



**CRISIS, COMMAND, AND LEGITIMACY: SOVEREIGNTY
AND THE STATE OF EXCEPTION IN FERYAL
ALI GAUHAR'S AN ABUNDANCE
OF WILD ROSES**

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Abstract

Drawing on Carl Schmitt's concept of sovereignty and the state of exception, this study examines how Feryal Ali Gauhar's *An Abundance of Wild Roses* represents authority, legitimacy, and decision-making in moments of crisis. Existing scholarship has largely approached the novel through ecofeminist, trauma, feminist, and posthumanist perspectives; however, limited attention has been paid to how exceptional situations produce legitimacy through sovereign acts of decision. Addressing this gap, the study conducts a close textual analysis of selected crisis scenes, including the arrival of the wounded stranger, the confinement of Sabiha, natural calamity, blocked roads, and the appearance of dead bodies. The study argues that the novel constructs sovereignty through figures capable of defining, interpreting, and managing exceptional situations, thereby transforming disruption into social order. It concludes that social and legal legitimacy in the narrative depends less on stable rules and traditional norms than on the authority of the decision-maker whose commands organize communal response when ordinary structures fail.

Keywords: *Authority, Crisis, Decision-Making, Exception, Legitimacy, Political Theology, Social Order, Sovereignty.*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Context

Authority and decision-making remain important concerns in literary studies, particularly in works that represent the construction of social order and the power that sustains it during crisis. Questions such as who decides, who holds authority, and how order is maintained when ordinary structures collapse are central to any reading of sovereignty in literature. These questions become especially significant in narratives where domestic, communal, ecological, and social crises expose forms of authority that remain less visible during normal conditions.

Feryal Ali Gauhar's *An Abundance of Wild Roses* (2024) portrays the lives of people living in a remote mountainous region marked by harsh environmental conditions, social vulnerability, and violence. The novel repeatedly presents moments in which the routine of daily life is interrupted and urgent action becomes necessary. The arrival of a wounded stranger, the confinement of Sabiha, the appearance of dead bodies, and the disruption caused by environmental crises all create situations in which ordinary norms no longer appear sufficient. In these moments, the narrative reveals who can decide, who can command, and whose authority is accepted as legitimate.

1.2. Research Gap and Rationale

Existing scholarship has mainly approached *An Abundance of Wild Roses* through ecofeminist, trauma, feminist, postcolonial, and posthuman perspectives. Bibi et al. (2025), Ullah et al. (2025), Bashir et al. (2025), and Saleem et al. (2025) emphasize ecological degradation, patriarchal violence, and women's resistance in male-dominated societies. Asif et al. (2025) and Yasmin et al. (2026) foreground postcolonial and environmental trauma, while Bukhari (2026) examines non-human agency and ecological accountability. Khwaja (2024) reads the novel as a complex feminist depiction of Pakistani society. Although these studies are useful, they do not sufficiently examine how moments of crisis produce legitimacy through decisive acts of authority. This gap provides the rationale for the present study.

This article extends existing criticism by shifting attention from ecological and gendered distress alone to the logic regarding decision-making through which authority becomes visible in the novel. By applying Carl Schmitt's political-theological concepts of sovereignty and the exception to Gauhar's domestic and communal crisis scenes, the study explores how familial authority, communal hierarchy, and emergency decision-making function as manifestations of sovereign power.

1.3. Research Objective

The objective of this study is to critically investigate how *An Abundance of Wild Roses* represents authority and legitimacy, and how decision-makers maintain social order in exceptional situations. More specifically, the study evaluates how moments of disruption reveal the authority hidden behind rules, traditions, and norms, and how such authority becomes legitimized within familial and communal boundaries.

1.4. Research Questions

1. How does Feryal Ali Gauhar's *An Abundance of Wild Roses* dramatize Carl Schmitt's concept of the state of exception?
2. How does authority emerge through crises in the narrative?
3. How do exceptional situations suspend routine moral and social norms to produce legitimacy in the text?

1.5. Argument of the Study

The study argues that the novel presents sovereignty as the capacity to define and manage situations in which normal rules fail. The sovereign figure is the one who interprets crisis, issues commands, allocates responsibilities, and transforms uncertainty into social order. Through this framework, the article shows that exception is not a marginal condition in the novel; rather, it is central to the construction and recognition of authority.

2. Literature Review

Academic research on *An Abundance of Wild Roses* largely revolves around gender, ecology, trauma, power, and Gauhar's ethical vision. A major line of criticism examines the novel through environmental destruction and women's oppression. Bibi et al. (2025) and Ullah et al. (2025) argue that the novel portrays ecological degradation and gender injustice as interconnected outcomes of patriarchal systems. Both studies emphasize women's resilience and the novel's critique of oppressive social structures. In a related but more specifically feminist direction, Saleem et al. (2025) focus on female marginality in rural Pakistani communities, arguing that the novel exposes gender-based violence and the social systems that restrict women's autonomy.

Several scholars extend this ecofeminist reading to broader literary and theoretical contexts. Bashir et al. (2025) argue that contemporary Pakistani women's fiction, including Gauhar's work, uses ecofeminist frameworks to connect gender oppression with ecological crisis and to construct narratives of resistance grounded in local cultural contexts. Bukhari (2026), however, moves beyond human-centered analysis and focuses on the non-human world, presenting nature as a form of agency and advancing an ethical vision of ecological accountability.

Trauma is another central concern in existing criticism. Asif et al. (2025) interpret the novel through the lens of postcolonial trauma narrative, exposing historical violence in Pakistan's Black Mountains region and highlighting the continuing effects of colonial legacies on people, bodies, memory, and land. Yasmin et al. (2026) offer a related approach by modeling environmental destruction itself as a form of trauma that reshapes the psychological, social, and cultural life of a community. This reading highlights ecological change as a source of collective distress and social breakdown.

Finally, Khwaja (2024) presents *An Abundance of Wild Roses* as a multilayered and realistic depiction of Pakistani society. This critical evaluation draws attention to the novel's interconnected narrative, its representation of gender-based violence, and its contribution to

Pakistani feminist literature. Taken together, these studies establish the novel as a text concerned with ecofeminism, trauma, social critique, collective memory, structural power, and ethical relations with the non-human world.

Despite this valuable body of scholarship, the novel has not been sufficiently examined in relation to sovereignty, authority, legitimacy, and the state of exception. Existing studies have explored ecological and feminist dimensions, but they leave relatively unexamined the question of how authority arises during crisis, how decision-making power suspends ordinary rules, and how legitimacy is produced when legal, moral, and traditional norms collapse. This study addresses that absence by situating *An Abundance of Wild Roses* within a political-theological framework that foregrounds sovereignty and exception as key interpretive lenses.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Carl Schmitt's concept of sovereignty and the state of exception. Schmitt (2005) defines the sovereign as the authority that decides on the exception, suggesting that political and legal order ultimately depends on a concrete decision rather than on an abstract norm. The state of exception functions as a border situation that exposes the limits of rule-based systems. It becomes visible when normal conditions no longer hold and when order must be created or preserved through decisive authority.

Schmitt's framework is useful because it shows that law is not merely a set of stable rules; it is also situational. In exceptional circumstances, the sovereign decision becomes independent of ordinary norms because the survival of order depends on someone's ability to define the situation and act upon it. Schmitt's comparison between the exception and the miracle is significant here: just as a miracle interrupts the normal laws of nature in theological thought, the exception interrupts normal legal and social rules in political life. This analogy connects political authority, social order, and the foundations of legitimacy.

In the present study, Schmitt's concepts of sovereignty, exception, decision, and legitimacy are used as analytical tools to read the domestic and communal crises in Gauhar's novel. The framework helps explain how authority becomes visible when ordinary norms collapse, how certain characters acquire the power to define crisis, and how their decisions create temporary order in moments of uncertainty. The study therefore treats the novel's crisis scenes not only as representations of trauma, patriarchy, or ecological breakdown, but also as sites where sovereign power is enacted and legitimized.

4. Methodology

This article employs qualitative close textual analysis as its research method. The primary text is Feryal Ali Gauhar's *An Abundance of Wild Roses*, which is examined through Carl Schmitt's concepts of sovereignty and the state of exception. The study focuses on narrative moments in which authority becomes visible because ordinary legal, moral, familial, or communal norms appear suspended.

The selected scenes include the arrival of the wounded stranger, Sabiha's confinement, the appearance of dead bodies, environmental calamity, blocked roads, and moments of urgent communal response. These scenes have been selected purposively because they represent decision-making, the breakdown of routine procedures, and the need for decisive authority. Relevant textual passages are analyzed in relation to Schmitt's concepts of sovereignty, exception, decision-maker, legitimacy, and social order.

The method proceeds by identifying crisis situations in the narrative, examining how characters interpret these situations, and analyzing how commands, decisions, and responsibilities are distributed. Particular attention is given to Moosa's role as a figure whose decisions organize domestic and communal life. Through this method, the study traces how the novel dramatizes the emergence of legitimacy when normal structures fail.

5. Discussion and Analysis

5.1. Exception and the Visibility of Authority

Schmitt's proposition that "It is precisely the exception that makes relevant the subject of sovereignty, that is, the whole question of sovereignty" (Schmitt, 2005, p. 6) provides a useful way to read Gauhar's repeated staging of crisis. In the novel, exceptional moments do not merely interrupt the plot; they reveal the hidden mechanisms and limits of authority. The imprisonment of Sabiha, the sudden appearance of a dead body, blocked roads, and the suffocating room in which women plead for Sabiha's life all strip away ordinary routines and require authority to appear publicly.

The confinement of Sabiha is especially significant because it transforms paternal authority into a visible and contested form of power. Her mother's question, "How long do you think you can stay in this room, this prison...it has been two days now, and you haven't eaten a thing" (Gauhar, 2024, p. 209), and the women's cries, "Sabiha, Sabiha, my daughter, my child, what has he done to you?" (Gauhar, 2024, p. 299), expose Moosa's control at the very moment it is challenged. Noor's demand for accountability further shows that authority must repeatedly prove itself when familial roles fail to manage crisis.

The appearance of Kulsoom's dead body similarly produces panic and suspends ordinary procedures. Moosa's decision that he "would take care of the burial" and that her husband would be informed (Gauhar, 2024, p. 228) places the burden of order upon him. His instructions become the principle through which the immediate situation is managed. Even when his control is limited, his public assertion of authority helps sustain communal order by providing a decision through which chaos can be organized.

5.2. Sovereign Decision and the Wounded Stranger

Schmitt's statement that "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception" (Schmitt, 2005, p. 5) is dramatized repeatedly in the novel. The arrival of the wounded stranger is one of the clearest examples. When Moosa asks "who he is, what was he doing up in the Chartoi... and how long can we harbour a total stranger in my house?" (Gauhar, 2024, p. 100), he does more than ask practical questions. His questioning defines the event as a potential threat,

responsibility, and emergency. In doing so, he converts uncertainty into a field that must be managed through decision.

The same logic appears when Moosa confines his daughter and orders, “Make sure the girl stays locked in that storeroom... I want to make sure she tells me the name of that bastard who wrote this” (Gauhar, 2024, pp. 36-37). The household ceases to function through ordinary familial rules and becomes a space governed by command. Paternal care is displaced by sovereign intervention, and legitimacy emerges from the ability to declare a crisis and impose a decision upon it.

The novel also extends this logic beyond paternal authority. When disaster turns the igloo-shaped bunker into “a massive pile of ice and debris, snow, ice, moraine, detritus” (Gauhar, 2024, p. 141), Ibrahim’s survival decisions become existential acts of sovereignty. Whether he searches for Zaki, releases the dogs, or struggles against the storm, there is no stable institution to guide him. His own decision becomes the only available source of order.

A similar pattern appears when roads are blocked and the wounded stranger cannot be taken away. Moosa’s statement, “We have no choice but to keep him here, young man. Let us hope he lives through this, you know. At least then we shall find out who you have brought into my house!” (Gauhar, 2024, p. 173), transforms uncertainty into an actionable response. By deciding what must be done in a contingent situation, the sovereign figure produces order and makes the response appear socially justified.

5.3. Suspension of Moral and Familial Norms

Schmitt argues that the exception involves “unlimited authority” because the normal order is suspended (Schmitt, 2005, p. 12). Gauhar’s novel illustrates this through coercive paternalism and the intensification of punishment in the name of honour. When Moosa imagines that he “would break every limb in the man’s body... gouge out the man’s eyes... hurt him as much as the family’s honour had been wounded” (Gauhar, 2024, p. 33), his language transforms personal grievance into an emergency that appears to justify excessive punishment.

This logic is repeated when he declares, “not over my dead body! Not until I find out who is this infernal bastard of a man” (Gauhar, 2024, p. 115). Normal moral values, due process, and familial care are pushed aside as the patriarch’s decision becomes central. The home becomes a microcosm of sovereign power where the suspension of normative life makes actions appear acceptable that would otherwise seem illegitimate.

Physical violence further clarifies how the state of exception weakens ordinary restraints. When Moosa strikes Fatimah and threatens, “Don’t you dare go into that room again... If I find you trying to open that door, you will pay dearly” (Gauhar, 2024, p. 213), the norms that might have limited paternal or marital authority give way to coercion. The situation is construed as exceptional, and that construction allows extraordinary measures to be justified. The exception is therefore produced rhetorically before it is enacted physically: Moosa’s violent language creates the sense of crisis that authorizes his actions.

5.4. The Decision-Maker and the Production of Legitimacy

Schmitt maintains that law operates in a specific situation and that the sovereign creates and secures that situation in its totality. The exception discloses the “essence of the state’s authority” (Schmitt, 2005, p. 13). This idea is echoed in Moosa’s actions, which reorganize household and communal practices. When he commands, “Right, then. Take him inside... we will get this man through the night and then take him to the District Headquarters Hospital in the morning” (Gauhar, 2024, pp. 17-21), the house is transformed from a space of uncertainty into a structured field of response.

This transformation is significant because Moosa does not merely follow existing rules; he produces a temporary procedure through decision. He allocates tasks, defines responsibilities, and imposes a direction that makes communal action possible despite the breakdown of routine. Even when physical control is not fully possible, his need to “say something, anything... to preserve his position as the ultimate arbitrator of the cards his people had been dealt” (Gauhar, 2024, p. 172) organizes perception and reduces chaos.

Schmitt’s claim that “What matters for the reality of legal life is who decides” (Schmitt, 2005, p. 34) is particularly relevant to the novel’s treatment of authority. Noor may offer an ethical and rational response when he says, “It is our duty to look after this man... we shall take full responsibility... until we can get help” (Gauhar, 2024, p. 105), but his words gain social force only when recognized by Moosa. The text therefore distinguishes between ethical reasoning and enforceable authority. Moral arguments may be persuasive, but they require embodiment in a recognized decision-maker to become social order.

Moosa’s insistence that “I will decide how this nonsense ends... I, Moosa Madad, the Numberdar of Saudukh Das, will decide what is best for that wayward girl” (Gauhar, 2024, p. 212) makes the logic regarding decision-making explicit. Legitimacy lies less in moral or communal norms than in the figure who claims and imposes authority. The same pattern reappears when the burial of the dead body, the calling of villagers, and the distribution of tasks “fall to him,” and when he believes that he “had to make a decision, and he had to make sure that it was known far and wide... he, Moosa Madad, would be the one to steer this raft” (Gauhar, 2024, p. 172). The community’s concern is not only what is decided, but who has the power to decide.

Even when alternative viewpoints emerge, such as Noor’s emphasis on care or the women’s appeals for mercy, their effectiveness remains dependent on recognition by the decision-maker. In these scenes, the reality of social order is attached to the figure whose decision organizes uncertainty into an acceptable and actionable form. The novel therefore confirms Schmitt’s idea that the operation of law and order is tied to the question of who decides in moments where rules alone cannot determine the outcome.

6. Findings

The analysis finds that sovereignty in *An Abundance of Wild Roses* is represented as the power to identify, define, and manage exceptional situations in both domestic and

communal contexts. Crisis moments, including confinement, the appearance of corpses, blocked roads, environmental disaster, and the arrival of the wounded stranger, make authority visible when ordinary norms and procedures no longer function.

The study further finds that Moosa's commands, decisions, allocation of responsibilities, and public assertions of control operate as mechanisms through which order is produced and maintained. In the novel, sovereignty functions through the suspension of moral, legal, and familial rules. Under perceived crisis, extraordinary actions become legitimate because they are presented as necessary for restoring or preserving social order.

Another major finding is that ethical arguments and alternative viewpoints do not automatically produce order in the narrative. Their force depends upon recognition by the decision-maker. Thus, the novel reveals a structure involving decision-making in which legitimacy is produced not simply by norms, but by the figure whose authority transforms uncertainty into a socially acceptable response.

These findings extend earlier ecofeminist, trauma-centered, and posthumanist readings of the novel by showing that the text also contains a political-theological logic. Gauhar's crisis scenes not only dramatize patriarchy, trauma, and ecological decay; they also reveal how authority becomes legitimate through sovereign decision-making in exceptional situations.

7. Conclusion

This article concludes that *An Abundance of Wild Roses* represents authority as a force that becomes visible through the identification and management of exceptional situations. Through Schmitt's political-theological framework, the analysis has shown that sovereignty appears when traditional norms are suspended and a decision is imposed in response to crisis. Legitimacy in the novel does not rest primarily on stable institutions or fixed rules; rather, it emerges through the figure who decides and whose command organizes communal life during moments of uncertainty.

The discussion has examined how crisis scenes such as Sabiha's confinement, the appearance of dead bodies, natural calamity, blocked roads, and the arrival of the wounded stranger reveal hidden structures of power. Moosa's decisions and interpretive acts show how the narrative constructs authority through command, responsibility, and public recognition. The findings demonstrate that social and legal order in the novel depends upon a decision-maker whose authority directs action and validates responses when ordinary structures fail.

The scholarly contribution of this study lies in showing that *An Abundance of Wild Roses* can be productively interpreted through the lens of sovereignty and exception. This reading extends the dominant ecofeminist, trauma, and posthumanist criticism of the novel by introducing a distinct focus on decision-making, legitimacy, and political theology. Future research may apply this framework to other contemporary Pakistani novels that represent crisis, social breakdown, and authority. Further studies may also combine Schmitt's framework with ecofeminism or trauma studies to explore how sovereignty intersects with gendered and environmental crises across South Asian fiction.

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