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A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness
Critical Thinking Essay #3

Saba is a 19 year old Pakistani female taken to a river and shot in the face by her father and her uncle. She is shot and left for dead in the water because her uncle wishes her to marry his brother-in-law but Saba wants to follow her heart and marry Qaiser, the man of her choosing. This is considered an attempted honor killing in Pakistan, where “women ... live as second class citizens” (HBO).

Saba’s family believes she has disrespected the integrity of their familial unit and themselves personally by her choice to marry an individual of her choice outside of their wish for her. It is their position that “parents have a right to decide their children’s future” (HBO), and that they can kill in the name of defending their power over their children. Saba’s father and uncle happily go to prison in the name of this attempted honor killing, and even state they’d have relished the murder of the young man she freely chose in favor of their choice for her.

In Pakistan, honor killings are acquitted if the family forgives the perpetrator(s). This is a matter of commonly accepted public policy once the legal technicalities are hashed out, even if the case is investigated as a crime. Traditionally in Pakistan, marriage has been an institution dedicated to the preservation of power, privilege and prestige, and not of individual choice and right. Because it is only in the modern era with the trend shifting from collectivistic to individualistic that this institution, in the minds of the elders, has been undermined, has romantic love won in marriage.

Pakistan is an Islamic country, where apparently love wins before the eyes of the law. Qaiser and Saba were able to get married independently at a court, and they felt brave enough to do it with protection of law in the first place over familial objections. They knew the consequences would be severe if their

family disapproved of their marriage, even if the attempted honor killing were investigated as a crime, because of their culture's policy of exonerating the criminal with familial forgiveness.

The police themselves acknowledge "God has given [Saba] the right to choose freely" on the "simple matter" of who to marry (HBO). What they cannot do, though, is even with the individualistic trend this propounds is ensure she has the equal protection of law in a culture that clings to traditionalist notions of culture and custom in providing for whom to marry. The juxtaposition of a court that can marry them who would let her family off scot free for killing her for that decision is confounding.

What will stick with me about this film is that the transition of the change from collectivistic to individualistic marriage in a society like Pakistan's has occurred or is occurring despite sincerely held religious beliefs about plural marriage and arranged marriage to maintain a family's power, prestige and privilege. Marriage for advancement of the family – for status, economic gain, or power alliances – are common throughout the Muslim world, and to be informed by the movie that Pakistan is shifting away from the old guard is intriguing. It is observed, that less approval than ever is required of the family and kin for a choice in a partner than ever before, in societies tending toward individualistic marriage.

Works Cited

Films, H. (Director). (2016). *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness* [Motion Picture].

Lamanna, M. A. (2017). *Marriage, Families and Relationships: Making Choices in a Diverse Society*. Boston: Cengage Learning.