

# The Creative Launcher

Journal URL: <https://www.thecreativelauncher.com/index.php/tcl>

ISSN: 2455-6580

Issue: Vol. 7 & Issue 6, (December, 2022)

Publisher: Perception Publishing

Published on: 30<sup>th</sup> December, 2022

Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access: Yes

Journal DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.53032/issn.2455-6580>

©The Creative Launcher (2022). This Open Access article is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>, which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For citation use the DOI. For commercial re-use, please contact editor on: [thecreativelauncher@gmail.com](mailto:thecreativelauncher@gmail.com)

Licensing:  <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>



Article History: Abstract and complete research article received on: 09 October 2022 | Revised article received: 14 October 2022 | Accepted: 10 November 2022 | First Published: 30 December 2022

Research Article



## Multiple Hues of Marginality and Assertion in Jokha Alharthi's *Celestial Bodies*

**Dr. Hem Raj Bansal**

Assistant Professor of English

Department of English and European Languages,

School of Humanities and Languages,

Central University of Himachal Pradesh

Dhauladhar Campus-I, Dharamshala, India

Email Id: [rajbansal24mar@gmail.com](mailto:rajbansal24mar@gmail.com)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3364-047X>

 <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2022.7.6.05>

Pages: 46-56

### Abstract

Marginality is not only a state of tangible/physical suffering but also a condition of mind. However, the nature of both is complementary to each other as the troubled psychic state results only from material reality. The adjective 'celestial' in the title seems to negate any material

claims to one's deprived state as emanating from structural inequities. The marginal state of major female characters in Jokha Alharthi's (b. 1978) the Man Booker International Prize-Winning novel *Celestial Bodies* (2019) has its basis in the patriarchal functioning of society. Marilyn Booth writes, "The impact of a strong patriarchal system on both women and subordinate men is unsparing but it shapes different generations, and individuals, distinctly as it leads to both suffering and confrontation" (x). All three sisters Mayya, Khawla and Asma in the *Celestial Bodies* have their own trajectories of hidden pain. Apart from it, marginality as observed in the case of Zarifa, the female slave who unconsciously submits herself to a better life, results from ignorance as she does not find anything appalling even in being a concubine to Merchant Sulayman, the slave owner. Another note of marginality stems in the portrayal of Habib and his son Sanjar who view slavery as an "involuntary human servitude" (Wright n.pag.) and hence break themselves free from the shackles of bondage by leaving the house of Sulayman. While the former realizes that despite being his wife, Zarifa is also his master's keep which is a blow to his masculinity; his son also identifies selfish motives in Sulayman's doing a few things for his betterment. Another victim of a husbandly suspicion is Fatima, the wife of Sulayman whose death remains a mystery until it is learnt that it was her husband who hastens her to a poisonous death as her affair with a slave is suspected. Mayya's daughter London's marginal state cements the vulnerable status of women as despite from a rich family she is treated in terms of her supposed weak gender as her voluntary marriage to a peasant's ends in a fiasco. The present paper seeks to provide answer to different types of marginalities found in the *Celestial Bodies* along with charting out a course of passive to active resistance as adopted by different characters.

**Keywords:** Marginality, Slavery, Gender, Love, Resistance, Marriage, Bodies, Identity

Jokha Alharthi grapples with the question of gender, class and slave identities through the rubric of a family. Azaan and Salima's three daughters map out different course of life for themselves. The eldest daughter Mayya's wish to see her lover Ali Bin Khallaf once before her forced marriage remains abortive. She is a seamstress who remains all the time bent upon her sewing work, absorbed in the thoughts of her lover. When Abdallah witnesses Mayya all absorbed in herself stitching a shroud of memories and worries for herself as does the female narrator also in Thomas Hood's (1799-1845) poem "The Song of the Shirt" (1843), he is captivated by something mysterious about her. Not even smiling on her wedding day and giving up praying after the marriage shows her resistance. She has a firm belief in Allah and says the prayers but upon marriage, she gives up praying. As a mark of silent protest, she christens her daughter London to show her inclinations more towards liberality in Christianity. Like Zaitoon in Bapsi Sidhwa's (b. 1936) *The Pakistani Bride* (1983), she submits to passive resignation because the latter has been so oriented in a strict Islamic religious ambience.

Motherhood brings along a lot many ordeals for Mayya: exhaustion, back and belly pain, itching scalp on not being allowed to bathe, the constant struggle to feed the baby for hours, sleepless nights and so on. For Mayya taking refuge later in silence and then in sleep

become the defence shields to camouflage her anguish and register her protest. The sleep becomes for her an “enjoyable coma” where she has “nothing to confront” (55). Though “education strengthens women's say in decisions that affect their own lives” (Riyami et al 146), Mayya being uneducated fails to muster up the courage to speak about her love. The way motherhood is naturalised and valorised by patriarchal dictates comes out more truly with Salima. The very fact that she is Shaykh Masoud’s daughter, Salima puffs with pride over having given birth to her babies in a standing position. Enamoured with bravery that patriarchy attributes to her, Salima unconsciously ignores how it could have led to not only her death but also of the baby. She fails to see that “women’s reproductive capacity historically had been used to define and confine them” (O’Reilly and Porter 1). She takes pride in the birth of London and becoming a grandmother. Ironically, the birth of a girl is welcomed only in so far as she will nourish her younger brothers: “The first one is a girl, and a girl comes to raise her little brothers. Ten boys will follow her, God willing” (18).

While Asma wants to restore Mayya to health soon from the bookish knowledge, her mother dismisses the modern education and counts on traditional education. Muezzin-Wife (another woman whose own name is forgotten in that of her husband’s) harbours thoughts concerning clean/unclean women. For her sharing the food of a new mother is abominable as she instructs Asma, “Because she is unclean inside. It is not proper for people to share her food. It is not permitted to eat from the same platter as an unclean woman” (22). Asma, however, remains silent as it would have been termed as an act of “criticizing the Faith” (22). Asma serves a counterfoil to her mother and Muzzein wife by exposing religious patriarchy which terms women unclean during periods and post-delivery interim. The Bible and the Quran both prohibit contact with menstruating women. The Book of Leviticus, the Third Book of the Hebrew Bible reads: “When a woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period will last seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening” (Leviticus:15). Similarly, an ayat from the Quran enjoins the same purity to be followed: “... None can touch but those who are pure...” (Al-Waqi'a 56:79 qtd. in Syed 3). From ritual restrictions to social exclusion to not circumnambulating and touching the idols in the temples in non-Abrahamic religions to not touching the scriptures are various examples of a check on women’s mobility during monthly periods.

A strict segregation of the sexes is practiced in Salima’s house. Asma is scoffed at when she hears the conversation of the married women concerning sexuality as it is kept from unmarried girls. Moreover, the Oman “culture endorses ideals of virgin marriage and marital chastity for women” (Wikan 14). Salima does not allow any talk about sex to be shared with unmarried girls as it is considered profane in Islam. “Within every culture there are rules or measures for the management of sexuality and gender expressions and sanctions for those who break” (Sanjakdar 106). But Asma feels that she can get all this knowledge “from books” (CB 23). Salima wants a separate room for the girls when they grow young to avoid running into “male relatives” (32). It is here that Khawla, her sister, hides a lipstick behind the books, procured for her by Mayya from Muscat. In fact, she is like Plabita in the Bollywood movie *Lipstick Under My Burqah* (2017) who out of stifled and cloistered life in a Muslim family “is

cloaked in her *burkha*, but dreams of ripped jeans, bad boys and Miley Cyrus's brand of liberation" (Bhave n.pag). While going through that book shelf, Asma comes across many religious books and rues that though the schools had come up in al-Awafi "girls older than ten were not allowed in" (CB 34). It simply remains a dream to pursue education further and only possessing the basic literacy to read and write is considered enough. Asma reads a verse from *The Well Supported Prophetic Traditions Compiled by the Imam al-Rabi* to support how the scriptures stand misrepresented:

Abu Hurayra, may God be pleased with him, recited: When the Messenger of God was praying, he said to his wife. Aisha, hand me my robe. She said, But I am having my period. He said, That isn't your fault and it doesn't matter. (35)

Through this she wants to teach Muezzini-Wife that "childbirths and periods and what have you didn't soil anything" (35). It is not God, thus, who considers this impure but preachers who do not read closely in between the lines or wilfully ignore them. She also comes across the story of Tawuddud the Jariya, with few ripped pages about African slave girl in *The Arabian Nights*. The reason of the missing pages about Tawuddud is to induce in girls a complete sense of their intellectual inferiority as in that story the slave girl outwits all scholars and thus breaks the myth that women lack reason or rationality.

Another female character Qamar also known as Najiya and Moon leads life on her own terms and does not want to be tied in the conventional bond of marriage. She does not want to be like other rejected, lonely women for whom "the supreme goal of marriage remains elusive" (Jarrett-Macauley 47). When her friend reminds her that he is Shaykh Masoud's son-in-law, already married and hence won't leave his wife and shaykhhood, Qamar shows least interest in marriage: "Who said I want to marry him? Qamar doesn't let anyone give her orders. I was not created to serve and obey some man. Some fellow who would steal what should be mine and keep me from seeing my brother and my girlfriends!" (43). Qamar's bravery is visible in the form of "scars on her body" (43) which she receives while protecting her brother from the bullying school boys. It is indicative of her masculine prowess which otherwise remains attributed to men traditionally. Her father being a drunkard, she takes up the home affairs in her hand and deals in sheep and camel and earns enough to change her home from a tent building to a two-story house. Not only this, even her own camel is sold off into twenty thousand riyals. Her father's death does not bring sorrow but 'relief' as she now becomes the master of her soul and being. Moreover, she also feels puffed with pride as her home becomes a "refuge for those in need" (45). She restores her polio-afflicted brother to health when doctors claim that he can never walk. Najiya, thus, emerges as a strong character who defies patriarchal dictates about sexuality and marriage. Qamar begins to feel troubled when Azzan immerses himself too much in pessimistic poets and does not like his usage of the words like 'possession' and 'hunting' as she deems their relation free of all bounds. Moreover, she realizes what Christine Delphy argues in "The Main Enemy" that the source of patriarchy is the marriage contract in which "the positions of husband and wife are supposedly analogous to that of capital and labour, though the position of the woman in this context is in fact apparently far worse than that of the wage labourer" (Murray 11).

The issue of pure/impure woman also stands challenged in the novel. The sudden disappearance of Qamar attributed to her murder by her brothers for being shameless in her relations with men brings in the concept of family honour. Though she successfully changes her class through her sheer hard work, societal expectations of gender normative roles make her a victim resulting in her enigmatic vanishing. She too becomes a victim like London and Fatima who are oppressed because of their female gender identities despite being rich. Alharthi wants to convey that for society a free relation outside the domain of marriage is unacceptable which turns out to be another institution to satiate a husband's libido. It is for this reason that Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) says in her *The Second Sex* (1949) that while the proletariat can change their class identity, women cannot change their status even after achieving something substantial as they are largely viewed in terms of gender stereotypes (27).

The novelist paints a grim picture for women whose rich class never warrants their unquestioned acceptance in a marriage. Mayya does not want her daughter London to marry Ahmad, a man of her own choice. She smashes her daughter's phone and slaps her for being insolent and even her grandmother would have "slit her granddaughter's throat if the rebellious girl really did marry the peasant's son. How could she possibly marry the issue of the man who had threshed the family's grain?" (57). However, she resists her daughter's love marriage until Abdallah lets it happen.

Post-marriage Ahmad turns out to be a misogynist who does not want London to look out at the boys in shorts, not understanding that she loves him only. Eventually she realizes that her choice was wrong. But she keeps enduring the beatings of Ahmad for one year as she had married him despite her parents' protests. In her family no one had ever beaten his wife so this was quite unprecedented: "The peasant's son beats my girl? No one ever put his hand on me and no one put his hand on my mother or my sisters, and now this dog comes and beats my little girl?" (62) Parents feel happy that finally London is divorced by Ahmad after dowry (bride price) is paid back to him and can now have her own independent existence as a successful physician. After the divorce it becomes really hard for her to "turn the page" as people would advise her. For her it is a shattering and shocking experience, "What people called 'an experience' was in reality a chronic disease, surely—not one you can die from, but not one that is ever cured" (185). So, it is marriage ultimately which becomes a licence for Ahmad for oppressing her and her salvation lied in unpinning herself from this institution.

London remains heartbroken as even after breaking the barriers of class by betrothing herself to Ahmad, she is forced to live in her assumed weak feminine gender only. Despite being a thresher's son, Ahmad is a replica of male chauvinistic mind/culture, and does not accept London as his equal as he uses her like an article or private property. Vulnerability of female gender, thus, comes to light as she is the only one of her clan who is a battered woman. So somewhere historical materialism's claims that "transition to . . . socialism would in and of itself free women from their subordination to men" (Buchanan 454) turn out to be hollow for London.

### **Slavery: An Unending Trauma**

Resistance to slavery also forms a major concern of the novel. Zarifa's mother Ankabuta also emerges as a symbol of resistance and tries to overcome patriarchal stranglehold by not submitting to forced copulation. At fifteen she becomes known for her resistance to her bodily submission to her husband Nasib. Shaykh Said imprisons her in a cell when she does not allow her husband, another slave of Said, to sleep with her. Nasib would "tie her hands to the rusting iron bedposts and stuff her mouth with his turn-cloth, just to get his husbandly rights" (65). It is something which would have amounted to marital rape in a free democratic country as "women who have been raped by their partners experience pain, humiliation and distress" ("Marital Rape" n.pag.). Moreover, Ankabuta here denies the "historical development of representations of Black women as animalistic, diseased and licentious" (Marshall 5) as they were seen sexually promiscuous and depraved. When she is set off free, she gives birth to Zarifa on 25 Sept. 1926 which coincides with a treaty signed in Geneva which "abolished slavery and criminalized the slave trade" (139). However, the author tells us that Zarifa or her mother did not even know where a place called Geneva existed on earth. For Zarifa it was the beginning of slavery with her birth and so it was for her mother. After the lapse of sixteen years, she is bought by Merchant Sulayman and eventually becomes his concubine as she views him as "her liberator" (140).

Slave owning grips the mind of Sulayman so much so that even on his death bed he wants his son Abdallah to punish Zarifa's son Sanjar for being disobedient. Even after Abdallah reminds his father that government has now outlawed slavery, the latter unilaterally pronounces, "Sanjar is mine. The government can't free my slaves" (14). As a powerful patriarch, Sulayman wields a powerful influence over both his family and the slaves.

Protest against slavery also manifests itself in children. Deep-seated feelings of resentment to his being a slave torment Sanjar since his childhood. When as children, the slave boys Sanjar and Marhun prevail upon Abdallah to steal his father's rifle and go for hunting magpies, the dormant anger in them surfaces. Abdallah recalls, ". . . they attacked me and held me down. They tried to force me to say it: I am the slave. I am Abdallah the slave of Sanjar and Marhun" (29). The way Abdallah is pushed down the well with his head against the wall, he receives severe wounds. Franz Fanon (1925-1961) also discusses in his "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" how two Arab boys kill their European friend and assert "We cannot kill the 'grown-ups,' but we can kill someone like him because he's our own age" (199). Similarly, Abdallah is not seen by Sanjar and Marhun as someone not complicit in slavery but a part of the cycle of oppressors.

Sanjar epitomizes resistance against his family's bondage as a slave. His courage to even name his sons as Abdallah or Muhammad shows his defiant spirit. "We are free, Mother. Free according to the law. And we will name our children whatever we like" (121). However, his mother senses fear, ". . . the name of a baby born into a slave family must never, ever echo the names of the masters" (64) and further warns "Merchant Sulayman would kill you! You'd give your child a name he gave one of his children?" (103). Sanjar is driven by an urge to put an end to his slave identity as his father had done while leaving behind his wife and son. Aware and awakened as he is, Sanjar goes by the law and considers Sulayman's schooling and

marrying him off as a ploy to serve his own “self-interest” (104). He wants to move out of this cycle of slavery and does not want his children as well to be bound by any more obligations. “. . . the outlawing of slavery did not erase the pain and stigma of having been a slave. Many descendants of slaves were affected by this stigma for generations after slavery was abolished” (Wright n.pag.).

However, Zarifa remains a slave to her ignorance. She compares her blessed state with Masouda who “had to go out into the desert at sunrise to gather wood” (122). She considers Merchant Sulayman’s house as her own and wants to take care of him, not leaving him to the care of his sister, Abdallah’s aunt. Abdallah’s aunt was divorced twice and had no children and she would despise children most while Zarifa would shower her affection on them. After his wife’s death, Sulayman does not allow his sister to raise Abdallah but his mistress Zarifa. He shares a tacit understanding with her. Being a “long-time mistress” of Sulayman also empowers her in her animosity with Sulayman’s sister who “was the only one who treated Zarifa like any other slave and would never acknowledge her status” (129). But after the Merchant’s death, she leaves to be with her son in Kuwait as she would have been humiliated in that house by Sulayman’s sister.

The novelist also underscores the fact that it is patriarchal conditioning which makes women turn against one-another. Abdallah’s aunt’s two divorces and barrenness result in her capriciousness. Since a woman is held responsible for holding her family/husband together, she is deemed a failure. She fails to serve the most important purpose of a woman, i.e., motherhood which causes her divorces and also completely unsettles her. It results in her playing a foil against her own sister-in-law Fatima and the female slave Zarifa. While she exposes the former before her brother and thus, causes her (Fatima’s) death, she turns against the latter as her brother does not allow her the custody of Abdallah after the death of Fatima. Raising Abdallah would have assuaged her feelings of barrenness since motherhood stands so glorified and naturalized in every culture. It is for this reason that the radical feminists reject mothering as something innate “. . . it is not the biological fact that women have children that is the cause of women’s subordination but, rather, the cultural construction of mothering and sexuality that defines women’s status” (Hekman 93).

Habib, Zarifa’s husband, suffers interminably due to his slave lineage. When he disappears, his son Sanjar was just six years old. Habib would always say that “he would go back to that land from which he’d been snatched away, back to his freedom, plundered by pirates and merchants” (78). Zarifa does not cry when her husband disappears. Habib remains deeply disgruntled with his slave identity which results in his wild savage laughter and cries in the middle of the night and he would stuff sense in Zarifa, “Your ancestors are not from here. They were as black as you are, they were from Africa, from the lands from where they stole you, all of you and sold you” (123). However, Zarifa weaves an altogether different thread of the narrative as she considers that no one stole Habib and that slavery passed to him from his mother who was a slave and that “al-Awafi is your place, its people are yours” (123). However, Habib “did not want to banish the memory, to forget the terrifying journey that ended his calm, pleasant life in Makran” (123). His mother was attacked by a gang of locals, and his mother

and five brothers were bought by Baluch and the Arab slave traders. The whole journey in a jammed and filthy ship, eye disease that killed the nursing baby of his mother and how the other sons were separated from his mother everything deeply troubles him. Petro Kilekwa (1860s?-1967) in his autobiography *Slave Boy to Priest* (1937) also weaves the same narrative wherein he was abducted by the slaver raiders: “When we three set out in the early morning to go to the plain where the ponds were, all the people in the village who could take to the flight did so. Our mothers tried to find us but failed, so they just fled to save themselves. Afterwards we were taken to the camp of our captors” (221). Bitter past experiences of being uprooted trouble Habib in the present and that is why he leaves Zarifa when she fails to fathom the pain he was in. His family is sold from one trader to another until Sulayman buys them and Habib’s mother weeps for many years for her other sons who had been separated from her and hurled off into different directions. Everyone would sympathise with Habib’s mother for the terrible plight she was pushed into. Decolonization of minds becomes important for Habib as he leaves both the land of his master and indirect tormentor as Franz Fanon also argues that imperialism “sows seeds of decay here and there that must be mercilessly rooted out from our land and from our minds” (181).

Zarifa’s body is used to perpetuate oppression. Her mind and body both are colonized as she considers herself lucky to be in Sulayman’s house. She sells her flesh for her survival and sticks to her master, thinking that she would die without him. She considers herself more lucky than other slaves and never wants to go away anywhere. Special treatment is given to her because of being a mistress of Sulayman. Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) in his autobiography *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789) highlights how the relation between a white woman and a slave was not acceptable to the masters whereas they would sexually abuse female slaves openly. He writes: “. . . in Montserrat I have seen a negro man staked to the ground, and cut most shockingly, and then his ears cut off bit by bit, because he had been connected with a white woman who was a common prostitute: as if it were no crime in the whites to rob an innocent African girl of her virtue” (Equiano 70-71).

Marriage as an institution to regulate women is another major concern of Alharthi. Asma and Khawla’s marriage proposal to Khalid and Ali, the sons of Emigrant Isa sadden Khawla. She defies the parental choice and accuses her father of betraying her uncle’s last words on the death bed. She feels that she was already engaged to and was in love with her cousin Nasir. Unlike her elder sister Maya, she does not submit to passive resignation and moreover “Mayya had not had an education but Khawla had” (90). She prays for the return of Nasir who was in Canada for studies but nothing had been heard of him in the last four years. Even as young children they had formed a bond with each other. While Asma would not like Romance Books, Khawla would enjoy Harlequin Romances carrying stories “about love” (97) imagining herself to be one like the heroines lost in the dreams of Nasir. She had even torn a photograph from Nasir’s certificate and hidden that in a tree trunk and would often pay her pilgrimages there. Eventually, Azzan submits to Khawla’s entreaties and refuses her hand in marriage to Ali despite Salima’s protestations.



Nasir comes back after five years as he exhausts all his funds in Canada. He marries Khawla only because in her bequeath, Nasir's mother had cleared Nasir's share only if he marries Khawla. So, this marriage does not emerge out of any love but greed and obligation. After the marriage, he goes to Canada, returning after every two years to impregnate Khawla. He had his girlfriend there in Canada, and even while in India he "hung a photo of his Canadian girlfriend on his car key ring" (203). But Khawla trusts him blindly and after ten years he comes back to her when his girlfriend leaves him in Canada.

Though Khawla keeps tolerating everything after her marriage, there is sudden realization which makes her seek divorce at a later stage as her husband had stolen her happy time and evaded fatherly affection and husbandly duties, care and love. After her divorce, she opens a beauty salon in Muscat and drives her car, which again indicates her liberation from a self-imposed complacent state emerging out of a compromised marital state. Oman that way appears to be a relatively liberal Islamic state where a few liberties are exercised by women. Oman, thus, is a progressive country as compared to Saudi Arabia where women do not enjoy this liberty. "Saudi Arabia is an extreme example, with its heavy and compulsory veiling of women, who cannot even walk on the street unless accompanied by a male relative, and need male permission to travel and work" (Walters 127).

For Asma "marriage was her identity document, her passport to a world wider than home" (156). She considers marriage as a way to freedom as she would not be stopped now from joining the company of the married women, attending weddings, funerals, lunches and dinners. Asma dreams of getting educated in a secondary school in Cairo, and also of joining a university which was under construction at that time.

After the marriage, Asma joins the night classes as "the government prohibited married women from attending the regular government day schools" (194). As the narration paces, she has fourteen children in the course of twenty-five years by the age of forty-five. When some points of dissension grew between them, "she formed her own celestial orbit. In the end, and with a great deal of patience, self-examination, and occasional sacrifice, they learned to create enough space that each could orbit freely" (196).

Salima is another character who remains a victim both in and outside the sphere of marriage. After her father's death, Salima's childhood is spent in utter misery in her uncle's "fortress-like compound" (163). Though she is not exposed to any manual work there, she is not allowed to play, eat the same food which other girls would relish, enjoy the dance like slave girls at weddings, wear bracelets, pretty clothes and so on. Moreover, her uncle Shaykh Said deprives her of brotherly company as he does not allow her brother Muaadh to live at Salima's maternal uncle's house. At the age of thirteen, Shaykh Said forcibly marries her off with Azzan who eventually secretly has an affair with Qamar.

London being a doctor does not believe in her grandmother Fatima's death. After inquiring from her father she diagnoses the symptoms of poisoning. Many women would sometimes add poisonous herbs to their co-wives' food to keep their husbands to themselves only. But since Merchant Sulayman did not have a co-wife, this possibility is ruled out. Fatima had died just in two to three days after giving birth to Abdallah. Fatima, as the curtain lifts from

the mystery is left to die by her own husband Sulayman as his sister drops the hint that she had seen Fatima and the slave Salim together at the basil soil. Hereafter not only does Salim disappear but Fatima also dies when Sulayman deliberately leaves on a business trip. Fatima's supposed relation with a black man is actually an act of revenge as she feels equally troubled with her husband's relation with Zarifa. "Adultery becomes a natural part of marriage" (Beauvoir 88) for Fatima as she tries to hit her husband with the same weapon though she stands completely silenced/exterminated. The novelist contests how a slave cannot have relation with a freeborn woman or the wife of a Shaykh whereas Sulayman openly sleeps with Zarifa, a slave woman. At the same time men in patriarchy believe "that they have ownership of women's bodies, whereas women own neither their own bodies nor that of their spouse" (Jankowiak 85).

To conclude, thus, marginality of each character stems from not giving space to the close relations. While the title as it is discussed in the case of Asma and Khalid introduces them as celestial bodies who had known to live life by giving space to each other, the same does not happen truly with the rest of the characters. They fail to accommodate each other unlike celestial bodies do and thus ram into each other causing apprehensions, secret liaisons, planned clandestine murders, and eventual disintegrations. London and Ahmad, Mayya and Abdallah, Khawla and Nasir, Merchant Sulayman and Fatima through all their relations a fissure is created which widens itself to engulf them all. Victimization does not go unquestioned and assertive stance of characters like Mayya, Fatima, Sanjar, Habib, Khawla makes itself felt through either divorce as in the case of Khawla and London or through silent protest as with Mayya; either through denouncing a perpetual state of slavery as with Habib and his son Sanjar or through resistance to husband's adultery by entering in relation with a slave as with Fatima. Different characters, thus, move from marginality to assertion in their own respective ways and do not easily give way to others as celestial bodies do.

### Works Cited

- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Books, 1949.
- Booth, Marilyn. Translator's Introduction. *Celestial Bodies*, by Jokha Alharthi, translated by Marilyn Booth, Simon & Schuster, 2019, pp. ix-xi.
- Bhave, Nihit, Review of *Lipstick under My Burqah*, by Alankrita Shrivastava. 24 July 2017. [timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/movie-reviews/lipstick-under-my-burkha/movie-review/59645392.cms](https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/movie-reviews/lipstick-under-my-burkha/movie-review/59645392.cms)
- Buchanan, Ian. *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory*. OUP, 2010.
- Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. Dodo Press, 1789.
- Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Richard Philcox. Grove Press, 1963.
- Hood, Thomas. "The Song of the Shirt." [poets.org/poem/song-shirt](https://poets.org/poem/song-shirt).
- Hekman, Susan. "Feminism." *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory*, edited by Simon Malpas and Paul Wake, 2006, pp. 91-101.

- Kilekwa, Petro. "Slave Boy to Priest." *Anthology of African Literature*, edited by Anthonia C. Kalu, Viva Books, 2008, pp. 221-230.
- Jankowiak, William, M. Diane Nell, and Anne Buckmaster. "Managing Infidelity: Cross-Cultural Perspective." *Ethnology*, vol. 41 no. 1, Winter 1995, pp. 85-101. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/4153022](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4153022).
- Jarrett-Macauley, Delia, editor. *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism: Writings on Black Women*. Routledge, 1996.
- Leviticus: 15. Accessed on 25 Sept. 2019. [web.mit.edu/jywang/www/cef/Bible/NIV/NIV - Bible/LEV+15.html](http://web.mit.edu/jywang/www/cef/Bible/NIV/NIV_-_Bible/LEV+15.html)
- "Marital Rape and Its Impacts". *Policy Brief*. no. 13, 2010. [www.realisingrights.org/docs/newsletter/Marital%20Rape%20Policy%20Brief%20for%20MPs.pdf](http://www.realisingrights.org/docs/newsletter/Marital%20Rape%20Policy%20Brief%20for%20MPs.pdf).
- Marshall, Anneka. "From Sexual Denigration to Self Respect: Resisting Images of Black Female Sexuality." *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism: Writings on Black Women*, edited by Delia Jarrett-Macauley, Routledge, 1996. pp. 5-36.
- Murray, Mary. *The Law of the Father? Patriarchy in the Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*. Routledge, 1995.
- Reilly, Andrea Ó, and Marie Porter. Introduction. *Motherhood, Power and Oppression*, edited by Marie Porter, Patricia Short, and Andria O'Reilly, Women's Press, 2005. pp. 1-24.
- Riyami, Asya Al Mustafa Afifi and Ruth M. Mabry. Women's Autonomy, Education and Employment in Oman and Their Influence on Contraceptive Use." *Reproductive Health Matters*, vol. 12 no. 23, pp. 144-154. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3775984](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3775984).
- Sanjakdar, Fida. "Cultural Constructions of Sexuality and Gender." *Counterpoints*, vol. 364, 2011, pp. 105-130. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/42980846](http://www.jstor.org/stable/42980846).
- Sidhwa, Bapsi. *The Pakistani Bride*. Penguin Books India, 1990.
- Syed, Ibrahim B. "Touching the Quran during Menses." Dec. 2019. Accessed on 24 Sep. 2020. <[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337715838\\_TOUCHING\\_THE\\_QUIRAN\\_During\\_Menses](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337715838_TOUCHING_THE_QUIRAN_During_Menses)>
- Walters, Margaret. *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*. OUP, 2005.
- Wikan, Unni. "Cross-Cultural Features of Women's Place in Society." *Genus*, vol. 46 no. 3/4, 1990, pp. 1-16. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/29789029](http://www.jstor.org/stable/29789029)
- Wright, Donald R. "Slavery in Africa." [autocwww.colorado.edu/~toldy2/E64ContentFiles/-AfricanHistory/SlaveryInAfrica.htm](http://autocwww.colorado.edu/~toldy2/E64ContentFiles/-AfricanHistory/SlaveryInAfrica.htm).