي ر ڪنجيچ
ڪپيلائي ! ڪچ ڏي، حج م هلائچ
پائنا ڏار پريٽتو، سنسئي ! سان ڪنج،
اوچي ! عازيل کي، ويجهي تان م وجيج،

بنا ا میدی نیج، ته اوڈی ٹئین ا مید کی

“By taking humility as your guide, follow its footsteps.
 O lonely helpless one! never, carry expectations while travelling to Kech کچ.
 Sasui! سسی! take selfless love with you.
 Never, let Azazil come near you.
 Take hopelessness with you, then hope will come near you.” (Shakles 2008)

Sana Amjad (2024) put it well that these women of the folk lore spend their whole lives working, tangled in problems, but still, they kept going. They never stop.

This research looks at how feminism is woven into the language of Sufi stories, which are thick with metaphor. It uses feminist discourse analysis to dig into the kind of feminism that lives inside this tale. Sufism tends to be more accepting of human desire and will, leaning toward equality—so it's not surprising to find feminist ideas, even if they're wrapped in layers of symbolism.

❖ Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)

Michelle Lazar (2005) took feminist analysis and made it a branch of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The main goal of Feminist CDA is to shine a light on subtle, gendered discourses in social and cultural settings, often gets overlooked in favor of bigger political or historical narratives. The process always keeps in mind the push and pull between different forces. In this kind of analysis, language itself matters more than just what's being said or who's saying it. Those bigger social issues might not always be the focus (see Gordon, 1986; Harding, 1986; Spender, 1981).

FCDA relies on digging into the text to spot the ways language creates power structures—who holds the power, who doesn't, and why. This study uses Sufi folk tales to uncover those power dynamics and see how men and women are portrayed, giving us a window into the society and its culture. Sa'diyya Shaikh (2012) thinks Sufism might actually hold answers to gender issues. By really analyzing these Sufi texts, we can start to untangle how gender works in this mystical context. Reading closely is key for FCDA. The language in these stories often reveals the ideas that keep women boxed in.

Lazar (2005) also lays out some core practices for analyzing discourse—basic tools for any FCDA project.

❖ **Feminist Analytical Activism**

FCDA aims to expose the discourses that create and uphold systems of oppression and inequality. Its goal is to help free women from the control built into these ways of speaking and thinking. By doing this, it uncovers the language practices that discriminate based on gender.

❖ **Gender as an Ideological Structure**

Society splits people into two sexes, and that split gives birth to ideas like patriarchy and other forms of control. People act according to the roles, society gives them, and those roles shape how they think and behave. Where you're placed in that system determines how you participate in social life and discourse. (Caldas-Coulthard, 1995; Lazar, 1993, 2004; Talbot, 1998; Lazar, 1993, 2000).

❖ **Complexity of gender and power relations**

Text is analyzed for the gender and its construction through the context in which it exists. Lazar (2007). When we are analysing gender, we must consider the impact and influences of the time, traditions and culture in which a particular gender is placed. The term gender may have different meanings in different times hence oppression may have been shown through different applicable modes according to the traditions.

❖ **Discourse in the (de)construction of gender**

According to Chouliariaki & Fairclough, (1999) the main aim of FCDA is to unearth the discursive practices which carry ideologies and power struggles within the hidden conflicts.

The Feminist CDA discovers how gender ideology and gendered relations of power get (re)produced, negotiated, and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and in people's social and personal identities in texts and talk (Lazar, 2000).

❖ Identified Research Gap

Even though Shah Latif's poetry has been studied for its universal and spiritual themes, hardly anyone looks at it through both Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis and Sufi hermeneutics at the same time.

Earlier studies either made Sassui a symbol of mystical devotion or skipped over how she speaks with a feminine voice of resistance and defiance and acts in the poetry, or they looked at Sindhi women's folklore but only from a sociological angle, not focusing on how the language itself works. This research takes a different approach. By combining FCDA and NVivo coding, it shows how Bhittai's poetry actually creates a feminist voice—one that resists and redefines.

Methodology

The research Uses NVIVO coding for the collection and gathering of data using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis Praxes given by Lazar (2005). Nvivo organized the data where themes and codes became easier to be formed through their occurrences in the text, forming patterns in themes and language (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The data is gathered from the text of the Risalo. All Five suras are taken from the text thorough reading. For example, understanding Sassui's life before and after marriage helps shed light on how society and marriage shape her world, especially when seen through a feminist lens.

The researcher pulled out themes by coding the data — everything ties back to the core theory from the start. These codes follow the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis framework, homing in on big ideas like gender inequity, patriarchy, and oppression. The researcher then applied these themes to the data, gathering codes from Sassui's story and beyond.

Pulling from both the Grounded theory of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis theory and literature, this study places Sassui-Punhoon inside a Sufi-feminist frame of thought. It leans on FCDA for its sharp take on gendered language and power and uses NVivo's thematic mapping to map out how feminist ideas take shape in the text. When you put these tools together, Sassui emerges as more than just a character — she's a feminine voice that refuses to be silenced, turning her spiritual journey into a kind of feminist expression.

❖ **Coding Scheme (based on FCDA)**

Data Analysis Technique

❖ **Familiarization with the data**

After reading the text a few times, the researcher started to pick up on words and phrases that tie back to the theory and gender-related themes. For example, codes like Sassui's state—how she feels after being rejected and abandoned by her in-laws—show the kinds of connections the researcher made with the theory as they kept going over the text.

❖ **Identification of Important Text for In Vivo Coding**

In the second phase, text that was related with feminist issues—things like oppression, institutional power, and the ways women get silenced in the story, was picked up and placed in NVIVO.

For the initial coding, examples like, “Oh hothi, you have struck me fiercely,” and then, “I will seek after the kechi,”, show women’s struggles.

Feminist critical discourse analysis looks at how language lays out gendered power dynamics. The codes gathered as initial codes, help keep things consistent within the theory.

❖ **Categorize In Vivo Codes into Themes**

In the second phase, the text that really deal with the feminist issues, like oppression, institutional power, and all the ways women get pushed aside in the story, were picked and coded. Throughout this process language shaped first codes. Feminist critical discourse analysis worked into how language reveals gendered power dynamics. The codes I started with help keep everything in line with that theory.

Name	Files	References
Cultural Impact	0	0
Charter of Patriarchy	1	1
De and reconstructed gender roles	2	7
Patriarchal norms of suppressing women	1	5
Women are weak	1	1
Discursivity in the Culture for Feminism	0	0

Critical reflexivity	1	10
Reflexivity for women	1	4
The pangs of women	1	2
Sassui's سسی pain and Woes	1	2
Sassui's سسی long travel for <i>Punhoon</i> پونہن	1	8

After initial codes the Axial codes helped to form themes. As the main themes started to take shape, different ideas linked together from one code to the next. Axial coding helped sort, combine, and organize a mountain of material. It works hand in hand with open coding—one process feeds into the other (Charmaz, 2006, 2009, 2016).

So, codes about domination, submission, and silencing, were grouped under the bigger issue of "patriarchal control." On the other hand, anything connected to self-expression, speech, or empowerment fell under "feminist resistance." As the main themes started to take shape, different ideas linked together from one code to the next.

Dedication as love itself is empowerment	1	2
Hardships for <i>Sassui</i> سسی	1	1
Shah upholds love and rights of women	1	1
The call to take up the resistance and follow the heart	1	1
Institutional suppression	1	2
Complaints of women	1	1
Injustice by patriarchy through institutions	1	1
Institutional hegemony over the weak	1	1
Institutional hypocrisy	1	1
<i>Sassui's</i> سسی heartfelt cries upon losing <i>Punhoon</i> پونہن	1	16
Ordeals of women	1	1
Patriarchy	2	12
Patriarchy and institutional hegemony	2	3
Torture for women in society	1	4
Woman's status	1	3
Women face hardships	1	9
Social Impact on Feminism Today	0	0
Be strong women and face the institutional hegemony	1	1
Summing up of Feminism	1	1

❖ Selection of codes to develop a narrative

In the final phase, the themes were fixed in the theory so that the theory helped to explore the themes at this stage, it's important to use in-vivo coding to see how the codes actually fit together in theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2009).

❖ Analyze from a Feminist Critical Discourse Perspective

In the last phase, the themes were jelled together to form summary that really answered the study's questions, using selective coding. The research focused on how gendered power structures hold women back, limiting their freedom and voice in the material. It also looked at the ways women push back—whether through defiance or moments of empowerment. At this point, in-vivo coding matters because it shows how the codes actually connect in practice (Charmaz, 2006, 2009).

Women empowerment	2	20
Empowerment and taking decision in hands	1	1
Women empowerment and choice to life	1	1
Women need to bring the change	1	3
Spiritually Hurt Sassui سسی	1	8
Going mad in Love Sassui	1	30
Forcefully abduction of <i>Punhoon</i> پنہون	1	20
Caste Clash	1	13
Powerlessness of Sassui سسی	1	15
Loss of love for Sassui سسی	1	18
World is enemy	1	30
Alone in the way to beloved	1	38
Remains Loyal Sassui سسی	1	30

Abandonment by the Family	1	20
Hatred By the family for Sassui سسی	1	10
Fight Against Family/Sassui سسی	1	5
Stay unmoved in pursuance of ambition	1	30
Protest against Caste and status differences /Sassui سسی	1	20

INVIVO coding provided a systematic summary of all the codes after clustering of the codes in themes were done.

❖ **Writing a summary of the codes, categories and themes**

Braun and Clark (2010) explain that the summary helps to identify the main ideas running through all the data. Feminist critical discourse analysis set up codes ahead of time and then together these create themes. Those themes became the backbone for analyzing the data.

In the figure below how the texts lead to bigger themes, from the gathered data. By carefully collecting, labeling, and grouping the codes under different themes, the data started to make sense the subtle cultural details became highlighted and started to shape any kind of belief or ideology. The images below show exactly which codes and themes were found in the data.

NVIVO CODEBOOK
Theme: Cultural Impact
Charter of Patriarchy
De and reconstructed gender roles
Patriarchal norms of suppressing women
Patriarchy feels for women to be deceitful
Women are weak
Theme: Discursivity in the Culture for Feminism
Critical reflexivity

Reflexivity
Reflexivity for women
The pangs of women
Women and their Woes
Theme: Feminist Features in the Folk Tradition
Dedication as love itself is empowerment
Hardships for <i>Sassui</i> سنسی
Shah upholds love and rights of women
The call to take up the resistance and follow the heart
Theme: Institutional suppression
Complaints of women
Melody of the Odessey of being desi
Ordeals of women
Patriarchy and institutional hegemony
Torture for women in society
Woman's status
Women face hardships
Theme: Social Impact on Feminism Today
Be strong women and face the institutional hegemony
Summing up of Feminism
Women empowerment
Empowerment and taking decision in hands
Women empowerment and choice to life
Women need to bring the change

Figure 4.1. Codebook generated through Nvivo

The NVIVO helped to shape five essential concepts that emerged through coding:

1. Gendered Power in the Family Institution

2. Religious Discourse and the Moralization of Femininity: Discourse in the (de)construction of gender
3. Patriarchal Authority in Customary Law and Judgment,
4. Discursive Erasure and Silencing of Female Voices, Gender as ideological structure
5. Containment of Female Resistance.

❖ Gendered Power in the Family Institution

Most folklore paints the family as a place where men call the shots—fathers, older brothers, even kings. Women, especially wives and daughters, barely get a say. You see it in passive phrases like “she was given in marriage.” Shaheen, Mumtaz, and Khalid (2019) dug into Pakistani fairy tales and found that these stories push old-school gender roles. People just accept them as the way things are. The tales don’t just reflect these ideas—they spread them, showing women under the thumb of powerful men. Language does a lot of heavy lifting here. It hides who really has the power, makes male dominance look normal, and even takes away women’s choices through the way things are worded.

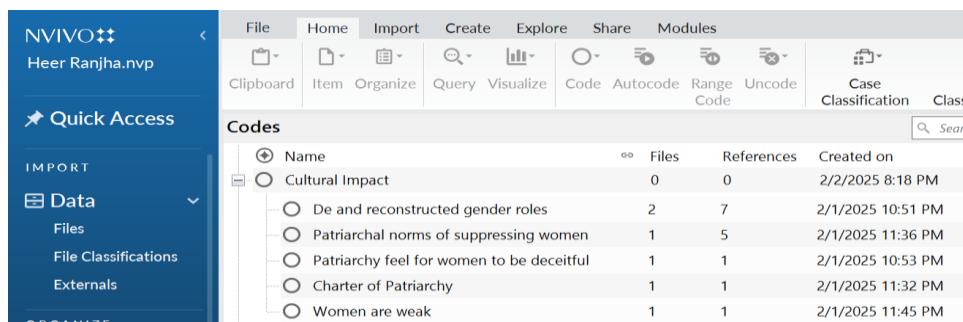


Figure 4.2. Cultural impact

When you look at the female characters—just called “wife,” “daughter,” or “mother” instead of by their own names—you see right away they’re basically treated as extensions of the men around them. This lines up with what Lazar (2007) points out: FCDA needs to dig into how identity gets built through language, and how society slots women into certain roles, especially when stories only ever show them in domestic settings.

Take Sassui's story, for example. Power is complicated here. On the surface, Sassui looks like just another victim of fate and society, but then she does something unexpected. She heads out across a harsh, empty landscape to find Punhoon, even though her family and religion push back hard. That move isn't small—it's a real act of resistance. But then the folktales turn her grief into something romantic or spiritual, almost washing out her defiance. That's the strange thing Lazar (2005) talks about: women can feel both empowered and oppressed at the same time, all within the same set of cultural stories.

Even though Sassui is innocent, the poet still finds fault with her. He calls her ordinary, says she doesn't really understand love, and pushes her to toughen up and bear the responsibilities forced on her. Just being a woman, in his eyes, means she's not cut out for the challenge.

❖ Translation

Sit not in Bhamphore, o woman, go not to Haaro,
Do not tell lie, confess not truth,
Burn not for the beloved, nor forget the pain of separation. (Shackles, 2018)

❖ Original Verse

ویہ م منڈ پیپور ہے، ہارہی ہڈم ہل
کھڑی کچ م گڈھن، سچی گالہہ م سل،
جانب لاء م جل، سور و سار م سنتی.

This shows that Patriarchy sets the belief system for a society including women. To summarize, gender and power are viewed as multifaceted entities as insisted by FCDA. This analysis underscores the broad intricacy of the roles of institutions or characters. Instead of categorizing them as exclusively oppressive or liberating, it facilitates a more sophisticated and politically involved understanding of South Asian folktales, acknowledging the limitations as well as resistances inherent in traditions, and cultural practices.

❖ Gender as ideological Discourse

FCDA empowered the examination of these silences as battlegrounds of negotiations. Folklore not only serves as a part of entertainment; it also plays a significant role in shaping society's perception on gender and authority. Following themes are identified from the discourse.

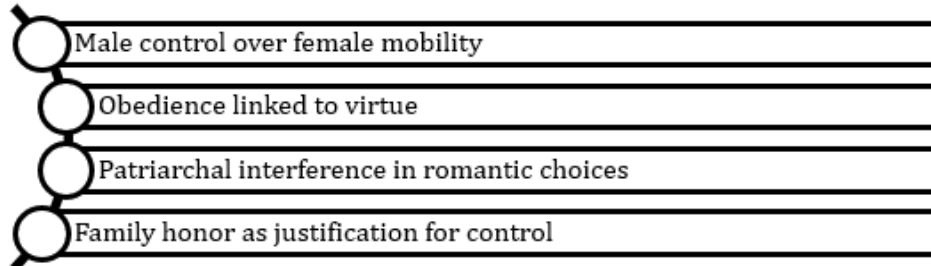


Figure 4.5. Themes identified from gender as ideological structure

Similarly, a direct interference by patriarchal kinship structures is exemplified in *Sassui*-پنھوں folktale, where relationship of *Sassui* سسی is undermined by the interference of *Punhoon*'s brothers. These activities are portrayed as morally justified, emphasizing the belief that male-dominated institutional frameworks have ultimate control over female's lives. On the absence of *Sassui*'s husband, she was anticipated to mourn and shun all the happiness throughout this period of parting. She is held responsible for the tragedy, and *Punhoon*'s abduction is attributed to her careless sleep and listlessness.

A voice urges *Sassui* to follow his path, upon the abduction of her husband, *Punhoon*. yet, as a woman despite being alone, she traversed the arid mountain range of *Pub* to visit her in-laws, the *Kechis*. However, she was constantly admonished to preserve by the community. The writer frequently claims that she is lethargic in her speed and enormously indulged for this trial.

Translation	Original Verse
<p><i>Seeing the mountains, o slave grief, do not slow down your pace, Search passes, says Lateef, and go after the Kechis</i>, Look out for the traces of the Baluchi's campfires and follow that trait, Despair not of meeting your gracious husband, Don't say the beloved is far when he is before your very eyes. (Shackles, 2018)</p>	<p>پسی ڈونگر ڈاہ، چم ھلُّ ۾ ھیٺی وھیں، لانجي لکے لطیف، چئی، پئیء ڪیچن ڪاہ، پُچی پُورج سئی، بلوچائی باه، ان وَرِ انتی وَرِ جی، آسَرَ هَدَّم لاه، جو اکیئون اوڏو آه، سو پرین پَراهُون م چله.</p>

She confronts each of her apprehension, stating she must go find her love, as she was responsible for the abduction of her husband by her brothers-in-law on her own carelessness in sleeping comfortably. Society expects a woman to safeguard her marriage, linking any issues within it to be her responsibility, so labelling her as the one who must bear suffering, adhere to societal traditions and norms, and, if needed, devote herself to compensate for her alleged shortcomings.	Original Verse غَلَتْ يَازْ گُنْوَابِيُو، بَرْ يِ جِنْدِيُون سَيْنَنْ كَرْيَانْ كَوْهُنْتِيُو سَيْنَنْ تَانْ سَاتْ وَنُو، أَتَيْسِنْ تَانْ دُكْ أَبُو بَچَانْ تَيْ پَنْهُونَهْ كِي، عَبَثْ تَانْ أَنْ كَابِي هُوتْ هَنْدِي جَا كَهْيِ، سَا مُونْ گَالِهِ سُتْلِيُو
O mates, I lost my friend because of carelessness, What should I do now?	
While I slept, the party went away, as I got up sorrows came,	
Alas, I asked for Punhoon پَنْهُون after eating cereal, Tell me, what did he say before he left. Let them call me mad only if they hearken my cry, Let people come and blame me. (Shackles, 2018)	چُونِمْ هُرْ جَرِي لَيِّ، بَرْ جِي سَدْ سَيْنَن مَرْ مُونْهِنْ كِي دَيْنِ، مَأْهُو أَجْنُو مِيَهَنَا

<p><i>I am not familiar with Vankaar, the track seems to be unending,</i></p> <p><i>Come, my beloved, I am tired of tracking, O my jewel of a spouse, Lateef says, Do care for the who is dying of exhaustion, See that you don't forsake this wretch midway. (Shackles, 2018)</i></p>	<p>واقف نه وٺڪار جي، باري پُچي بن، ور وسپلا سپرين، ٿيڪين ٿوري ٿئ، لُچ لال لطيف چئي، ڪاندڻيءَ جي ڪر، ولهي ڪري ور، مڻڻ مارگ، چڏين</p>
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<p>Be not happy over comforts, nor fear sorrows, Don't pull down your house, nor build a new one, O wretch, do not die, nor try to live. (Shackles, 2018)</p>	<p>سُکين ٿئه م سنري، پسي ٺڪ م ڏر، پئي ڪر م پانهجو، گهورنو آدم گهڙ، ماري هڏ م مر، مڻڻ جيءَ جيارين</p>
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She has to deal with the darkness of society, which Shah Latif Shah Latif Bhittai has metaphorically characterized and named throughout his entire lore. When there are trees and a space where trees evolve, the Vankar turns into a woman's mean of comfort.

<p><i>Trees of Vankar the Jao, Jamar, and Jar are tall, Pebbles become hot, so does earth, The poor creature wanders here and there but fails to find any footprint of the beloved. (Shackles, 2018)</i></p>	<p>اذا لڪ لطيف چئي، جيل جوراڻو، پهرو ائي پاڻو، سولو ڪچ ساڻ جو</p>
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<p><i>My soles were blistered, I wept copiously on the way, But I did not curse him out of anger, Even in my utter exhaustion I said, "He is the best guide,"</i> (Shackles, 2018)</p>	<p>بپرین پنا پر ڪٿا، ره ۾ گھڻو رُنوم بپر اتو پرین ء کي، ٿئي تان ٿه ڏئوم چُڪي ٿي چيو، سُواهيو سين سچڻين</p>
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Sassui undertakes the dangerous journey via the barren Hoath Mountain range, to demonstrate her loyalty and virtue as a bride. She should neglect the reality of herself and focus on rescuing her husband, chasing him wherever he may have gone.

<p><i>Sorrows pounced upon wretched woman, Forget not, my spouse, the one who come from a low clan,</i> <i>Renouncing all relations, cross over to your in-laws, or truthful, Lateef says, the trek will mature you into a jewel.</i> (Shackles, 2018)</p>	<p>اولادڪن آچي، معدُور کي مارو ڪنو، وساريچ م ڙر کي، منجهان ڪڙه ڪچي، لاهي لاڳپا لڳيهمه ٿون، سڀئن ڏونهن سچي، سُپڪي ٿي سُورَن سين، پهچندين ء ڙجي، منجهان راهُرچي، ٿيندين ء لان لطيف چئي</p>
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Shah (2003) makes this idea obvious when she states that a female's life is full of challenges, fights and struggles on all fronts. Shah while highlighting the adversities and challenges faced by women who embody the virtues of sincerity, loyalty and honesty as wives also encapsulated the gendered discourses of our society, stated, Kayany & Dar (2020) in their study in the folk songs of the Sufis discovered that the women lament at the discrimination and yet this very sadness in their hearts increase their longing and in the real world it means that the longing in engrained in them, in other words they are born with pain inherent in their gender. So only women have the resilience to go through this amount of pain and eventually achieve their target.

<p>Camels were my enemy, So were the camel men and brothers of Punhoon پنهون Fourth enemy was the wind as it covered Beloved's</p>	<p>أُن ويري اوڻاز ويري، تنا ويري ڏئز چوڻون ويري واء ڦئو، جنهن لئتا پُوه پير، پندخون ويري سچ ڦئو، جنهن آلهي ڪشي اوري،</p>
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<p>footprints with dust, Fifth enemy was the sun, which delayed my journey by setting, Sixth enemy was the mountain as, It did not make its passes any easier, Seventh enemy was the moon as it was late in rising, It is time for birds to return home, but I am wandering in mountain. (Shackles, 2018)</p>	<p>چھون ویری چند تتو، جو کرتو نہ ودیء ویز، سٹون ویری چپڑ ٹیو، جنھن ستوان ٹکانہ سیر، واہری جپ ویز، یہی چلوں ڪریان چرین</p>
<p><i>Indolent women, give up indolence, how could you be so drowsy? They stole away and reached their destination, Strip your eyes of sleep, else you will cry on the winding paths.</i> (Shackles, 2018)</p>	<p>غافل غفلت چوڑ، ٹون ٹکین آتاسی اوچرین، جیاتا چڑھی وٹا، وچپی بھتا توڑ، نیشن ننہ اکوڑ، چم ڈزن ھ واسکا ڪرین</p>
<p><i>If only disclose and tell a bit of what I have experienced my mates, Beasts will go dumb, herdsmen will be paired, Hills will be dislodged, whole of mountains will burn down.</i> (Shackles, 2018)</p>	<p>حقیقت ہن حال جی، جی ظاہر ڪریان بُران، لگی مانٹ مژن کی، جیڪر سُور سلان بی ٹاگر نکی ڪانہ، جیل سپ جلی وچی.</p>

❖ Critical Reflexivity: Gender based inequalities

These folk tales while concealing the systemic gender inequities under romantic sorrow, portray love stories. The following coded themes were identified from the discourse.

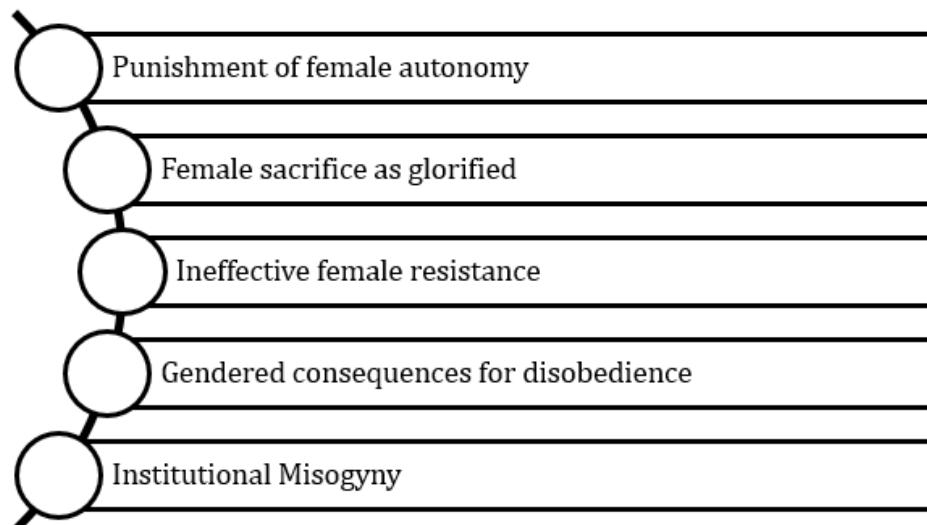


Figure 4.7. Critical Reflexivity Gender-Based Inequalities

Sassui is reprimanded for expressing her desires. Sassui pursues an extremely difficult journey across the desert, a symbolic battle for autonomy, ultimately resulting in death, which rather than critically problematized, is romanticized.

Lazar's (2005) FCDA highlights the significance of revealing instances where women suffering is discursively normalized. The narratives emphasize self-sacrificing femininity while penalizing rebelliousness, so deterring alternative expressions of agency.

❖ Discourse of Obedience and Sacrifices in Sassui Punhoon

When examined through the perspective of Michel Lazar's Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), despite being profoundly rooted in a patriarchal cultural system, it holds subversive potential. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis according to Lazar (2005) focusses on uncovering the ways by which ideology, gender and power are generated and preserved through discourse, as well as the potential for resistance within hegemonic frameworks. In this context, Sassui -Punhoon can be understood as a locus where narratives of compliance and sacrifice simultaneously mirror and challenge patriarchal dominance.

❖ Obedience as Gendered Expectation.

The folktale of Sassui -Punhoon represents Sassui as a compliant daughter to her adoptive father, the highest-ranking washer man, of Bhambhor. Nevertheless, as she went against familial and social authority to find Punhoon, her obedience is subsequently disrupted. Lazar (2005) states that gendered discourse situates women within conventional expectations-like domesticity, chastity and obedience, which plays a role of tool to perpetuate patriarchal supremacy. Sassui firstly comprehends these standards; however, her actions afterwards show a conceptual breakdown as she revives agency by refusing to comply.

Shah Latif Bhittai (2010) frames her protagonist's opposition in spiritual terms, thus rendering her rebellion acceptable to society through the pretext of mystical love. This dichotomy, submissive but spiritually elevated, obedient but defiant, illustrates the contradictory and complex way female autonomy is dealt within patriarchal discourse.

❖ Sacrifice as a Gendered Virtue

Sassui's tale is based on the concept of sacrifice. Her physical pain and eventual mortality in the desert are idealized as a sign of commitment. Although Sufi tradition sees pain and suffering as a necessary aspect of the pursuer's route to the Divine (Nasr, 2007), FCDA by Lazar (2005) makes one reconsider whose suffering is esteemed and why. Sassui's agony is both sanctified and aestheticized, but it reflects a gendered ethical framework where women pain serves as the cost for emotional or spiritual fulfilment.

<p><i>O mates, o mother, my husband's brothers were not at fault, Fault was mine, I was unfamiliar, they were familiar, The beloved was from another land, Right from the beginning I did not hold to the tail of Aari lord, Help those walkers, who have only you, to attain their goals. (Shackles, 2018)</i></p>	<p>دُبِّنْ دُوْهْنَه جِيَّدِيُونْ، مَاءْ مِرْوَنْيِي، مُونْ، أُونْ أَسُونْهِينْ أُو سُونْهَانْ، بِرِينْ يَلَا يَرِيُونْ، أَصْلِي آرِيَه چَامْ جَوْ، پَانْدَه بُنْتَوْ سُونْ، جَنْ جَوْ ٿُونْهِينْ ٿُونْ، سِي بِنَادِيُونْ بَهْجَانِينْ</p>
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<p><i>Indolent women, give up indolence, how could you be so drowsy? They stole away and reached their destination, Strip your eyes of sleep, else you will cry on the winding paths.</i></p> <p>(Shackles, 2018)</p>	<p>غافل غفت چوڙ، ٿون ڪيئن آتاسي اوچهرين، چيڪا چڙهي وٺا، وچي نهتا توڙ، نيڻين ڦندَ اکوڙ، چم ورڻ ۾ واسڪارين</p>
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The view that the worth of a female is derived from her capability to deal with hardship in astutely silently, is affirmed by this moral economy. Patriarchal discourse, as per Lazar (2005), frequently works insidiously by integrating ideology into emotionally appealing and culturally cherished narratives. Sassui's perseverance is represented not just as spiritual toughness, but as an essential feminine devotion to achieve Divine affection, represented by Punhoon.

❖ The Contradictory Discourse of Obedience and Resistance

Lazar's (2005) theory emphasizes the discovery of variances in discourse, where a text concurrently supports and challenges prevailing ideologies. This tension is illustrated by Sassui Punhoon. While idealizing feminine submission and sacrifice, it reinforces traditional gender norms on one hand while on the other, it quietly validates female disobedience via Divine endorsement.

Sufi-influenced narrative by Shah Latif Bhittai, states that when female chases love with honesty and determination, her deeds transcend constraints of society and earn Divine approval. (Memon, G. 2011).

<p><i>Where mountains are harsh, distance is long, And all around is wasteland, Where wise men forget their wisdom and logicians their logic, Lateef says, Sassui went across the tract charged with love,</i></p>	<p>ڪرڙا ڏونگر ڪه گهڻي، جت بَرَ پَتْ بِيابانُ، ڏاهن ڏاهپَ وَسِي، ٿنا حَرِيفَ حَيرانُ، سَسْنِيَةَ لَنِگَهُنَو سَيَّدُ چَيَ، مَحْبَتَ سِين مَيدانُ،</p>
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The one, whose leader is Aaryani can have no fear on the trail. (Shackles, 2018)

جنہون جو آریانی ایگوان، تئہن کی کانھی

بَابَكَ بَهِيرَ

Thus, this redefines obedience as an allegiance to inner truth and spiritual vocation rather than as subordination to patriarchal authority. This change signifies a rhetorical approach that reinstates obedience from patriarchal dominance and redirects it towards Divine and individual authority. Sassui's devotion turns into a politicized religious action, challenging prevailing standards through mystical metaphor.

The Sufi's folktale of Sassui -Punhoon via Lazar's (2005) Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, clarifies the complex pattern among sacrifice, female agency and obedience. Although the story apparently seems to be in line with the conventional norms of gender, an in depth critical-reflexive analysis uncovers its capability for feminist subversion. The journey of Sassui assists as a theoretical arena where sacrifice turns into opposition, and obedience is reconceptualized commitment to spiritual truth rather than conformity of society. Hence, Shah Latif Bhittai's (2010) oeuvre, analyzed through feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, suggests a convincing standpoint to inspect the endurance and contestation of patriarchal discourses in the mystical literature.

The discourse portrays her as an emblematic victim—humiliated, forsaken, and ultimately collapsing in the desert while finding her love. Although, the tale elevates her perseverance and demise as a representation of unending love, however it ignores the examination of the gendered systems that deprive her of safeguard and agency. Through FCDA, one perceives the subtle standardization of women subordination of the discourse. Sassui is honored for her pain, but male treachery is portrayed as an outcome of familial honor or cultural limitations. This concept is innate even within the complexity of Sufi philosophy.

<p>When you saw the alien camels in your courtyard,</p> <p>You should have tied their knees with your hair, You would not have suffered the jolts you did in defiles.</p> <p>(Shackles, 2018)</p>	اڳڻ مئڻ اوپرا، ڦئڻي جي توڏا، ونگيني نه وازن سين، نن گورن جا گوڏا، لڪن جا لودا، هوند نه سئڻي سئڻي
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This correlates with the Lazar's (2007) assumption that gender concepts are frequently concealed, reinforced via "mundane and normalized" methods of discourse (p. 146). The lyrical representation of Sassui's suffering acts as a cultural gear that upholds the notion of women sacrifice as admirable and righteous, a profoundly gendered discourse that demands a careful examination.

Shah Latif Bhittai drives Sassui to demonstrate bravery and hasten her search for her love, as the journey is hard and extensive, any moment of her delay risks losing her sight of him. Her love won't be hurt rather its Sassui who will be dead.

<p><i>O mates, I lost my friend because of carelessness, what should I do now?</i></p> <p><i>While I slept, the party went away, as I got up sorrows came, Alas, I asked for Punhoon پڻهن after eating cereal, Tell me, what did he say before he left. (Shackles, 2018)</i></p>	غفلت يار گوابو، پڙي جيڻيون، ڪيئن ڪريان ڪوهٺو، سُئيئن تان ساڻ ونو، آئيئن تان ڏڪ آيو، پڻان ٿي پڻهنء کي، عيٺ تان آن ڪابو، هوٽ هُلندى جا ڪيئي، سا مون ڳالهه سٺابو.
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❖ Reflexive Positioning of the Analyst

Engaging crucial reflexivity in this situation means accepting the cultural and social stance of the analyst. Ahmed, (1992), believes that, it is crucial to consider how these tales have been acquired, assimilated and even glorified among generations. Mohanty, (2003) believe that this sacrifice of human beings in the name of Patriarchy is not just due to the oppressive orders but also colonial and post-colonial impacts that make these traditions increasingly restrictive.

The culture demands a woman to be strong to lead out of the difficulties and polish her weaknesses through hardships and whosoever remerges out successful is the one who went through the pain and agony in the name of patriarchal dominance of men. The aim is not just criticizing these cultural narratives but also to comprehend their contribution in the discursive reproduction of gendered norms- in which the affection of female is glorious only when it is tragic and selfless meanwhile male is rarely considered responsible for the implications of their actions.

<p><i>They, who stay behind, cannot be in love's loop, And they, who sleep, will not get beloved's company, They won the beloved, Who removed forward and sacrificed their lives on the altar of love, accepting all the fears and hardships, They marched on to reach the lord. (Shackles, 2018)</i></p>	<p>وَبَيْنَ كَوْنَهُ وَرَاسِكُو، سُتْبَنْ كَوْنَهُي سَنْگُ، هُوَثْ هَلْنِنْ كَتُو، آنَگِنْ جَارْهِي آنْگُ، بَاسِي پَيْيِ پَنْگُ، رَرْهِي جَامْ رَسِيلُون</p>
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In the story of Sassui -Punhoon, the female lead's bodily attractiveness turns to be her weakness, eventually becoming a difficulty, she should overcome in her emotional and spiritual journey. The “Beloved” in Sufi culture frequently signifies the Divine, depicting the eventual communion the devotee struggles for. In this narrative, Punhoon not only acts as a romantic companion, but also as a representation of Divine Beloved, showing the Sufi culture where oneness with the cherished is attainable only via self-annihilation (fanā) (Arberry, 1950). Chittick, (1983), believes that the journey in love is a process of realization in the metaphysical sense which makes you closer to the Being. Thus, romantic narratives of longing are simultaneously narratives of metaphysical awakening.

<p><i>Tortuous and difficult are the curves of Vindur, The one who is in love with Hoat will search the mountain, Lead me there with your grace, my Guardian, says Lateef. (Shackles, 2018)</i></p>	<p>أَدْ تِرْلَاجَا أَهْرَا، وَنَذْ وَرَاسِكَا وَرَ، حُبَّ جَنْهُنْ كَيْ هُوَثْ جِي، سَا دُورِينْدِي دُونْگَرْ، پَهْجَانِنْ پَرْرُوزْ، لَطْفَ سَانْ أَطْبِيْفَتْ چَي</p>
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Seeker's path to Divine union mirrors Sassui quest for Punhoon a route characterized by solitude, self-sacrifice and suffering. Sassui's journey is isolating and challenging as to achieve her goals she requires a transformation to spiritual sacrifice. A woman following her love must surpass her social identity and material existence, as illustrated by the philosophical concept of Ibn Arabi (as cited in Chittick, 1989). The journey of Sassui exemplifies this transcendence, she becomes psychologically separated from suffering, adopting perseverance as her sole companion. Rumi, Attar, and Hafiz contested that the journey fraught with tortures is elemental in the cleansing of the soul before it is united with the one Beloved. (Chittick 1989). In Rumi's *Masnavi*, this Love is only a sensation that drives you towards the awakening process and makes you appease for this reunion (Rumi, trans. 2004)

In the context of FCDA, especially as mentioned by Michel Lazar (2005), the journey of Sassui symbolizes an extensive rebellion of conventional gender roles. Sassui's search for her beloved, signifies Divine desire and assists as a conceptual encounter to patriarchal ideas that intent to limit women's ambitions, self-expression and mobility (Lazar, 2007).

Hence, the tale of Sassui is not merely a story of lost affection-it evolves into a symbol of feminine resistance, wherein Divine admiration changes female pain into an expression of social and spiritual defiance. Journey of her, is both metaphorical and literal: a display of spiritual resistance and an exploration of enlightenment in an age which aimed at denying her.

❖ Discourse, Power, and Divine Feminist Resistance

By implementing FCDA on these narrations, we discover how Divine language of love evolves into a feminist tactic-shaping the motif of women pain into a narrative of sacred rebellion. For loving beyond the patriarchal constraints, Sassui is penalized, but by doing this she sets a symbol of opposition towards the cultural framework that seek to govern women desires. Van Dijk, T. A. (1998), believes that the social belief system lies deep in the cognition and the memory allows certain constraints against or in favor of a gender as it is embedded in the memory or the cognition.

An alternate feminist spiritual discourse is offered by the depiction of female by Shah Abdul Latif Shah Latif Bhittai in these tales. Baloch, N. B. (1983). Exposes that

Shah Latif Bhittai, presents female resistance as a route towards transcendence instead of a moral transgression. Lazar (2007) highlights that FCDA should along with analyzing oppressive systems, also amplify and recover instances of discourse opposition specifically the ones rooted in spiritually enriched and culturally complex narratives. Junejo (2018) asserts that Sassui, is not passive trekker but an active lover who is in search of her own destiny.

<p><i>A musk-deer and Huma' are always perplexed in the universe,</i></p> <p><i>One never plants his feet on the ground, the other is always breathless,</i></p> <p><i>Sassui سسی seems to have acquired her painful wandering from them. (Shackles, 2018)</i></p>	<p>چین سی ہرُنْ ہماء، سرگردان سنسار ۴</p> <p>ہو پگُ نہ ڈری پئین، ہیء ڈر سر ڈری نہ ساہ، جیکُنْ ٿن ملا، سنتئی سُور پرایو</p>
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❖ Feminist Analytical Activism in Sufi Discourses

As outlined by Michel Lazar (2005), is an approach within Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) that views discourse as not only a medium for critique but also as a platform for activism and transformation. This tenant emphasizes that protagonists challenge patriarchal ideologies and as Heer and Sassui become representatives of women, even when working within traditional or religious-cultural discourses. Within this framework, Sufi-inspired folk narratives like Sassui -Punhoon offer rich terrain to explore how resistance, agency, and empowerment are discursively constructed in contexts shaped by spiritual love, patriarchal structures, and collective cultural memory. Every decision and action these heroines take and initiate lead to resistance against the world they are surrounded in and hence create a precedent for every woman who want to live according to their own wishes and follow their Love.

❖ Empowerment through Devotional Defiance in Sassui -Punhoon.

The obedient and passive traditional female in many local writings is challenged by the portrayal of Sassui in Shah Abdul Latif Shah Latif Bhittai's narrative. Sassui route in search of Punhoon across the dessert is not just mysticism and romance, rather it is a discursive revolution towards cultural and social limitations that try to delineate

and restrict women aspiration. From the viewpoint of feminist analytical action, autonomy and perseverance of Sassui could be regarded as a radical declaration of feminine agency, reinforced by spiritual rationale.

<p><i>Let them call me mad only if they hearken my cry, let people come and blame me.</i></p> <p>(Shackles, 2018)</p>	<p>چونئِ مُر چری یئی، پُر جی سُد سُنیں، مُر مونہین کی یئیں، مائھو اچھو میھا۔</p>
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Shah Latif Bhittai's narratives not only make Divine affection accessible to austere males but also to the female who are spiritually and emotionally devoted. Sassui journey symbolizes women empowerment and realization of self, where she goes against societal standards of obedience, marriage and femininity, making her own course in opposition of societal and familial norms.

<p><i>Even if countless thorns prick my feet, Even if my fingers do not bend towards thumb, and cliffs injure my soles, I will proceed to the beloved without wearing a Jutti</i></p> <p>(Shackles, 2018)</p>	<p>ڪندڏا ڙون پیڙن ۾، توڙي لک لڳن، اڳل ڳوڻي نه مڙي، چٻون پير چن، ويندي ڻونهن پرئن، جٽيءِ ذات نه پايان</p>
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Lazar (2005) declares that feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) should find and encourage counter-discourses, predominantly the ones that accentuate female's freedom of self-determination. Sassui takes up this unsurpassable trek through rugged and deserted mountain, without for once feeling scared for being alone, she goes after her Beloved and remains undeterred throughout this torturous journey till her death. She is encouraged to move on through the voice of Shah Latif Bhittai, who constantly asks her to move so that she does not fall behind. He is recording her suffering and the whole ordeal.

<p><i>Where harsh are the mountains, Long is the distance, and sand-covered are the paths,</i></p>	
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<p><i>Ahead are the passes and all is wilderness, says Lateef, There, O God, help the one who is still midway. (Shackles, 2018)</i></p>	<p>ڪُرڙا ڏونگر ڪڻه گهڻي، چت و اُن تي واري، اذا لڪ طيڻ چني، تر سُجن باري، جا مَنَّل ماري سا قادر ڪچ ڙسائين</p>
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The strength resides in appropriating the writing: Sassui instead of awaiting salvation turns into a traveler, a seeker and the protagonist of her own adventure.

<p><i>In the absence of my beloved, I am sustained by love pangs, It is better, o mother, to die them to endure agony of beloved's separation, Sisters, mates, the pain from which you don't suffer, I do. (Shackles, 2018)</i></p>	<p>ريء ڦريين ڦوڻ ڪنو، آئون ويني ور هڇان، ان عذابن اڳين، ماڏر چو ٿه مَران، آڊيون جو ٿه آوهان، سو مان شور ٽريون</p>
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Her physiological pain and spiritual strength contest gendered notions of fragility and passivity, showing a substitute conception of womanhood founded in autonomy, courage and ethical resilience.

<p><i>You are still away from the path and forgetful and forgetful of the track, Be familiar with the right path so that you may find the right track with your heart. (Shackles, 2018)</i></p>	<p>آجا ٿون اوڻ، وائان پاسي ويسري، سُونهين ٿيء سُوات، ٿه منجهان دل دُكُ لهي</p>
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❖ Women Empowerment through activism

Michel Lazar's Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) digs into how language shapes power and gender. It's not just about studying words—it's about a real push for women's empowerment. That means finding and highlighting the places where women push back, rewrite the rules, or refuse to accept the old stories about their

place in society. Lazar points out how important it is to spot these moments, especially when they show up in our culture, religion, or literature.

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai's Sufi folk tale, *Sassui-Punhoon*. If you look closely, you'll see how it quietly but forcefully gives voice to women's empowerment. In this story, Shah Latif doesn't paint *Sassui* as some passive lover waiting around. Instead, she comes alive as a determined spiritual seeker. She faces a world that keeps trying to box women in—tame, dependent, obedient. But *Sassui* refuses to fit that mold. She claims her independence, her longing, and her right to choose her own path, even when the journey tests her spirit and her body, and she has no support from her family or society. Shah declares that:

<p><i>O friend Abdul Latif's wellbeing lies in trouble and humiliation</i></p> <p><i>I am unable to utter phrases of what suffering is like</i></p> <p><i>I spell it out with passion, reading it with love</i></p> <p><i>The sadness caused by Punhoon پنہوں is all my joy</i></p> <p><i>My comfort lies in being starved of my beloved embrace. (Shackles, 2018)</i></p>	<p>خوبی منجه خفت، ای دوست خفت اهي عذاللئيف، کي</p> <p>مذخ مون کان نه تئي، سندی سور صفت هجي ڪريان هيج سين، مطالع مخت خُرُنُ هوٽ پنهون جو، رگياني راخت پريان جي پستان جو، فاقروئي فرخت</p>
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This illustration of agency parallels Lazars FCDA to emphasize discourse which “constructs women as active subjects of resistance” (Lazar, 2005).

<p><i>Heedless one abandon your heedlessness.,</i></p> <p><i>How can you dose?</i></p> <p><i>You shameless girl—</i></p>	<p>غافل خفقت چوڙ، ٿون ڪيئن آثاسي اوچهرين</p> <p>چپاتا چڙ هي ويا، وچي پڻتا توڙ</p> <p>نيئين نند اکوڙ ، چمه وزن ه واسڪريين</p>
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<p><i>Silently they set out and got to their journeys end</i></p> <p><i>Get rid of the sleepiness from your eyes</i></p> <p>(Shackles, 2018)</p>	
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This narration embodies feminine principles of self-realization and strength. When viewed through Sufi's perspective, her love was not only an action of commitment to Punhoon but also to her authenticity and identity.

<p><i>Donot turn back, girl, when you see the pub-</i></p> <p><i>Don't tremble as you go on,It is a carpet that is spread before kech.</i> (Shackles, 2018)</p>	
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<p><i>Never even think of turning back,</i></p> <p><i>Even if you don't find a footprint there is joy for you in crawling.</i> (Shackles, 2018)</p>	
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<p><i>Keep burning, so long as you live</i></p> <p><i>There is no alternative to burning.</i></p> <p><i>Go on through heat and cold, there is no time to sit and rest</i> (Shackles, 2018)</p>	
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Sassui-Punhoon really puts women's empowerment front and center—it's basically at the heart of FCDA. The story brings female characters who don't just fit into

society's expectations; they break them. They take charge of their own lives, claim their right to speak, to love, and to choose their own path. These folk tales don't just quietly push back against patriarchy, they challenge it outright. They give a voice to women who endure, resist, and rise above, so these stories end up being a lot more than just old legends. They stick around as proof of women's strength and resilience, passed down through generations.

Michel Lazar's feminist lens brings out something fresh in the Sassui-Punhoon story. Sassui isn't just a tragic figure, but a symbol of strength, action, and defiance. She challenges the rules meant to hold her back. Through her words, her beliefs, and even her suffering, Sassui becomes a force of opposition—her story reshapes what it means to be feminine. So, instead of seeing her tale as a piece of the past, we start to see it as a living conversation about what women can be today.

<p><i>Camp-following the Kechis, trample upon stones on way,</i></p> <p><i>And for the sake of your spouse dye the gravel with your blood,</i></p> <p><i>Lateef says, cross the passes and explore the mountains,</i></p> <p><i>Camel man is going very fast, step up to catch him. (Shackles, 2018)</i></p>	<p>اُذر نڈر اپری، اُسونهین آهیان، لڑکے لان لطیف چئی، ور لئی وہايان، ھیجان ھنگون حب ۾، هوئن لئی هاریان، جاپن ڪنے یعنی سین، پُنھون پھايان، پیهان پچایان، خی مون نیو پاڻ سین</p> <p>پاپلی ٿی پور، پئنی ڪیچین ، ڪڪرا</p> <p>لانچی لئے لطیف چئی، ائی ڊونگر ڏور</p> <p>رائو مڙیوئی رَت سین، ڪارڻ ، ڪاند ڪور</p> <p>جُٹ وڃی ٿو جور اپر ٿئ اوڏی ٿئین</p>
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<p><i>Even if countless thorns prick my feet,</i></p> <p><i>Even if my fingers do not bend towards thumb, and</i></p> <p><i>cliffs injure my soles,</i></p> <p><i>I will proceed to the beloved without wearing a Jutti,</i></p> <p>(Shackles, 2018)</p>	<p>ڪنڊا مُون پيرن ۾، توڙي لڪ لڳن، اڳر آڳڻي نه مڙي، چپون پير چنن، ويندي ڏونون پيرئي، جٽيءِ ذات نه پايان</p>
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The FCDA of Sassui - Punhoon digs into the tangled ways power, gender, spirituality, and resistance show up in traditional Sufi literature. Sufi philosophy plays a huge part here—it really lifts up feminine voices. Sufism doesn't care much for hierarchy; it cares about the seeker's journey, letting go of the self, and chasing Divine love. That's where someone like Sassui comes in. She can show just as much longing and moral strength as any male figure. Sufi culture gives women the spiritual credibility to take on bigger, more symbolic roles, letting them step outside the limits of their usual social identities.

When you put Sufi ideas next to feminist thinking, you get a strong counter to the old, patriarchal ways of telling stories. It's not just about rewriting old tales—it's about using sharp analysis to call out domination and uncover women's stories that usually get buried or ignored. FCDA brings out these alternative stories, challenging the old rules about gender and claiming women's rights to desire, to rise above, to suffer, and to speak up. Even though her story is wrapped in spiritual language, it's deeply political. Sassui's journey keeps echoing, sparking new ways to think about feminism and culture.

“Shah Latif's depiction of Sassui ... serves as a powerful call to women ... to break free from societal constraints. Sassui's tragic love story symbolizes the struggles faced by women ... yet her unwavering determination, faith, and loyalty remain unshaken.”

The findings show that the woman Bhittai promotes is far more independent and stronger. She does not care about the ordeals and hardships that come her way while she walks in the path of love. Her journey is sacred and needs to be encouraged. Bhittai's voice constantly pushes her to move forward in the worst situations. He

knows that the society needs to succor women out of the suppression of the culture and hegemonic institutions.

Women walk the path of change and their encouragement is necessary for this so his voice is that of a saint and a male also which keeps Sassui moving in the most difficult path fraught with deadly dangers. This is a sanctified walk in the way towards the emancipation of women in a patriarchal oppression and hegemony. *Sassui-Punhoon* isn't just an old love story anymore; it becomes a feminist Sufi narrative, where the woman's voice, her silence, and her suffering all come together to shape a decolonial, indigenous feminist consciousness.

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