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## **(Religion as a Political Force in Pakistani Cultural Setting: A Foucauldian Study of *Black is My Robe*)**

### **Abstract:**

This paper examines religion as a political force in *Black is My Robe* “*Kalay Mainday Kapray*” by Shahid Nadeem. In this paper, the researchers argue that religious power which is also termed pastoral power demonstrates itself by subjugating the individuals, but it is resisted and opposed by the same individuals pursuing its counter-force. The researchers have drawn upon Michel Foucault’s notion of pastoral power borrowed from his lectures and Jeremy Carrette’s analysis of Foucault’s work to argue that religion has political imperatives embedded within. Although Foucauldian analysis of pastoral power is replete with references to Western Christianity, the researchers have integrated it as a theoretical framework to observe Islam as a political force in the Pakistani cultural setting. This paper concludes that pastoral power encounters its opposing force and in this conflict new forms of expression, discourses and behaviours emerge. Therefore, power, whether it is religious or political, is not oppressive or repressive, instead, it is productive as it opens new avenues and new worlds for the marginalized or subjugated members of a social body.

### **Keywords:**

Power, Religion, Political Force, Foucault, Resistance, Politics.

## Introduction:

Human societies are generally hierarchized and stratified in which there are dominant and powerful groups as opposed to marginalized and powerless groups. This prevalent dichotomy or stratification of society becomes the major concern of this research to contend that power is not possessed or seized by individuals or institutions, nevertheless, it is exercised by the individuals and institutions. It is essential to observe the analytics of power theorized by Michel Foucault in his published books, interviews, series and articles. Foucault rejects the traditional definition of power that makes power oppressive, constraining, violent and concrete. Contrary to this, Foucault contends that power is not oppressive but productive as it gives way to new forms of behaviours and discourse. It is not concrete since it cannot be possessed or seized by individuals and institutions rather but exercised by them. In *Power/Knowledge*, he argues that power should be examined as something that moves in a cycle and operates “in the form of a chain” (Foucault 1980, 98). Foucault doesn’t see power as a commodity in somebody’s hands, but it is perceived as something exercised by individuals and institutions. Interestingly, the ones who exercise it also undergo it at some point. The individuals are not adversaries they are one of the prime effects of power and its vehicle; moreover, “it (individual) is the element of its articulation”. (Foucault 1980, 98).

It is significant to indicate that Nadeem’s play portrays such characters who submit to power and also exercise their autonomy by resisting and challenging the social hierarchies. In *Black is My Robe*, the Pir tries, at his most, to maintain his orthodoxy by usurping and exploiting the basic human rights of the masses in the name of religion. He exercises his power being a spiritual leader and feudal lord of the villagers of the Sukka Pind. Foucault’s statement that “religion is a political force” assisted to establish that the Pir exploited the dichotomy of this world and the other world, body and soul, spiritual and physical for his benefit. The Pir is challenged by Opra who stands as a threatening force and whose assertiveness defuses Pir’s monopoly. Following Opra’s opposing and resisting arguments, the villagers refuse to submit to the Pir’s power. With this rejection, the villagers can fight off the Pir and move toward the positive direction where they realize that the prosperity of this world and the body is as significant as the success

and prosperity of the other world and the soul. Therefore, *Black is My Robe* closes with the expression that “the village became a different village altogether” (Nadeem 2008, 185) which infers that through resistance the marginalized voices and discourses may appear at a central position.

### **Literature Review:**

Power is generally considered as an ability or capacity to make others do what they would not do otherwise. It is a control of person A over person B. Power is usually deemed as negative, oppressive and violent. However, Michel Foucault, a French philosopher, historian and psychologist, gives an altogether different notion of power. His entire body of work deals with subject/individual and power. Although in *The Subject and Power*, he declares that the general theme of his research is subject not power, yet to comprehend this subject, he contends that it is “necessary to expand the dimensions of a definition power” (Foucault 1982, 778). Foucault rejects the traditional characterization of power i.e., power is repressive, oppressive, violent, constraining and negative. Instead of focusing on the oppression linked with power, Foucault is more concerned with resistance to power as he extrapolates that power has resistance inherent in it and it can be seen as a by-product of power.

Foucault explains pastoral power in *The Subject and Power*. The principles of this form of power are: this power adheres to the salvation of its individual; this power is not merely a form of domination, it sacrifices itself for the well-being of its flock of men; it cares for all the individuals collectively and individually also; and finally, this form of power focuses the bodies as well as the minds and souls of the individuals to direct them toward salvation. This pastoral power is reviewed by Jeremy Carrette in his essay “Foucault, Religion and Pastoral Power”. Carrette emphasizes Foucault’s engagement with religious power. He also asserts that much of the critical examination of Foucault's oeuvre misses the religious dimensions of his notions of power, therefore, Carrette argues that while exploring the genealogies of madness, criminality and sexuality Foucault “has a sustained interest in matters of religion for understanding the present... Foucault neither marginalizes nor privileges religious power. But he does recognize how Western society is inescapably constituted by religious – or, more accurately, Christian – thought and practice” (Carrette 2013, 369). Dr Carrette asserts that Foucault’s

lectures at the College de France and his published books prove conducive to see that “Foucault’s discussions of pastoral power relate to a wider “analytics” of religious power” (Carrette 2013, 370). In this essay, Carrette strategically integrates *Security, Territory, Population* (1978) and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* to trace the trajectory of his thoughts on religion. The objective behind this trajectory is to see that “pastoral power is not just a historical and transitional concept to governmentality studies but part of a longer development of Foucault’s thinking about religion and power” (Carrette 2013, 370). The other important aspect of Carrette’s essay is that it maps the persistence of pastoral power in the governmentality of the modern state. This work also explains the paradoxes inherent in pastoral power indicated by Foucault. Carrette concludes his work by proclaiming that “[t]he innovative aspect of Foucault’s reading of the relationship between religion and political power is that he shifts the relationship between religion and politics from church and state to “pastorate and government.” ... The priority Foucault gave to pastoral power is significant not only for its “decisive” historical importance, but also in showing something of how “religion is a political force”” (Carrette 2013, 382).

### **Theoretical Framework & Methodology:**

This research is qualitative and an interpretive method has been used to engage with Shahid Nadeem’s Play *Black is My Robe* (2008). The impetus behind this research is to bring to the surface the close nexus of power and religion in the Pakistani context.

To understand the nature of power, its mechanics and its multiple points of manifestation, Foucault’s oeuvre, his lectures and interviews along with the critical work on Foucault’s body of work have been considered. Foucault’s work, the critical literature on Foucault and research on Nadeem’s plays have proven helpful to examine the political nature of power and religion in the Pakistani context. Other than the books, research papers, the internet and critical articles, the personal correspondence with Shahid Nadeem has helped to understand his work and his objective. In the interview, while talking about the culture of theatre in Pakistani society, Nadeem professed that in Pakistan, theatre or art is not a priority of the state which is why initially, his theatre group, Ajoka, had to face many challenges posed by the dictatorial regime of Zia-ul-Haq in the 80s and also by the religious

extremists. However, in the present time of political consciousness, the state and masses have become a bit tolerant of the resistance and opposition posed by his work. By extending his standpoint, it must be stated that Nadeem endorses the inevitability of resistance and opposition in society just like Foucault. Through his plays, he challenges the dominant discourses and powers by surfacing those that are marginalized or cornered because of the politics of the powerful group. The particular focus to engage with Nadeem's work by employing the Foucauldian theory of power and subject is to investigate these underexplored aspects of his writing.

### **Discussion & Analysis:**

The play under discussion is set in a village of Thal desert named Sukka Pind (The Dry Village) where the Pir exercises his power to control the masses. As a feudal lord, he controls their lands and other means of earning; as a religious figure, he controls their morality. In other words, because he has the well (the only source of drinking water) and the land in his custody, the people are subjugated to him so much that they leave their women and animals at his disposal to get his charmed amulets for their prosperity. Michel Foucault in an interview, "On religion (1978)" claims "Faith, what is that? Religion is a political force" (Foucault 1978). This Foucauldian standpoint dismisses religion from the abstract notions of faith. Although Foucault's framework is embedded within Western Christianity while discussing the political nature of religion in his lectures in 1979, his analytics are integrated with this paper to observe Islam as a political force in the Pakistani cultural setting.

### **Religious Power:**

Michel Foucault in *Religion and Culture* claims that "religion is a political force" (Foucault 1999, 107). With this claim, he refuses the secularization of religion. Hence, religion cannot be separated from politics. Foucault's notion of religion as a political force/power can be understood with the help of his idea of "panopticon" – borrowed from Jeremy Bentham's model of prison presented in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. This circular panopticon prison provides the prison guard with an opportunity to observe all prisoners without being noticed by them; at the same time, the prisoners are well aware that they are under constant surveillance for that reason they direct their actions and behaviours

accordingly. This idea of constant surveillance and observation has resonances in Christianity and Islam – where an ever-watchful god/deity observes and knows all the actions, behaviours and thoughts of all human beings. The power of this panopticon can be realized with the fact that the individual living in such a system has internalized the subjugation so much that even if no one is looking at him/her, s/he must behave as if being watched. In modern times, security cameras, psychiatrists, doctors, priests, teachers, police patrols and counsellors are the agents of this power of surveillance and observation. The idea of confession in Catholic Christianity does not exist in Islam yet the observation and surveillance of good or bad conduct are felt in a sense that Almighty God is listening to and witnessing the acts and thoughts of an individual, or the pirs and mullahs are the ones who can scrutinize the behaviours of individuals to maintain the social order by sanctioning certain religious practices. In such cases, it can be inferred that the religious practices and traditions observed by the individual are not ideologically constructed but they are the means to exercise power in the field of social relations. It has been witnessed in the play under discussion that the villagers are impressed by the oratory of the Pir and most of the time they comply with his commands. They do not question the authority of the Pir; for example, when the Pir wanted Wasaya to leave his wife at his shrine for a night, Wasaya could not argue against Pir's reason: “[w]e will fight the evil spirit all night and if God wills, we will be victorious, before the dawn breaks... we will charm and seduce the spirit. For this, we need total privacy...Leave us alone... Prepare for the Holy Seduction” (Nadeem 2008, 177). It can also be observed that the villagers' compliance and obedience toward the Pir is signifying the voluntary conformity of the subordinate group; these villagers may believe that it is to their benefit to be in the position which has been allotted to them.

The Pir, as a spiritual guide, threatens the villagers with God's wrath in the following words: “Why should God give us rain? Do we deserve it? Look at your deeds. Which family can claim that it only lives on honest money, which tongue can claim that it only tells the truth, which heart can claim that it houses only on God? Repent, repent, you sinners!” (Nadeem 2008, 155). Throughout the play, the Pir preached that this world and the next world are two separate things; body and soul are adversaries to each other; spiritual contentment must be catered to before

physical satisfaction. He also boasts that it is because of him and his holy existence that this village is surviving. He is the ‘guardian angel’ and the sole protector of the village. Hence, he must be revered and followed as he is their guide to solve the abstract and transcendent mysteries of their lives that are above and beyond this corporal world.

In the interview “On religion”, Foucault does not deny the social, cultural and political reality of religion. He does not observe religion only as a matter of faith. Foucault’s works, as analysed by Jeremy Carrette, have discussed religion historically and culturally. He claims that, unlike Karl Marx, Foucault does not see religion as ideology, where religion works as an opium of the people to internalize and legitimize the marginalization and oppression being done by the elite group. Jeremy Carrette in *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* (1999), while reading and analysing the religious sub-texts of Foucault's oeuvre, asserts that Foucault does not categorically criticise or analyse religion in his works yet if subtexts of his works are brought to the surface then one can realize that he does:

raise profound questions about religion and bring Christianity from a marginal excess to a central strategic theme of his later work. He questions the hegemony of religious discourse and reveals its excluded Other; he identifies the hidden currents of confessional practice and uncovers the silenced body. Religion in Foucault’s work was no longer allowed to exist in a neutral space; it emerged and evolved in a power dynamic of the said and the unsaid. Religion was seen inseparably to exist in the social, cultural and political exclusions which attempt to control human experience through the values and ideals of religious belief. In unravelling these aspects of religious discourse Foucault contested the ‘spiritual’ in terms of the politics of experience, in terms of a corporality which challenges the very fabric of theological

dualism. (Carrette 1999, 129)

Foucault in his 1979 lecture “Pastoral Power and Political Reason” (published in *Religion and Culture*) uses the metaphor of shepherd-sheep while explaining pastoral power; the priest (Pir in the Pakistani context) is the shepherd who has been given the responsibility to protect and guide his sheep/subjects. It is the ‘duty’ of the shepherd to look after and guide his herd; to save them from dangerous lands; to take them to the good pastures with plenty of food; to gather them together; to make them reach their salvation; to protect and observe each member of the herd individually. The shepherd has to be devoted to his herd as the duty has been assigned by his god/deity for his salvation and achievement of grace. There are negative exceptions too; thereby, the wicked and cruel kings are compared to the bad shepherds who are not doing their duty. These bad shepherds “disperse the flock, let it die of thirst, shear it solely for profit’s sake” (*Religion and Culture* 1999, 137). All these characteristics have been only assigned to a shepherd/king by Christian pastorate; Foucault points out that these conditions were not witnessed in Greek or Roman political literature but are very much present and practised in ancient Oriental societies: Egypt, Assyria, Judaea as well as in Christian thought and institutions. Foucault also argues that these principles of Christian pastorate lay down the foundations of modern day governmentality (with alterations) in which the sovereign is controlling and monitoring the bodies and actions of the individuals. Subsequently, the individuals or subjects have internalized this control and surveillance so much that they have become their jailers.

The play *Black is My Robe* is replete with instances where the characters feel inadequate to take any decision in their lives as they are influenced by the law, Shariat and the Pir. When Maasi (match-maker of the village) offers Wasaya to exchange his first wife, Sundri, with an ox of Ditta to overcome the vicissitudes of life, Wasaya, in a state of perplexity, asks Maasi if that exchange is permissible by religious law or not. He isn’t bothered about Sundri’s reaction to such a proposal, but he is worried about the Shariat. A similar situation happened with Ditta when he was digging his land in search of a well. The Pir guides him to leave this futile effort of digging a well on his land and to “search for the well within” (Nadeem 2008, 173). He preaches to him to look for a “well inside the self, a fathomless



well of satisfaction and contentment. Dive into this well and your restless soul will find peace” (Nadeem 2008, 172). Those “words of profound wisdom” (Nadeem 2008, 173) have their mark on Ditta’s soul for which he seems ready to throw his shovel without realizing the ulterior motives of the Pir.

Shahid Nadeem has portrayed the Pir as a shepherd/master who controls the individual bodies of his subjects. In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, Michel Foucault in an answer to a question asked by the interviewer explains that as per Marxist schema the master is someone “who pronounces law and speaks the truth...the master who censors and forbids” and his power can “never to be thought of in other than negative terms: refusal, limitation, obstruction, censorship. Power is what says no...The manifestation of power takes on the pure form of ‘Thou shalt not’” (Foucault 1980, 139). Thus, according to this interpretation of power and master, Pir is the apt nominee of a such master who repudiates the chances of success and opulence of his subjects. The villagers work for Pir Khoi Shah and in return, they “get a little from his establishment” and they have to “survive on such low wages” that are “about a rupee for a bucket” of water (Nadeem 2008, 151). Moreover, the people are afraid of doing their own business such as when Opra gives Wasaya the suggestion of using his ox to fetch water from the nearby village and sell it in his village where the Pir owns the well whose water is “scarce and expensive” (Nadeem 2008, 152), Wasaya appears to be scared of taking this step out of Pir’s fear. The Pir exploits their fear of and devotion to the almighty by claiming that if they refuse him God will be angry with them and punish them with his wrath in this world and the next. He has attained their submission after portraying himself as their ‘protector’; he admits in front of Opra that he controls them, and owns them as if “they are the cattle (he) use(s) in water wheel” (Nadeem 2008, 178).

The Pir is not only seen as controlling the means of production but as a sovereign/shepherd, he is controlling the bodies of his subjects. For instance, he rapes Sohni, abducts a girl who was never found again, forcibly takes people’s cattle for the service of his shrine, grabs people’s land and makes it part of his shrine, maltreats the children so much that eventually, they die and when Wasaya asks for Pir’s blessings for his second wife and the ox (which may share his burden), the Pir answers “[a]nimals can’t share the burden of a man. He has to bear

it himself. Why don't you leave the animal at the shrine? That will make God happy and He may bless you with good fortune" (Nadeem 2008, 154). At this Wasaya replies that the ox is weak and "not worthy of the shrine service", against which the Pir argues that "Why are you looking for material support? Why don't you depend on the Almighty, and get support in this world and the next" (Nadeem 2008, 154). Wasaya seems reluctant in giving the ox for shrine services which forces the Pir to give him the charmed amulet. However, after some time he orders his goons to take care of Wasaya and his ox by saying "[t]his Wasaya is becoming too big for his boots" (Nadeem 2008, 155). The villagers consider Pir to be of great spiritual stature which is why they come to seek his blessings for their prosperity. The other reason for their docility is given in the text by the Pir's goons is that the people are neither fools nor cowards but they are weak. "They are not weak in fighting the living ones, but they can't fight the dead, the ones buried in the graves of the shrine" (Nadeem 2008, 181). The villagers have the potential to fight such fraudulent Pirs and their goons but they are afraid of disgracing the dead and most importantly they are concerned about their life hereafter as these sham spiritual leaders threaten them with the torments of hell. Shaista S. Sirajuddin critiques the Pir by elucidating that "Pir saeen holds the villagers in thrall through the dual mechanism of controlling their physical existence, owning as he does the only well in the village (which unsurprisingly is situated in his shrine) and selling water at a 'high price', and influencing their minds and hearts through superstition and cultural conditioning" (Sirajuddin 2008,xv). He has goons around him who threaten the powerless people of the village. "Extortion from the shopkeepers by the henchmen of the Pir was not unusual". (Nadeem 2008, 156) With the help of his goons, the Pir kills Wasaya's ox by giving it something poisonous and the naïve people think that it happens because Wasaya has disobeyed the Pir.

To sum up the discussion on pastoral/religious power, it is reiterated that in this type of power the shepherd/king (in this play's context the Pir) is assigned a very complex and difficult duty to take care of the herd under his supervision. He is responsible for their 'body' and 'soul'; the shepherd of men has to instruct and guide the flock of men; he has to sacrifice his 'self' to protect the 'self' of his men and take them to the point of salvation which would ultimately result in his salvation. The shepherd must work on the detail of the individual body in terms of

religious rituals and practices to save their souls and fulfil his promise of eternal grace in the next world. Therefore, religious power is both worldly power and one directed towards the other world because “that other world is the most important of all” (Foucault 1977, a141). The Pir of the play is not the perfect example of such a good shepherd because he is wicked and his priority is his benefit. Hence, he is manipulating the authorities bestowed to him and not fulfilling the divine duty that has been assigned to him by religious/pastoral thought and institutions.

### **Counter-Force of Religious Power:**

Much of Foucault’s work is concerned with analysing power, its mechanics and its relation with individuals and institutions. While theorizing power in *History of Sexuality 1*, Foucault’s focus is on the effects of various institutions on individuals and the role those individuals play by affirming or resisting those effects. His works critically analyse the notion that power is repressive or oppressive for powerless individuals. He never advocates that power could be held by individuals or institutions, however, he argues that power is something that is found in the relations between these individuals and institutions. Rather than viewing power as something constraining, he proposes that “power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault 1978, 93). He furthers his analytics of power and states that “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault 1978, 95) and there are multiple points of resistance “these points play the role of adversary, target, support or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network” (Foucault 1978,95). Sara Mills in *Michel Foucault* elaborates Foucault’s notion of resistance by articulating that power is not oppressive or repressive; instead, it is productive in a way that it gives “rise to new forms of behaviour” (Mills2003, 33). The dichotomy of body and soul, physical and spiritual, this world and the world hereafter presented by the pastoral/religious power is resisted by Opra, the ‘other’ in the play. Opra has been portrayed as an adversary to the Pir by Shahid Nadeem. His name is not there in the ‘List of Characters’ but has been commented upon in ‘Production Notes’ where Nadeem wrote: “Opra, the outsider, is a black-robed man full of charisma and mystery. He is also the *agent provocateur* who inspires the villagers to stand up for

their rights. Villagers normally distrust outsiders (opras)” (Nadeem 2008, 150). Opra’s identity is not revealed by the author as he’s been “enigmatically cryptic in his replies to direct questions about his identity” (Sirajuddin 2008, xvii). He mixes up well with the villagers, he engages with them in his unique blend of “mystical aphorisms” and “analytical clarity” to reveal the truth to them. Opra is the “flawed yet mysteriously charismatic ‘stranger’, clad in black, becomes the instigator of the ‘peoples’ revolt against the feudal tyranny of the Pir and his cohorts...he suggests an androgeneity which makes him humanely responsive to the predicaments of men and women alike” (Sirajuddin 2008, xvi).

Opra’s first appearance with Wasaya in scene 1 highlights the author’s commitment to the dire need for social change. At the very beginning of the play, the audience has been revealed to the socio-economic and spiritual plight of the villagers by the narrators. Soon after this introduction to the complicated condition of the villagers, Nadeem proposed a solution through Opra. Opra advises Wasaya to start his own business with the help of his ox to overcome the economic disparity. Unlike that bogus Pir, Opra gives him practical advice instead of looking and peeping into the depths of the soul to find some abstract spiritual contentment.

The Pastoral Power that has been mentioned above concerning the shepherd/sheep has its resisting and counter force. Foucault in that same lecture (in which he compares Christian pastoral power with Greek and Roman political structures) suggests that in Christian Pastorate the shepherd is responsible for his and his flock’s salvation; he has to be well aware of the bodily needs as well as the spiritual needs of the herd, but this duty of a shepherd is very complicated as it is impossible that one man/shepherd can look after and care about each individual of his herd and at the same time know about the sins and virtues of each member of the flock. This complexity has been raised by the resisting element inherent in the structures of power, which questions the devotedness, responsibility and miraculous abilities of the shepherd. This is argued by Carrette as “the shepherd – flock relationship is “only one aspect of the multiple, complex, and permanent relationships between God and men” and that before Christianity there was no specific pastoral institution (Carrette 2013, 375). This counterforce identifies that it is absolutely difficult for one individual or a few individuals to be responsible for so many others in all aspects. One person cannot be a baker or a peasant or a

doctor or a pedagogue at a time for his flock of men; hence, these are individual expertise for different individuals. If these notions of pastoral power and its counterforce are not considered farfetched then it could be interpreted that Pir is a representative of pastoral power where he is playing the wicked shepherd who is putting the herd in danger and misleading them for his benefit; on the contrary, Opra stands for the counterforce who questions the impracticality of the pastoral power by making the individual subjects realize that they have to differentiate between reason and unreason.

In scene 5 when Opra consoles Ditta on the loss of his wife, he meets Sundri and tells her that he is a stranger from the outside but inside he is one of them, and he understands that she is happy at the death of Wasaya's ox. Opra claims that he knows everything for which Sundri asks him about the murderer of the ox. Opra bluntly replies that the Pir killed it; but Sundri in her devotion to the Pir rejects this claim as a lie and says "Pir saeen is the patron of the village" (Nadeem 2008, 166). Opra combatively states that he is "not the patron but the plunderer. Tell me have you ever benefited from his blessings? You never got a child in spite of all the blessings". (Nadeem 2008, 166). The only reason this blindfolded follower of the Pir could give is: "that was my misfortune" (Nadeem 2008, 166). At this moment Opra hits the shackles of her futile faith hard and tries to put reason in her mind with these words: "that is the point. If he fails, you blame yourself. If something happens you credit him" (Nadeem 2008, 166). It is not an easy task for Opra to show the villagers the true colours of their sham spiritual leader. Consequently, he has been entitled as an "infidel".

In the very next scene when Maasi proposes the bartering of Sundri with an ox and the question of Shariat is silenced with the idea that "poor Shariat has nothing to do with it" (Nadeem 2008, 168), it was Opra who took side with Sundri and defended her by raising simple questions: "where can she go? Her parents are no more. Who should she share her grief with?" (Nadeem 2008, 169). Opra the "infidel" and the "non-believer" wants the villagers to believe in themselves because "belief is a strong force" (Nadeem 2008, 171). He motivates and encourages Ditta and Sundri (now wife of Ditta) to go on with their struggle and quest to find a well on their barren land. This quest is not only for personal gain or personal liberation since all the villagers will be benefited from the sweet, pure and

inexpensive water of this well. After the Pir's disincentive oratory, Opra inspires Ditta with these words: "Keep digging, don't throw away the shovel. Your goal is very near... I know your search is linked to the dreams of the whole village. The thirsty and parched people are waiting for you to discover that well. They believe in you. Don't stop now" (Nadeem 2008, 173). The belief or faith which Opra is trying to instil in the villagers is contrary to the abstract and transcendent promises of the next world made by the Pir. He wants them to think and act for themselves to improve their present living conditions. It is not that he wants to replace the Pir and see the villagers following him instead of that hypocrite and fake spiritual leader. He maintains his "elusiveness and a quietly stated freedom" (Sirajuddin 2008, xvii).

The dichotomy or the binary of body and soul, physical and spiritual which has been created by the Pir is dismantled by Opra in the play. He has made Ditta realize that "the well within is not separate from the well outside. The well of your soul is already full of your faith and belief. And that helps you in your search for the well outside... don't stop your search now" (Nadeem 2008, 173). He questions the Pir's advice of searching the well inside by counter-arguing that if the Pir is such a well-wisher and protector of the villagers why couldn't he free the well he owned "rather than advising others to dive deep in the well of the soul" (Nadeem 2008, 173). Opra, realistically and practically, explains to Ditta that "spiritual satisfaction is important but one needs water, air, and food to survive. You can make your land green by faith alone. You can't feed hungry people by sermons. And you can't quench your thirst by amulets and blessings" (Nadeem 2008, 174). After this analytical reasoning, he straightforwardly instructs Ditta: "Don't fall into the Pir's trap. He wants people to remain dependent on him. He wants to control them physically and spiritually" (Nadeem 2008, 174).

After a certain period, the people of Sukka Pind start believing Opra and retaliating against the hegemony of the fake spirituality of the Pir. This divergence from the villagers has not been expected by the Pir; he is shocked that his followers have started consulting Opra and most importantly they have started taking responsibility for their own lives and heading toward a better direction. This is an intolerable situation for the Pir and out of frenzy, he orders his goons to get all the information about "fugitive" Opra so that he could defame him and get back

his followers again. But this does not happen; people did not believe any of the allegations put forward by the Pir against Opra rather they unmasked their sham spiritual leader. The Pir wants to blame Opra for killing Ditta (which he did with the help of his goons) but Reshma, the bangle seller of the village, narrates the whole scene as she is the sole eye-witness of the murder. The Pir does not stop here; he tries his final resort which is to threaten them with his 'super powers' but the villagers have opened the blindfold of false spirituality from their eyes. They are now able to see, think and reason; and with their collective effort, they throw the Pir and his goons out of the village.

Power has resistance inherent in its construction. Where there is power, there is resistance; this power could be of any type: be it political power or religious/pastoral power. Here in *Black is My Robe* it has been observed that the pastoral power, even though it has many paradoxes and complications in its structures, is resisted by its counterforce. The representatives of these two different schools of thought: the Pir and Opra, are adversaries to each other. The Pir resists Opra and Opra resists the Pir and the war between these two opposing forces proves productive for the villagers of Sukka Pind as in the "Epilogue" the narrator exclaims that "the village became a different village altogether" (Nadeem 2008, 185). Power has not been seen as static or repressive in the play. The characters are mere agents of power; they are only exercising it as the power is coming from the discourse.

### **Discourse of Power:**

In the model of pastoral/religious power mentioned above, religious practices and traditions are among those means through which power is exercised. The villagers of Sukka Pind are religiously and culturally conditioned to practice certain rituals and traditions as directed by the Pir, their spiritual leader. The last statement of the previous section suggests that power works through discourse; this could mean that the rituals and practices of the villagers are part of the discourse. In a January 1976 lecture published in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, Foucault explains:

...in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power

cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.

(Foucault 1980, 93)

Hence, the power relations that are shared by the villagers and the Pir are only manifested with the help of a discourse. Discourse is not only the utterance of words, it can be understood in terms of actions and words at the same time. Discourses are not only the words that are uttered or written on the page; in fact, they are inscribed in activities, written on bodies and most importantly acted out by bodies as happened in the play under discussion.

Sara Mills, while summarizing Foucault's notion of discourse, states that in *Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault has "used 'discourse' to refer to 'the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements'" (Mills 2003,53). She elaborates that by "the general domain of all statements", Foucault meant all utterances and statements that have been made, that are meaningful and that have some effect; on the other hand, by "an individualizable group of statements" (53) he meant groups of utterances, for instance, the scientific discourse, the criminal discourse, discourse of oppression or the discourse of resistance. Mills continues her explanation by stating that Foucault also "used the term discourse to refer to 'regulated practices that account for a number of statements', that is the unwritten rules and structures which produce particular utterances and statements" (53). For example, there are no written rules about showing reverence and devotion toward a spiritual leader (the Pir in our context); yet all the devotees know how to show respect to that 'exalted personality'. These "regulated sets of statements" follow certain rules that allow



the “circulation and distribution” of certain utterances and statements and restrict others. This idea of restriction and exclusion of certain utterances is rudimentary in understanding Foucault’s analysis of discourse. For instance, in *Black is My Robe*, Opra’s statements and utterances against the Pir are not accepted by his devotees and the Pir as well. He has been labelled as “insane”, “infidel”, “fugitive” and a “non-believer”.

In *The Order of Discourse* (1970), Foucault illustrates the procedures that restrict certain discourses and permit others; he proposes three procedures: taboo, the distinction between the sane and the insane and the distinction between true and false. The first procedure through which certain statements are restricted come under the category of taboo; thereby it is not permissible to talk about taboos: sexuality, death or incest. The second point of exclusion is the distinction between the speech of the sane and the insane. The statements and the utterances of somebody who is taken as insane would not be accepted. For instance, in the play, there are many occasions where Opra’s statements are rejected by his listeners as the statements are coming from an insane person. The third point of exclusion is the distinction between true and false utterances. As earlier, Opra does not have a position of power and he lacks authority, so all his claims against the Pir are dismissed by his followers.

It has been established above that power is a system of relations; it is a war of opposing forces. It manifests itself through discourse; since power is a war of forces then there is a war between discourses: the discourse of oppression/repression versus the discourse of resistance. Hence, discourse is both the tool of oppression and resistance. The play, *Black is My Robe*, presents two dominant discourses of two powers/forces contesting each other: one is the discourse of the Pir and the other is the discourse of the Pir’s adversary, Opra. The Pir exercises his power by dominating the bodies of the villagers as his subjects. The first appearance of the Pir in the play is very crucial to understand the dominance of the villagers. “*The Pir comes in a procession. The villagers seek his blessings one by one*” (Nadeem 2008, 153). Later the audience is told by the narrators that the villagers are seen requesting and pleading for the charmed amulets by the Pir for their daughter’s marriage, for the jobs of their sons, for the fertility of their wives and also for the health of their animals. The Pir is seen

faking trances and falsely chanting holy words on the amulets to control the submission of his followers. As a result, the “*people sing the praise of the Pir in the traditional qawwali form... (and they) chant in frenzy*” (Nadeem 2008, 155). Every time the Pir enters the stage with “*fanfare*”, the villagers pay him respect and serve him well which symbolizes their devotion to the Pir and their subjectification. They wear the charmed amulets on their bodies given by their Pir Saeen and drink the charmed holy water distributed from Pir Saeen’s well which signifies the power of Pir’s dominant discourse. Pir’s powerful discourse is not challenged because it is the only knowledge or truth the villagers have; but as soon as they have the other discourse challenging Pir’s power, their truth changes. For a statement or utterance to be established as a fact or truth, another equally valid utterance has to be dismissed and rejected. This happens in the play where initially Opra’s truth is rejected by the Pir and his devotees and later Pir’s truth is dismissed by Opra and the villagers. It is not that these discourses have power in themselves, instead, they are the means through which power relations are expressed and constructed. These power relations create discourses, which play the role of “regimes of truth” as termed by Foucault. Remaining within such a regime makes it difficult to agree to take any other truth than that which is given by the dominant discourse. This is what happens with the villagers of Sukka Pind; they neglect Opra. They consider him an “infidel”, “non-believer” and “fugitive”. It is nearly impossible for them to question the integrity and honesty of their Pir Saeen. That is why they title him “saeen”; in Seraiki, it is a “title of respect for an exalted personality” (Nadeem 2008, 186). Since this discourse of oppression has its contesting discourse of resistance, so Opra’s analytical and critical questions about the Pir make them think about the Pir’s reality. The devotees who used to pay respect to their saviour and protector have started questioning his acts. They have stopped relying on the sole holy well of the Pir. It is not that the villagers are blind towards the trickery and wrongdoings of the Pir; but because they could not muster up the courage which is needed to throw the Pir from his high and holy pedestal. With the presence of Opra and his interaction with the villagers, it has been witnessed that the villagers' attitudes and perceptions toward Pir start changing. For instance, in scene 5 the shopkeeper in front of the shrine hopelessly declares that the villagers can’t “escape the wrath of the Pir” if they disobey him. Then Wasaya, Ditta and Sundri as motivated and entrusted with confidence and courage

by Opra challenge the hegemony of the Pir. Ditta stays focused on his quest for the well which he ultimately achieved for his good and also for the good of the villagers. Sundri backs Ditta with the same enthusiasm and positive energy that is required to fulfil the task. Wasaya does not give up by leaving his ox at the Pir's shrine for his services; he argues with him and wins the battle for time being. Later in the play, the Pir kills that ox with his poisonous 'holy medicine'.

The Pir is not at peace after seeing that "new people were having more faith in Opra than in their local Pir" (Nadeem 2008, 175). His power has been challenged and resisted by Opra in the play. It has been seen that almost by the end of the play the devotees of the Pir blatantly and boldly accuse him of killing and abducting their loved ones. Sundri who once claimed that "Pir saeen is the protector of village" angrily charges the Pir in public with the murder of her husband, Ditta. Wasaya, who initially considered the Pir the fate of his village and sought his blessing in getting a son and a healthy ox, blames the Pir for poisoning his ox so that his water-selling business could not flourish. Sohni, who has visited the Pir in her hatred of Sundri and also to seek blessings to bear a son, publicly reports that the Pir has raped her in the name of "holy seduction" and he's an "evil man, not a spiritual man" (Nadeem 2008, 184).

It has been observed that the resistance shown by the villagers has opened productive avenues for them. Wasaya becomes successful in his quest, the villagers have unrestricted access to their well and Sohni bears a son. They get rid of the corrupt, cruel and fraud pir who uses his power to subjugate them. Therefore, power, whether it is religious or political, does not appear to be negative, constraining or repressing rather it seems to be productive, providing new space for different and new forms of behaviours and discourses that are excluded or restricted in the dominant behaviours and discourses of the social body.

### **Conclusion:**

To conclude, it is reiterated that the traditional concept of power i.e., power is coercive, negative, oppressive and violent as explained by many Marxist and Feminist theorists have been challenged and dismantled. On the contrary, power is something positive and productive which provides opportunities for the

oppressed individuals to create new avenues for themselves by resisting this power. Hence, resistance is inherent in the mechanics of power; any power without resistance is not power but a mere manifestation of coercion and constraint. It is observed that the Pir who represents the repressive and oppressive form of religious power is challenged and resisted by its counterpart. Nadeem has portrayed Opra as a contesting force against the Pir. The Pir, as a religious leader and feudal lord, makes utmost efforts to control and subjugate the villagers; but his efforts are contested by the reason presented by Opra. Following Opra's ideals, the villagers achieve their freedom from the cruel and oppressive Pir.

Power is not any commodity or material thing in the hands of individuals and institutions; on the other hand, it is only exercised or experienced by them by the means of force relations. This relationship is not the relationship of the oppressor and the oppressed, since the power that has been exercised by a group is challenged and resisted by the other group and in this struggle, the other group finds new and productive spaces for itself. Lastly, this study also suggests that discourse ascribes power to individuals and institutions which is dismantled or challenged by another discourse which is considered peripheral. The powerful discourse creates spaces for this other discourse to emerge and completes this chain-like system where one is indispensable for the other.

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