

Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind Study Guide

Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind by Suzanne Fisher Staples

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Overview

A bildungsroman (an autobiographical novel which tells the story of a character who grows from childhood into adulthood), *Shabanu*, published in 1989, depicts a young girl's coming of age in a desert in Pakistan, a predominantly Muslim country. The subtitle, *Daughter of the Wind*, reflects the desert conditions where the people live, which force them to move—like the wind—when the land becomes parched and the toba, or water hole, dries up. *Shabanu*, only eleven when the novel opens, disobeys on occasion and attempts to rebel, but she soon realizes that she must submit to the will of her father, and later to that of her husband, an arranged marriage to an older man. She maintains her independent streak, but definitely matures by the novel's close.

About the Author

Born in Philadelphia in 1945 to Helen Brittain Fisher and Robert Charles, Suzanne Fisher Staples grew up in northeastern Pennsylvania. She received a bachelor of arts in literature and political science from Cedar Crest College, Allentown, Pennsylvania, in 1967. She married Nicholas Green that same year, but divorced in 1976.

She married Eugene Staples in 1980.

Staples has lived in many places and had a variety of jobs during her career; she worked as a journalist, foreign correspondent, editor, and consultant during the 1970s and 1980s for Business International Corporation, United Press International, the Washington Post, and the U. S. Agency for International Development. In the late 1980s she published her first young adult novel.

While engaged in her various positions, Staples lived in Pakistan in 1980 and again from 1985 to 1988, where she interviewed many Muslim women. This research became the impetus for her fiction writing, beginning with *Shabanu, Daughter of the Wind*. Her second novel, *Haveli*, is its sequel. She has subsequently lectured on the status of women in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

After publishing her two novels set in Pakistan, Staples wrote *Dangerous Skies*, a novel set along the Virginia coast. This award-winning mystery explores the relationship between Buck Smith, a twelve-year-old white boy and his best friend, Tunes Smith, a twelve-year-old black girl.

The book examines the impact of racial differences on their friendship. Staples returned to the East for her next novel, *Shiva's Fire*, set in India; it relates the story of Parvari, a young girl with a remarkable gift for dance, who experiences her first love.

Staples currently lives in Chattanooga, Tennessee.



Plot Summary

Shabanu lives in the Cholistan Desert in Pakistan near the border with India. Her people are a nomadic desert family. Shabanu is on the brink of womanhood; her older sister Phulan is already marriageable, and soon will be married to Hamir, a cousin of their family's. Shabanu eventually will be married to Hamir's brother, Murad. At age eleven, Shabanu is not interested in marriage; she likes to be with the animals that are her best friends.

Shabanu's family raises camels, which provide the bulk of their income. Once a year Dadi, Shabanu's father, travels to Sibi to sell some of the camels. Shabanu loves the camels, especially Guluband who can dance. Shabanu is anxiously awaiting the trip to Sibi with Dadi. Shabanu saves a baby camel whose mother is dying during birth. They name him Mithoo. He has no mother to nurse him so Shabanu becomes his surrogate mother, and devises a way to feed him milk from another female camel.

It has not rained for a long time and the family may have to move to be near a village where water will be easier to get. However, a rainstorm brings enough water to stay a while longer. Shabanu and Dadi get ready to leave for Sibi. It will be a long trip. Along the way, they meet some Desert Rangers, who express an interest in buying Guluband. Shabanu is horrified. Would Dadi really sell him? Dadi won't sell to them, but Shabanu now understands that it might be a possibility when they reach Sibi. Farther along the way, they meet up with others traveling to Sibi. They agree to travel together for safety, because they will be going through an area of tribal families who are not always peaceful. They come upon some tribesmen called Bugtis, who are searching for a daughter who eloped against her family's will. Shabanu is afraid they might kill Dadi, but they let the caravan pass.

Finally, they arrive in Sibi. It is full of people selling all kinds of things and there is a carnival. Dadi negotiates the best price he can for the camels because they need the money for Phulan's dowry. He also sells Guluband, which devastates Shabanu. She is beside herself with grief. On the way home from Sibi, they stop in a city to buy items for Phulan's dowry. Shabanu visits a shawl seller, who gives her a precious and old shawl called a shatoosh. The old man sees the inner beauty Shabanu radiates. He wants her to be happy. They take the dowry home to show Phulan and Mama. Now that the older camels are sold, the younger ones must take on the work, so the whole family helps insert nose pegs in the camels' noses. Xhush Dil is now the primary work male.

The family takes a pilgrimage to a shrine known as Channan Pir. They pray here for many sons for Phulan. Here, the men and women separate. Shabanu likes being in the circle of women, talking, eating, and being together. Her aunt Sharma and cousin Fatima join them and the hordes of other women at the shrine. Sharma and Fatima are seen as somewhat scandalous because Sharma left her abusive husband, and Fatima is still unmarried at 16.



They return home, only to experience a frightful sand storm that ruins everything and ends up nearly killing Shabanu's beloved Grandfather. Although he is still barely alive, they know he will not last much longer. He wants to be buried at Derawar, a fort where he was a soldier in his youth. The family travels to Derawar where Grandfather dies. However, there is no way for him to be buried in the official cemetery, so they bury him out in the desert, building a crypt out of desert cement. Once Grandfather is safely buried, the family must decide what to do. The water at Derawar is not very good, so they decide to go to Mehrabpur, where Phulan's wedding will be. They will observe Ramadan and then prepare for the wedding. However, the landlord Nazir Mohammad takes notice of the two sisters and plans to give them away as gifts to his hunting friends. To protect their honor, Shabanu, Phulan, Mama, Auntie, and the children flee to the desert, hoping to outrun Nazir. Meanwhile, Dadi stays to do what he can to keep Nazir from following them.

Shabanu takes charge of the women, but they are soon overtaken by a group of Desert Rangers. She is actually relieved to let someone else take care of them. A false report tells them it's okay to return to Mehrabpur, but Mama does not believe it. They will stay and wait for Dadi to come get them. Eventually Dadi arrives with Murad, Hamir's brother, the one Shabanu is supposed to marry someday. Hamir died trying to defend Phulan's honor. Phulan is devastated. After a time, it is safe to go to Azman, where negotiations will take place to work for a peaceful solution. In the end, it is decided that Phulan will marry Murad in place of Hamir. Shabanu will marry Rahim-sahib, the older brother of Nazir Mohammad. Rahim is a well-respected politician and Muslim scholar, but he is old enough to be Shabanu's grandfather. He also has three other wives. Shabanu cannot bear the thought of marrying him, although he appears to be in love with her and he is kind and doting.

Phulan's wedding takes place, and Shabanu returns to Cholistan with her family. They fix up the huts and build cisterns to hold water. Shabanu knows her impending marriage is inevitable, but she has not yet started menstruating, so she hopes against hope that something will be wrong with her and Rahim-sahib will not want her. However, her monthly blood does come. She tries to hide it from her parents, but Mama figures it out. When Shabanu overhears her parents discussing it, she makes a decision. She will run away to be with Sharma. Shabanu leaves in the middle of the night, taking as little as possible. She doesn't count on her dear camel, Mithoo, who follows her. He will not let her go, and he protests loudly when she tries to tie him up. To avoid being discovered, Shabanu lets Mithoo come along, but he falls into a foxhole and breaks his leg. This is the end for Shabanu. She refuses to leave Mithoo to the jackals, and he is too big for her to carry. She knows Dadi will find her, beat her, and force her to marry Rahim-sahib. She resigns herself to this fate, steeling herself for the life she must face.



Chapter 1, Guluband

Chapter 1, Guluband Summary

This first chapter introduces the reader to Shabanu, the main character. She is eleven years old. She has a thirteen-year-old sister named Phulan who will be getting married soon. In the opening scene, the two girls carry water from the water basin back to their hut. It is dry and water is scarce. Their Mama sits in the courtyard by their hut sewing Phulan's wedding clothes. An extended family including an aunt and her two sons and a grandfather all live together.

Mama talks with Auntie about Phulan's wedding. Auntie expresses her worries about Mama having only girls. She wonders who will take care of Mama and Dadi, Shabanu's father, when they are old. Shabanu tells Auntie that Mama and Dadi are happy, and Mama says she and Phulan are better than seven sons. Dadi arrives home, and Phulan lights his pipe for him.

Shabanu describes how their family must move depending on the availability of water. In the summer, they move to settlements where wells are full. When the monsoons bring rain, they go back to the desert dunes. Now it is winter, and they may have to go to the village to live, because soon there will be no more water in the desert. Phulan worries that if they move to the village she will never see her home again, because then she will be married and will go live with her husband. Shabanu thinks about a trip she will be taking with Dadi to a place called Sibi. They will be taking camels to sell at the fair in order to pay for Phulan's wedding.

That night, the winter air is cold and the sisters huddle together to keep warm. They talk about how their lives will soon change. Shabanu will be married to the brother of Phulan's husband in another year. The two brothers are cousins to their family. Shabanu is afraid of this future. The people of Mehrabpur, the place they will live when they are married, consider Shabanu's family gypsies and harass Shabanu's family.

In the morning, the sky is filled with clouds and then the rains begin. Suddenly, the plans change. They will stay where they are, now that there will be water. The family stays inside while the rain pours. Everyone is happy. They stay cozy by the fire while they mend camel harnesses. The rain continues all day and night. The next day the landscape glistens; flowers have sprouted literally overnight.

Shabanu takes her camel Guluband to the water basin, or toba, to gather water. It is clear that they are close friends. Shabanu relates how sometimes the animals wander over the border into India. When she goes to retrieve them, she looks at India, but it doesn't seem any different to her. Guluband is a talented camel: he can dance when Shabanu sings. They take him to dance when they travel, charging admission for people to see it.



When Shabanu arrives at the toba, Dadi is already there, dancing and praising Allah for the water. Shabanu asks how long the water will last. Dadi replies that they should be able to stay in the desert until Phulan's wedding. She loads up her goatskins with water, ignoring its icy coldness. The goatskins glisten like diamonds.

Chapter 1, Guluband Analysis

Elements of the setting introduced in this chapter include the desert, dry sand, huts with thatched roofs, cooking fires outside, camels, water holes and wells, and monsoons. Other elements that indicate setting include the food and drink - lentils, chapitas, and tea. All of this is part of the nomadic desert life that Shabanu and her family live. This setting goes hand in hand with the culture, one where arranged marriages take girls from their families as soon as they are menstruating and are able to birth babies. The culture also involves dowries; the price a family pays to marry their daughter into another family.

Characterization is essential in a good story. Here, the author focuses on Shabanu and her sister, Phulan. They accept their lot in life, to be married off, but it also makes them nervous and anxious. All these elements pull together as the monsoon rains come. The culture and characters must be at the mercy of the rains, so the rain determines everything for them. Monsoons are part of the setting, part of the culture, and part of the characters.



Chapter 2, Birth

Chapter 2, Birth Summary

Shabanu comments that the rains of winter have forced snakes and scorpions out of their underground homes, which attracts vultures that want to eat them. Shabanu is tending the camel herd because with water readily available everywhere, the camels tend to wander off. While she is tending them, she notices vultures hovering and hears a bellowing sound. Shabanu runs toward the sound. She comes upon a female camel lying on the ground surrounded by vultures. She thinks the vultures are after the camel until she sees that this is a birthing mother and the vultures are trying to get to her still unborn baby. When Shabanu examines the mother camel, she notices two holes that look like a snakebite. Shabanu realizes the mother is dying and she must get the baby out. She pulls on the front legs of the baby camel that have already emerged, but it doesn't seem to help much. In a foggy memory, Shabanu remembers being present when her Auntie was giving birth and how Shabanu's own mother had lain on top of Auntie's belly to help push the baby out. Shabanu tries that now with the camel, and it works.

For some reason, she thinks about her sister, who is going to be married soon and having babies in a strange place with strange women helping her. As soon as the baby camel is born, the vultures go after the mother. Shabanu stimulates the baby by wiping him clean. When the baby is able to stand, she ties her scarf to him and leads him to the toba. She tries to get other camel mothers to nurse the baby, but they all reject him. Shabanu is exhausted from the work of pulling the baby camel out into the world, and she drinks from the water pots at the toba. She lets the baby suck water off her fingers, and then they fall asleep.

She awakens to the sounds of Guluband's leg bracelets. Dadi is there with Phulan, covered in her chadr. Shabanu tells Dadi what happened. He is a little mad because the mother and her baby were part of Phulan's dowry. Shabanu shows Dadi where the mother is. While Dadi inspects the mother camel, Shabanu observes Phulan, who is pleased with her status as a betrothed woman. Dadi returns to tell Shabanu that she did well in saving the baby. They try to figure out a way to feed the baby, but it will take constant attention to feed him the way Shabanu did with the water. Phulan comes up with the idea of dribbling milk from another mother down the back of Shabanu's hand while Shabanu holds her fingers in the baby's mouth. She thinks he might survive.

Chapter 2, Birth Analysis

In this chapter, images of birth and death exist side by side. The first sign of death is the presence of the vultures. Shabanu knows right away what their hovering means. The mother camel dies because of the life-giving water, which brought out the snakes, one of which bites her. Images of birth include, obviously, the actual birth of the baby camel,

as well as the memory Shabanu has of her Auntie's delivery and the thought of Phulan in the future giving birth. The rains represent life and birth as well. The juxtaposition of these two themes emphasizes the reality that life and death go hand in hand. While circumstances bring life, such as the rains, they can also result in death, as when a deadly snake bites the mother camel. The dying mother camel still births the baby, with Shabanu's help. The baby camel is in danger of dying if he can't nurse. Ultimately, Shabanu becomes the surrogate mother in birthing him and in nursing him.



Chapter 3, Kalu

Chapter 3, Kalu Summary

Shabanu names the baby camel Mithoo, and he follows her around as if she is really his mother. She tends the camels and thinks about the trip to the Sibi Fair she will go on soon. Mama has made her new clothes for the trip, the first grown-up clothes she's ever had. Phulan brings Shabanu some chapatis for lunch. Shabanu thinks about the changes she's noticed in Phulan: she has no interest in her chores because she thinks only about her wedding, she doesn't cry under the quilt in bed anymore because she knows her home for the rest of her life will be with her husband's family.

Tipu, the stud of the camel herd, bellows and pursues one of the females. As Shabanu watches the mating ritual, she wonders if humans mate in a similar way. Phulan laughs at her and tells her not to worry. Another male, Kalu, challenges Tipu, and they begin to fight. Shabanu knows this is dangerous because it's possible neither male will survive the fight, which will damage the herd. Phulan runs to get Dadi, while Shabanu picks up some sticks and tries to scare the males apart. Soon Dadi and Phulan are back and the three of them work to separate the fighting males. Kalu eventually gives up, but Tipu seems intent on killing something. He notices Shabanu, Phulan, and Dadi and starts to go after them. Dadi takes off his turban and tosses it in Tipu's face while they try to run away. Phulan trips on her chadr, which Shabanu unwraps and throws on the ground. They run as fast as they can, while Tipu takes out his fury on Dadi's turban. Guluband runs behind them. Dadi and Phulan get up on his back, and when Dadi tries to pull Shabanu up as well, she resists because she is worried about Mithoo. Mithoo is indeed distraught at his abandonment and is running after them, so Dadi stops Guluband and goes back to get Mithoo. They all get home safely.

Mama is glad to have them all back in one piece. Dadi is furious with Shabanu for disobeying him, and Mama is worried that her daughter will become a disobedient wife. Shabanu knows what will be expected of her as a wife. She can't help but compare herself to her sister as they bathe in the toba. Phulan is developing a woman's body, but Shabanu looks like a little girl still. Phulan enjoys housework; Shabanu cares only for her camels. She thinks about Murad, whom she will marry in a year. They are cousins and have known each other all their lives. He is four years older than her. She thinks about how hard it will be to obey Murad, who is still just a boy as much as she is still a girl, when she cannot even obey Dadi, who is wise. While she lies in bed thinking these things, she overhears Dadi and Mama talking about Tipu, and how he will not fetch a great price because he is so skinny from constantly mating. Still, he is a great stud. Shabanu falls asleep knowing that Dadi is trying to protect her.



Chapter 3, Kalu Analysis

The theme of this chapter is mating, mostly explored through the actions of Tipu but also through Shabanu's thoughts about what is expected from a wife. She notices how her mother acts. She thinks about Phulan. She wonders herself how it will be to have Murad for a husband. Shabanu will not have an easy time of it. She is not an obedient daughter; she likes being with the camels and hates housework. She cannot imagine life away from her desert home. The tension has begun to mount as the reader realizes that Shabanu has no control over her life or her future; it is a future she resists, but she also accepts.



Chapter 4, Safari

Chapter 4, Safari Summary

Shabanu and Dadi are preparing to leave for Sibi. Shabanu and Phulan have washed and groomed the camels to look their best, using dye and henna. The camels are decked out in bangles and tassels. The camels carry items to sell as well as provisions for the ten-day trip. Shabanu leaves instructions for Phulan to take care of Mithoo. Auntie gives Shabanu her own chadr. Even though Shabanu would rather not have it, she sees her mother and father and how they want her to grow into a lady. She thanks Auntie for the chadr. Dadi lifts Shabanu up onto Guluband's back and they start the journey. They don't speak very much. Shabanu sings to Guluband to make him dance, and Dadi even joins in.

At the end of the first day, they reach Derawar Fort where they make camp for the night. They build a fire and make chapatis. After they eat, a group of Desert Rangers comes upon them. They talk to Dadi about his journey and his camels. They want to buy Guluband. Dadi doesn't sell him, but the thought of selling Guluband upsets Shabanu. She runs off to avoid the talk. Shabanu makes her way to a garden, where a prince once kept seventy wives. Shabanu ponders how those women were prisoners, living their lives by the rules of their fathers and the prince.

The next morning they attend the mosque for prayers and continue on their way. They do not speak of selling Guluband, and Shabanu knows that they need money for Phulan's wedding. One morning along the way, Dadi is not in camp when Shabanu awakes. He returns soon, though, and with a gift for her. She opens it to find many bands of glass bangles, in colors that exactly match the new dress she is wearing.

Chapter 4, Safari Analysis

Dadi is able to express some tenderness toward Shabanu with his gift of bangles. Perhaps it is his way of saying, "Don't worry. I won't sell Guluband." Alternatively, perhaps it is how he makes up for what he will do. Either way, it illuminates his character, showing that he is a loving father, one who must be harsh at times because they live in a harsh environment. This scene foreshadows the one to come where he will sell Guluband.

Setting is an important part of this novel, and details offer a glimpse of life in the desert and its culture. For example, details about how the camels are groomed and decorated demonstrate the importance of camels in this family's life. The camels are one of their most important resources. The occasional Pakistani words also show clues about the culture. The old crumbling fort they pass and the presence of the Desert Rangers indicate a war-torn country with no resources to rebuild. Continual references to the

expectation that women must obey their husbands and fathers reveal more of the culture in which Shabanu inhabits.



Chapter 5, The Bugtis

Chapter 5, The Bugtis Summary

The Gudu Barrage is a dam across the Indus River. The road there is crowded with buses, trucks, and cars, which makes Shabanu and the camels nervous. They meet another caravan and all agree to travel together for safety against the tribal leaders they will encounter. Soon a group of Bugtis tribesmen stop the caravan. They are looking for a daughter who eloped with a man from another tribe. Shabanu is nervous and worried these men will harm Dadi. When the Bugtis give them permission to pass, Dadi warns Shabanu that those men will kill the daughter for her act of disobedience.

When they make camp that evening, the men of the group talk about prices in Sibi, especially the prices for special camels like Guluband. They talk about how the Iranians eat camels during the feast of Eid. This thought disgusts Shabanu, since her family eats goats during Eid, not camels. She loves her camels and could never imagine them being eaten. She worries about Guluband. Last year Dadi would not sell him, and she hopes it will be the same this year.

Chapter 5, The Bugtis Analysis

Once again, the theme about a girl obeying her father is brought into the scene in a graphic way. Although the girl who ran away is never actually in the book, her punishment will be harsh and horrible when the tribesmen find her, and this knowledge is a glimpse of what might await Shabanu should she disobey. Shabanu is increasingly aware of the kind of future her life holds.

Camels are extremely important in this culture. They are a main source of trade, money, prestige, and other things. Shabanu has to deal with her internal conflict over the knowledge that the camels are bred to be sold versus her personal attachment to the majestic animals. This is yet another harsh reality she must face, much like how she must face the reality of a girl's fate.



Chapter 6, Sibi Fair

Chapter 6, Sibi Fair Summary

Soon, Dadi and Shabanu are in Sibi, met by the crowds and colors of the fair. Animals of all sorts are decorated with dyes, tassels, blankets, and mirrors. Vendors sell fodder for the animals and crushed sugarcane for the people. As much as Shabanu wants to go to the carnival and have fun, she knows she must take care of the animals, build a fire, and cook a meal. She asks her father if he was afraid of the Bugtis, and he says he was a bit, but he trusts Allah to keep them safe. He tells her in a pointed way that Allah's will must be kept. Dadi gives Shabanu some money for herself and some to buy fodder for the animals. As she rides Guluband down the street, she knows people are looking at her fine camel, and she sits tall and proud. She always looks forward to this part of the fair, and knows that this will be her last time coming. Next year she will be married and will stay at her new home instead of coming to Sibi with Dadi.

Finally, Dadi takes her to the carnival. She rides a merry-go-round and an early type of Farris wheel. Dadi buys her a paan, a treat, from a man dressed as a woman. Shabanu finds this a little shocking. They watch a midget dance. It is time to go, but Shabanu wishes they could come back the next night. As they return to their camp, they see a group of tribesmen called Pathan waiting. The men want to buy the whole camel herd, and Dadi holds them off by asking an extremely high price. Dadi doesn't want to sell the favorite, Guluband, but he says they could be very rich if he did. Shabanu tries to sleep that night, waking continuously to hear the reassuring sounds of Dadi refusing to sell Guluband. The next morning, offers are still coming in. She wants to take Guluband away, but she realizes as a girl with no money, she could not last long and the consequences would be severe. Another man is in camp looking at the females of the herd. Dadi asks him for less than half the price he told the Pathan man, and it makes Shabanu feel better to know that Dadi is looking out for Guluband.

Chapter 6, Sibi Fair Analysis

Although Shabanu has been to the Sibi Fair many times, it is a marvel each time. This time is particularly poignant because it is her last. This bittersweet feeling is overshadowed, however, by the constant tension and worry she experiences over the possible sale of Guluband. The irony of this chapter is that women in this culture are not subjected to the rude and sometimes menacing world of trade and men. Shabanu is still young enough, not yet a woman, but very close, so that she is allowed to view this world. Perhaps all the times before when she has come with Dadi to Sibi, she has not paid any attention to the implications of growing up; she just enjoyed it. Now that she is on the cusp of adulthood, she might be seeing things in a new way. She is beginning to understand some of the realities of life. Another irony is that the female camels are offered for a lot less money than the male camels, which symbolizes the status of

female humans as well in this culture. Girls like Shabanu are seen as burdens, something to be rid of at the earliest possible moment.



Chapter 7, The Bargain

Chapter 7, The Bargain Summary

The nice man returns to bargain with Dadi. Dadi trusts the man and wants a good deal for both of them. They haggle pleasantly until they reach an agreement. Dadi is so happy he sends Shabanu to the market for chickens and other food to celebrate. By the time she returns, he has sold Tipu for a large sum. He is eager to invite all their traveling companions for a celebration feast. While Shabanu begins preparing the food, a dust storm comes up and she runs around trying to get everything covered up and tied down. Dadi, who has gone to buy more food, returns and helps her. Inside their tarpaulin, Shabanu falls asleep.

Shouts outside wake her up. It is the mean Pathan man, Wardak. He pays Dadi a large sum, and suddenly Shabanu realizes he is buying Guluband. She screams and runs at him, but Dadi catches her. He holds her back while Wardak takes Guluband away. Shabanu is traumatized. Her favorite camel, her best friend has been sold. She feels as if her heart has been sold. She says, "My heart is crumbling up inside me like a burning piece of paper." Dadi comforts her, and when the rain and wind stops, he continues preparations for their celebration. Shabanu is numb, but goes about the work. She knows they needed the money for two weddings and dowries, and she knows it will give Dadi and Mama an easier life, so she resigns herself to this state of affairs. The celebration commences with musicians, food, and friends.

Chapter 7, The Bargain Analysis

The moment that Shabanu realizes Guluband is being sold is as gut-wrenching as if someone has died. Guluband represents everything Shabanu holds dear - her freedom, her childhood, her home, herself. She goes numb. The reader can see a shift in her, as if she has been plucked from the ground and is now beginning to already wilt. It is the first of many moments in her life that will tear at her heart. She must learn to deal with these unpleasant hardships. This foreshadows many more hardships ahead.



Chapter 8, Shatoosh

Chapter 8, Shatoosh Summary

Wardak, the man who bought Guluband, returns to join in the feasting. Shabanu can hardly tolerate his presence, but she does. The men sit around the fire and talk of camels and Arabs while music plays. After a while, the men encourage Dadi to dance, which is traditional. He pretends to protest, also tradition. Finally, he and another man dance with swords. Shabanu makes tea all the time during the feasting, and is glad to be busy afterward with cleaning up. They will start the journey home the next morning.

She is numb and is without feeling. She even tries to feel something, but reflects, "I am as empty as clay cups after the dancing." In the morning, Dadi wakes Shabanu with a present: a puppy. She is uninterested. The journey is uneventful. They do not talk. Little by little, the puppy, named Sher Dil, gains the attention of Shabanu and she starts to like him. She still thinks of Guluband all the time, but says, "it's as if he's with a part of me that now is gone."

They reach a city where they will buy shawls for Phulan's dowry. While Dadi searches for other items in the bazaar, Shabanu looks at shawls. She finds a shop where a kind old man assists her. He sees something special in her and brings out the shatoosh his mother used to have. He wants to give it to her. The kindness of the man starts to melt the coldness in her heart she's had since Guluband was sold. The man helps her pick out beautiful shawls for Phulan.

They leave the city and enter the desert once again. At a resting spot, Sher Dil plays with Shabanu, bringing out laughter from both her and from Dadi. As she falls asleep that night, Shabanu hears the sounds of animals at a nearby toba. She is almost home.

Chapter 8, Shatoosh Analysis

Broken hearts are capable of mending, as Shabanu sees in this chapter. While she is not willing to accept the puppy at first, knowing he is a less worthy substitute for Guluband, she comes to like him while they progress on their way home. The kindness of another human being outweighs the meanness exhibited by Wardak. The closer she gets to home and to her sister's wedding, the better Shabanu feels. This is the other side of the hurt and pain of the day before: hope. To fully grow up, Shabanu must understand that life comes with both the hurt and the hope.

Chapter 9, Dowry

Chapter 9, Dowry Summary

Finally, Shabanu and Dadi are home, greeted eagerly by Phulan and Mama. Everyone is full of news. Phulan says there are many baby camels; the cousins have grown. Shabanu shows everyone Sher Dil. The puppy runs and tumbles with the young children. As she unloads items from the trip, Shabanu feels strange to be back in her hut after such a long time. Grandfather asks her to tell him everything she saw. He tells her it is okay to grieve for Guluband, and with that permission she lets out what she's been holding in. She cries, and the rest of the family comforts her. Phulan shows Shabanu the new baby camels, as well as her feeding method for Mithoo, who is growing tall. Dadi and Shabanu unwrap the shawls and gold for Phulan's dowry. The others are amazed at such finery, and Mama looks a little worried about how much it all cost. Dadi reassures her that they are rich now. Eventually, everyone goes to bed, with Phulan and Shabanu sleeping outside in the courtyard so the girls' parents can be alone.

Chapter 9, Dowry Analysis

Change in a character is often indicated by the reactions of others after a time of separation. Grandfather comments on how much Shabanu has grown, but her growth shows in other ways: how she reacts on first going in the hut; her ability to wait until the appropriate moment to cry over Guluband; and, her consideration of her parents' need to be alone.



Chapter 10, Nose Pegs

Chapter 10, Nose Pegs Summary

Shabanu rises before the sun and sets out for the toba to bathe. She notices how low the water is getting - there is only enough for maybe a few more weeks. As Shabanu bathes, she realizes her breasts are beginning to mature. Phulan arrives for her bath and Shabanu washes her sister's hair while she tells Phulan everything that happened in Sibi. As she talks, she realizes that she has no interest in returning another year. She tells Phulan about the Bugti woman who was being hunted down.

Since Dadi has sold off the breeding males of the camel herd, they have to train new males for working, which means they have to pierce the noses and put nose pegs in to allow for reins to be attached. Shabanu describes how it takes the whole family to subdue a camel and for Mama to expertly pierce the nose with a needle. As the chapter ends, water in the toba is dwindling rapidly.

Chapter 10, Nose Pegs Analysis

Shabanu thinks about Guluband as a part of her life that is now over, a part that enjoyed rides at the carnival and telling stories about the paan maker. Thus, Guluband symbolizes her childhood. Now that she is maturing, both physically and emotionally, she finds herself less interested in those kinds of things. She longs to be as pretty as Phulan, as contrasted to Auntie who is fat and grumpy. The subject of marriage is always in the back of Shabanu's mind. It is the only certain thing in her future. At this point, the prospect seems not so bad.



Chapter 11, Channan Pir

Chapter 11, Channan Pir Summary

Channan Pir is a shrine in the desert where women go to pray for their daughters to have good marriages and to bear sons. A caravan of women travel there, and Shabanu's family travels to meet up with the caravan and continue to the shrine. All of their camels are finely arrayed for the wedding. Phulan and Mama look beautiful, while Auntie looks disgruntled. Grandfather tells stories, some true and some befuddled. Shabanu likes them even if they are not his own life stories.

Eventually, the women ride on to join the caravan where they will get to see some relatives, especially Sharma, Mama's sister, and her daughter, Fatima. Auntie disapproves of them because Sharma left her abusive husband and Fatima is already 16 and not married. They go to the shrine to pray, then back to their spot to sleep through the hot sun of the afternoon.

Later in the afternoon, Shabanu goes out to gather fodder and wood for a fire. She wanders near to the camp where the men wait for the women, and she observes a wrestling match between two men who are dressed only in loin clothes. She is stunned to realize one of them is Dadi. She knows he would be furious if he knew she was there, and she tries to get away without being seen, but he does see her. Shabanu finishes her chores and returns to her camp of women. Mama is making chapatis and smiling. Shabanu cannot understand why Mama would lie with Dadi, someone who fights other men naked.

Chapter 11, Channan Pir Analysis

While Shabanu is growing up, she is still quite naive about the adult world. She knows, for example, about Sharma's husband and why she does not force Fatima to marry. On the other hand, she doesn't understand how Mama could want Dadi when she's seen him fighting and being violent.

This world of women seems comforting and nurturing to Shabanu, even though she loves Dadi. Ironically, the women laugh and joke about how birthing daughters runs in the family, when they are on a pilgrimage to pray for sons for Phulan. The notion that boys are valued above girls is always present, even in the midst of the gathering of women. Contrasting that is the presence of Sharma and Fatima who seem to be doing just fine without men, and whom Dadi admires. Perhaps Shabanu might choose that future instead of the one planned for her.



Chapter 12, Sharma

Chapter 12, Sharma Summary

The women gather around the fire circle to eat and sing. They talk about preparations for Phulan's wedding. Sharma tells a story about a woman who was stoned to death for looking at man other than her husband. Shabanu tells about the Bugti girl who eloped and the probable death awaiting her. Sharma reassures Shabanu that there are good men in the world, and that marriage to one is a blessing, yet Shabanu thinks Sharma's independence and freedom would be wonderful. Sharma sings a song about Channan Pir, the Muslim saint whose shrine they are visiting. The song tells how the Hindu raja took the infant son of his Muslim wife and left him to die in the desert, but the animals and god protected the child. He grew into a great man who was loved by both Hindus and Muslims.

The next day, Shabanu's family of women visit the shrine once more, then starts packing to go home again. As she prays at the shrine, Shabanu feels a sense of connection to the saint. They are not sad to part, since they will all be together again at Phulan's wedding in a few months. Sharma again tells Shabanu that she is lucky her father has picked out a good man for her. The women meet up with the men again to go home. Dadi is happy to see them and doesn't let on that he saw Shabanu watching the wrestling. Auntie acts superior about having sons, and Shabanu comes to the sudden realization that Auntie might be pregnant again. Mithoo finds his friend and nuzzles her, making Shabanu realize that he is growing up just as she is.

Chapter 12, Sharma Analysis

Shabanu is happy and comfortable in the company of women. She is shocked and disgusted when she watches the company of men. She is sure that remaining unmarried will make her happier than being married. Ironically, Sharma tells her there are good men, when Sharma has more reason than others to think of men as generally bad. However, she seems to have a balanced view of life.

In Shabanu's world, marriage is the only future for a girl. Unmarried women, like Sharma, are not looked upon very highly. Shabanu's thoughts about staying unmarried may not seem so bad, except that in her culture, it would be a bad choice for her. She will have to choose, if she has a choice, between a respected place in the world as a wife and mother or a life of independence that comes with the price of being despised by her community. However, she really doesn't have a choice in the matter at this point.



Chapter 13, Desert Storm

Chapter 13, Desert Storm Summary

In the middle of the night, back home, a horrible sand storm ravages the hut, the toba, and Shabanu's family. As they move furniture and belongings to shut the house up as much as possible so sand doesn't infest everything, they discover that Grandfather is not there. Shabanu and Dadi go out searching for him, but cannot find him in the dark and the storm.

They return to the hut and wait out the storm. When it ends, they go out searching for Grandfather again. The terrain is changed. Vegetation has been uprooted and blown away. Dunes appear where there used to be none. Dadi and Shabanu search and search as they struggle to find their way. They eventually discover the toba, the water source, under mounds of sand, and they realize they will have to leave for the settled area immediately. Grandfather is still nowhere to be seen.

They return to the hut once again. This time, while Shabanu helps ready the family for the move, Dadi goes back out into the desert to search. In the morning, he returns with the camel herds, including Mithoo whom Shabanu had worried about. Grandfather is with him, frail and nearly dead, but still alive. Grandfather whispers to Shabanu that he wants them to take him to the fort where he fought as a soldier - he wants to die there. Dadi promises him they will leave in the morning.

Chapter 13, Desert Storm Analysis

The setting plays an important role in this novel. Shabanu belongs to a nomadic desert-dwelling people who, time and again, survive storms just like this. They survive by adapting, by moving, by changing. This storm symbolizes the changes and adaptations going on internally for Shabanu. Like all her ancestors, she will grow, change, and move. Like all women, she will grow up and bear children. Like all young girls, she will have to adapt to a new life as she moves from girl to woman.

Death is part of life, especially recognized by people whose lives closely intertwine with nature and all the elements. While the family worries about Grandfather, they understand that death is coming for him, regardless of the storm. They wish to honor his desire to die at his old fort and be buried there. They do not try to prolong his life and add to his pain; they merely respect his wishes.



Chapter 14, The Thirsty Dead

Chapter 14, The Thirsty Dead Summary

The family prepares to leave. They squeeze what water they can from the sand to take with them. They sling Grandfather's hammock on the side of one of the camels and head out. Their home is like a wasteland, the prayer platform buried in sand from yesterday's storm. Shabanu keeps careful watch on the water pot as they take drinks once during the day. Grandfather won't drink, but he seems calm knowing they are on the way to the fort.

Phulan and Shabanu are sent to search for sito, a plant that has deep roots that hold water. While they are looking, they find a turban tied to a bush, a sign that someone is waiting for help. The girls look around, but whoever tied the turban is likely buried under the sand, dead by now. Phulan worries about the person's ghost haunting them, as legend tells. Shabanu sends Phulan back to the camp to fetch Dadi. When Dadi comes, they dig and find the young man. Dadi performs the traditional death rituals and they bury him as best they can. After the family eats and rests, they continue on to Derawar, the fort where Grandfather wants to go. They arrive by nightfall and camp outside, planning to take Grandfather there in the morning.

Chapter 14, The Thirsty Dead Analysis

Again, the specter of death appears. The girls are not afraid of death or of the dead, but of souls that are lost and haunted. Dadi calmly handles the necessary rituals to help the man's soul on its journey to the other side.

The thirsty dead, as this chapter is titled, refers to the dry season and lack of water that they now experience. Water is the source of all life, a necessity. The lack of water makes them all thirsty, at risk of dying. However, in death is also rebirth, and on the other side of the dry season come the monsoons. The seasons of life for Shabanu are much the same; bad times are followed by good. Shabanu is always hopeful and waiting for better times. The thirsty dead man is aided, and she hopes they will soon see better times.



Chapter 15, Derawar

Chapter 15, Derawar Summary

Grandfather dies during the night. They had all felt he would. They wash his body. Before the day begins, Dadi and Shabanu go into the village to find a place to bury Grandfather. They go to the graveyard of the nawab's family, only to be told of the bureaucratic red tape they must go through to get permission to bury him there. They go to the keeper of the fort, who repeats the information. They are in a rush to bury Grandfather's body before the heat causes it to start decomposing. Finally, they decide to make desert cement from clay, rock, and water and use it to create a tomb in the desert for Grandfather. They dig and cement an area, then bury Grandfather. Shabanu is not sad for him, because she believes he is in a better place. However, she feels bad that they couldn't keep their promise to bury him at the fort.

As they make dinner that evening, the keeper of the fort joins them and promises to keep an eye on the grave. Shabanu breaks with her expected place as a girl and asks the keeper if Grandfather's fez and sword can be kept in a special place of honor. The keeper agrees to this. Shabanu feels she has kept the promise as best she can and that Grandfather will rest peacefully now.

Chapter 15, Derawar Analysis

Perhaps the dead man in the previous chapter was an omen, a way to prepare for Grandfather's death. Shabanu clearly has a soft spot in her heart for her Grandfather and wants to honor his dying request. Although circumstances are against her, she steps out of her submissive and silent role to ask for what she needs. She is brave and strong. Her love and respect for her Grandfather outweigh societal expectations about her gender roles. Love is one thing Shabanu values above all things, even to the point of stepping out of her expected role. This is just one time she will opt for the one she loves; in the future, she will sacrifice even herself for the love in her heart.



Chapter 16, Ramadan

Chapter 16, Ramadan Summary

Shabanu's family decides to leave the camp by Derawar because the water is drying out. They go to Mehrabpur, where Phulan's wedding will take place, and will stay there until her wedding. As they prepare to leave, Phulan and Shabanu get what water they can from the well, using one of the camels, Xhush Dil. As Xhush Dil pulls the goatskin out of the well, he takes Phulan's chadr in his mouth and waves it around. It makes everyone laugh, and Shabanu is glad that they can still laugh.

On the trip to Mehrabpur, they pass a herd of camels all lying dead in the parched sand. Soon, they smell vegetation and they know they are close to their destination. Hamir, Phulan's soon-to-be husband, lives on desert land turned into farmland by his father. Shabanu imagines the back-breaking farm work Phulan will have to do. Bibi Lal, Phulan's future mother-in-law, comes out to greet the women as Dadi goes ahead to greet the men. Bibi Lal is friendly and kind. Bibi Lal's daughter-in-law Kulsum and the other women help them set up a hut. Bibi Lal brings them supplies from her own home. Ramadan begins, so the families fast during the day while they finish preparing for the wedding. Hamir has built a cottage, a real house, for Phulan. She is near tears with gratitude and anticipation.

Dadi tells Shabanu about the man, Nazir, who killed Hamir's older brother. He warns Shabanu not to go out alone with the camels, because Nazir is returned and may try to harm her or Phulan. When the cottage is finished, Bibi Lal takes all the women, including Shabanu, to see it. Then they decorate the outside walls with symbols to bring good luck and many sons to the newlyweds.

Chapter 16, Ramadan Analysis

Shabanu has mixed feelings about this new temporary home. She is grateful and relieved that they have fresh, sweet water. At the same time, she knows that the hard labor of turning desert into farmland killed Hamir's father. She realizes Phulan is lucky to have a mother-in-law like Bibi Lal who will be kind to her; but she is haunted by the image of Kulsum's gaunt and pale person - Kulsum is not too many years older than Phulan, but bearing children seems to have sucked the life out of her.

Shabanu is not sure Phulan will be able to survive as a farmer's wife, yet she believes Phulan is lucky to have made such a match. Deep down, Shabanu's feelings are turning toward her own future marriage to Hamir's brother, Murad. She wishes she could catch sight of him sometime. This is the first year Shabanu observes Ramadan as an adult. She grows ever closer to adulthood while observing its unpleasant outcomes. Shabanu is a thoughtful, observant character. Everything that goes on around her, she takes into

herself and makes a part of her. The people around her affect how she interprets life. The environment she lives in does that as well.



Chapter 17, The Landlord

Chapter 17, The Landlord Summary

Shabanu and Phulan are filling water pots from the canal. Phulan stays behind to do some washing while Shabanu heads back to the camp. On the way there, a group of men and the evil Nazir stop her. They are on a hunting trip. Nazir has a tradition of "giving" a girl from his tenants to a friend in his hunting party, and they eye Shabanu. However, when Phulan starts to walk toward them, they decide they like her better. Shabanu keeps her head in this desperate situation. She dumps the water pots on the men, leaps onto Xhush Dil, pulling Phulan up with her, and rides away. The men laugh at Nazir's humiliation.

When they get to the camp, Shabanu tells Dadi the whole story. He grabs his gun to go warn Hamir. He directs them to get everything packed up as quickly as possible and leave for Derawar. Shabanu takes control of the group and gets them all out safely, for the moment. She is exhilarated by the excitement, even though they are in danger.

Chapter 17, The Landlord Analysis

This is the most serious danger they've experienced so far. When the water dries up, they can leave to find another place, but it will be hard to escape a man with a jeep and guns. Shabanu acts decisively to protect herself and her sister. She does everything she should do. She is truly becoming an adult, for she can stay calm and rational in a crisis. She also realizes the gravity of the situation, and knows that all their easiness and happy wedding preparations may all be over for good. If Nazir kills Hamir, there will be no wedding. Their lives will not be what they were. Once again, the low value placed on women is apparent; that Nazir can "give" a girl means she is a mere piece of property, not a human. Ironically, the women who live in this system seem resilient and peaceful, happy with whatever their lot in life might be, while the men seem to be always fighting for the upper hand.



Chapter 18, Spin Gul

Chapter 18, Spin Gul Summary

Shabanu safely leads the women through the night. Phulan is distraught, worrying over her ruined wedding, and afraid for her future family. Mama tries to comfort her. As they continue on, Mithoo catches up with them, having broken away from the camel herd. He is nearly grown now.

Things get worse. They run out of water. Then Shabanu hears a shot. Her first instinct is to get away, but they are overcome. Fortunately, it turns out to be Desert Rangers. They have a message that the women should return to Mehrabpur. Mama believes it's a trick by Nazir, and she refuses to go. They are under the protection of the rangers, who provide water and tents. Auntie lies down without complaining, and Shabanu thinks something must be wrong with her. After some time, Dadi and Murad arrive, stained with blood, their camels wheezing from running the entire way. Hamir is dead. Phulan wails in grief, her happiness crushed.

Auntie is miscarrying a baby, so Mama sends Shabanu into the village to find a midwife to help ease her pain. The midwife turns out to be the sister of the man who promised to watch Grandfather's grave. As the midwife works with Auntie, Shabanu takes Auntie's sons to watch for Sher Dil and the camels. When she returns, Auntie is asleep and everything is as if nothing has happened.

Chapter 18, Spin Gul Analysis

Shabanu is relieved to allow the rangers to care for them; she knows she is at her wits' end at this point. Things seem to be going from bad to worse. Not only are they in danger, but they are also far from friends and family, Hamir is now dead, and Auntie is miscarrying. Phulan is beside herself with grief. Shabanu seems less distraught and more practical about surviving and getting through the troubles. She is a rock in times of hardship.

The climax is near. Seemingly, insurmountable troubles pile on, leading Shabanu to the very edge. There is some respite as the rangers take charge for a time. After all, Shabanu is still just a girl, and cannot be expected to grow up all at once. However, she seems more capable than the other women at keeping the group going. Shabanu loves these people and she will do everything she can to help them survive.



Chapter 19, Yazman

Chapter 19, Yazman Summary

When Shabanu wakes the next morning, rain is in the air. At first, she thinks they will have rain for the wedding. Then she remembers there will be no wedding. The rest of the family seems to be waiting, but Shabanu doesn't know what they're waiting for. When she asks, Auntie replies angrily that they are waiting to hear the price "for all this foolishness you've caused." Shabanu generously ignores Auntie's mean remarks, and asks Mama instead. Nazir's brother is a politician and he doesn't want his brother's hatred to mar his political success, so he is willing to protect Shabanu's family and Hamir's family, but Shabanu worries there is more to pay; that perhaps Nazir will somehow insist on having Phulan. She cannot bear the thought of that. When Phulan is up and about, Mama asks her how she feels. She promises Phulan they will not let bad things happen to her.

They are finally asked to go to Dingarh to meet and work out a settlement. The family travels to Dingarh and is escorted to Wing Command headquarters. The women and children are taken to some rooms, while the men go another room. Suddenly, Shabanu is worried that Murad's family will blame her family for Hamir's death, but they are greeted warmly. Phulan, Shabanu, and Hamir's sister Sakina are together in one room. Shabanu asks her to tell them what happened. Sakina relates how Dadi told them about Nazir's actions, which made Hamir very angry. Murad told the girls and women to go to the desert with Shabanu's family, and just as they were leaving, Hamir was shot. They buried him quickly as they were afraid Nazir's men would be back.

Shabanu hears her young cousins outside where they have climbed a tree using a ladder. Now the ladder has fallen and they can't get down. She goes outside to help them out of the tree when a car drives up. She is afraid it will be Nazir, but it isn't. It is a kind man who helps her get the children down.

Chapter 19, Yazman Analysis

The novel is now at the point of the rising action's peak. Hamir is dead, but the denouement is not here yet. The negotiations must take place, and Phulan and Shabanu's futures must be decided. Much can happen still. Since girls and women are so expendable, it is clear they are the ones who will be used to pay off any deal that is made. Shabanu is right to worry that Phulan may have to pay the price. Auntie's accusation that their present situation is somehow all Shabanu's fault, while ignored, is still in the back of Shabanu's mind. What fate awaits them is, seemingly, out of her control.



Chapter 20, Justice

Chapter 20, Justice Summary

The talks go on and on. Shabanu is restless and wants to know what is happening. Mama comes into Shabanu's room, and Shabanu asks what they are deciding. Mama says whatever they decide will be what's best for Phulan and Shabanu. Realizing that they are talking about her fate as well as her sister's, Shabanu insists on being allowed to be present and listen. They let her in and get Phulan as well. The decision has been made that Phulan will now marry Murad. Shabanu is furious at this idea. She was beginning to accept and even like the idea of marrying Murad, especially after seeing him the past few days. They tell Shabanu that she will wed Nazir's brother, Rahim-sahib. Shabanu cannot believe this - he is old enough to be her grandfather and he has three wives already. She cannot stand the thought of a man so old being her husband.

The man who helped her get the children down from the tree is Rahim-sahib. Even though he is kind, rich, and will help keep peace, Shabanu has a hard time believing what they tell her about him falling in love with her already upon seeing her that afternoon. She says she will live with Sharma, and Mama slaps her hard.

Chapter 20, Justice Analysis

Shabanu feels that she is the one who is being sacrificed to maintain peace in the land. She does not want to be the wife of an old man. She wanted Murad. No matter how much the other women tell her that it is a good match, and even that Rahim-sahib seems to be falling in love with her already, she cannot stomach it. Here's where it all boils down to the question of whether or not Shabanu will be obedient. In the West, obedience is not the highest virtue, but in her own culture, Shabanu is expected to obey. While Shabanu has no control over what the others decide, she now has control over how she will handle the decision that has been made. The unfairness is evident to her - the women are the ones who pay for the men's mistakes. This is not her fault. If anyone's, it is Nazir's fault, but she is the one who has to live a life as the fourth wife of a very old man.



Chapter 21, The Choice

Chapter 21, The Choice Summary

When they all return to Mehrabpur, Rahim-sahib has built fine houses for Shabanu's family, and even finer houses for Murad's family. He sends servants and lavish gifts to Shabanu. Oddly, the house where Hamir is buried becomes a shrine as people hear how his death has brought wealth to the two families and come to see his burial place. None of it makes Shabanu happy. She still longs to be marrying Murad or to not be marrying at all. They officially mourn for Hamir and simultaneously make plans for Phulan's wedding - again. The monsoons come, bringing rain and humidity. Phulan becomes almost unbearable in her demands. Shabanu knows that her impending marriage to Rahim-sahib is good for everyone, but she feels her heart will never bear it. She relishes her time in the desert with the camels; time she knows will disappear soon enough. She decides to teach Mithoo to dance as Guluband once did.

Sharma and Fatima arrive. Sharma tells Dadi how appalled she is at the arrangement for Shabanu. She argues that Phulan would be a better match for Rahim-sahib. Shabanu steals over to Sharma's house one night. Sharma tells her that she has a choice. Sharma and Fatima fix Shabanu's hair and put make up on her, telling her that she must learn how to keep a man's interest so that Rahim-sahib will not forget her and will therefore leave her with wealth when he dies. If he treats her badly, they tell her, she can live with them.

Chapter 21, The Choice Analysis

While Sharma is right about the arrangement, it is doubtful anything will change, so Sharma sets out to change Shabanu for her own good. Shabanu does have a rebellious nature, and maybe she will take her aunt up on the offer to live with them. Or, maybe she will find marriage not as bad as she thought. Sharma puts the thought into Shabanu's head that she has an option, while at the same time tries to train her to be a good wife for her own sake. This is the Shabanu's culture's message to young girls: because you must marry a man not of your choosing, it is best to go along and be obedient, because then you will receive the best treatment and perhaps be taken care of the rest of your life. However, Sharma represents another side.



Chapter 22, The Wedding

Chapter 22, The Wedding Summary

It is eight days before Phulan's wedding. Relatives are coming from all around, making lean-tos in the area around the houses. Musicians play and people eat. Phulan is afraid something else will go wrong, but Shabanu insists she's already had all the bad luck she will have. Rahim-sahib sends strings of gems for Phulan to wear in her hair. Phulan thinks Shabanu is very lucky, but Shabanu says he is used to buying what he wants. Preparations continue, food is cooked, sweets are made, and clothes are sewn.

It is time for the mahendi women to come paint the hands of feet of Phulan and her family. Sharma dresses Shabanu and applies makeup so she will look as beautiful as Phulan. Murad's mother and other women in the family come to feast and celebrate too. Phulan is painted first, while women give her advice for her wedding night. Sharma's advice is to keep some of who she is hidden so that her husband will have to reach out to her for her innermost beauty. Phulan doesn't seem to understand what she means by this, but Shabanu does.

Shabanu falls asleep as she is painted, and when she wakes, it is dawn. It will be time to dress Phulan and get her ready to leave. Shabanu goes out to be with the camels for a while. As she ponders having no control over losing Murad and losing Guluband, Mithoo comforts her and helps her work it all out. She is able, finally, to give up her dream of marrying Murad and to be happy for her sister.

Murad comes to Phulan's house, and the wedding ceremony takes place. They repeat their vows, then drink from a cup of sweet milk and see their reflection together in a mirror. As the couple gets ready to leave, Shabanu's aunts hold the Koran up to create an arch with their arms under which Phulan must pass. Mama and all the women are crying. The next day there is a feast given by Murad's family. Rahim-sahib is there. Shabanu knows he is looking at her all day. She is half pleased and half angry.

Chapter 22, The Wedding Analysis

Shabanu comes into her own even more in this chapter, where she learns she is beautiful. She also learns that her heart can break and mend and that she can have some power of her own, in how much of herself she gives to her husband. As always, the camels comfort her, especially Mithoo. He is always there for her. He loves her truly as it seems no person can or does. The crucial element of this chapter is that now Phulan is married off, Shabanu's future is more pressing and imminent. All the focus will now be on her wedding.



Chapter 23, Cholistan

Chapter 23, Cholistan Summary

After the wedding, all the relatives return to the desert. When Sharma is almost ready to leave, she gives Shabanu some advice. She tells Shabanu not to make "silly mistakes." She tells Shabanu she watched Rahim-sahib at the wedding and he seems to truly be in love with her. She promises to help Shabanu stay strong and healthy when she is having babies so he will continue to want her. Sharma's final advice is: "Keep your wits about you. Trust yourself. Keep your inner reserves hidden. You know where to find me if you need me."

Shabanu and her family return to Cholistan, and along the way, Dadi falls off Xhush Dil, making them laugh. They all miss Phulan. When they arrive home, rain is falling, a good omen. Things look more like they used to than after the sand storm, and the family sets to work on restoring their lives. Shabanu wants to go out with the camels, but Dadi insists she is too old for that now; she must stay home and learn to keep house. The younger boy cousins will watch the camels. Shabanu doesn't like this, but she remembers Sharma's advice not to make silly mistakes, so she submits.

Eventually, after all her cleaning and housework, Shabanu makes an excuse to go out and she finds Mithoo. She ponders how when she is married her servants will do all the work and she can still have her freedom, except it won't be true freedom because she will belong to Rahim-sahib. Shabanu notices her breasts developing more, and she knows soon her menstruation will begin. She wishes it wouldn't, that she could be barren and then Rahim-sahib won't want her. However, it does start. She tries to hide it from Mama and Dadi, but Mama figures it out.

She overhears Dadi and Mama talking about making plans for her wedding, and she decides at that moment to run away to Sharma's. She sneaks out in the middle of the night, dressed as a boy, and takes Xhush Dil. She starts to head out, but Mithoo follows her. She ties him to a tree, but he doesn't like that. She unties him so he won't make noise and wake everyone. Shabanu finally lets Mithoo come along. Shabanu feels better the farther she gets, but then Mithoo falls into a fox hole and breaks his leg. Shabanu is devastated. She cannot take him with her - he is too big for her to lift. She cannot leave him there to be eaten by jackals. She prays that Dadi will find them soon, even though she knows he will beat her. Her only thought is to save Mithoo, hoping that his leg can be mended, although she is sure he will never dance again.

Dadi finds them soon enough. He does beat her, but Shabanu refuses to cry out. She refuses to let anyone get to her. She hears Sharma's advice in her ears, to keep her innermost beauty and inner reserves carefully hidden away. Eventually, Dadi can take it no more. He stops the beating and hugs her, sobbing. Shabanu steals herself for her fate.



Chapter 23, Cholistan Analysis

Shabanu's love for Mithoo is greater than her love for herself. She willingly sacrifices herself for him. She cannot betray Mithoo. She will save him rather than herself. Mithoo symbolizes her love for not only the animals, but also for her family. Even though running away was a selfish act of sorts, she now realizes that her sacrifice is required in order to save not just Mithoo, but her entire family. There is some nobility in knowingly sacrificing oneself for the larger good.

The final moments of this book come as a surprise but not a shock. Shabanu is a free spirit, so it is not at all out of character for her to make the choice to run away. It is not at all out of character for her to give up her hopes in order to save her favorite camel or to save her family from harm. It is sad that she will have to spend a lifetime in a marriage she dreads. Still, it might be okay. She believes it will be, because what was important to her, she can lock away inside herself.



Characters

Shabanu

Shabanu is an eleven-year-old girl who is the main character of the story. She lives in the Cholistan Desert of Pakistan with her nomadic family and is reaching an age when she will have to be married. Phulan is still young physically and emotionally. She prefers the company of her camels. Shabanu is the rebellious, headstrong daughter.

Phulan

Phulan is Shabanu's older sister who is going to be married soon. Phulan is distracted from daily practical matters by dreamy thoughts of her wedding. Phulan is compliant and accepts her role in life happily.

Dadi

Dadi is their father. He is a strong man, but kind. He dotes on Shabanu until she gets older. As she reaches adulthood, he has less patience with her rebelliousness, but he never stops loving her, and, even in the end when he beats her for running away, he sobs over it.

Mama

Mama is Shabanu's mother. She is patient and wise. She understands Shabanu, but doesn't let Shabanu go too far. She has a loving nature, but as her culture demands, she is submissive to her husband.

Auntie

Auntie is Shabanu's aunt who lives in a hut next door with her sons. Her husband works in a city and rarely comes to visit. She acts superior because she has sons, and sometimes she is rather annoying to Shabanu.

Grandfather

Grandfather is a favorite of Shabanu's. He is well respected by his entire family, and they care for him even to his last wish. Shabanu makes sure that his sword and fez will be put in a place of honor, even though he cannot be buried with honors.



Hamir

Hamir is a cousin of Shabanu and Phulan's. He is going to be Phulan's husband, but when he dies defending her honor, plans change.

Murad

Murad is Hamir's brother. Originally, he was supposed to marry Shabanu, but after his brother's death, he instead marries Phulan

Sharma

Sharma is Shabanu's aunt who tries to provide her with wisdom and advice. She left her abusive husband, which is not looked upon very well by this culture.

Fatima

Fatima is Sharma's daughter, who is still unmarried at age 16, which is considered shameful in this culture.

Bibi Lal

Bibi Lal is Hamir's and Murad's mother, and is Phulan's mother-in-law and for a while Shabanu's future mother-in-law. She is kind and helpful. She does not blame Shabanu or her family for Hamir's death.

Nazir Mohammad

Nazir is a landlord in Mehrabpur and he takes advantage of his position. He is violent and excessive. He wants to take Phulan and Shabanu for his own and give them as prostitutes to his friends.

Rahim-sahib

Rahim is Nazir's brother, a politician, and the one who works out the entire dispute between his brother and Shabanu's family. He loves Shabanu and wants her for a wife. He does not want his political career ruined by his evil brother.



Guluband

Guluband is Shabanu's favorite camel. He dances when she sings and ends up being sold at the fair in Sibi. Shabanu mourns his loss deeply, but she must keep going on.

Mithoo

Mithoo is the camel Shabanu helped deliver because his mother was dying. She becomes Mithoo's surrogate mother. Mithoo loves Shabanu and doesn't want her to leave when she is running away. The love of Mithoo is in the end what seals Shabanu's fate.



Objects/Places

Cholistan Desert

This desert is the eastern part of Pakistan near the Indian border. It is where Shabanu lives.

Toba

A toba is a freshwater pond that desert dwellers use as their water source. Without water, life in the desert would not be possible. The people must live near a source of fresh water, and they move if that source dries up.

Sibi

Sibi is a city where Shabanu and Dadi go to sell the camels. It takes about ten days of traveling to reach Sibi from their home in the desert.

Mehrabpur

This is the village where Hamir and Murad live and where Shabanu's family goes when they are out of water.

Derawar

Derawar is a fort where Grandfather wants to be buried. The people there have never been very friendly to the desert dwellers, and they aren't inclined to allow Grandfather to be buried there.

Chadr

This is a head covering worn by Muslim women. Auntie gives one to Shabanu as she is leaving for Sibi, because Auntie thinks Shabanu is old enough now to be modest.

Chapatis

Chapatis are the flat bread of this region made with wheat and water and cooked on an open fire. They are a staple of Shabanu's diet.



Shatoosh

A shatoosh is a very fine shawl made of expensive thread. The old man at the bazaar gives one to Shabanu because he sees a special quality in her and he seems to know that nobody else ever tells her how wonderful she is.

Setting

The significance of the setting, in contemporary times the Cholistan region desert of Pakistan, a part of the Islamic world, cannot be overstated; however, separating the influence of cultural mores from those of Islam is sometimes difficult and perhaps unnecessary. The setting dictates the way of life in many aspects, such as how the families live, how they support themselves, as well as their cultural, traditional, and religious beliefs, involving such matters as marriage customs, roles within the family, prayer, and even language. The desert conditions force the family into a nomadic way of life, a life which dictates simplicity and frugality, obliging eleven-year-old Shabanu to wear the same tunic and skirt for three years. On the occasion of her marriage, she will receive new clothes. What the family lacks in material goods, however, is compensated for by the love and affection they share.

The time span of the novel is less than a year. It begins in January, continues through the summer monsoon rains, and concludes in autumn. In the space of just about nine months Shabanu learns what it means to make sacrifices for her family, experiences death on many levels, and learns about her inner strengths and beauty.

The setting controls the means of transportation, and in a desert setting the best mode of travel is via camel, as it has been for generations. Shabanu's grandfather has served in the Army Camel Corps of the Nawab of Bahawalpur. Her father makes his living raising camels. Shabanu aids her father in tending his camel herds since he has no sons. Camels become some of Shabanu's first pets; the sale of her camel Guluband proves to be a growth experience for her. Staples accurately describes mounting, riding, and dismounting a camel. She explores with the reader the life cycle of the camel, including the birth that Shabanu assists, the food camels like, their varying personalities, their mating habits, their abilities including dancing, and finally, their sale or death as the case might be.

In order to achieve verisimilitude, Staples provides a list of names in the novel with their pronunciations and a glossary of expressions and terms. A map of the area showing Pakistan's location in the East, a portion of which is enlarged to show the region of the Cholistan Desert, proves helpful for readers.



Social Sensitivity

Staples's respect for the culture she depicts proves her sensitivity. As previously stated, she lived in the area and talked to the people there, using their stories as the basis of her novel. The reader's relationship to Shabanu is a direct result of the author's attitude toward her characters. Readers sympathize with Shabanu, delight in her independent streak, and feel compassion when she despairs.

Another way in which the author shows her sensitivity is in her depiction of classic teenage milestones, such as Shabanu's physical development and experiencing menarche. Shabanu envies her sister's earlier development, but at the same time wishes to remain a child with the freedom and independence she will not be able to have as a woman in her society. Staples has a love for the region, or she would not have written about it, yet she depicts the bad as well as the good aspects, producing a balanced portrait.

Literary Qualities

Shabanu has justly won many awards. It was a 1990 Newbery Honor Book, an American Library Association (ALA) Notable Children's Book, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, a Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies, a Horn Book Fanfare Honor Book, an International Reading Association (IRA) Teachers' Choice, a New York Times Notable Book of the Year, and an International Board of Books for Youth's Honor List Book in 1992. The wide recognition accorded this book suggests the excellence of its literary qualities.

Staples writes in the present tense firstperson point of view to enable readers to feel a sense of immediacy, a desire to know more about Shabanu, and a feeling of sympathy with her plight. The plot, although slow-paced in parts because life in the desert is necessarily slower paced than life in contemporary urban centers, nevertheless provides exciting and different twists for Western readers, most of whom have experiences far different from Shabanu's. The author's descriptive passages, although vivid, are generally brief. For example, she describes on several occasions the beauty of the sky over the desert: at daybreak "lavender ribbons reflect from the sky" and at night "the stars peer out from their sapphire curtain."

Figures of speech contribute to Staples's descriptions and help to paint a vivid picture. When Shabanu's family visits the shire of Channan Pir, Shabanu says they leave their prayers "like hens laying eggs," and while there she feels the presence of the saint Channan Pir "like a soothing hand on [her] shoulder." Other vivid similes involve Staples's description of the desert as "an opal haze," of the sandstorms which "rearrange the desert" and make one feel like he is being pierced by "thousands of needles."

She describes the pots holding water, so essential to life, as "shining . . . as though God had sprinkled them with diamonds."

Accuracy in depicting another culture is extremely important, especially a culture about which so little is known in the West.

Staples acquired a knowledge of this area of Pakistan by living there on two separate occasions. She learned Urdu, the language of the region, prior to her second visit when she studied the lives of poor rural women for three years. She has stated in a Bookbird article that every scene and chapter in Shabanu contains real incidents told to her by women of the region. In addition, over a dozen scholars and knowledgeable others checked her work for accuracy before she submitted it for publication.

Staples has stated that she did not intend "a portrayal or defense of Islam," but rather that her goal was to depict the people of Cholistan, with their unique history and culture, who just happen to be Muslims, and yet her depiction of Islam may be the only one, or one of a few, that many American readers have experienced. Readers must be careful



not to generalize and assume that all Muslims or all Pakistani families are like those in this particular story.

To further the accuracy and provide verisimilitude for her story, Staples uses some of the language of the region as well as typical names; she incorporates legends and superstitions as well as commonly held beliefs. She depicts members of a variety of desert tribes, such as the Bugtis and the Marris from Baluchistan, as well as the personalities of various buyers at the Sibi Fair, like the wild-looking, gun-toting Wardak and the gentle man from Zhob.



Themes

Coming of Age

Shabanu and her sister, Phulan, live in a nomadic desert culture that follows the Islamic religion. Therefore, even though they are very young by Western standards, in their culture they are considered to be of marriageable age. Once a girl's bleeding starts, she is considered an adult, ready to bear children. Phulan readily accepts this, although she cries some at first. However, by the time her wedding comes, she is happy and embraces her future. She is only thirteen years old.

Shabanu, on the other hand, is not so ready to grow up. She loves her camels and would rather be with them than keeping house or getting married. As the novel progresses, she grows up quite a bit. While she never leaves her rebellious nature behind, she does understand that she has a role in life. She learns to protect herself by keeping parts of herself deep inside where only she can know them. She learns what real love means: it means one will give up everything for that love.

In this harsh desert environment, growing up is a harsh reality as well. Even though childhood is full of hard work and obedience to one's parents, the reality of having to leave the ones she loves and live with a man she's never met is one Shabanu has a hard time swallowing. However, she begins to get used to the idea of marrying Murad. When Hamir is killed and Phulan marries Murad instead, and Shabanu is required to marry a man old enough to be her grandfather, Shabanu's views begin to change. She cannot imagine being married to an old man who already has three wives.

The true moment of her growing up comes not through mere acceptance of her fate, but in a moment of realization that she can choose to sacrifice herself to save those she loves, even if the one she loves the most is her camel, Mithoo. She comes to understand that adulthood is not always about oneself, but about making choices, sometimes about sacrifice, and about balancing that all out. The unfortunate side effect of her realization is the knowledge that to survive in this world, it sometimes means keeping a part of oneself hidden deep inside. This is a difficult realization, but a necessary one.

Water

Water is as important in Shabanu's culture as her religion is. Her family must have water, and everything depends upon that. Throughout the book, one sees death occur for lack of water. There are times when Shabanu must go without fresh water, and she suffers. She even fears that she might die.

Water is so much a part of the setting that it is almost a character in this novel. It determines nearly everything about the life of this nomadic family, as if it were a flighty aunt whose whims determine what will happen. On the other hand, the water comes



and goes with a great deal of predictability, with plenty of water after the monsoons that gradually decreases during the dry season. This seasonal variation lends a rhythm and reason to Shabanu's life. The family accepts the role of water in their lives; they do not view the dry times as some sort of evil presence, just part of life in the desert. While dry times create hardship, they are to be expected and managed.

Water is universally symbolic of life, since without it there is no life. In this novel, water also symbolizes the precarious nature of life and existence. Few people recognize just how important it is, but Shabanu experiences this reality every single day. Her entire existence is based upon where the water is. Her family moves according to the availability of water. Shabanu and her family have no control over their water supply - only the rains will determine that. This lack of control becomes a personal theme for Shabanu, who has no control over her future - at least she thinks she has no control.

Men and Women

The relationship of men and women is magnified because of the culture Shabanu lives in. There are distinct roles, and women are expected to obey and submit. While Shabanu resists these gender distinctions, she does love being in the presence of the women. She loves their talk and their easy ways with one another. When she has the chance to see the group of men without the women present, she is disgusted. On the other hand, Shabanu has a close and loving relationship with Grandfather. He dotes on her and treats her like a special girl. So does the old man selling shawls.

Being female in this culture is not easy. Sons are preferred over daughters, even though daughters are necessary in order to have sons. Mama tells her girls they are as precious as any sons, and she means it. Even so, daughters are expected to submit to men, as Shabanu observes on the trip to Sibi when the father is searching for his daughter who has eloped. This girl will receive very harsh punishment for her disobedience. Shabanu knows that she will have to obey when the time comes for her to marry.

The difference between the sexes is amplified when Sharma and Fatima appear. Both are women who have taken a different road and are ostracized for it, yet Dadi respects and reveres Sharma. He considers her wise. There is a bit of a double standard here. Dadi respects Sharma, but he would be appalled if one of his daughters were unmarried. Perhaps Dadi's respect is because Sharma was once married, but her husband was so cruel that she left. Perhaps Dadi sees that she did what she had to do to protect her child. Dadi is a man who does not take advantage of his position over the women; he treats them fairly and lovingly. In such a society, many men become abusive and cruel, like Nazir, but there are good men who treat women with respect. Dadi is a man who would sacrifice for his family, just as Sharma sacrificed her good name in order to save her daughter from a life of abuse.



Sacrifice

Sacrifice is a way of life for those who dwell in this place. The dying mother camel sacrifices her life for that of her baby. Shabanu sacrifices herself in a way to deliver the baby, because there are vultures all around wanting to eat. Guluband is sacrificed in Sibi so that they have enough money for Phulan's dowry. Sharma has to sacrifice her good name in order to live the life she needs and to be safe.

Sacrifice is part of adulthood, part of knowing that not everything is about oneself. At first, Shabanu does not understand this. She is upset when sacrifices have to be made. She is particularly upset when the ultimate sacrifice, it seems to her, is required of her: that she marries an old man when Phulan marries Murad. She finds this blatantly unfair and objectionable.

In order for all the families to remain safe, Shabanu's happiness is sacrificed as she is promised to Rahim-sahib. For a time, Shabanu is unwilling to sacrifice herself, and that is when she runs away. However, there is one sacrifice she is willing to make. She will sacrifice her own happiness for the rest of her life to save her precious Mithoo, the one who loves her unconditionally. She understands that real sacrifice must be voluntary and done out of love. Through her love for Mithoo, she comes to know that her sacrifice will keep her family safe and protected. She now accepts that sacrifice out of love.



Themes/Characters

The characters could hardly be more varied. Not one to stereotype, Staples presents a broad range of personalities to develop her story. Women are depicted as kind and loving (Mama, Shabanu's mother); as jealous and supercilious (Auntie, Shabanu's aunt by marriage); and even as pragmatic and independent (Sharma, Shabanu's favorite aunt, who has left an abusive husband and refuses to force her daughter to marry). Shabanu herself is vivacious and independent, yet her sister, Phulan, appears quite passive and mild mannered. The male characters also exhibit various traits. Dadi (Shabanu's father) is loving and kind but demanding. Rahim (Shabanu's fiance) is decent, kind, and generous, but his brother Nazir is possessive, greedy, lustful, even murderous. The family is all important; without various members to help out in the harsh desert conditions, survival would be impossible.

A common misconception about Islam, which Staples corrects, concerns arranged marriages. Limited in Western culture, usually involving only members of royal families, they are more prevalent in the East.

Arrangements there, sometimes made as early as the child's birth with the marriage to take place as soon as the female experiences menarche (the onset of menstruation), are based on cultural not religious tradition, probably in an effort to restrict sex to marriage. Shabanu's marriage is arranged, but not because the family practices Islam; if that were the case, Shabanu could choose not to be married to the older, thrice-married Rahim, for Islam offers females a choice in the selection of their marriage partners. Young people are encouraged to listen to the wisdom and advice of their elders, but they are not forced to follow their suggestions, not unlike the case in Western society. Shabanu says, "As Muslim girls, we are brought up knowing our childhood homes are temporary. Our real homes are the ones we go to when we marry." Shabanu's opinion and feelings about her future husband must yield to the greater importance placed upon the security of the larger family circle, for Rahim's wealth and power could help stabilize Shabanu's family situation. On the other hand, Pakistani cultural traditions, such as landowning cousins marrying in order to keep the land within the family, take precedence over the Islamic freedom of choice.

One aspect of this freedom involves age differences between the potential marriage partners. The Prophet Muhammad himself approved of his daughter's choice of a younger suitor. Shabanu's father follows cultural tradition for financial security and peace between families, a decision perhaps unattractive but at least understandable to most Western readers.

Another marriage custom that Staples depicts, similar to an old Judaic one, occurs when a couple has not been married long and the husband dies; his childless widow then marries her dead husband's brother.

The marriage of England's King Henry VIII to Catherine, widow of Henry's older brother, indicates that a similar custom existed in the West, at least among royal families (albeit



often considered incest as Shakespeare suggests in Hamlet). When Phulan's betrothed, Hamir, dies unexpectedly, Phulan is then married to Hamir's younger brother, Murad, who had until that time been intended for Shabanu.

Another custom is the mahendi celebration, the gathering of women before the marriage to offer advice to the bride, such as how to please one's husband. At the mahendi for Phulan, Shabanu must learn to swallow her disappointment over not being able to marry Murad herself and be happy about Phulan's impending marriage.

No discussion of marriage under Islamic law would be complete without mention of multiple wives, a particularly misunderstood concept. First, most Muslims do not have multiple wives. Second, only the very rich can afford them, for Muslim law requires just and equal treatment, not only in time spent with each but financially— clearly an expensive arrangement. In addition, if a man provides a bride price, a custom common in the desert, four such gifts would be quite expensive. Rahim, being rich however, can afford four wives. The nature of the relationship among these wives is particularly interesting, but one must read *Haveli*, the sequel to *Shabanu*, to learn more.

Understandable, although most likely not preferred by most twenty-first century non-Muslims, is the dominance of the father or husband over the daughter or wife, a tradition both Islamic and cultural. In general, in Islamic households, men govern matters outside the home, but inside the domestic sphere women are honored for being mothers and homemakers. As mentioned above, marriage is an important issue for the entire family. The girl who elopes with a Marri tribesman will be killed by her father for her disobedience and for bringing dishonor to the family. This punishment seems very severe to Shabanu, Phulan, and the reader.

But readers must understand that the girl knew what the punishment would be prior to breaking the rules.

Another theme developed by Staples is the traditional one that families prefer sons.

Auntie does since she would worry about providing marriage dowries if she had daughters, and about her care when she is old as that is the son's responsibility. Shabanu herself questions both her mother and her father to ascertain their feelings about having daughters but no sons. Both gladly accept their situation, but quite likely they hoped for sons too prior to the birth of their daughters. The traditional importance of sons crops up repeatedly, for instance, in the speech of the shopkeeper who sells Shabanu a shawl for Phulan's dowry, the family's visit to a shrine to pray for sons, the description of the house built for Phulan and Hamir, Mama's informing Shabanu in terms of sons about Rahim's marriage proposal, Phulan's wish for sons, and even Sharma's comments on the subject.

Many reasons may account for this preference. Muslim inheritance laws are one. If a man dies without sons, his siblings will share the inheritance with his daughters. In general, females receive a single portion of an inheritance while males receive a double portion in an Islamic family. Theoretically, as females become a part of their husbands'



families, they have less need for money of their own. Patriarchal households are not unfamiliar in the Western world, although gender-specific inheritance laws would not be acceptable in the United States today.

Readers see that all of Shabanu's financial needs are met, and thus she has little reason for money except when she desires independence.

Shabanu is both strong-willed and obedient. She questions the customs of her society, yet she remains within its bounds.

Jinx Watson believes Shabanu must marry or she will "be shunned, penniless, and friendless"; yet Sharma and her daughter are an exception. At age twelve, however, Shabanu is unable to survive on her own.

When she disobeys Dadi, she gets into trouble. For example, when she tries to run away and takes her favorite young camel, Mithoo, into the desert where he breaks his leg and cannot walk, she puts her life and Mithoo's in danger.

Another theme Staples develops is the importance of hospitality and generosity, an essential part of life in this region. At the camel sale, tea is prepared and served to potential buyers; Dadi and others provide food to share at the sale's conclusion. Simply because his mother's name was also Shabanu, the generous shopkeeper in Rahimyar Khan gives Shabanu, a total stranger, the beautiful shatoosh, or gossamer shawl, that his father had given his mother. The family provides hospitality for any gathering, and elaborate preparations take place for Phulan's wedding. Rahim builds houses and sends jewels for the family of his betrothed, Shabanu.

Separation and death and burial are other themes that Staples develops. Shabanu must learn to accept separation when her beloved Guluband is sold and when she herself must leave her family upon her marriage. She does not want Phulan to leave the family even though she favors Phulan's marriage. Even worse than separation is death. Numerous deaths occur among animals and humans, such as the death of the stranger in the desert which invokes the legend of the thirsty dead, of Shabanu's beloved grandfather and the subsequent problems connected with an appropriate burial for him, and of Hamir with its consequent changes in Shabanu's future. The religion dictates a sprinkling of water over the dead and turning the head toward Mecca. Dadi, even with extremely limited water, follows this ritual for a total stranger, and Mama sprinkles the last of the family's water over her father-in-law when he dies.

Providing the best burial that conditions allow is important to all of these characters.



Style

Point of View

This novel is told in first person from Shabanu's point of view. Shabanu is the character who has the greatest change to go through as she grows from child to adult, from self-centered to willing to sacrifice for others, and from not understanding how the world works and considering it unfair to understanding that fairness is not part of the bargain. Shabanu has the greatest conflict, the internal one of how to be a good submissive daughter and future wife when her own nature is rebellious and free-spirited. She is the one who has to learn what matters to her and what she is willing to do.

This novel is told in first person; in other words, as if Shabanu herself is telling it. Another option would have been to use third person. There are many valid reasons for using one or the other, but because this novel is written for young readers, first person works best. It gives Shabanu a voice and allows young readers to identify with this girl who is their age. In addition, because much of Shabanu's conflict is internal, first person works best because she can express her own thoughts and feelings, allowing readers to have insight into the mind and heart of this young girl.

Consider if the novel were told from another point of view. If Phulan were the point of view character, where would be the interest? She is submissive and compliant. The only conflict that happens to her is that her initial husband-to-be is killed. This is not really so much her own conflict, though, because she is equally as happy to marry his brother. In other words, her story is pretty boring. The same applies to almost all the other characters. These characters do not have as much growth or conflict to face as Shabanu does, and thus it must be Shabanu's story.

Setting

Set in the Cholistan Desert in Pakistan, the setting at first seems a bit historical. However, jeeps and other modern items identified in the novel indicate that it is in modern times. It is obviously after the time when Pakistan was part of India, so it is the second half of the 20th century. It is because the culture seems so foreign that the setting seems historical. The culture is part of the setting; in fact, setting and culture are so intertwined that it is difficult to separate them. The culture is an outgrowth of the setting and is affected by the setting. Culture includes government, family structure, religion, how society is organized, and so on. All of those pieces of culture are the way they are in Shabanu's world based on two things: the desert setting and the Muslim religion.

The setting in this novel is very important. The desert inflicts certain restrictions on its inhabitants. For example, they must travel to water sources, and that makes them nomadic. Villages are few and far between, but are main gathering places when water is



scarce, so traveling far becomes a part of life, such as the long trip to Sibi to sell camels and the trip to Mehrabpur for the wedding. Because of the desert life, camels are the animals they keep. In addition, because camels are so important, they are very valuable and a measure of wealth, much the same way horses once were for Native Americans. Because of the cultural setting, that of an Islamic culture, Shabanu faces conflicts that would not be part of the normal Western girl's experience. Most eleven year olds are not facing an arranged marriage to a 55-year-old man, nor must they submit and obey simply because they are girls. Thus, the setting affects Shabanu's life quite significantly.

Language and Meaning

Pakistani words help define the culture and setting of this book. While these words are explained within the text as well as defined in a glossary at the end of the book, they are woven into the narrative so that they do not stand out except that they are not familiar to the Western reader. These words develop the language of the book.

Similarly, the names of the characters depict a life in another culture. They are not Western names, nor European. They are clearly from a distant land and culture. The names of places achieve the same quality. Once introduced, the foreign words, name of characters, and names of places imbue the novel with an otherworldly air. The language help lay the groundwork for the setting and the culture.



Quotes

"A soft pain jolts beneath my ribs as I watch Mithoo nurse, and I think my heart is beginning to mend" (p. 82).

"Crossing the dunes to the toba, I think of Guluband. He seems a part of my life that is long past. His going has taught me both the strength of my will and its limits. I know Dadi thinks my bent for freedom is dangerous, and I'm learning to save my spirit for when it can be useful" (p. 85).

"Phulan looks regal with the red chadr over her shiny black hair. She looks like a flower blooming in the desert sunset, the wind whipping her clothes around her in sheets of color" (p. 92).

"I too feel like a child struggling to know what it is to be grown" (p. 108).

"Outside, the desert has been rearranged. Unfamiliar dunes roll where the land used to lie flat. Stands of shrub and thorn trees are no more. Nothing looks the same" (p. 114).

"Phulan and I head off toward the rolling sand, where the dunes cast peaked and fluted shadows like waves frozen on a sea" (p. 124).

"'It was another boy,' Mama whispers, and she takes me with her to bury it like a piece of excrement in the sand" (p. 173).

"How strange life is; it's all there is, for now at least, yet to some it seems to have so little meaning" (p. 175).

"The monsoon sky is pearly with white, humid heat. There are showers in the afternoon, just enough to cool the air. Then the sun comes out, and vapor rises in curls and wisps" (p.212).

"I wonder if this is all the happiness there will be for the rest of my life: stealing a few moments from a day of housework to sit quietly in the desert with my camels. I wonder how I will endure" (p. 231).

"Like Guluband, I have been betrayed and sold. And Mithoo, like me, has lost his greatest gift by wanting to follow his heart" (p. 239).

Adaptations

Other than Haveli, the sequel to Shabanu, books could be related to Shabanu because they are bildungsromans, focus on Muslim society, have a Pakistani setting, or center on desert culture. Few related titles fitting these descriptions are available for young adults in the United States today, although some excellent ones exist for younger readers. Some of the few titles available include Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy: A Novel* (HarperCollins, 1993) about a nineteen-year-old Indian girl whose mother insists on an arranged marriage; *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee (Fawcett, 1991), which focuses on a young Indian girl, widowed at seventeen, who escapes village life by emigrating to the United States; and Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (NAL, 1956), which centers on an Indian girl, married at the age of twelve, who triumphs over poverty. Elizabeth Bumiller, who spent three and one-half years as a reporter in India, entitles her nonfiction work after a Hindu blessing bestowed upon brides: *May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey Among the Women of India*. There are books produced by Muslim publishers, but their primary intent is to further the teaching of religion; for example, two Pakistanis who have written about Islam are Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, second edition (University of Chicago Press, 1979), and Akbar A. Ahmed, *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society* (Routledge, 1988).



Topics for Discussion

1. What are some of the tenets of Islam?

What is Ramadan? What is Eid? How important is prayer and the practice of religion to the characters?

2. Describe the desert culture. What is its significance to this novel? How would this novel be different if it were set in another culture or country such as the United States?

3. Discuss Shabanu as a bildungsroman, an autobiographical coming-of-age novel.

How does Shabanu change as she matures? What are some of the defining moments in her maturation?

4. Discuss the marriage customs of the area, including the importance of a dowry, the bride price, and the mahendi.

Does Shabanu have to marry so young?

Does she have to marry at all? What other options does Shabanu have if she decides not to marry?

5. Discuss the theme of revenge or retaliation in the novel. What does shutr keena, or camel vengeance, mean?

6. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages to using the first person point of view in this novel.

7. Find evidence that the story is set in contemporary times. Explain how it might or might not be different if it were set further in the past?

8. Cite some of the superstitions of this region. How do they help to indicate what is important to the people who practice or believe in them? What are some of the superstitions involving marriage and death?

9. What is it like to live with an extended family? What are the advantages and disadvantages? Why are extended families living in the same household not popular in the United States? Why are extended families living in the desert popular?

10. What is the law of the desert? Is it just?

Who really has the power to control events? What is the role of the Desert Rangers?

11. Discuss burial customs, such as those practiced for the stranger in the desert, Grandfather, and Hamir.



12. Aunt Sharma advises Shabanu on several occasions. Find those occasions and discuss the advice. Explain whether it is valuable? Determine how it helps or does not help Shabanu?

13. What type of education does Shabanu have? Can she read and write? Is being literate the type of education she needs for where she lives? What shows that she is intelligent?

14. Explain Shabanu's remarks, "Like Guluband, I have been betrayed and sold. And Mithoo, like me, has lost his greatest gift by following his heart."

Does this speech negate Aunt Sharma's advice? If so, explain.



Essay Topics

How is Shabanu similar to girls in America? How is she a normal eleven-year-old?

What issues are different for her? Does she seem to act older than girls her age do in the West?

Shabanu loves her camels. What kinds of animals do Western children fall in love with in this way?

Shabanu doesn't go to school and doesn't know how to read and write. In fact, she seems completely unaware that other children do these things. Do you feel sorry for her because she can't read or write?

The setting is very important in this novel. List five elements of the setting and the role they play in the progression of the plot. You can use place, time, culture, and weather, for example.

Why and how does Shabanu's relationship with Dadi change? When do you most notice the change?

Why does Dadi cry at the end when he beats his daughter? Do you think he is upset that he has such a disobedient daughter? Or is it that he doesn't want to have to do this? Or does he feel sorry for her that she is forced to marry such a disagreeable (to her) man? Or is it a culmination of sorrows?

Imagine what Shabanu's future might have looked like if she had made it to Sharma's. Write an alternate ending.

Write the next chapter of the story. What will happen to Shabanu? Will she be able to be happy?

Many cultures separate the men and women for certain events and ceremonies. Why do you think this is a useful tradition? Why not? Use evidence from scenes in this novel to support your answer.



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Characterize Shabanu and discuss her coming of age, including specific instances when she learns what it means to be an adult in her society.
2. Discuss advantages and disadvantages to arranged marriages, including such topics as dowries, bride price, and the mahendi.
3. Discuss the desert culture, including the food, clothing, livelihood, and language of its people. How does this setting control action and custom in the novel?
4. Discuss Islam as it affects the lives of the characters.
5. Find evidence in the novel that supports the preference for sons over daughters. Why do some characters feel this way? How do other societies feel about this preference?
6. Discuss the history of this area of the world. Are the historical references made by Dadi, Grandfather, and Sharma accurate? Explain.
7. Discuss the beliefs in omens, superstitions, and legends in the novel. How do they differ from those of the Western world?
8. Discuss the laws of the desert. Who enforces them? Compare them with laws in the United States.



Further Study

Frederick, Heather Vogel. Review of *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*. *Christian Science Monitor*, vol. 6 (July 1990): 10. A brief review that praises the novel highly for its extraordinary story.

Gever, Ellen A., and Patricia Austin. "Suzanne Fisher Staples: From Journalist to Novelist." *Teaching and Learning Literature* (1997): 43-55. A substantial article, both biographical and analytical, incorporating long quotes from Staples with commentary from Greever and Austin.

Discusses Staples's four novels, but focuses mainly on *Shabanu*. Covers such topics as cultural misconceptions; journalistic versus fiction writing; use of setting, point of view, native terms, and origin of characters, as well as insideroutsider issues.

Grimes, Marijo. Review of *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*. *Voice of Youth Advocates* (April 1990): 34-35. A brief but favorable review, emphasizing the need for more multicultural young adult novels like *Shabanu*.

Iskander, Sylvia Patterson. "Shabanu and Haveli: Culture, Islam, and Females." *Five Owls* (November/December 2000): 41-43.

An insightful article on Staples's use of the cultural and religious background of the region that she describes and discusses in both *Shabanu* and its sequel *Haveli*.

Nadvi, Mohammad Zafeeruddin. *Modesty and Chastity in Islam*. Translated by Sharif Ahmed Khan. Safat, Kuwait: Karamat Sheikh, Islamic Book Publishers, 1982.

One of many available sources providing information on Muslim tradition, particularly involving the role of women as described in the Koran.

Sawyer, Walter, and Jean Sawyer. "A Discussion with Suzanne Fisher Staples: The Author as Writer and Cultural Observer."

New Advocate (1993): 159-69. An extensive interview with Staples, discussing her background, the effects of her journalistic training on her fiction, her writing style and techniques, her observations of the culture, and her creation of the character of *Shabanu*.

Simon, Maurya. Review of *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*. *New York Times Book Review* (November 12, 1989): 32. A lengthy review, more analytical than most and highly complimentary for its depiction of a world so profoundly different from that of most of the reading audience.

"Staples, Suzanne Fisher." In *Something about the Author*, vol. 105. Detroit: Gale, 1999.



Pp. 208-10. A biographical and analytical article including all of the above article plus an analysis of *Haveli* and *Dangerous Skies*. Includes a number of reviewers' comments.

Staples, Suzanne Fisher. "Writing about the Islamic World: An American Author's Thoughts on Authenticity." *Bookbird* (1997): 17-20. An extremely interesting analysis of the topic of authenticity and a firsthand account of the author's sources for her book as well as a summary of her efforts to provide an accurate picture of another culture.

Watson, Jinx Stapleton. "Individual Choice and Family Loyalty: Suzanne Fisher Staples' Protagonists Come of Age." *ALAN Review* (1999): 25-28. Well-supported theses about characters from *Shabanu*, *Haveli*, and *Dangerous Skies* coming-of-age.

Includes a comparison of *Shabanu*'s conflict in the Pakistan desert to Buck Smith's in the United States. Explores conflict between teens' usual search for identity and the age-old customs shared by their cultures.

Zeiger, Hanna B. Review of *Shabanu: Daughter of the Wind*. *Horn Book* (January/February 1990): 72. A summary of the highlights of the book and high praise for the author's honesty in portraying the world of the desert culture.



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