

**ART IN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: HANNAH SHAH'S *THE IMAM'S DAUGHTER*  
AND WARIS DIRIE'S *DESERT DAWN***

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## **DECLARATION**

This project is my original work and has not been presented for award of a degree in any other university.

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### **Supervisor's declaration**

This project has been submitted for examination with our approval as University Supervisors.

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## **DEDICATION**

To my children, Jesse and Abigail.

You give me the joy of motherhood.

To my parents, Mr and Mrs G. K. Munga

You are a spring of my inspiration in my life.

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## ABSTRACT

The autobiography portrays literary communicative features which show its worth as a creative work. It is on this ground that this study attempts a literary inquiry into Hannah Shah's *The Imam's Daughter* and Waris Dirie's *Desert Dawn* to discuss artistry. This study shows how Shah's and Dirie's narratives employ various strategies to craft the stories of their challenging childhood to adulthood. The study focuses on the literary communicative practices that are thematically organised around the four elements of setting, story, plot and characterization which are critical features in the creation of a text. Shah and Dirie uses them aesthetically and creatively to convey and maintain information and coherence. The two authors maintain consistency of intention, a great will to select, control, organize and use artistic choices effectively. Their unique setting and explicit representation of varied opinions drive the understanding of social cultural backgrounds of the authors which render them worth studying. The study compares how the two autobiographical texts use literary artistic choices to effectively communicate their experiences and opinions. It is on this strength that this study attempts a literary inquiry into Dirie's *Desert Dawn* and Shah's *The Imam's Daughter* to discuss artistry.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Writers in autobiography works seek to reconstruct their personal development and experiences within a given period in a given social cultural context. The individuals seek to share their innermost feelings with the public at a juncture or after overcoming challenges and achieving extraordinary success in life. In their narratives, they demonstrate use of artistry to depict their life experiences creatively and aesthetically. This study compares two autobiographies, *The Imam's Daughter* by Hannah Shah and *Desert Dawn* by Wares Dirie in order to understand how the narrators use relatively similar artistic choices to narrate their life stories as an act of relieving their souls and thus simultaneously validating their life's contributions to society.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* argue that the narrators in their autobiographical acts claim the “authority of experience” both explicitly and implicitly (29). This is because in an autobiography, the author is the narrator as well as the protagonist. Therefore, the narrator owns the story since he has the authority of the story. The readers have to trust the narrator who experienced the incidents. It is through the elements of setting, story, plot and characterization that this study examines how Dirie and Shah own their stories being both narrators and protagonists.



Shah writes about her painful experiences by taking the readers on a journey back to her childhood to explore her status as a daughter of an Imam and her community. She narrates the events that shaped and influenced her life. Through her narratives, we become aware that her autobiography is based on recollection of life experiences and associations, which enable the readers, paint a vivid picture of most experiences of her life. Dirie gives an account of her life as an adult by use of flashbacks to convey information regarding her experiences. She gives us an idea of her intention for doing certain things in her present life.

The necessity of writing about one's life arises from the sense of individuality. Roy Pascal in analyzing *Design and Truth in Autobiography* argues that, "Autobiography is then interplay, collusion between past and present; its significance is indeed more the revelation of the present situation than the covering of the past" (183). By analyzing Pascal, this study provides information about how literary works use artistry to inform us about how the various experiences and incidents of the narrator's lives are integrated.

Shah is a British woman of Pakistani Muslim parentage. At the age of 16, she finds out about her father's plan for an arranged marriage in Pakistan and escapes to save herself from it. Away from her home, she finds acceptance through a teacher who befriends her. It is through her teacher's church, that she discovers faith in Christ and she decides to be baptised. After she converts to Christianity, her own people plan to kill her in what is called "honour killing" and vow to track her. In her autobiography, she recounts her experience as a daughter of an Imam.

She narrates about her childhood ordeal of both physical and sexual abuse by her father and this is what leads her to escape from a forced marriage. She converts from Islam to Christianity although she is aware that Apostasy is a sin punishable by death.

Dirie is born in 1965 and brought up in Galkayo, Somalia to a traditional family of tribal desert nomads. She tells how she endured female circumcision at the age of five and runs away at the age of thirteen through the desert in order to escape an arranged marriage. After living with various family members in Mogadishu, she travels to England with her uncle and works as a house cleaner for them for four years. She narrates her experiences of freeing from one state to another as she tries to look for “greener pastures.” Life becomes hard in America because of cultural differences she has with her fiancé, Dana. Having lost zeal for life, she decides to take a journey back home to reconcile with herself and her family. Although Dirie has written, other books such as *Desert Flower* (1998), *Desert Children* (2005) and *Letter to My Mother* (2007), the *Desert Dawn* stands out as unique work of artistic integrity and coherence.

Jennifer Muchiri, while discussing artistry in autobiography, observes that autobiographers employ deliberate aesthetic craft when telling their stories. She says when studying the autobiography as a literary form, we consider aspects of art such as the themes, the setting, the story, the plot and characterization. She further observes that literary writers select their narrators deliberately depending on what and how the writers wish to communicate to readers.

This is important to this study since it focuses on Shah and Dirie's treatment of their story, the issues they tackle, the plot of their narrative, the setting and characterization of their story in order to create unity and craft their narrative as a whole.

This study examines and compares artistic strategies in Shah's *The Imam's Daughter* and Dirie's *Desert Dawn*. Artistic strategies are the techniques or methods employed by the authors in a narrative in order to communicate their message effectively. In this context, they are the setting, the story, the plot and characterization.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Autobiographic works are recognized as unique forms of contemporary literary genre that express human experiences within acceptable and specific frames of reference. The shared frames of reference in respect to literary works are not only restricted to the setting, the story, dramatic conflict in plot designs, or characterization but are also concerned with questions of relevance, quality of narrative and conformity with recognized artistic creativity. In the case of *Desert Dawn* by Dirie and *The Imam's Daughter* by Shah, the two autobiographic works share similarities in expressing their human experiences. The study is concerned with the extent to which their similar cultural and religious backgrounds are presented through artistic strategies and communicative effectiveness.

The study sought to compare and contrast the way artistry is represented in autobiographical writings in Dirie's *Desert Dawn* and Shah's *The Imam's Daughter*.

There is no comparative study that has been done on artistry based on the two books. However, studies have been done on the themes of religion, circumcision and portrayal of Muslim women, but not on the artistic strategies through which the writers present these themes. This study is significant because it allows us to examine autobiographic works, which represent a class of unique texts with specific characteristics in which the writers maintain consistency of intention and use of aspects of art effectively.

### **1.3 Objectives**

The study aims to realize the following objectives:

- i. Identify the artistic strategies in Shah and Dirie's autobiographies.
- ii. Compare the artistic strategies that Shah and Dirie employ in their autobiographies.
- iii. Evaluate the communicative effectiveness of the artistic strategies.

### **1.4 Hypotheses**

This study is guided by the following hypotheses:

- i. Shah and Dirie employ artistic strategies in their autobiographies.
- ii. As autobiographies, they use similar artistic strategies, though differently, thereby making the works comparable.
- iii. Communicative effectiveness in both autobiographies is achieved through unities of setting, story, plot and characterization.

### **1.5 Justification of the study**

This study falls within autobiographic artistry which is concerned with literary works in which the authors are the main characters in depicting their life experiences creatively. In their effort to conform with recognized frames of reference in respect to artistic literary works, they construct their works in conformity with similar strategies that literary works employ. In recognition of this premise, this study assesses the artistic strategies and compares the communicative effectiveness of the authors.

Literary critics have paid scholarly attention to thematic concerns raised by the authors but have paid little attention to artistry in most autobiographic works. Limited research on artistry has been done on *The Imam's Daughter* and *Desert Dawn* hence the need to examine how Shah and Dirie through the literary aspect of art, execute their purposes in narratives of their life experiences. The two books are comparable because they share the same religious, socio- cultural backgrounds, therefore, this study focuses on analysing aspect of art and how the themes are presented.

No literary researcher has undertaken a comparative study on artistic strategies on the two autobiographies that necessitate analysis on these literary aspects. However, critics of *The Imam's Daughter* for instance, Ayaan Hirsi Ali concentrates on the theme of the plight of a Muslim woman in the Arab world. Critics like Bracanto Sabrina in discussion of *Desert Dawn* focuses on the theme of female circumcision, which is a theme recurrent in her works.

These scholars ignore the creativity and artistry in as far as telling their personal stories is concerned which is part of autobiography that the authors employ in order to recreate past events and put them in a narrative form. Muchiri, in *Women's Autobiography: Voices from Independent Kenya* observes that, autobiographers employ literary devices to reconstruct their life stories, which render them worth studying in an attempt to unearth not only the motives for writing, but also their intentions and vision as well.

The study is significant and justified as it provides a platform for discussion and understanding the relationship between aesthetic writing and wider culture. This understanding may generate background information that help shape the story while providing details about characters and plots from new perspectives.

## **1.6 Literature Review**

In this section, the study reviews the literature on critical works in articles, book reviews, e-journals, essays and dissertations on texts under study.

Duane Alexander Miller in *The Imam's Daughter: My Desperate Flight to Freedom* argues that, much of Shah's autobiography reveals a great deal about the honour-shame culture of Pakistani Muslims and adds that the autobiography reveals the sexual abuse she suffered. Miller tackles the theme of female abuse in Pakistani Islamic family from the perspective of Shah's personal story. This study goes further to identify artistic strategies she has used to bring out the thematic concerns such as sexual abuse experiences among others such as torture and trauma.

Miller observes that, Shah wrote her autobiography to create public awareness about the harsh realities that is going on inside Muslim communities throughout England. She adds that in school, everyone studies all the religions, but negative attribute is mentioned to create “tolerance for diversity”. Miller’s focus is on harsh realities facing Muslims in England. This study examines the literary artistic creativity in addressing the concerns raised by the writers under study, focusing on the setting, the story, the plot and characterization but not the theme of Islamic religion in England.

Emma Fredriksson in, *Mission Possible: A Study of Autobiography Treating Difficult Childhood* comments about Dirie’s difficult times and concludes that she went through circumcision and that experience made her a strong woman. Fredriksson further observes how the author uses her writing as a therapy and concurs with Ibid that “Writing is private, a communication with the self, until you decide to share it usually after solitary reflective rereading. It can be destroyed unshared, if necessary even with yourself. Once something has been said and heard, it can never be unsaid” (7). I agree with what Fredriksson observes because an autobiography is one of the avenues where people relief their past harsh experiences by sharing with the public. It therefore acts as a therapy. He does not focus on how the writer crafts her story literary artistic creativity. This study goes further to evaluate the effectiveness of the aspects of art to bring out coherence of literary text and in understanding Dirie’s expression of her identity.

Frederique Vande Poel-Knottnerus in *Quarterly Journal of Ideology* reviews Dirie's theme of female genital mutilation as a social ritual. He focuses on the role rituals play in social life and the processes by which ritualization occurs and leads to the formation of social structures. The review is valuable to this research because it enable us to find out how these themes are created then re-membered.

Brancato Sabrina in "*Afro European Literature(s): A New Discursive Category?*" *Research in African Literatures* reviews states, "It feeds a Western white readership that is eager for third-world victim stories to generate worldwide public debate around female genital mutilation" (4). Brancato attempts to show that stories of writers of African descent in Diaspora tend to attract Western readers because of emotive issues like female genital mutilation. Western white readership to some extent while reading narratives of such nature focuses on female genital mutilation, as they perceive it 'barbaric' and retrogressive. This study focuses on how these themes are presented to portray Dirie that we see in her texts through autobiographical artistry.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's, *The Caged Virgin* gives an account of the way Islam discriminates against women especially in education, sexual violence against women, arranged marriages and female genital mutilation. Ayaan's view of Islam is very negative as she narrates her life events. Her central concern is a list of points a Muslim woman should do before fleeing from oppressive family life and the plight of a woman in Muslim community.



The thematic concerns, which she discusses, are important in this study because Dirie and Shah share the same socio-cultural experiences; therefore, we examine how the artistic strategies bring out the themes to create unity of coherence in the literary texts under study.

According to Jackie Sydney in *Woman Hero*, Dirie is a voice to the voiceless and a survivor of horrific pain and trauma of female genital mutilation. She traces her journey from her childhood in Somali to Western countries where she is able to talk freely about cultural and Islamic issues. Her concern is about her achievements from a victim of female genital mutilation to a United Nation Ambassador. Her observation is a compilation of a brief life of Dirie's achievement. This study goes further to examine other thematic concerns through examining the setting, the story, plot structuring, and characterization.

Bracanto comments about Afro-European Literature and states, "texts produced by Afrosporic authors in Europe is characterized by plurality of the languages used such as the author's African heritages and of their European locations which adds to the specificities of individual experience" (45). Bracanto's argument is valid given that an author like Dirie tends to use English as well as words from her Somali language to put a point across. However, Sabrina's concern is about the need to trace commonalities and differences of Afrosporic literary production in different European contexts. The observation enables this study, through literary artistic creativity in autobiography, create a gripping narrative and articulate the themes raised by the writer.

A review by Kirkus studies about Shah's life after she escapes from her father who is an Imam and the perpetrator of her abuse. He portrays him as insensitive and cruel. He concentrates on themes of fear, terror, religion and portrays Shah as a resilient character who escapes the ordeal of her father. Since he concerns himself with these themes, this study is intended to find out how these themes are presented to portray Shah and Dirie in the texts under study through autobiographical artistry.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali in *Infidel: My Journey from Somali to the West* discusses the ordeal of female genital mutilation in relation to what Dirie experiences. She focuses on the theme of Islamic religion and its practices. Ayaan recounts the evolution of her extraordinary resolve to fight injustices done in the name of religion. The argument is valuable to this research because it justifies a search for better understanding of how theme is created and re-membered to fall in an autobiographical category.

In *Mediated Plot in the Construct of the Theme of struggle in Nelson Mandela's Autobiography: Long Walk to Freedom*, Jairus Omuteche observes that "the autobiography not only records the events of a changing society at a particular time in history but also notes events which affect the autobiographer himself or herself" (40). From Omuteche's observation the events around the society the writer emerges, forms part of the autobiographer's life story. His observation is significant for the analysis of the two texts under study in order to realize how events around the author's social life are crafted in a narrative and how they artistically reveal their life experiences.

Williams, Aisha in her dissertation observes in Maya Angelou's, *Why the Caged Bird Sings* by stating that Maya gave a compelling account of her life of poverty, racism, sexual assault at the age of eight years. She says Maya's experiences did not deter her from becoming a successful writer, actor and activist despite her experiences. William compares the story of Dirie with Maya and says that both women use their autobiographies as a therapy to tell their stories instead of traditional mental health systems. This observation is important in the study because it helps in understanding the functions and motives of writing an autobiography. It discusses how the narrators use aspects of art in autobiography to create an enthralling narrative.

Henry Indangasi in "The Autobiographical Impulses in African and African American Literature" considers the literariness in autobiographical writings. He notes that an autobiography does not just retell the writer's life story but seeks to bring out a higher truth using a degree of creativity. He says autobiographer "selects re-organizes, rearranges and reshapes the facts of life" (144) using literary features like suspense", flashbacks, parallelism" (115). This observation is important because the literary features like the setting, story, plot and characterization represent and are part of creative artistry that the authors use to craft their stories.

Shah and Dirie have not received much critical appraisal, few critics have concentrated on thematic concerns raised by the authors but limited research has been done on artistry.

My literature review shows that there is a literary gap that needs to be filled in studying autobiographical artistry which has not been done on the two books jointly in examining how the narrators creatively craft their life experiences. This study may be used as a trigger to other studies on the same texts.

### **1.7 Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by the theory of autobiography, which refers to the study of the autobiography that illuminates the study of self-writing and the issues that arise in the study of this mode of writing. It highlights the connection between historical progresses with growth in human individuality and separates autobiography from forms of history writing. The early proponents of the theory of autobiography are Dilthey, Misch, Gusdorf and Pascal. It is largely associated with Wilhelm Dilthey, who sees human sciences as grounded in the understanding of human life and experiences. In his studies, he indicates that biography and autobiography are both central in the discipline of human sciences. Thus, experience becomes a major aspect of autobiographical criticism since self-writing is a reflection of one's life. This proposition gives me the basis upon which to examine the life experiences of Shah in *The Imam's Daughter* and Dirie in *Desert Dawn*.

A scholar of autobiographical theory, Roy Pascal, whose view in *Design and Truth in Autobiography* points to aesthetic approaches to the autobiography. He observes that it is through intensive study of the art of autobiography that one can establish the element of truth in autobiographical writing.

He views the autobiography as a strategy for creating the illusion of unity in a work of art despite the fragments of identity. He goes to an extensive study of the art of autobiography in an attempt to ascertain the elements of truth in autobiographical works. The idea of truth in an autobiography is largely contributed to by manner in which the writer orders his/her stories to form one whole narrative. We thus find this assertion important in enabling us to examine the extent to which Shah and Dirie create the idea of coherence and unity in the two texts.

George Gusdorf contributes to autobiographical criticism by relating autobiographical writing to the Christian context where the souls find itself through communion with God. He is mainly concerned with growth and development of man's self-awareness, which is the main concern in this study whereby the narrators express their exploration and understanding of themselves overtime.

George Misch, Dilthey's student contributes to autobiographical criticism by placing the author-subject identity as central to autobiographical theory since it provides essential unity in the text. The unity of the author and subject in autobiographical writings binds all autobiographies because the autobiographer is an I-narrator who narrates as an observer and protagonist of the narrative. Shah and Dirie are both observers and protagonist narrating the self that unite their texts to an organic whole.

Laura Marcus, in her 'Introduction to *Auto/biography Discourse*, discusses tenets of autobiography that helps one distinguish an autobiographical work from other literary works. One of the main tenets is the concept intentions, which is the motive for writing the autobiography. This concept helps in understanding artistry in autobiographical text. The first aim of the writer is remember, orders and re-organises his memory to bring the narrative to a cohesion that communicate the intended motive. The study examines Shah and Dirie's texts in terms of how their intentions and motives are achieved.

Another tenet Marcus discusses is the concept of compulsion to write about the self. The autobiographer is driven by an inner compulsion to write the self and this compulsion is not driven by mercenary motives. Through self-narration the narrator reveals to the reader directly or indirectly the motive of narration. It is through this observation that we discover Shah and Dirie's self-narration that reveal their growth by going back in time and narrating in retrospection.

A significant tenet of the theory of autobiography is the autobiographical truth. The representation of truth is one of the concerns of the theory of autobiography. It can only be achieved through studying the reliability and credibility of the autobiographer's testimony. This principle will help in discovering the communicative effectiveness of the writers.

The theory of autobiography is useful in this study in examining how Shah and Dirie create their narratives in the two autobiographical texts under study. The crafting of the narratives is made possible by the way Shah and Dirie employ autobiographical artistry which is the main focus of this study.

### **1.8 Methodology**

The study begins with a comprehensive reading of the texts under study to form an informed base for research. We draw from the arguments of other critics who have undertaken studies on this mode of writing to provide the study with a case of scholarly penetration and argumentation.

The principles of the theory of autobiography guided our analysis of aspects of art in the selected texts. The research is approached through textual analysis because this approach appreciates the literary text as an aesthetic craft with the sense of its importance. The theory of autobiography has enabled us appreciate the functions and motives of autobiography in the selected texts and the use of aspect of artistic creativity to explore and affirm the writer's identity as they narrate the self. The selected texts are the central focus of analysis and interpretation.

### **1.9 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

The focus of this study is literary artistic creativity in autobiographies which include the setting, the story, the plot and characterization; a strategy that form the basis of my investigation. The focus of this research is limited to the two autobiographies, *The Imam's Daughter* and *Desert Dawn*, which share some similarities in ideological and cultural setting. The study is text-bound and therefore we are not able to comment on issues outside the works under study.



## CHAPTER TWO

### ARTISTIC STRATEGIES IN *THE IMAM'S DAUGHTER*

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines artistry in Shah's *The Imam's Daughter*. It identifies the distinctive pointers that set apart *The Imam's Daughter* as an autobiographical text. This analysis looks at the setting, the story, the plot, and characterization. The study discusses the setting in terms of place, time, social environment and physical environment where the events of the story take place. In the plot, the study examines the narrator's sequencing of actions and arrangement of the events that constitute the narrative. The arrangements are evident in the plot of her narrative. She organises the aspects that are significant in her life uniting them as a whole through plot structuring. In the story, we look at how Shah narrates her life story in a way that immerses the reader into walking with her from her childhood to adulthood. In Characterization, we highlight and explain about characters. In this section, we focus on characters that create an impact on the persona and contribute in shaping her life. The study discusses the strategies the persona employs to create empathy in the reader and how they enrich credibility in her narrative under the aspects.

#### 2.2 Setting

Literary writers use setting as the backdrop against which the characters act out the events. The creation of atmosphere and mood go a long way to set the scene of the story and helps to support the main theme and intention of the narrative.

Shah situates her story in Pakistan back in the 1980's; the place her father grows up to reveal the basis of her conflicts. She introduces several places and the time the events occurred to reveal her early years that moulded her to what she is today. The other places include, East Street in England the place she grows up. There is the cellar the place her father rapes her for a period of ten years. There is the Islamic mosque; the place she is indoctrinated into Islamic religion at the age of three. Later there is her apartment and India; the places she exercises her own freedom in her teenage years. She introduces the schools she attends from the time she is four years to the age of sixteen years. Finally, the Christian church, the place she finds refuge and freedom.

The narrator first introduces Pakistan as a cultural and ideological setting and the history of rural Pakistan in the early 1980s. She reveals the central traditions practiced at this time. First, she says that Islam is the dominant religion. The religion firmly considers apostasy as the greatest sin punishable by death. Second, arranged marriage practices where people marry within their clan lines and intermarriage is part of defense system of clans that seem to be permanently at war. Third, the elder's decisions on matters concerning religion are never questioned. During this period, we learn that in Pakistan, the narrator cannot escape the arranged marriage or the punishment of apostasy but these practices do not take place in Britain. She is aware of the challenges she is likely to face in her life because she is familiar with her father's background. She decides to leave her ancestral home and settles in England the place that provides her an opportunity to escape from the traditions that bring her in a collision path with her father and relatives.

Pakistan, her ancestral home, is the place her father grows up under a very strict religious background in Pakistan's madrassa. We learn what happens to him through his son Raz after he takes him to the same Pakistan madrassa. The son comes back to Britain worse than he left. He has lost confidence and joy in life. The madrassa remakes him as a closed and wounded young man whose love of life they had destroyed. Shah comments:

Well done, Dad, I told myself. He had managed to remake Raz in something like his own image. In adult life, Raz would develop serious psychological problems. I don't know whether his time in the madrassa triggered it, I do know that it left him with horrible scars. (129)

Shah learns that her father attended similar madrassa when he was a boy. She says, "Perhaps that might explain some of his warped, perverted, violent ways" (130). This discussion shows how important Pakistan is in revealing the formative life of Shah's father in Madrassa School. The school system shapes him into a ruthless individual to the detriment of his own daughter and this contributes to her escape and change of her identity.

Shah describes and gives a dramatic picture of the life of young boys growing up in Pakistan. She says that they are prepared to fight a "jihad" against the West and that they take them from their families at a vulnerable age and torture them by breaking their spirit, then when the boys can be controlled, they indoctrinate them with hatred and send them off as cannon fodder to fight. This episode is important in revealing her father's life as a victim. As a young boy, he goes through the same torturers' experiences. This reveals the reason he carries on this influence in England that leads him to mistreat his own family when he physically abuses the wife and sexually molests his own daughter.

The experiences Shah narrates about Pakistan are significant in revealing the source of conflicts with her father and the reason she leaves her ancestral home.

Shah's perception about Pakistan is undesirable and distasteful. She says, "I lived in England, and it was England that felt like home country to me" (20). It offers her refuge as she escapes from her rural community and their traditions unlike Pakistan where one has to abide by the rules of "honour" and "shame". She manages to escape a forced marriage unlike her mother back in Pakistan. She is fearless of the ultimate sin of apostasy despite the threats she gets. The anonymity of living in a big southern English town offers her security when her community members hunt to kill her. In England, unlike Pakistan, women's education is valued. She freely chooses to study Theology and is motivated to understand other world's major faith systems. She not only denounces her traditions but also her family and community members. England gives her an avenue to explore her own freedom. She manages to go public and reveal the secrets behind her Imam father. She becomes a voice to victims of the same experiences. This encourages her to write her autobiography.

The narrator's parents relocate to East Street in England the place Shah grows up as a physically and psychologically abused child for a period of ten years. She creates a mental picture of how she is raised in an enclosed environment where her parents recreate their own Pakistani village. She says, "It was typical of an Asian Street in Britain in the early 1980s: a tight, close-knit community, where everyone knew each other" (5).

Her community members avoid living with non- Muslims or Pakistanis. She says, “everyone else in our street was a Muslim of Pakistan origin. This area is exclusively Pakistani Muslim territory” (7). She describes how her father, in private, refuses to show respect to anyone except other Pakistani Muslims. She states that the environment suffocates her because of her father’s abuse and her community religious dogmas. It is at this point that her perception about her father and her community members changes.

Shah also presents East Street in her narrative as the home of her community members. At a young age, she discovers that her people are exclusive and intolerant. She starts to question the mores of her community members. She wonders why her father, an Imam is a racist. She says, “To outsiders, he appeared sweet and gentle. He acted like a truly spiritual, likeable man but in private he was full of cruel words, hatred, rage and violence” (28). She develops a strong repulsion of her community and their religious practices particularly when they abandon a neighbor who had been knifed just because he is “not one of them” East Street setting is significant in her narrative because it reveals the character of her people and the reasons she escapes from them.

The narrator presents the home environment as a place she cannot endure through the revelation she makes. She narrates how their culture and religious practices dominate and enslave their lives. Religion in her family centres on how one can gain honour, how to maintain it and how one can avoid bringing shame to oneself or their family and the community. The atmosphere at home is cold, despicable and scary. At the age of four, she remembers watching the way her father beater mother repeatedly.

She says, “He used meals as an excuse to attack mum, both physically and verbally” (32). Her father shows no affection to his children. The home environment suffocates her. As a young child, she longs for love and a happy family. She compares her parents with the others in neighborhood and discovers her father is different. She says, “I was starting to realise that things were rotten somewhere in dad’s relationship with us” (33). Home becomes the place where she possesses a mark of independence, which she portrays when she makes a decision to leave the family.

Within the home environment, the narrator presents to the reader the cellar. It is a room set aside for storage of household items usually beneath the ground. In the context of this study, the term cellar is referred as a dark room, a place of agony and torture. Through painful memories; Shah recollects it as the secret place her father uses to punish her. She reveals that nobody is aware of the kind of punishment her father gives her. Her family members treat the punishment as normal. Shah’s own mother cannot defend her from the punishment because their traditions invariably consider it better for a woman to suffer in silence than bringing shame to the community.

The cellar is place her father hides her and secretly rapes her for a period of ten years. She further remarks that according to Islamic societies, a victim of rape becomes the guilty party, because the victim somehow tempts the man into sexual excess. Likewise, her father blames her for “tempting” him into the house.

The experiences at the cellar reveal the source of her rebellious attitude. She becomes bitter with her father and breaks the “honour” “shame” rule. At the end of the narrative, she goes against her father’s Islamic faith and confesses to the public about his brutality. Shah agonizingly illustrates the dehumanising actions that take place in the cellar. This period of her childhood is unfavorable. She describes it as a prison because her father rapes her and locks her for hours. After the rape, he keeps on taunting her that she is disgusting and dirty and that nobody will ever marry her since she is useless, dirty and worthless. Within this setting therefore, the narrator is subject to physical, emotional and psychological trauma in her early life. She reveals the irony of her father’s character as a hypocrite who spends time sermonizing his flock in the mosque and returns to the cellar to rape her. The abuse and treatment in the cellar becomes the reason she starts her journey towards freedom. She starts by developing an urge of crossing the boundaries of her father’s rules. In one incidence, she decides to cross into the *gora*’s territory, a place forbidden by her father. She says:

My visit to my friend’s house had been true rebellion. It felt frightening and dangerous, and I was relieved that no one had actually caught me. However, it was exciting and somehow liberating for it was my first rebellion, and I would keep it to all myself. I vowed there would be more. (59)

The narrator further presents the Mosque as the first place she explores outside East Street. It foregrounds the centrality of religion in her upbringing. At the age of three, the narrator is forced by the mosque teacher to recite Koran in Arabic to avoid her question anything, seek meaning or any explanation. Her father makes her recite and chant ninety-nine names of Allah. She learns the mysterious words to try to please him. She cannot challenge him.

She experiences physical abuse from her mosque teacher because of her lack of self-control. This makes her hate indignantly the mosque lessons. She says, "I knew by hiding, I was not just defying the mosque, I was also defying my father" (38). Her first experience with rebellion begins herewhen she cunningly hides under a bed to avoid going to the mosque.

In addition, the narrator presents the schools environment in her narrative as the place she escapes from the suffocating nature of life at home. She says, "From the very first I loved school and tried to do well in class. This was largely because school was a much happier place than home" (31). At secondary school, she starts to feel special, as she becomes the first girl to start her periods. For the first time she feels valued as the starting of periods gives her a brief spell of unexpected popularity. She discovers the only way to escape her adversaries is to work hard in school, as it remains the only certain escape. She states:

I lived for the promise of escape. It was the promise of escape that drove my hopes to do well at secondary school. If I studied hard, I might win a place to go to Sixth Form College, or University. I knew of girls in our community who had left home to do further studies. I knew that would give me a way out, for then Dad would have no access to me. (92)

It is at school that she starts learning about other religions like Christianity. She says, "In secondary school, I had learnt enough about other religions to start questioning my own family's faith system. It was at this point that I first began to question whether I actually wanted to be a Muslim" (102). She considers her father's god to be cruel and avenging while laughing at her misfortune, then sits in harsh judgment, and condemns her to hell. She learns that the Christian god is one that loves unconditionally. She slowly starts isolating herself from her family since she feels more comfortable in school.



She escapes after finishing high school and she is admitted in a college where she asserts her identity. She compares her Christian friends with those of her family members and discovers that there is genuine love in Christianity. Eventually, school becomes essential for opening her worldviews.

At the age of sixteen, the narrator is in pursuit of her dream for freedom. She describes Mrs. Jones' house as the place she acquires that dream. She uses a comparison strategy to compare her life at home and that of Mrs. Jones. She keenly re-examines her life and discovers that Mrs. Jones does not impose rules on her children unlike her home where women do house chores while males sit and wait for services from women. She is surprised to see how Mrs. Jones' family sits together, eats and chats freely. She states that her father rarely eats with women, and if the children eat in the same room, they are to be silent. She says, "at home we rarely if ever sat down as a family and chatted. Mostly dad and mum ordered us around" (177).

At Mrs. Jones' house, she learns to do things at her free will. She is surprised at how she helps with house chores without anyone's supervision. She discovers that freedom, choice and anonymity are new things that she has to learn to cope with. She states, "In my new life I had so much freedom from the very start. I didn't know what to do with it" (177). This place is important in her narrative because it is the first place she first experiences a new life of freedom.

The narrator further explores many places after running away from home as a teenager. She introduces the church; the first place she reconstructs her life and acquires a new identity. She uses illustrations to describe the stories Bob the preacher tells in church. She says she gets amazed at how God can become something as humble as man can. She relates the services offered in church with those in the Mosque and learns that her father only chants and raves in the Mosque. Bob preaches the message of love. It creates an impact in Shah's life that compels her to change her Muslim faith. She says, "I didn't think about the past; the last sixteen years of being a Muslim. I didn't think about the faith of my birth. I was carried in an unstoppable flow that propelled me to a new place, a place of love, laughter and light" (191). The narrator is now an adult and feels the need to choose her own religion. The church becomes essential focus in her narrative in offering her that free will. She says that for the first time she truly feels at peace with herself. At the church, she embraces the newfound freedom to herself and the right to feel loved.

After the narrator attains her own freedom, she introduces the reader her own apartment in Bermford, England. In her new residence, she discovers several things about herself. First, she learns that she can manage her own finances. Second, she realizes she can cook well, and she can manage her own freedom. She says, "I had turned my back on my family, my religion and an arranged marriage. I had given up everything I knew from the old life, and now I would have to survive on my wits alone" (195). The experience she describes allows her to present herself as a woman free from suppression. She is now a woman who can exercise her free will in a free environment.

Her apartment becomes important in revealing her first experiment with her life and the place she pushes the boundaries of her independence and freedom.

Shah introduces India in her narrative to show the physical journey she takes in achieving her dream of freedom. She reveals that she had not had that experience before. Her worldview expands when she meets a young girl aged six years, skinny and unwashed. She relates her life to that of the young girl and says:

I found that experience so disturbing. I wondered what had happened in her life, and where her family might be. I related to that girl and her life. I felt her trauma and her pain. I had spent my childhood alone and lost, giving up on life. (211)

She learns that there are people with worse problems than hers. She decides to disregard her own situation and takes part in helping others. She learns about other people's lives, cultures and belief systems. She discovers that other cultures have worse traditions. The experiences in India put her own life into perspective. She returns to England prepared to help other victims of her painful experiences.

As an adult, the narrator finally leaves the family circle that is controlled by Muslim religious practices to the wider world of Christianity. She is a different person from the little abused child at the beginning of the story. She is mature and more knowledgeable from the experiences she has gone through. She has acquired a new identity as a Christian. She is a strong-minded, self-confident and forgiving individual.

She displays a good understanding of the physical setting, which her story occupies. She develops the setting as the basis of her conflict, which brings her on a collision path with her father. The community where she lives carries the events that drive her story towards the resolution of her conflicts at the end of the narrative. The more we know about the setting and representation of its relationship with the characters, the more likely we are able to understand and interpret their behavior as well as their interactive nature within a given context.

### **2.3 The Story**

This section examines how Shah weaves her story through remembering and re-remembering to make her work an interesting autobiographical work.

Shah takes us on a step by step journey of her experiences from childhood to adulthood. She begins her story at the time she is five years old, a stage that defies the first person narrative because she would have had to be told about her painful experiences inflicted by her father. This opening strategy points to a kind of exaggeration on her part because she does not acknowledge the source of her information about the time. She says, “I don’t remember much from when I was little. The images are sketchy and opaque, a splash of colour here and there amongst the darkness and the dull smudge of grey” (4).

At the beginning of her story, Shah uses personification to describe the character of her father. She introduces him as a monster that causes pain in her life.

Her father becomes significant in her later life when he influences her to discover herself as worthy human being as she asserts her new identity of Christianity. By starting the autobiography in this manner, she gives information, identify, the motive of her autobiography that explains her change of identity, and about her target audience, namely the Muslim girls who go through the similar experiences.

Shah divides *The Imam's Daughter* into twenty-eight chapters. She introduces each of the chapters in her story in order to capture the attention of the reader. The introduction serves to provide background on the issues she raises in each section and serves as a coherent element linking the narrative to the author's life story. "Rebel with a Cause" is the section where she discusses painfully her agonizing experiences and therefore labels herself as an Imam's daughter raped by her own father. The last chapter "Silence broken" allows her to look back at her long journey of freedom as she discovers that she has not only fought for her own freedom but for other victims too.

The narrator invites the reader to believe in her story as she takes courage to open the window of her private life to the public as a child tortured by an Imam father. This act of courage offers credibility to her narrative that result into autobiographical truth. She says, "How can I write this so that it does not read like scenes from a horror movie? Perhaps I cannot. All I can do is telling like it was and hope you'll believe me that this was my life for real" (2). Her statement is convincing as it validates events that she narrates.

She further gives credence to her narrative by reporting incidents of her life as she experiences them. She makes her experiences believable by giving evidence through detailed description and consistency of the narrative voice.

Right from the title of the narrative, she employs suspense to whet the readers' appetite. She leaves the readers asking themselves why her father was a monster yet he was an Imam, a person believed to be holy and a respectable member of their society. Suspense plays an important role in a story for it creates a feeling of pleasurable fascination and scrub excitement mixed with tension and anxiety to the readers hence grabbing attention.

As the narrative progresses, Shah believes her father is a racist. She says that he does not allow any member of the family to bring white people in his house. She says her father believes that the whites will infect his family with strange ideas and lead them off the straight and narrow. She is disturbed by his behaviour. She learns that her mother cannot question the husband's behaviours and his decisions. She says, "but growing up in Pakistan she'd been taught never to question her husband or defy his will-doubly so if he was also the community Imam" (31). Shah's attitude towards her father deteriorates. She condemns him for even using meals as an excuse to beat her mother. As a young girl, she suffers emotionally and psychologically because she constantly worries about her mother's safety. This event gives her space of introspectively questioning the habits of her father who causes her to leave her community.

As the story progresses, the narrator moves from innocence to experience. She is now aware of what is happening around her. She observes her mother from a distance and portrays her as a woman who deserves a chance in education. She figuratively says, “Mum was like a caged bird all she wanted was a chance to fly” (43). She decides to risk her life to protect her mother but her father’s wrath turns against her for the next ten years. She demonstrates to the readers the safety she finds into the world of imagination and draws from a lonely bird that will set her down in the Lavender Fields that is quiet, peaceful and secure.

She says:

I would imagine that I was calling out for the loneliness birds to come and rescue me, my magical, imaginary saviours. To either side of me their soft white wings would lift me up, and with the barest of flaps we would rise into the air, my hands gripping tightly to their down from the heavens own feathers. The loneliness Birds were giant white doves, and they would fly down from the heavens to rescue me. Perched beside me with their wise grey eyes, they would coo soft reassurance in my ear. (47)

Shah challenges our sympathy when she narrates how helpless she is in defending herself from her father. Also as a daughter, she reveals her troubled relationship with her mother. Her mother is a passive partner in the defilement. She appears as a disturbed child because of what is happening around her. She learns that things were rotten somewhere in her father’s relationship with his family. She says, “But a child always lives in hope, I lived in the hope that things would get better, and that dad would be a loving and caring father that I dreamed him to be” (33). We see the character of Shah emerging as a determined child and protective especially when she defends her mother.

We see her empathising with her and without totally blaming her for her condition and complicity in the abuse. The painful experiences encourage her to tell her story. The readers who identify with such experiences are relieved and this elicits empathy from the readers.

The narrator takes us to a new direction of her experiences in the chapter “Innocence Lost.” This chapter shows us the change of attitude of the protagonist as we get to understand the nature of conflict in the story. She keeps us glued to the story as she uses illustrations and details to describe scenes that produce a pensive and tense effect.

The scene of rape and beatings goes on unabated until the narrator graduates junior school. By this time, she is used to her father’s beatings and rape and it is a well-kept family secret, as nobody talks about it. Her father is aware that if he uses threats, he will succeed in raping her. He says, “I will kill you if you ever breathe a word,” he hissed, his eyes cold and dark pits of loathing. You are dirty and worthless and you are going to hell. It’s all cursed, evil girl like you deserves” (81). Shah manages to portray her purpose of revealing the challenges she experiences as she struggles to fight for her freedom.

The drama heightens when the narrator is on a confrontation course with her father and for that, she says, “At home, Dad was a distant figure. He would spend his time cloistered with his holy book” (6). She says that her father has a poor relationship with his children. She despises the fact that her father is cold in the house and more of an authoritarian than a father is.



He orders his children around in the house and can never go out of his way to engage his children. Shah asserts that her father is a hypocrite Imam. Her determined character drives her to create a friendship with her father by reciting the whole Quran, but all is in vain. This part brings out the contradictory life of her father she detests. Her father's hostility drives her rebellious spirit that now fights against him, her teachers, family and her friends.

The narrator shifts her narrative voice because some experiences are too painful for her to narrate as the subject. As young narrator, she criticizes the adult world that practices racism. She does not understand why her father hates white people. She meets a white person who equally hates her. She asks, "But why was it always the adults causing such blind hatred, whilst we children did our best to get along?" (88). She observes Amanda's stable family and envies her. As a young child, she wishes she could give up her own parents in a flash if Amanda offers her a home. It is through these painful experiences that she decides to change her identity.

The narrative reveals that she is in constant battle to challenge her past and her father is the symbol of that bitter past. At one point, when they are having fun as a Christian youth group in India and they play a funny game called *gunge*, she intensely compares and reflects on her father's social life. She recalls that he can never engage in such games. She says, "It goes without saying, perhaps, that the very idea of my father or any Imam for that matter putting himself up to be 'gunged' was unthinkable. My father took himself and what he had to say far too seriously for that.

It was a continuing revelation for me that religion could be fun” (209). Through retrospective review and introspective observation of the interactive situations, she is able to confront her past. She learns that she cannot live the kind of life her father sutured her. She develops an independent mind and decides to join a religion of her own choice.

Shah shows consistency in her narrative as the story progresses in each section. She reconstructs and represents the life she lived with crippling honesty in order to reassure her readers who have felt pride and insecurity in two worlds similar to what she experiences. The subtitles of the various sections point to the narrator's struggles of redemption from her father's abuses. In the section, “Rebellion Springs” reveals Shah's coming of age in her freedom pursuit. She comes out of her cage as a child characterized by ignorance to a braver teenager.

She meets her friend Skip, a born rebel and a fellow Pakistan neighbour. She identifies with her because they share the same belief of freedom. Skip's rebellion fulfills Shah's rebellious soul. Skip manages to escape a forced marriage, a character Shah tells the readers she admires. Shah also breaks her father's rules and starts to learn about other religions. She questions her own family's faith system. Watching soap operas becomes her window onto a different world, free of the suffocating bind of her Muslim world. In this section, she demonstrates her discovery of independence and courageously observing and reacting to her father's brutish actions. She therefore develops a complex ambivalent attitude towards risks and rewards in one's life.

After Shah loses her innocence through rape, her consciousness is aroused and this propels her to take a firm stand against her father and a decisive move towards redemption and escape. As the story progresses, She attains a sense of self-discovery. She castigates the custom of arranged marriages arguing that it denies the girl a chance to choose her true love. She breaks the community-honour rule that defines her community. She reveals to the readers, the relief she feels after running away. She states, “I felt safe and a sense of relief away from the threat of abduction and forced marriage” (183). She experiences true love from Mrs. Jones who embraces her with a hug, something she has never experienced. She takes her father’s religion to task and question some of its practices, which she views as conniving and conspiring with patriarchal Pakistan society to oppress her. Since she has no voice in her family, she gains courage and challenges her community’s traditions by speaking out. It is at this point that she is motivated to narrate her story, which culminates in writing her autobiography.

The narrator discovers that her experience in the church alters her perception of herself in a reversed situation. Back in her family, her father considers her as hopeless, rebellious and cursed but in church; they accept her despite her weaknesses. She explains to the readers that her friends have extended friendship and offer her sanctuary in the face of great danger and risk regardless of the fact that she is a Muslim from a different race, religion and culture. She reveals to the readers that she wants to embrace a religion that practices true friendship. Through her narrative, Shah shows the readers how to attain one’s dream, amid challenges of cultural or religious practices.

At the end of her narrative, she chooses the religion of her choice, despite death threats from her community members.

Tension heightens as Shah's world-view takes a different course from her previous naïve thoughts and actions. Her dysfunctional family does not make the slightest sense any more. She finds herself interested in what other religions have to say and about their relationships with their God. For instance, when Shah goes to school, friends like Karen, Skip and Rachel, as well as the teachers such as Mrs. Zora change her world-views. They introduce her to a world of freedom in worship. They show her unconditional love and care unlike her own Muslim community members. At this stage, the narrator tells us that she is drawing from religious world systems, which is an abomination in Islam. She wants to understand if it is right for oppressors to seek shelter in religion. She reveals how important her newfound religion is because it is through Christianity that she realizes her dream of freedom and true love.

Shah eventually gains self-realization and changes her identity. Having converted to Christianity, she changes her name from Hannan to Hannah. In chapter nineteen, she asserts her newfound religion by stating, "This is my church". She finally gets the space that she has been looking for in chapter two when she indicates that she feels like suffocating. This is where she comes to own not only her body, but also her destiny. However, the joy does not last long when her father sends death threats through a mob. She says, "I had physically escaped from my father yet; still he was my nightmare" (219). This event does not deter her from pursuing her desires.

The dream to be free is significant in her story. She longs to live alone and away from the agonies of her family. That translates into a kind of a “dream” for a better life. She acquires independence when she gets a new apartment of her own. At this point, nothing can stop her in her quest to achieve her dream of freedom. She decides to be baptised and says, “It was something I felt I had to do, to both celebrate and reaffirm my conversion. It was another step towards growing in my faith and celebrating my free choice as a free person in a free society” (213). She decides to invite her family to her baptism. She wants them to see how important her newfound faith and identity are to her. She wants to testify to them about how her life has changed. She learns that the only way to move on is by forgiving her parents. She says, “in spite of everything, I had forgiven them and the only way of saying that is by inviting them to my baptism” (213).

As the story develops, Shah leaves the East street community family to go to university. According to her, it no longer matter what she wears, how she looks like, what colour of skin she is or what she believes since the new world is now different from the previous one. She decides to risk in reading the Quran in English after a long period of reciting what she did not understand. She decides to read it for herself. She reminds the readers about her childhood and says, “As a child I had memorized many of the verses of the Quran in Arabic, yet I did not understand a single word. Now I want to know the truth and to understand” (223).

In addition, Shah learns that the holy men altered Quran into a rigid creed of exclusion and control at the whim of her father. She heightens the readers' curiosity as she reads it from cover to cover and discovers that there is nothing in the Quran about arranged marriages; she learns that Quran cherishes women and protects them. She realizes that most dogmatic beliefs and prejudices her father instilled in people is not in the holy book of Islam. She asserts, "For the first time in my life I had a much clearer view of Islam, and I didn't believe my father's version anymore" (227). She is able to discover herself as a worthy human being and assert her identity as an important person in the society.

In the section, "Finding Me" Shah comes to terms with her past abused life that tormented her life for sixteen years. The shadow of her past still follows her but she takes a bold step and tries a private, faith-oriented therapy service. She discovers her life and decides to cure herself by understanding herself first. She starts putting together her own treatment therapy. Self-discovery for her occurs, as she perceives herself in view of what her life has been. She takes a survey of her life by looking back at herself from the present and it is only after reminiscing about her past that she reveals to the readers what she discovers and states:

By talking about what happened and putting it out in the open, I found I could slowly release the hurt and pain. I felt I was ready to forgive the guilty party- my father. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life feeling like a victim, and being defined by the harm that he had done to me. I wanted to move on to a place where I could speak out about what had happened. I wanted to let go of the hurt and the hatred and resentment. (243)

In this quotation, the narrator shows how she self-consciously becomes aware of perceiving life through the lens of language. She is able to make sense of her experiences and categorize reality.

Self discovery and challenges as well as attempts to resolve the complications in the conflict further leads to a climax in the last chapter “Hunted”. Shah accepts that there is no hope of ever reconciling with the family. She refuses to meet her brother Raz and emphatically states, “The naïve hopes about a family reunion that I had nurtured at the time of baptism had long since faded” (234). She moves to the climax of her life by converting to Christianity and points out that she has forgiven her family. She states, “I prayed for reconciliation. I even prayed for the deliverance of my father” (227). She forgives her family and moves on with her life.

According to Waring in *Lavender: Nature’s Way to Relaxation and Health*, lavender is a medicinal plant that has healing power, hence rescuing lives from terminal diseases. Shah uses Lavender a therapeutic symbol of refuge. It comes in her dream and rescues her not from diseases but from the agony and pain she experienced as a young girl. She says that the lavender signifies love, life and hope. In addition, she reveals that the butterflies that always came to rescue her in her dream became a metaphor of her transformation. She comes out of darkness into the light. All these experiences in Shah’s life help us understand the growth of her personality. By overcoming the challenges, she portrays a gradual development from an abused young child to a decisive resolute adult.

At end of the narrative, Shah finds peace and happiness in her life. This involves the change that her life takes after forgiveness. She finds the love of her life, Tom. This presents the redemption value of love. It aims at bringing closure to her bitter past by breaking silence. She fully speaks out about her past to the attention of the whole world. Her last words to the interviewer are inspiring. She says, “There is a real need to understand the challenge posed by Islamic cultural practices. We need to provide escape routes for girls like me. Silence does not help. It makes it worse” (264).

Shah records the factuality of her experiences not just in order to gain a psychotherapeutic outlet from her traumatic rape experience but also to indulge in an act of creative excellence. She also succeeds in using her autobiography to reconstruct a coherent self and identity in the face of hostile environment.

## **2.4 The Plot**

This section discusses the plot in Shah’s ordering as well as sequencing and arrangement of events that constitute the narrative. She develops her narrative by taking us back to Pakistan, her ancestral home. She tries to make us understand where she is coming from to appreciate where she is going and why. She illustrates and compares life in England and in Pakistan in a manner, which shows how significant the experiences in both countries made a mark in her later life. She recalls what happened to her father back in Pakistan and the influences he carries in England.



Most events that she narrates at the beginning revolve around her father. It shows how her father's life had an impact on her. The rhetoric questions she asks set the tone of the plot. Every painful moment revolves around the narrator, and her father. The experiences with her father allow readers enter into her anguish as she invites us to empathize with her and states:

Did you ever play monsters-under-the-stairs; imagine for one moment that the monster-under –the stairs game is for real. Imagine your father is the beast, more terrifying and dark than your childish mind could ever have made. Imagine living the monsters-under-the-stairs game for real. Your father is the monster under the stairs, and you are his helpless child. (2)

In the next five chapters, she gives an overview of her family background and experiences of living with an Imam father. The consequent chapters that she recalls, selects and presents are significant insofar as her dream for escape and freedom is. The episodes of hiding under a bed to avoid going to the mosque, hiding at her friend's house to play, running away after she learns about the arranged marriage and eventually changing her Muslim faith to Christianity, are important events in indicating the importance of her pursuit for freedom.

Shah narrates some episodes that are painful, pathetic and dehumanizing in her life. Through such narrations, the readers empathise with her as she also finds relief after talking about the experiences. In the section 'My Father's House' Shah discusses the physical and psychological tortures she experiences from her father. It is at this point we learn how dehumanizing her father is when he exposes her daughter to child molestation.

As events unfold, she describes this incident well such that the issue of rape connects with the initial questions she asked the readers at the beginning of the narrative. She asks, “Did you ever play ‘monster under the stairs’ and you imagine your father is the beast under the stairs and you are his helpless child victim?” It marks interconnected transition from one episode to the next through choice and arrangement of events that effectively bring unity and coherence at the end of the narrative.

Shah succeeds in ordering her events in a chronological order as she takes us through her journey towards freedom. The events she organizes in each section form a significant pattern of action with beginning, climax, falling action and her conflict resolution at the end of the narrative. Through ordering her events, she artistically controls them in order to craft a meaningful text.

The narrative uses foreshadowing which is creatively employed to create effect and to indicate and give hints in what we would expect. The narrator at the age of five years hints on her future escape. She says, “One day I will be leaving them for real, thanks to my father” (35). She anticipates breaking the silence one day after a long physical and psychological suffering in her life. At the end of the narrative she says, “I cannot be silent about injustice. And I shall keep doing so because I love life and my fellow human beings” (270).

In *The Imam's Daughter*, Shah presents her plot through a journey motif to indicate the steps she has taken to be where she is at the end of the narrative. There are physical journeys as she grows from a naïve young girl to an adolescent who is ready to leave her family and pursue her own freedom. The other journey she makes is her journey from Islamic faith to Christianity that leads to her independence. The journey has obstacles that block her from achieving her dreams but at the end of the narrative, she stops running physically and psychologically. She realises she can no longer hide from the sexual abuse that she has suffered. She finally walks into the darkness and banishes it finally.

The quest to be free is very important in Shah's autobiography. For sixteen years, she has lived under the tyranny of her own father who not only controls her life but also owns her body by doing whatever he likes with it. She becomes hopeful that even in the midst of challenges; it is possible to be free. It is through these challenges of her father's molestation that she desires to work hard in school to challenge her father's Islamic traditions. At the end of the narrative, she scrutinizes books and learns about other religions, which widens her consciousness.

At the beginning of the narrative, Shah informs the readers about the events that filled her with pain, fear, confusion, agony and hopelessness. She retrospectively takes the readers through her formative years by representing episodes and experiences in each section that finally end up her conflicts at the closure of her narrative. She ends up a happy free woman and a voice to other victims. Through this kind of sequencing of events, the plot is consistent in the text by bringing a resolution to a harsh experience. It is through looking

back that she is able to discover what is significant in shaping her self-revealed personality.

## **2.5 Characterization**

Among the aspects of creative artistry in *The Imam's Daughter* are characters who contribute to the personal development of Shah. Her parents, brothers, her friends in school, her college tutor, Skip her neighbour and her fiancé Tom.

The character of her father, takes the centre stage in terms of people who influence her life. She mentions him throughout the narrative as a retrogressive and detrimental figure in her life. She uses the symbol of a monster to describe him, a strategy that shows how she despised his cruel actions. Her rebellion is a consequence of her father's exposure to torture and rape. She becomes bitter and this affects her attitude towards her and Islamic faith. At the beginning of the narrative, we find her questioning how one's own father can inflict cruel acts to his own daughter. She directs this bitterness against the Islamic faith, which she is determined to abandon in order to forget her bitter experiences with her father.

Through her father, Shah discovers that for a long time, she has lived in a community ruled by half -truths, opaque traditions and the strictures of "honour" and "shame". She reveals that her father has nurtured and maintained those rules by reinforcing them, policing them and feeding them to others. Her father's brutality throughout the narrative depicts consistency and determination in her character and hence a strategy for credibility

in the narrative. She presents a cruel relationship that exists between her and father. She resolves that she cannot continue to lead a life of misery and informs her readers that:

I was a caged butterfly, but I have flown free from what some would call the ghettoized Muslim community, but what I would call the trap of uniformed Islam. I seized hold of my freedom: freedom to choose what I believe; freedom to speak out my beliefs; freedom to live a life as I see fit, even when others don't agree. I am a free woman in a world where there are many women encaged. (268)

Her mother's place in the narrative is significant since she passively observes how she copes with life. She symbolically compares her to a caged bird who wishes to fly. She does not envy her life of servitude or the kind of environment she is subjected to. Unlike her mother, she chooses to rebel against them. She reveals the true personality of her mother as a strategy to cultivate credibility in the story. It is through her mother's suffering that Shah develops the courage to free herself from her father's and the community's oppressive cultural practices.

Shah's brothers play a big role in shaping her life. They too, like their father, are chauvinists. They can neither help in household chores nor protect their mother and sister from her father's violence. Instead, they shove the sister around the house to do exactly as they say. We empathise with Shah, as she feels discriminated and dehumanised. She informs the readers that her brothers behave like little kings. It is the attitude and treatment by her brothers that she discovers her self-worth when she not only denounces her family but also rejects her Islamic religion.

Shah's friends Rachel, Zoe and Felicity are personalities who are influential in her life. Felicity, which incidentally means "happiness", boosts her self-esteem by assuring her of God's love. Throughout her life, her parents had told her that she is useless, godless and a child destined to end up in hell, however, her friends support her into the process of being a free young woman. They introduce her to a free world of dressing, experimenting with make-up, jewellery and going to cinemas, something she has never experienced before. Through them, she gains self-confidence and asserts:

With Felicity, Rachel and Zoe, I had seen people extend friendship and offer me sanctuary in the face of great danger and risk regardless of the fact that I had come from a different race, religion and culture. That was the meaning of true friendship- one I decided to embrace. (194)

Readers are introduced to Samantha, one of the characters whom Shah meets at the university. She is important in shaping Shah's life. Apart from being the source of her comfort, she encourages her to speak out against the abuse, an act she suppressed for many years. Samantha; a supportive friend, further suggests that she needs professional help in order to recover from post-traumatic experience, which would easily release the tension, hurt, and pain. It is through her, that she learns the value of honesty, which helps her adjust to her new social cultural setting.

Mrs. Jones is Shah's college tutor. She accords her great respect in her narrative because of the influence she has in her life. Through her, she discovers new ways of doing things at her free will. She learns to be independent and starts managing her own finances. Mrs. Jones teaches her the virtue of forgiveness. She convinces her to reconcile with her

parents and continue with her studies despite the sour relationship and challenges she faces.

Skip is Shah's friend and a member of her community. Some of her ideas about their traditions on marriage play an important part in decision making about her life. She describes her as a born rebel. She not only refuses a forced marriage, but also helps her friends who are victims to escape. Skip's independent character motivates her to have an independent mind. The narrative shows the shared experiences that mould her into who she is. Skip informs her that there is nothing wrong in eating pork and drinking alcohol against their customs. At the end of the narrative, she defines herself as an open-minded woman who believes she has a responsibility of creating awareness among Muslim women who are victims of forced marriages.

The reader is finally introduced to Tom, her fiancé, who is and has a major impact in Shah's life. She reveals that it is through Tom that she learns the virtue of truthfulness and responsibility. Tom provides the psychological support she needs in order to deal with tragic and painful situations. She manages to reveal all her inner secrets, which she had suppressed for many years. She realises that Tom helps her come to terms with her dark past. She affirms that, "Telling Tom was difficult, but it was also cathartic and liberating" (250). It is through his encouragement and assistance that she decides to find justice for victims of forced marriages through charity organizations. Through his support, she speaks for so many women entombed within a dark, unbreakable silence.

Shah views herself as a determined woman who overcomes much pain in her life to achieve a purpose in society as an advocate against sexual abuse. Shah portrays herself as a child who grows out of fear and gains courage to confront her tormenting cultural practices. She portrays herself as a person who is accommodative of other cultures. She is open to learning. This attribute is what makes her able to overcome the pain she went through.

Finally, Shah shows herself as a very imaginative and creative child. She tells us that most times when she was at home her escape was in books. She says, “I found solace in books...I would lock myself in the bedroom and read” (44). This habit of reading helps us to understand the path that she follows in growing and maturing in the mind, and also how she learns the skill and technique that enables her to become a writer who is capable of writing an autobiography and purging the pain in her life. Therefore, Shah the reader, tells us about Shah the writer.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter examines how Shah has crafted her story in *The Imam's Daughter*. She creates suspense from the beginning of her story to the end. She uses techniques like flashback and foreshadowing to create suspense, which whets the appetite of the readers. She has employed strategies in her narrative to create empathy in her readers by narrating and describing experiences that are painful in her life.



Shah has described settings in terms of place and time that show her progress in life. The setting is where we find her and we are able to see and understand how she grows in different spaces and how those spaces she creates influence her personality.

The events in her narrative unfold in a chronological order as evident in the plot development. This has resulted into an organic unity causing coherence in her narrative. She shows the development of plot along the lines of growth where she grows from a fearful young girl to a brave woman who courageously comes out from an imprisoned life of her family to an experience of freedom in her new identity.

The study has also examined the characters that have had a negative and positive impact in her life; contributing towards the choices that she makes in her life.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ARTISTIC STRATEGIES IN *DESERT DAWN*

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines artistry in Dirie's, *Desert Dawn*. The chapter identifies the distinctive pointers that set apart *Desert Dawn* as an autobiographical text. This analysis looks at the setting, the story, the plot, and characterization. The study discusses the setting in terms of place, time, social cultural environment and physical environment where the events of the story take place. We examine Dirie's arrangement of the events that constitute the narrative. The arrangements are evident in the plot of her narrative. She organises the aspects that are significant in her life uniting them as a whole through plot structuring. The study examines how she narrates her life story in a way that immerses the reader into walking with her from her childhood to adulthood. The characterization in her narrative focuses on those that create an impact on the persona and contribute in shaping her life. Finally, the study discusses the strategies the persona employs to create empathy in the reader and how they create credibility in her narrative under the aspects.

#### 3.2 Setting

Setting is the physical and social context in which the action of a story occurs. In Dirie's narrative, *Desert Dawn*, the setting is important in giving the reader the feel of the people who move through it. She has used it to evoke a mood that will prepare the reader for what is to come. She situates her story in different places and the time the events occur.

First in Somali where she spends her childhood and second, in Britain, the place she escapes after running away from home and the place her talent of modeling is discovered in her teenage years. Finally, America the place she spends her adulthood life working as a model.

Dirie present Somali at the beginning of the narrative as the place she grows up during the reign of the military dictator, Siad Barre in 1974. He was a leader who was eager to make changes among the pastoral life Somali. The first change is seen when her brother Mohammed gets an opportunity to go to school. Dirie does not get that chance because she is a girl. Her brother leaves her to take care of the camels. She describes her desert life as nomad and the Somali traditions that allow girls' circumcision through a woman called *midgaan*. She says when the girls reach a certain age they are married off. She reveals how she abhors some practices. At a young age, she envisions herself marrying the man of her dreams but the dream is shattered when her father arranges a marriage for her. It is at this point that she escapes her ancestral home. Somali becomes the springboard of her battles.

She gives a description of Somali during her childhood as a place deep rooted by poverty and strong Somali traditions. She says her family never stayed in one place for more than three weeks. They were always on the move in search for greener pastures of their livestock. She states that the Somali cultural practices are not favourable to women. She remembers how the clan members settled family disputes amicably by summoning both parties. She says that the strength of a family ties provides a safety net in times of crisis.

Through the women in the community, she develops the value of hard work and self-reliance that moulds her into a world known model. She highly holds the values she acquires in her ancestral home but when she goes to America, she is caught up in the midst of her traditions and western modernity. She battles in keeping the family honour when she publicly speaks about female genital mutilation. It is in Somali that we learn and understand her formative life that transforms her into who she is today.

Dirie uses a comparative strategy to describe Somali as a place where food and water are highly valued because they are scarce yet the people are cheerful and happy unlike America, which is a land of plenty, yet people are discontented. She despises the waste of the basic commodities there. Going back to her roots brings her a sense of belonging. She compares her life in America and Somali and reveals that Somali is the only place she feels at home. She values the fact that her people survive by following their instincts unlike in America where the clock controls them. She says that Somali is a place where families share whatever little they have unlike American's life of exclusiveness and selfishness. In Somali, problems are communally resolved and the joy to be together is the most important. The two countries she introduces in her narrative are crucial in showing comparisons of conflicting cultures that result to her inner conflicts.

Dirie shares her experiences in America as an adult. She presents it as a harsher place than Somali is. She creates a context where characters are in constant flight and fight for survival just like in Somali. She does not settle in one place. She keeps on moving from one state to another to look for greener pastures.

Her change of environment and behaviour makes her reflect back on her roots. She says, “The habits of my desert childhood remain and I am always running even when I have no destination” (56). She now understands the reason she is unable to cope with anybody in Dana’s family, hence the reason she is going back to Somali.

Dirie describes Somali as a place where she values traditions but we find her narration countering this as we discover her embracing the American’s lifestyle as she gets into a conflict with her brother who admonishes her western dressing. She justifies herself and say, “We live in wintry countries. I don’t know what you want me to wear. This is what I wear, these are my clothes” (60). The basis of conflicts with her family begins when she informs them about the effects of female circumcision while persuading them to change their perception and yet they cannot relent. She remarks, “I tried to reason with them but I got nowhere. I could provoke them all I wanted, they were not going to change the way they did things” (178). She finds herself in the midst of different cultural forces that are beyond her control.

The narrator introduces America in her narration for challenging some notions about Somali, in which Dana’s mother believe that Africa is backward. When she plans to go back home, the comment she gets is that Somali is bad. She receives advice from people who rely on the uninformed media as a source of information. She compares the information she gets with the travel agent at the airport who suggests the Caribbean as an alternative country for Dirie. Ironically, she falls into this trap of looking at Africa through Western lens when she goes back home.

We see her condemning the poverty of her people and criticizing the poor medical system. At one time she even acts and imitates a tourist when she brings out her camera to take a picture of a boy she calls, “Blackie, O, Blackie, Blackie...give me your beautiful skin! I got my camera to take some pictures” (171). This scene shows the influence of the West on Dirie who is dramatizing a bias she has absorbed without knowing it. She views Blackie as unique person yet she and the boy share the same ancestry.

Dirie introduces Britain the place she lives back in 1995. She reveals that it is the place she first breaks her taboo when she goes public about her own circumcision ordeal. She is honoured for that courage and she is appointed the United Nation Spokesperson against girl’s circumcision. She emphatically states that, it is in Britain that she comprehends what exactly happened to her. It is a critical setting for it introduces her perception on her traditions. She explains how she had begged her mother to have it done because of ignorance. It is in Britain that she understands more about the effects of female circumcision at different levels and forms of it. Her contradictory statement that, “Talking about genital mutilation was both a blessing and a curse” is not only hyperbolic but also ironic. She further says, “I was glad people wanted to do something about this cruel custom, but over and over I had to relieve all the pain and misery it caused in my life” (14). Britain offers her an opportunity to speak against the cruel Somali cultural practices.

A trip back to Somali provides Dirie an opportunity for reconciliation within herself and community members. She starts by revealing to her parents about the rape by uncle Guba that happened when she was four years old, a secret she kept for many years. She says, “Talking about what Guban did was painful. Everyone stared at me and I was too embarrassed to say anymore” (165). This information becomes her grounds to start her campaign of eliminating the practice of female circumcision. She says, “Women had to be educated about sex. Men needed to know about women’s bodies as well as their own” (166). She is delighted in educating her patriarchal father. She says, “I educated him and he was proud. My father was proud of me he was proud of me and that made me feel strong and passionate about life as well as proud of myself” (168). Dirie goes back to America a happy woman free from resentments of rape, circumcision and her father’s dictatorship.

### **3.3 The Story**

Born and raised in Somalia, within the shelter of old patriarchal traditions, Dirie in *Desert Dawn*, tells a story imbued with happenings that makes its reading captivating. These events are presented in a narrative form, which authenticate certain values of Somali traditional story-telling techniques like the use of proverbs to capture experiences. Every chapter opens with a Somali proverb. The use of elements of Somali orality strongly grounds the text within the Somali environment and culture.

The story is divided into fifteen sections. Every chapter captures an episode, which forms the body of the narrative. In the first four sections, she compares her life in Somali and America. She finds out that America exposes her life away from the traditions of her people but it does not offer her peace. All are selected for their importance in showing Dirie's disturbed state and how she realizes that even the America she thought was a refuge does not solve her problems.

The author starts the story by taking us back to Somali her ancestral home and the place she grows up. She adopts an empathetic tone to explain about devils called *djinns* that crawl inside people and animals and make them sick. She uses description and illustrations to reveal about them. She says they play tricks and makes one lazy. As a young child, she watches her mother chant as she chases away the *djinns*. She reveals that her mother is the only one who knows about the *djinns* and how to chase them away. She discovers that the *djinns* follow her in America and anywhere she goes. She presents them as symbols of anxiety and alienation. We understand her agony through the inner conflict she is battling with. She feels that the only person who can resolve her battles is her mother. She says that she is the only one who can keep away the *djinns* in her life. Dirie uses flashbacks to present not only an act of looking back at a given present but she also lays bare the preparatory nature of whatever happened in her life back in Somali as a signpost of the actions later in her life.



Historical accuracy is important to Dirie in contextualizing the events of the story. In the section “Differences”, she shows authenticity and communicating meaning through autobiographical claims such as important dates of important events. She has the dates when some historical events occurred in Somali including the time when over two million Somali were starving to death in October 1992. She gives the exact date when Siad Barre, a military dictator, who took over Somali, was defeated. Her decision to narrate the story of her life to the public is an act of courage and this offers credibility, which results to autobiographical truth.

As the story progresses, she reveals the reason she escapes from her ancestral home. In the initial situation, we see girls are not valued in her community. They see them as human beings who should be married off soon as they are mature. Dirie becomes a victim of an arranged marriage that causes her to flee. She manages to secure a job in Britain through her uncle. Life in Britain is not as rosy as she would have wanted. She continues with her flight that includes fleeing from places and fleeing from her relationship with Dana. She ends up in a job that requires constant movement, as she has no place to call home. All her constant flights are because of her nomadic life she experiences in Somali. The nomadic life taught her to move when conditions are not favourable to a better life.

The story has the recurring image of the Somali desert as a place of mystery, a place of adventure, and a place to go back home to for the narrator. Yet, the most outstanding feature of Dirie’s storytelling is the use of the flashback mode. Through a recollection of memories; she gives us accounts of persistence longing to return home to her parents.

It is through her description of her mother that we are made aware that she is a beautiful and a strong willed woman. She fondly calls her “Mama”. She says, “My mother is an extraordinarily beautiful woman but she has never seen her reflection so she has no idea what her face looks like” (16). This then sets another reason for going home, which is to bring her mother to an awareness of her beauty, and the idea that a woman’s beauty is one of the things that endow her with self-esteem in the society.

An encounter with a Somali man creates tension because he informs her that Somali does not exist. Despite the negative assertion that Somali does not exist, she still plans to go home. Through flashback, she recalls the beautiful aspects of her motherland. She tells us how great her mother is while she recalls her father’s harsh treatment and this creates tension. The transformation and the knowledge she acquires in America and Britain motivates her. She states, “I intended to go back to educate my father about what a woman could do and how a woman could make a good life for herself” (76). She wishes to challenge her father on the traditions he still holds on about girls.

Several things happen to the narrator back in Somali that haunt her even in her later years; she still remembers her sister warning her not to trust uncle Guban alone in the bush. She is just four years when the uncle entices her and rapes her. This is the most devastating experience of her life because she knows the uncle has done something terrible to her as much as she does not understand it. She associates some of her past ordeals to her lack of stability in America. She tries to reconcile herself by breaking up with Dana but it does not solve her problems.

Dirie seems to have acquired the time to write about her life experience later when she has already achieved a lot through education and as a supermodel. Through retrospection and introspection, an art of looking back, she is able to present her experiences that later shapes her career. She is appointed as the United Nation Spokesperson and an advocate of anti-female genital mutilation.

Taking us back to her childhood years, Dirie reveals to the readers that she had a dream of what she wanted to be. She states, “Even as a little child I had a vision. I had a husband and children and we lived far away from home” (2). As a supermodel and a spokesperson of women’s rights, she reveals to the readers that memories of childhood serve to demonstrate how human beings can move from a simple life to a complex one, from a young naïve inexperienced girl to a well-known world supermodel.

Dirie keeps the readers glued to the narrative when she recollects her painful memories of her circumcision. She describes the painful operation with gloom. Through flashback, she recalls her ignorance of the mutilation. She says that she encourages her mother to have it done because she learns that it will make her clean, pure, and most importantly initiated into adulthood. She later decides to denounce her family and the Somali cultural practices and traditions. She defines herself as an enlightened woman who believes she has a responsibility of creating awareness among other victims. She says that every time she speaks about it, the process brings back painful emotional and physical memories.

The act of remembering such experiences have a therapeutic effect on the writer and the reader too as the readers can get an opportunity to reflect back and relate to their own experiences.

In the section “Differences”, Dirie compares her life in Somali and that in America. She reveals the conflicts that arise because of the differences of her life in the two countries. She says in Somali, they do not use diapers. Her fiancé and her son’s grandmother cannot understand the reason why she does not use it on her son. Tension heightens when Dirie wants to travel to Spain on her eighth month’s pregnancy but Dana’s family members are skeptical about the decision she makes. They feel that she should not travel or work in her last trimester, but she rebukes them for their advice and say that, pregnancy is not an illness as she vividly recalls and describes how her mother and aunts worked until their last month of pregnancy. She confesses that she cannot abandon her desert ways of life. This confession contradicts her reaction when she comes back to Somali and criticizes the traditions of her people. The story portrays Dirie in crisis amid two domains she embraces and condemns at the same time.

Dirie reveals how she meets her brother Mohammed in America several years later. Her encounter with him brings hope of going back to Somali. Conflict arises between them, as Mohammed cannot understand why his sister is wearing Western clothes. On their way back home, she disagrees on any Somali values Mohammed prompts her. He gets perplexed when her sister retorts back to justify her western dressing. He feels disrespected and cautions her behaviour.

The narrator's perceptions of life have changed in America. Therefore, she classifies to her brother that he is a product of patriarchy. Since she is more exposed to western traditions, she longs to meet her father not as the naive girl he wanted to marry off, but as a special ambassador of women's rights and she asserts:

I wanted to look my father in the eyes. He would expect me to look down, to demonstrate my respect. I was not going to do that! I was going to look right at him, stare at him, and hold his gaze with my eyes. He would see me, Dirie, her daughter he sold to an old man for a few camels who now earned her own money. He would have to look at the girl he never sent to school who became a writer and ambassador for women's rights at United Nations. (73)

Dirie keeps us in suspense as we wait for the reaction of her father after he meets her daughter whom he had planned to marry off twenty years ago. The confrontation between father and daughter is important, as we cannot wait to see how things turn out. However, when the two finally meet, there is no outburst of emotion. Her father seems very amenable as much as he knows the daughter he meets after twenty years, is not her daughter he raised. Moreover, Dirie comes to realize that her father the one she ran away from is a different one she runs back to because he can now accommodate her views as an adult.

When she goes back to Somali, Dirie exudes optimism and confidence that one day the guns will fall silent and "the bullets will begin to flower". At the car, when they are driving to her mother's village, she tells Ragge, the cousin, that clanism is the disease at the heart of the failure of Somali state. However, according to her, in spite of the war, she still finds hope. One of the symbols of hope is a mixed school of boys and girls.

This shows that she still holds Somali close to her heart. She empathizes with the children looking for knowledge and says:

They watched the teacher as if he was a baby goat and they were hungry lions. It was very sad for me. I always wanted to go to school, to learn to read books easily and write and spell perfectly but I never had a chance. Standing there, I forgot about being hot and uncomfortable; school is a magical place for me. (186)

In this scene, she positions herself in the same lens as the children as she tries to understand her struggles. This purpose of going back home reveals the dream of change for not only Dirie, but also for the Somali nation.

The drama reaches a climax during an incident when Dirie is at home with her family. There is no confrontation between the prodigal daughter and her family. She says, “It was a miracle for my nomadic family to be sitting together in front of a little hut. My brothers and sisters haven’t been together in one place throughout our whole lives” (197). This scene is crucial in the narrative because it shows the final calmness in a family that has always been nomadic.

Towards the end of the narrative, Dirie becomes aware that even though she has lost the family in America, at least her journey had ensured that she does not lose her family in Somali. She gets a fulfillment and hope that she will help her people realise the effects of the female genital mutilation. She states:

Talking about female genital mutilation in the West is easy- the real battle is Somali. Allah led me back to my own people in a way they can hear and understand. I pray that he will give me the strength to speak to my own people in a way they can hear and understand. (226)

The climax to the conflict of her emptiness is resolved. There is a sense of renewal of hope. At the end of her visit to her family, she feels like she has found a purpose in life. This is like an answer to the Oprah Show organizers who had wanted her talk about female genital mutilation without actually knowing anything about it. It is as if they were trying to speak without experience.

Dirie's life progression is not only a physical journey but also a journey towards regaining a better understanding of herself and asserting her moral independence. By borrowing representational strategy from artists in order to tell her story, she not only creates an illusion of immortality for herself which probably is the human purpose behind artistic creation but she also succeed in lending beauty to the ugliness of ordinary life.

### **3.4 The Plot**

Dirie chooses to introduce her narrative through flashbacks. She recollects the events in Somali, Britain and then America. She presents her plot in form of a journey to reveal the steps she has taken in her life to what she is now. She gives credence to her narrative by her consistency and unity of purpose, which brings the narrative to an organic whole at the end.

The sequence of events in *Desert Dawn* takes a form of a physical and psychological journey. At the beginning of the narrative, Dirie reveals how she is in constant flight all her life. She tells us that life as a nomad is all about looking for green grass. Her life follows this same plot of looking for 'green grass'. These flights define her life.

The flights are the journeys that she makes throughout her life. These journeys begin in *Desert Flower* when she escapes an arranged marriage and gets to Mogadishu where she meets an uncle who secures her a job in Britain. Her mind is never settled there. She moves from one state to another looking for green pastures only to find herself lonely. It is through these journeys that she brings us to a conflict resolution at the end of the narrative.

Dirie uses flashbacks and links present events with past incidents. She gives the reader information of her past, including her secrets, inner and external conflicts, while revealing significant events that affected her life. Her recollection of childhood memories results into twist and turns as Dirie looks back at her past and explores the experiences that have shaped her life. As events unfold, she gives reasons for her actions as she moves back and forth throughout the story. First, she gives the reason why she cannot cope with Dana's cultural and social background. She states, "I needed to change myself-that I was a lot of the problem but I didn't know what to do. I have been always weary about men, not only because of my father, but due to other things that happened to me" (25). Secondly, she recalls her relationship with her mother; she explores her past and discovers herself in the present. She describes her mother as hardworking and in the process of exploring herself; she discovers she too is hard working, having learnt from her mother.



Every event in a section opens with a Somali proverb, song or a verse from Koran to give emphasis on the different experiences in each event that occurs in each section. She discusses the effects of lack of family relations in Somali. She says that to be alone is worse than death and an insult is hurled to people with no relations of relatives. The reason for her loneliness in America is that her relationship with Dana and his family has deteriorated. The event she discusses reveals her loneliness for none of her relatives is accessible. She longs to see her family hence her reason to go back to Somali.

Dirie takes us back and forth throughout the story sometimes bringing diversions from the main story. In doing this, she contextualizes her present experience produced by an experience of the past. Through recollection of events, she recalls herself as a young girl who was always barefoot and running after goats. The questions she evokes so as to enable us understand her present stature in life as a model in a long tough journey pricked by thorns physically, and tormented by tradition emotionally are dramatically credible. Her use of flashback is essential and effective in patterning of events because it takes a journey to the past and invites the reader to travel with her to the present.

As events unfold, Dirie reveals that the kind of conflict she experiences is personal. In America, she finds that she is alone after she has broken up with Dana. She is unable to reconcile her upbringing with the realities in America where they even scorn breastfeeding in public. It is while in America that she discovers a sense of emptiness in her life. She realizes she is lonely and states that, "I longed for home touch...even a slap from hands that loved me" (11).

She reveals to the readers that family in her culture is everything and relationships are as essential as water and milk. This is very ironical that she should long for home so much that she even wishes for a slap from her father. Is it not the very expression of male overrules which she ran away from? This longing sets the plot forward as she takes a journey to her native land.

The events Dirie narrates take physical journeys in many countries. She starts in Somali at the age of thirteen years to the time she is about twenty-eight years in America. The journeys that she makes in America gives her new experiences that moulds her character as she tries to come to terms with her past. A decision to go back to Somali is an emotional struggle. She gets a warning that Somali is no more. She fears she will never trace her family. She makes the decision and decides to go back despite the warnings.

The events unfold as she allows herself an opportunity to visit her past through recollection of events and take stock of the hurdles she has had to overcome to become who she is today. She recollects the painful and physical memories of female genital mutilation and the rape from her uncle Guban. This culminates denouncing her traditions and talk publicly against the practice. She states, "I agreed to speak even though it was difficult for me. I had broken a strong traditional taboo and talked publicly about my own circumcision. I had become a United Nations Spokeswoman" (11). The autobiography allows her to become a voice to the victims that are voiceless.

The narrative ends with a happy Dirie. The conflict in her personality that had no home is now rooted in a familiar ground where her purpose is to bring about positive change in the community. Through the ordering of events she narrates, the plot creates cohesion by revealing a successful conclusion. From the beginning of her narrative, her conflicts with her family culminated to her escape but her narrative ends with a hopeful Dirie who not only reconciles with herself but also her Somali community as well.

### **3.5 Characterization**

Dirie's mother takes the centre stage in her personal development. She is the pillar of her life as she mentions her throughout the narrative. She comes out as a strong-willed woman who has the ability to confront challenges. She goes behind her husband's back and saves her daughter from an arranged marriage. The manner in which she describes the relationship with her mother seems very special. It is through her mother that she learns about the importance of hard work and self-reliance. She states, "Mama, I raised my own child myself and I fed him the way you taught me you taught me how to feed a baby. I am a very self-reliant person because of where I grew up. I learnt how to do a lot of things most people don't do" (178).

One event that portrays Dirie's mother as caring and areliable parent occurred at night when she saves her daughter from the arranged marriage. The narrator presents her as open minded because she does not conform to the cultural practices. She saves her from the agony she too experienced. Her mother is the most decorated figure in the narrative. She says, "My mother was the worker in the family. She cooked the food, nursed the

babies, built the house, wove the mats we slept on and made baskets and wooden spoons. She was the cook, the builder, the doctor and my only teacher” (6). Here, Dirie wants us to believe that it is because of her mother that she has become who she is.

Dirie’s mother comes out as someone who confronts challenges of life. She describes her as fifty-seven years old and energetic although she looks ninety because of the pain and the hardship she endures. She says, “I am grateful that she is still able to work and that she is still strong” (190). She watches her work as she sing; she learns from her that everything works by faith. She further describes the challenges her mother faces and says that she lost half of her children through death and that she still carries a bullet in her chest yet despite all the obstacles her mother faces in her life, she is full of courage and hope. She learns traits of perseverance from her as she tries to survive in the foreign countries she lives.

Dirie’s father contributes to the shaping of her life. She describes him at first as one who is attached to tradition, which informs the chauvinism he projects. However, we see that he is capable of changing when he accepts the challenges prescribed by his daughter. She is interested to see her society change and her father provides her with that hope.

Mohammed is Dirie’s elder brother who has a great impact in her life. At first, he appears as a traditionalist when he cautions her on her dressing code. In Somali, he warns her sister on taking photographs because people in their village believe that a picture will take their spirits. She presents her brother as a symbol of change. Mohammed protects the

sister when outraged men caution her on entering men's territory in a hotel. She does not understand why men cannot eat together with women in a hotel. Mohammed who embraces traditions feels frustrated by the traditions that undermine women. She is happy to have her brother's support in eradicating ignorance in her country. She says, "I was so pleased at my brother actually taking my part...I was glad my brother had started to see things differently" (212).

Dirie's large family in a desert set up, that consists of her parents, her brothers, sisters and aunts who play a big role in her development. At an early age, she watches her mother build a house which is a role done by women. As a little child, she dreams of building and owning her own house. She learns survival techniques through the harsh conditions of the desert as they always move from one place to another looking for better pastures. Through the challenges of the desert, she develops a strong personality that is daring to move ahead as a world supermodel. She states, "I learnt many great things here, like confidence. I also learnt to be self-reliant. I do not sit around and wait for somebody else to do something. I get up and do it. That is what I learnt here" (164).

Dirie brings out her character as a strong-willed woman who survives an arranged marriage amid harsh conditions in her Somali community. She escapes from her home and even moves on as a single mother after she separates with Dana. She is as brave and plans to run away as if she has no intentions to return. She assumes the role of a provider to her siblings, even older ones like Mohammed, while she is in the West. She portrays herself as a woman who values her Somali tradition and embraces change. The evidence

is seen when she goes to America and tries to adopt their culture especially in her dressing. We see her going back to Somali to educate her people on the negative effects of female circumcision. Ironically, she condemns the changes and at the same time criticizes her Somali traditions. This further shows her lack of consistency.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In examining the literary aspects in Dirie's autobiography *Desert Dawn*, this study has attempted to show how she adopts the literary strategies of the setting, the story, the plot and characterization as an effective strategy of telling her story beautifully and in way that makes the readers enjoy the narrative but also understand the struggles she has overcome. She develops her plot to show growth and overcomes of barriers. She uses literary techniques such as flashbacks to create suspense and to help her to return to her life and reveals herself in the present. She succeeds in overcoming the hate that she once felt about the traditions of her people by embracing her people and aiming at changing her society from within rather than from without. She employs strategies in her narrative that create empathy in her readers by narrating and vividly describing experiences that are painful to her. Her use of para-textual elements such as specific dates of events and photographic, results creates credibility in her narrative.

In the next chapter, this study compares the artistic strategies in *Imam's Daughter* and *Desert Dawn* and finally evaluates their effectiveness.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### COMPARING THE ARTISTIC STRATEGIES IN *THE IMAM'S DAUGHTER* AND *DESERT DAWN*

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and evaluates the communicative effectiveness of artistic strategies through which the works of Shah and Dirie are considered unique and significant. They reflect similar attributes of measurable literary indicators in response to the set out objectives and hypotheses and the study findings. Using comparative explanatory analysis and discussion of the texts after intensive examination of the structure of their setting, the story, the sequences in the plot and characterization, the study demonstrate the shared elements through which creative authors' works are interpreted and conflict resolution achieved.

#### 4.2 The Setting

This section discusses and compares the setting in Shah's *The Imam's Daughter* and Dirie's *Desert Dawn* to examine how the different settings shape them into what they are today.

Shah situates her narrative within a home environment. This is the place she starts her fights with her family members and her community members. She introduces them as religious fanatics. She explains how they wear masks within the community and change their identity when outside the community.

She discusses how she is physically and psychologically tortured within this environment. She struggles to free herself amid challenges from an oppressive life she lives in her father's house. She succeeds at the end of the narrative by not only escaping but also changing her identity.

East Street in Britain is the home she grows up and she presents it as the source of assimilation of beliefs and values that controls the lives of most of the Pakistani immigrants. The vivid description of the street and the community is important in bringing out the behavior of characters and identity formation. It is the fundamental symbol of characterizing the Mob as people driven by religious dogma.

The East Street influences how she relates with the outside world. It is embellished by qualities that make it scary to necessitate the need for an escape. She tells us that the trees on the street looked like monsters, a symbol of her harsh living conditions. Furthermore, this can mean that this street was not welcoming to the narrator, as she often fears going down the streets. It was not home enough to her. It is as a place of suffering and oppression for the female characters. It also reveals male chauvinism within the family set up. Shah state:

I was the fourth child born to my parents, the first girl. In privacy of our home, my father and brothers were allowed to be nasty to me – for I was ‘only a girl. In our culture, girls are less welcome than boys are. If a daughter goes off the rails, it brings more shame on your family than if a son does. (22)



This home setting serves as the source of the conflict in the story. One can empathize with Shah and the situation she finds herself in as an only girl in a family within a society that prescribes to a notion that boys are of more value than girls do. This scene also shows the hypocrisy in the family that hides the suffering of an only-girl in a family.

Dirie situates her narrative in different geographical locales. She begins her narrative with the story of her life abroad but she keeps on taking us back to Somali to narrate her childhood years. She explains how her life abroad is harsh. She has a desire to go back to her ancestral land. Through descriptions and illustrations, we learn about the culture of her people, the lives of nomads in Somalia and the role of men and women. She illustrates customs such as circumcision of girls and position of boys and men in her community. We learn about the history of her country through historical facts of Siad Barre, the dictator who ruled the country back in the 70s.

The geographical region of Dirie's narrative becomes an important site of formation of identity. Unlike Shah who highlights her life in Britain, Dirie takes readers through places and highlights her life as lived in each of them. She focuses more on Somali where she learns to be confident and self-reliance and this helps her survive harsh conditions in America. In the west, she learns the spirit of resilience. She rises from an illiterate young naive girl to a supermodel and a United Nation Spokeswoman.

Dirie presents her ancestral home Somali as an important place where the resilience of the female characters is revealed. We see her recalling how her mother was the pillar of the family who made the house, fetched the firewood, looked for water in the desert, cooked the food and generally maintained the health of the family. The Somali setting brings out the spirit of resilience that she shows as a child. Later in Britain and America she indicates, to a good extent the Somali setting is just as important to her in the autobiography because it helps her to explain herself to the world, her heritage and identity to the world that only knows her as a model of Somali background who escapes from home. She reveals a sense of movement and change in the society she escapes. However, through the descriptions and illustrations of Somali, Dirie's autobiography becomes essentially a Somali narrative.

Dirie further presents Somali her ancestral home as her sanctuary. Through retrospection, she remembers her life back in Somali and compares it with America the place she settles. She says that in her country, family and relationships are very essential unlike in America where everyone is busy with no time for family. She says, "For us to be alone is worse than death" (11). In America she feels lost and with no direction. When she goes back to her country she says, "I felt peace settling in my bones. I pushed all my worries, all my stress and chaos. I let the Somali darkness and the deep silence surround me. I was at peace that I had not felt anywhere in my life" (109). She further compares the two countries and says:

Things in New York keep me up or I wake up worried about something. When you know something, and I know the ways of the desert, you know that you are safe you can let your fears go and slip away from your mind as water spilt on dry land. I slept soundly every night I was there. (109)

Shah presents Pakistan her ancestral home, only as a reference of the source of cultural practices of her community members. This is the place she describes as dominated by Islamic religion. She says “honour killing” is a common custom in which family members can kill to avenge a “shame” or “dishonor” she is accused of bringing upon her family. She further says that behaviours considered dishonourable are many including apostasy, publically disobeying the family patriarch and a woman wanting to marry a man of her choice. She says the inhuman act of “honour killing” is not condemned by society and the law does not punish perpetrators. Her parents carry on these traditions in England and the narrator describes them as retrogressive. As she ends her narrative, she defies these traditions by changing her identity.

The two authors, Dirie and Shah present similar marriage cultural settings. Both reveal cultures that force young women into marriage. Dirie narrates her experiences of escaping on the night of the ordeal at the age of thirteen years. She goes to look for her sister who lives in Mogadishu where she finally gets refuge as she secure a job in Britain. Shah runs away immediately she finishes high school after she discovers her father is planning to take her to Pakistan to marry a distance cousin. Dirie further discusses about the Somali traditional practices of female circumcision and her nomadic life. She reveals her experiences as a victim who was not aware of the effects. She observes how her childhood depicts gender discrimination in her society by revealing that camels are more valuable than girls are. The experiences changes Shah and Dirie’s perspective about the communities they come from.

They both discover they can live a life of free will without traditional dictums. They later decide to denounce their traditions and families ties to become a voice to girls who go through the same experiences.

The cultural setting that explains the heritage that they wish to share helps us to understand their pursuits in life. Shah and Dirie effectively bring out the cultural setting to present the cultural practices of their people. This is significant in the narratives because it shows the connection between the individual narrator and the society she originates from as she tries to find her identity.

A careful study reveals that both Dirie and Shah share the same ideological setting. Islam as a religion dominates their lives. Shah describes how her father orders her to chant Quran, foreign words that she cannot understand. She recites them to try to please him because of her naivety. Shah says, "From the age of three my biggest daily task was learning the Quran. It is seen as being honourable for a Muslim to have learned to read the Quran. It brings shame on the family if you reach a certain age without having done so" (25). Shah challenges the notions of her father's religion, Islam in her later years when she converts from her father's religion to Christianity. Dirie does not challenge her Islamic religion. She admires her mother's routine of praying five times a day and always seeking divine connections from Allah. Ironically, we see her lifestyle against the Muslim culture. She does not see any problem showing her thighs when her brother challenges her. She says, "We live in wintry countries. This is what I wear, these are my clothes. I am not going to act like a Somali woman who covers her body completely" (60).

Unlike Shah, for whom the home is a place of anguish, Dirie does not show us much of the home setting as to be so torturous to her childhood. Her childhood is marked by the times she spent herding goats and climbing rocks barefoot. She has a special relationship with her mother who helps her escape a forced marriage. Her mother does not want her daughter to go through a process she detests since she was also subjected to the same practice. Shah's mother accepts the norms of her traditions. She does not protect her daughter from physical and sexual abuse. She is a partisan in planning her daughter's forced marriage. The home environment for both narrators creates a reality and relevance to readers as they empathise with Shah who is imprisoned in her own home.

Shah and Dirie presents home setting to produce dual oppositions, which then enhance the tension that produces the major conflicts in the two autobiographies. It begs the question where is home? To Dirie, home is where Mama is and that is Somalia. In the *Imam's Daughter*, Shah has embellished the home with symbols of fear and fright. To her home is in the heart of those who love genuinely.

The different cultural environment in which the narrators grow up is important because it stimulates them to discover who they are as they find their own destiny. This is evident since both change their identity when they decide to escape and denounce their families and traditions. At the end of the narrative, Dirie becomes a spokesperson for the United Nation to speak on behalf of victims of female genital mutilation, a taboo in her own culture.

Shah changes her Muslim religion and becomes a Christian, an act that brought shame in her community. The narrators bring about the conflict in their lives, which they can resolve by running away. They both present to the readers that most times running away, escaping from the home, presents the best opportunity of the oppressed woman to overcome the pain in their lives. They both succeed in using the setting of their stories to create a reality that readers can experience, one they actually know or one they can draw inspiration.

### **4.3 The story**

In *Desert Dawn*, there is an extensive use of orality in her story, a feature common in autobiographies. The narrator grounds for a Somali narrative and so part of her diction involves heavy borrowing from her rich Somali oral traditions. The quotes are openings of the chapters. They enclose the main idea and the theme that the author wishes to pass across. “A woman without relatives dances with her children on her back” (19). This proverb opens the chapter on loneliness aptly title “Alone.” She goes on to apply this proverb to her life and shows how much she longs for family so that she may dance freely and not with “her children on her back.” The story of Dirie is further embellished with other forms of orality like the tale of the rich man land ‘The Sultan’ that her mother tells to her family by the fireside is a celebration of African culture. The story is about life endeavours in how human beings achieve happiness.

As her narrative progresses, Dirie uses the wise sayings and proverbs, which are effective in moving the narrative forward and giving us information on the Somali culture and the people's way of life. This is important because if the autobiography is a palm shake then we are hereby shaking not only the hands of Dirie but also her people.

Shah does not have such oral embellishment in her story. She pieces her plot through small separated sections. Each section heightens the readers' attention to the narrative as she incites our anticipation by giving us some foreshadowing of events to come. The foreshadowing is apparent in the continuous experience of rape and death warnings by her father. He says, "Remember, I will kill you if you ever breathe a word, he hissed" (81). We have a crisis and a moment of tension when Shah defies her father and runs away. Then an event, which unfolds greater crisis, the turning point in the action, occurs with Shah's second defiance of changing her identity, from a Muslim to a Christian.

There are incidents of contrast as Shah narrates her story. When describing her first freedom at Mrs. Jones house, she contrasts religious practices of Christians she learns from Felicity to her father's in Islam. She says:

The very idea of my parents inviting a stranger of another race and faith to share their home with them was a total impossibility. I wondered what gave Mrs. Jones such an incredible generosity of spirit. All my life my parents had told me that I was a useless, godless child destined to end up in hell. Felicity had told me that God loved me. My parent's god was one of punishment and damnation- a god I could never be good enough for. I was intrigued by felicity's idea of God, even whilst I didn't believe it could be true. (181)

Shah shows another contrasting description to show how she feels about her home. She feels suffocated compared to her other friend's home that is peaceful and with a lot of freedom. She comments and says:

Amina's household seemed far more relaxed than mine. Her parents didn't pray regularly, and outside of her Quran lessons they rarely made her read the holy book. Neither she nor Ruhama ever had to wear a hijab- the Muslim headscarf- when they were outside the house. They only wore one during Quran lessons at the mosque" (10).

In *The Imam's Daughter*, repetition of words such as "scream" and "again" several times in the narrative are significant to the narrator since they are a clear indication of her childhood physical and psychological torture. At the age of four, she witnesses her father's brutal attacks to her mother. She declares her honest feelings about her father and says:

I was left alone in the lounge. From there I could hear the dull thump of his fist smashing into her body as mum screamed and screamed. He beat her again and again and again. I sat there frozen to the spot. Mum was ashamed for her little, four-year-old daughter to see her like that. (33)

Shah's narrative carries with it many characters drawn from different categories of class, race, and religion. This makes it very cosmopolitan and influences the point of view that the narrator projects towards the struggles of different people across the world. She even likens the rejection and persecution, which she faces from her family after she converts to Christianity, to the suffering of black people in America during the days of slavery. In *Desert Dawn*, the story does not carry with it much diversification of character and is generally confined to family members.



The final scene in *The Imam's Daughter* shows Shah as having overcome the pain and breaking the silence of her past filled with physical, sexual and psychological abuse. In *Desert Dawn*, the final scene is tied around the fact that Dirie's presence in Somalia brings about a dawn or a new beginning in the life of the other society. She is bringing awareness, she says, "my visit showed me how difficult it will be for people to change- but I am filled with hope. I love my country. If you ask me right this minute where I want to be – I'll sing Africa" (226).

For Dirie, the end of her story leaves a feeling of anticipation. It ends as if it heralds a new chapter in the life of the narrator as she confronts her past and reconciles with herself and her family. After this reconciliation, she intends to use the good will of family and relatives to bring about the changes that she envisions for the country of her birth. That is why the story ends with Dirie swearing love for Africa. It also gives information on her origin "Desert Dawn" whose mission is to empower the child of Somalia with better health, education and opportunity.

Shah succeeds in creating suspense at the end of her narrative leaving the readers asking questions like, what might have happened to her after she publicly writes about her family? When her story ends, we do not really know whether it is the end of her tribulations. For one, the mob that pursued her for converting to Christianity is still there and still unresolved. She is very much in danger for writing the autobiography. Moreover, for that, she ends up quoting Ayaan Hirsi Ali in *Infidel*. "People ask me if I have some kind of

death wish, to keep saying the things I do. The answer is no. I would like to keep living. However, some things must be said” (269).

This ending in the epilogue tells us that if Shah is to tell her story from the point at which this one ends then some of the unresolved issues are bound to haunt her. Therefore, it leaves us in suspense as to what happened to her after she wrote this autobiography.

#### **4.4 The Plot**

The two autobiographies have used different approaches in arranging the sequence of events of in the time and space. It is at this point that we note a marked difference.

Shah’s autobiography is chronological as she takes us on a step by step journey of her experiences from childhood. The plot in her autobiography gives an account of painful experiences of her life as she relates events as vividly as possible. She begins her narrative by taking the readers to an imagination through questions. Her opening strategy gives a hint of the kind of a father she has, one the readers can identify with. She also begins the narrative when she is four years old, an innocent girl who imagines somebody else’s father raping his own daughter. Her starting the autobiography with this information identifies the motive for her autobiography; to give voice to the voiceless who could not express themselves as victims and to act as a voice to them.

Shah's autobiography is ironical from the beginning of the title, *The Imam's Daughter*, because what we see in the Imam father is the opposite of what one expects from an Imam. It is as if Shah wants us to ponder on the behaviors that are hidden under the veil of the Imam. The Imam is believed to be a holy and religious person. Shah says, "My father had an exalted status on our street. Because my father was an Imam, my parents were seen as pillars of the community" (28).

Ironically, to outsiders, he appears sweet and gentle; he speaks to them in a whisper and acts like a truly spiritual and peaceful person. In private, he is filled with cruelty and hatred, rage and violence to his family. He is a hypocrite Imam who hides behind religion. He beats his wife and sexually molests his own daughter from the age of four to sixteen years. He uses his title to lie to authorities. Shah says:

As a family, we survived on donations to the mosque, and on the generosity of British taxpayer. Dad was on income support and we were on housing benefit. Dad had managed to claim on the dole by lying to the council. He had claimed to be unemployed, but of course he wasn't. Dad was the community's full-time Imam, and he did get paid, from the cash donations to the mosque. (82)

In *Desert Dawn*, the plot unfolds with an urge to go back to Somalia and confront the past. This urge for reconciliation with the past forms the conflict inherent in the autobiography. The plot takes us back and forth as the story progresses. In this way, Dirie adopts a non-linear plot in patterning of the events and this makes the narrative sprightly and gives more tension to the narrative.

Dirie begins with a flashback the years of her childhood in Somalia. She remembers that her mother was a person who would fight with *djinns*. This flashback is very important because it sets the plot rolling when later we come to realize that Dirie has her own demons, *djinns* that are haunting her in America. The fear of *djinns* makes her to plan to return home and visit her mother who can fight the djinns and give her a settled peace of mind.

Dirie describes her childhood challenges. First, she remembers that she was not educated because she was only a girl. She illustrates her circumcision ceremony with a lot of pain because she did not know at that time the consequences. As she grows up and reaches the age of thirteen years, she discovers her father had arranged for her marriage to a sixty years old man. Through flashback, she recalls her childhood dream that one day she will marry the man of her choice. It is through these challenges that she shapes her life through hard work. This makes her what she is today, a supermodel and a Spokesman of women's rights.

Flashbacks allow Dirie to foreground certain aspects of her narrative. She has empathy for the Somali nation that is undergoing a tough time in its history. She says, "If there is no Somalia, then what am I? My language, culture and customs are unique, even the way we look is particular to us. How could a country disappear like water in tugin?" (14). She uses the pronoun "We" to take pride in the particular community that she comes from. She wants her readers to understand her as a Somali, and not as a British model. As a woman and the consciousness of an oppressed gender does not escape her. However, she

points out that it can happen to her in America, her place of refuge just as it happened to her in her motherland. The treatment that she gets from Dana is not so different from the cold treatment that she gets from the male members of the society. Through looking back, she is able to discover what is significant in shaping her self-revealed character. She seems keen on bringing out the woman hero within the culture and tradition of the Somali than one outside of it. She therefore describes the character of her mother who is in her own right a hero within the patriarchal structure.

The motive of Dirie writing her autobiography seems to be the idea that she should reconnect with her roots and realize her destiny on earth. This quest for reconnection is seen in the manner in which she uses her past as a projection of her destiny. The use of flashbacks to inform the reader about herding of goats and camels, and of her escape from an arranged marriage are powerful pointers to the future she wants, how different that future should be from the past. She has therefore effectively constructed the plot using flashbacks to show the aspects of personal growth and of the need for social or communal growth with herself as a mediator of change. This nonlinear plot results in foreshadowing that gives hints in what we would expect.

There is similarity in the way events unfold in *Desert Dawn* and *The Imam's Daughter* as the plot progresses. The arrangements of the events in the plot of the narrators is done in a way that they ultimately bring about the understanding of the pain that the two authors have to overcome to live in the society of rigid patriarchy. They develop the plot by bringing to the surface their thematic concerns. They narrate how patriarchal structures

present the futility of destiny to the girl child. They are also similar in showing the role of religion in supporting the culture of male chauvinism. In *The Imam's Daughter*, her father hides under Islam to conceal or even rationalize his abuses on her daughter. In *Desert Dawn* we also see how religion is a barrier that prevents the women from enjoying equal rights as men. The scene in Somalia where Dirie and Mohammed go to a restaurant and they refuse her entry because she is a woman shows the discriminations that women have to endure. All the actions in the two narratives are each linked to make an organic whole as each narrative brings a resolution at the end of the narrative hence bringing credence to their narratives.

The plot in Shah's narrative is sequential and this is effective in showing the aspect of physical growth and passage of time in her life. This sequential movement of the plot is very effective in showing her growth as a person who speaks out against ills of her father as an Imam. It shows how tension rises in her life and how she is set to solve some of the personal conflicts in her life. She states:

For the first time in my life, I thought that I was a good person. I had started to believe in myself. I had so much to offer people, yet my family was still trying to reject me and deny all that- to bury me in that dark place where they had imprisoned me for long. I felt I had much to offer to people that I didn't know- through my work, speaking at communities, youth groups, charities, and the workshops. (253)

Dirie and Shah succeed in artistically controlling their events in order to craft meaningful texts. Through the strategy of ordering events, they manage to portray their purpose in showing the challenges they go through as they struggle to achieve their dreams of freeing themselves from cultures that oppresses them.

Their re-ordering of facts they recall shows causality and their effects. The aesthetic plea in their stories through the plot is what lets the readers to see the actions, which involve rearrangement of the episodes of Dirie and Shah's experiences, which results in cohesion seen in their autobiographies.

#### **4.5 Characterization**

Characterization is central in any literary work of art. Dirie and Shah have presented their characters differently: those who contribute to the process of their growth from innocence to knowledge and those that shapes their lives into the people they are today.

In *The Imam's Daughter*, Shah relies on certain parameters in presenting her characters. In her story, we see a diversity of race, class, religious faiths and gender. This is primarily because her story focuses in Britain where the environment gives her such diversities. This diversity gives her story a sense of cosmopolitanism, which makes her message of religious tolerance and other kinds of tolerance pertinent in a world degenerating to dogmatic conflicts. This diversity of characters is not quite profound in *Desert Dawn* where Dirie's story progresses towards Somali narrative.

Shah uses descriptions to create characters. In the cellar, she describes the painful events visited upon her by her father. She describes her father as a distant figure who spent his time cloistered with his holy book. Through that, we learn about his fanaticism in religion. She further describes him as impractical man and strict. She says that he could not fix a bulb because he existed on a higher spiritual level such that worldly things as

fixing a radiator were below him. She describes him as a hypocrite and a liar to the council for the reason he claims the dole and that he is unemployed yet he is a community's full time Imam and paid from the cash donations to the Mosque. She terms him as an evil man.

Shah describes her brothers as little kings who wait for service from women as they sit and watch television all day. This brings out their male chauvinism. She brings out the most influential character Mrs. Zorba in her life through the descriptive mode. This enables the reader to form a mental picture of her, and to understand the influence she had on the narrator, especially when she describes her as 'gentle and soft spoken' a description which seems to show one of the attributes that would make her drawn to her.

She says:

I tried to write a good review because I loved English, and because Mrs. Zorba was my favorite teacher. Her name didn't sound English, but she looked like many other English people to me. She was tall and slim and she had to be somewhere in her mid-fifties. Her age showed in her face and hands, which were finely wrinkled. She had grey hair, which she wore in a bun, with wispy strands falling loose at the front...Mrs. Zorba was gentle and softly spoken. (136)

Dirie presents dynamic characters in her narrative. They are characters that undergo an important inner change, a change in personality and attitude overtime. At the beginning of her narrative, Dirie's father and the brother are fanatics of Somali traditions. Initially, her father gives attention to the boys only. He never allows any woman to speak to a man unless spoken to. A girl never asks any questions, give any reasons or talk to a man directly.



To demonstrate respect, her father and brother expects the narrator to look down while they talk to her. Apparently, when Dirie goes back to Somali, she is stunned to meet a different father who embraces change.

Shah presents static characters in her narrative. A static character is one that does not undergo important change in the course of the story, remaining essentially the same at the end of the narrative as he or she was at the start. At the beginning of the narrative, Shah introduces her community members and her family who have migrated to England from Pakistan to look for greener pastures. We see them settling in an exclusive environment to avoid any influence from the Britons. In addition, we see her father denying his wife a chance to learn English from the British teacher Mrs. Zhora. The community carries on with their Pakistan traditional practices and discriminates any member who defies them. At the end of the narrative, the narrator's community members cannot embrace the identity she acquires. They threaten her with a death sentence when she commits the sin of apostasy. She tries to reconcile with them in vain

Shah employs symbolism to highlight her male characters. She calls her father a monster-under-the-stairs to highlight his abusive nature that he portrays now and then. This creates an atmosphere of fear at the beginning of the narrative. She describes to the readers a father who never laughs in a home of gloom, a father who refuses to show respect to anyone except other Pakistan Muslims. Shah reveals that if a bulb's light fits loose, he orders his sons to fix and if it is beyond them, he brings an uncle to fix it. By virtue of being an Imam, we see him existing on higher spiritual plane.

Worldly things such as fixing a radiator are beneath him. We know him from home other than from the mosque despite of him being an Imam.

She further labels the brothers as “little kings” who wait for the females to serve them diligently. She calls Omer the social worker a “protector”. At first, he appears concerned about her ordeal and promises her safety, only for the narrator to discover he is an accomplice in her father’s crime. She states, “Omer and my father, two Muslim men of Pakistan origin had done a deal. This was the worst betrayal” (147).

Shah presents female characters as disempowered. An example is her mother who lacks the knowledge of English and cannot communicate in the setting outside the home. She, therefore, literally lacks a social life within the society. She says, “Mum could speak only a tiny bit of English, but still far more than Dad” (39). This woman lacks agency in changing the course of her life. We see her confined to the oppressive atmosphere of the home with no outlet to her condition. She is not influenced by different world-views; it is only the patriarchal system that she recognizes. The woman who tries to influence her mother figure is Miss Smith who has a positive influence on her mother. She states, “Miss Smith brought a ray of light into our home and into mum’s world” (42). Shah wishes to live a different life from her mother. She desires for a husband who loves her unlike her father who continuously beats her mother. At the end of the narrative, Shah finds joy in meeting Tom the man of her dream and choice.

Unlike Shah, Dirie draws a very intimate figure of female characters. She presents empowered women. She marvels about their achievement through them. They play a very big role in her life. She emulates the aunt's hard work. She says that, they toiled even in their last months of pregnancy. To Dirie, her mother has a strong, unbowed spirit. She is the one who creates an atmosphere where everybody else, including the males, can thrive. She can only offer change from within the cultural space and without trying to destroy it.

By characterizing her mother within the domestic space, Dirie, unlike Shah, is trying to tell us that the woman can be a pillar in the society even within the space defined by motherhood. At one time, her mother is described as religious that since she washes herself with sand in the absence of water before praying to Allah. The effect that such a drawing of her mother does is to show the impact of religion on her. Religion is one of the forces that shape her worldview. She infuses creativity into her autobiographical work to capture and present a character the readers can identify with, of her mother who stood out amidst poverty and a male dominated society where a woman has no place.

Characters are the carriers of both the plot and the themes in a novel. It is from characters' dialogue that action's themes unfold. In *Desert Dawn*, we learn Dirie's characters through their dialogue. This is evident with the narrator and her brother. We learn about his domineering character when he gives Dirie conditions of accompanying him to Somali.

He tells her to change to her traditional clothes but she does not yield to his demand. She refuses to change her clothes justifying it to the cold weather in America.

In *The Imam's Daughter*, we learn Shah's character through her soliloquies; a great technique used to convey the progress of action of the plot by means of expressing a character's thoughts about a certain character's past or present events while talking to oneself without acknowledging the presence of any other person. Shah is melancholic when she remembers her past, which is bitter and very sad.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have discussed and evaluated through descriptive comparative analysis the similarities and attributes that contribute to a better understanding of the artistic strategies in the two autobiographies. The use of powerful descriptive symbols and figurative representation are synchronized with relations of events, settings, characterization and the narrators' experience in order to move the conflicts towards resolution.

Setting in the two books is paramount because it brings out different identities in the two authors. The setting plays the role of identity formation. Further, comparing the two writers has shown great similarities on the way that they have told certain aspects of their stories. The characters draw from almost similar socio-cultural milieu. In *The Imam's Daughter* religion and tradition, produce characters that are trapped and want to escape.

In *Desert Dawn*, tradition and religion combine to produce complexities in the interactions between the genders typified by Dirie barred from a restaurant because religion prohibits the mixing of the sexes in public gatherings.

*Desert Dawn* centers in Somali cultural practices more than it does on religion to an extent that issues of tradition like clitoridectomy and early childhood marriage become the centers of conflict. While *The Imam's Daughter* uses religion as the major center of conflict arising between the major characters while the Pakistani tradition is left on the periphery and occasionally called upon to illuminate certain behaviors of the East Street immigrant masses.

In telling their stories, the two narrators use the autobiographical mode as an agent of change in the societies that they come from. Shah is speaking out against the abuses that can happen within the private spaces and from those that we entrust with our security. Dirie uses this examples to reconcile with her past and start a new journey into her life, that of rebuilding the past and her country to ensure that children are empowered and do not end up in the same situation as she did. Such understanding of the texts comes from the manner in which the two authors have employed aspects of art to narrate their stories.

Through patterning of events, Shah's narrative is chronological as it moves from the beginning to the end in accord with time it takes causes to produce effects. Distorting the chronology of Dirie's narrative by using flashbacks, a plot is realized. The courage to talk about themselves to the public contributes to the autobiographical truth in their

narratives. Coherence and artistic unity has been achieved through consistency of patterning of events. Shah and Dirie's courage to talk about themselves to the public and consistency in character depiction, contribute to the autobiographical truth in their narratives.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

This study has explored the way in which Shah and Dirie employ various aspects of art in *The Imam's Daughter* and *Desert Dawn*. It has discussed the strategies employed by Shah and Dirie in writing their two texts under study. The study further sought to answer the question whether Shah and Dirie's texts are representative of autobiographical works through analyzing aspects of art they have employed. The study compares the aspects of art in the two texts to examine how Shah and Dirie manipulate these aspects by artistically bringing to the surface their childhood and adulthood life experiences.

Through the aspect of art, Shah and Dirie explore the self by selecting, ordering, presenting their events and experiences that shape them to what they are today. The reorganizing and reshaping of their experiences creates unity of coherence and action. They show their creativity by narrating experiences uniquely in their life with a sense of literary artistry. This results in an aesthetic appeal that shapes the reader's engagement with the thematic concerns the narrators present.

Shah and Dirie's narratives are autobiographical texts going beyond the artistic rendition of their narratives. They employ the strategies unique to the genre of autobiography, which enable them artistically narrate their experiences that are a point of their references in solving their problems. I observe that, a stable self-identity allows for evaluation of experiences that lead to self-growth.

Dirie has always been associated with the art of fictionalizing her stories on campaign against female genital mutilation in all her books but in *Desert Dawn*, she has shown her creativity, her ability and artistry in telling her personal story. The unique thing is that she exploits the use of oral mediums of literature from the Somali community to flavour her story. While Shah, uses her writing prowess to record the factuality of her experience not just to gain psychotherapeutic outlet from her traumatic sexual abuse experience but also to indulge in an act of creative excellence.

However, the two books have unique qualities that set them apart. In *The Imam's Daughter*, the study has revealed how difficult it is for Shah as a writer of autobiography to distance herself from the experiences of the time she is writing about. Her voice at the beginning of the narrative is that of a little girl who is so timid to become part of the general society. She uses a young narrative voice to create empathy on the reader and heighten the sense of inhumanity, which she undergoes. The same feeling would not have been created if she had narrated from the perspective of an adult. Sometimes Shah would make comments on her childhood experiences, which are not part of her adult story. This reveals how writers are not influenced by their mature thoughts.

The research found out that autobiographical memory plays several roles in narrator's life; first, it can act as a therapy. Remembering painful experiences elicit empathy on readers who might be sharing the same experiences and relieves suppressed pain on the narrator. However, the experiences become a point of reference to solve problems. Shah and Dirie share their painful memories as they lived them.



Secondly, writers use autobiographical memory to reveal identity formation overtime. We learn about Shah and Dirie today through their formative years and the steps they have taken to what they are today.

Shah and Dirie are not renowned writers. Most writers concentrate on thematic concerns the writers narrate. In this research, the focus was on four aspects of art: The plot, the story, the setting and the characters. Further research can be done on other aspects of art to discover new possibilities in the two texts under study in order to bridge the existing knowledge gap.

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