Patriarchy and Inequality: A Feministic Critique of Khaled Hosseini's And The Mountains Echoed

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A B S T R A C T

The present study explores Afghani patriarchal ideology questioning the traditions laid down by patriarchy in the context of Afghanistan depicted in Khaled Hosseini's And the Mountains Echoed (2013). It is qualitative in nature using patriarchy and inequality as its standpoint proposed by Mary Becker (1999). Through the character portrayal of the selected text, it is concluded that in male dominant societies, men are described as naturally active, strong, dominant and logical while females are shown as emotional, passive and talkative. Moreover, the study highlights how women are subjugated and oppressed socially, politically and economically. Hosseini tries to overthrow the stereotypical portrayal given to women by patriarchy defying the traditional role assigned to them based on gender. Women, neither enjoy the freedom of expression nor do they have the luxury to work independently since they are regarded as weak and dependent on male. Furthermore, the study unfolds the way through which women question the assigned roles imposed upon them by patriarchs raising their voice in matters related to their lives. They strive for their liberation and free will in the face of the long-lasting legacy of patriarchy. Hosseini discards the idea of men as naturally active, dominant and logical. Additionally, he rejects the stereotypical portrayal of women and questions their weaknesses proclaimed by patriarchs in the selected text.

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy is a term derived from the ancient Greek 'patriarkhia', which means the system of society led by elder men of the community (Majewska-Güde, 2021). Patriarchy is considered everyday sexism, but in fact, it is more than just common sexism. Patriarchy is said to strengthen the gender disparity, and its consequences run deeper than they seem apparent. The voices raised by women have not been heard, ignored and commonly suppressed. Patriarchy has

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become a social system and has a long history of suppressing, exploiting and subordinating women.

Moreover, feminism emerged as a belief to provide equality in society, politics, and economic affairs to all sexes. The movement mainly originated in the West but it is manifested worldwide by representing all institutions that are committed to the equal rights of woman and their interest (Boros, & Erolin, 2020). Over time, extensive literature from a woman has shown that the fight of feminist aims to devise means and mechanism through which they suppress men "as a class, not through genocidal, but a political struggle" (Clarke, 1981, p.31).

According to Subirats (1991), there are disparities between the models that existed in society for males and females. There seems to be legally regulated equality between the two genders, however, it is biased in action which favours male more as compared to females. In addition, several studies have highlighted sexism in language, that is, the utterance and expressions which give rise to a disparaging experience in an inferior role of women.

The struggle of a feminist during the middle ages was to get right in property, to study, and to participate in public life. Simone de Beauvoir resisted the myth of "eternal feminine" through her landmark work 'The Second Sex (1949), and it also became one of the classics of feminist literature. Her famous sentence from the book "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" propelled the thoughts of feminists for the upcoming next fifty years (Beauvoir, 1949).

Feminism is divided into different phases; the first wave (1830-1920) has best been recalled as the suffragette movement, whereas the second wave (1960-1980) organized around the liberation of women in the world (Waugh, 2006). About the third wave, Walker (2020, p.p.124-153) stated in her article that "I am not a postfeminist feminist". Moreover, Walker encouraged young feminist towards female activism and stated in her article that "I am the Third Wave", and it began the era of the Third Wave of Feminism (Walker, 2020, p.p. 124-153).

The present study focuses on analysing Hosseini's female characters in his writings. Moreover, from his writings, it becomes evident that the female characters he has portrayed have deep and profound stories to be studied in detail. The study tries to unfold how the portrayals of Hosseini resist patriarchy and deals with it by setting different solutions to their constraints. The study examines the ways of Hosseini's portrayals of women as weaker gender in comparison to men. It also observes how depriving women do from their rights to land and property strengthens gendered subjectivity. In addition, the study highlights all the sacrifices women give to live in society. It enables women to identify their rights and counter threats they face in a patriarchal system.

Aims and Objectives

This study aims to find:

- To explore Afghani patriarchal ideology depicting the cultural and socio-political context in the selected narrative

- To highlight the questioning of monopoly and status of patriarchs by women in the selected text

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist scholars have written extensively about sexism, claiming that it is the primary cause of the oppression of women. A feminist, Lerner (1989), addressed patriarchy as a mechanism of oppression of women by women. In this situation, the predominant cause of women's oppression is giving birth to babies, while men have exceptions. For firestone, to get freedom from speech, a woman should gain control of reproduction (Lerner, 1989).

The variance between the sexes is hormonal and has some biological history, according to biological determination. The social behaviour of genetics has been fundamentally defined by some biologist. Goldberg, & Huber (1976), named patriarchy, a universal part of human society. He noticed that the emotions in this observation were present in almost every culture and there was no improvement in them (Goldberg & Huber, 1976).

Bridenthal (1987) reported that the information on women's behaviour was "sparse and inconsistent" and that the information on male-female relationships was vague. Men are free to demonstrate their feminine traits, according to the theory, and women are free to demonstrate their male characteristics since there is no distinction between the two. Because of their sexual activity, which is entirely dependent on hormones and chromosomes, the biological approach clearly distinguishes them.

Owing to its presence in many cultures, patriarchy is considered the inherent instrument of society. Patriarchy is the product of sociological constructions that are passed down from generation to generation, according to the theory (Man, 2012) "The wives and children regarded father as a dictator in many Asian and less developed societies. Somehow, this idea supports patriarchy in social interference because of traditional cultures inherited and less economic growth" (Man, 2012, p187). Moreover, in modern industrialized societies, the problem addressed is rational, since gender signals and mass media are still in support of male dominance (Côté, 2014).

According to Marilyn (1985), the evolving thoughts of feminists, patriarchy is both important and problematic. He further argues that the oppression of women by men is a form of slavery in the patriarchal state since they have no right to their bodies, sexuality, marriage, fertility, divorce and education. They have to face those limitations that elude their liberty when they choose to pursue a trade or career. They are bound to do something like for the improvement of their lives or the common growth of happiness in their lives.

Moreover, patriarchy is deeply rooted and male dominance and affiliation are very difficult to alter or regulate. Johnson (2014) concludes that patriarchy reveals men's superiority, centrism and power over women. The trunks reflect the form of the social structure and perpetuate patriarchy, such as education, politics, science, art and economy, and the faith-based structures

that are responsible for women's persuasion and importance in today's society. As an individual, the other part of the tree branches shows the relationship with patriarchy, which affects all life curves, such as legal systems, societies and families. The leaves are analogous to the passivity that break from the tree, and the whole structure loses control and die.

The word gender refers to socially formed distinctions helping social contact and relationship allocate male and female attitudes and possibilities. In any institution, such as economy, state, family, community, society and law, gender is a social class, legal classification and personal identity, rather than a fixed one. Moreover, every individual has equal opportunities in the life race, however, they have been restricted by some conventional peers of few citizens (Lorber, 2010).

The liberal feminism of the patriarchal view and its inspiration as a threat to the patriarchal social system are here. Today, women are the pride and dignity of their families in Afghanistan. The status and appearance of women as harming their prestige are especially misunderstood by men as patriarchs. On the other hand, in the novel Nila Wahadati, a liberal feminist character questioned the traditional portrayal of the female as a fickle and delicate and demonstrated sex. She also negates the custom and dominance enforced by her father (Mir-Hosseini, 2020).

The standard male and the female dichotomy of sex does not entirely or accurately capture gender. On the other hand, patriarchy is the primary objective of female development. Patriarchal societies give preference to men as an obstacle. In this way, the word "patriarchy" is used by feminists to describe the strong relationship between men and women. In a patriarchal culture, women have to fully cover their bodies with clothes that we call "purdah." Beyond the Quranic verses of modesty that are specifically applicable to all genders, we know the reason for "purdah". But to hold them in a private position, the patriarchal system conducts this "purdah" on the female voice and movement (Mahtab, 2007 p.87).

The idea of a male-controlled society is characterized by various scholars in various ways. Mitchell (2014) utilizes the word male-controlled society "to allude to connection frameworks in which men trade ladies" (p. 24).

Walby (1990) characterizes "male-controlled society as a framework of social structures and practices in which men rule, persecute also, misuse ladies" (p. 20). She clarifies man controlled society as a framework since this causes us to dismiss the idea of organic determinism (which says that people are normally distinctive in light of their science or bodies and, are accordingly appointed various jobs) or "the idea that each man is continuously in a predominant position and each lady in a subordinate one.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is qualitative. According to Patton and Cochran (2002) qualitative research techniques are essentially originated in social sciences. The methodology of content analysis is used as a parameter for the analysis of the selected text. Content research, according to Krippendorff (2003), relies on the notion that social orders have such organisations which have practical expertise in developing and dispersing society's operating laws. These laws and ideas are reflected in a particular society's written communications.

Theoretical Framework

The present study uses 'Patriarchy and Inequality' as a framework by Mary Backer (1999). According to Backer (1999), the structure of patriarchy is focused on the privilege of class, gender, race, and sexuality. To keep this kind of injustice alive, they often rely on ways of discrimination that revolve around these disparities, such as abuse, racism or even legislation. Both the analysis of formal equality and dominance are empty at any ideals that could challenge patriarchy are at their heart. With its importance of caretaking, partnerships, it is relational feminism that has the potential to improve well-being and empathy for women, infants, and men. Patriarchy prefers men over women and eventually mistreats all females without observing their class and being. Women are abused socially and mentally in various ways. Patriarchy also means that male dominates not only the women within their close circle but also in other circles of the society (Wyss, 1999).

German (1981) argues that patriarchal society is a specific society which is ruled by a patriarch, who controls not only the women of the family but also the younger and weaker men. In most families, the father is usually the patriarch. The power of the patriarch is defined by the possession of the property and the amount of strength a man possesses.

Tracy (2007) adds that patriarchy is the definitive cause of all the abuse and exploitation of women. Domestic violence has only been studied in detail for the past few years, however; the malice against women has been there for a long time.

Moreover, in a patriarchal culture, women play several important roles, although those roles often vary with race, class, and other "differences." The use of women and femininity to describe men and masculinity is perhaps the most basic. In such structures, male is autonomous, invulnerable, strong, powerful, violent, dominant, controlling, and non-emotional, while women are dependent, fragile, pliant, frail, compassionate, caring, intuitive, emotional, and empathic. Furthermore, in patriarchal social structures, men have primary authority and govern political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and property ownership while women are supposed to take care of children and look after household affairs only.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Patriarchy highlights the superiority of male over female, which gives rise to problems associated with the oppression of women. According to Backer (1999), patriarchy privileges male members of the society at the expense of female which further creates a disparity in the division of rights. The present study focuses on gender inequality, which has created problems for women in society. Moreover, the role a woman plays in a society cannot be neglected, however, due to the unequal division of rights, their role is minimised only to housewives and looking after children. Whatever they do in society is not encouraged in the context of the selected texts.

The novel *And The Mountains Echoed* revolves around the love bond between two siblings;

Abdullah and Pari. Abdullah loves his sister as much as that he would go to any extent for the sake of his sister's happiness. His love for his sister enabled him to walk barefoot after he exchanges his only pair of shoes to buy feathers for his sister. However, their bond does not last long, as when their parents needed money, they sold their daughter to a childless rich family. Moreover, the novel revolves around how Nila Wahdati goes against the standards set for women in Afghan society and tries to claim her social status in the society. She defies the stereotypical gender roles assigned to females through her poems. Khalid Hosseini tries to break gender inequality by creating characters like Nila in his novels to highlight gender issues in the context of Afghan society.

Discrimination based on sexual orientations almost everywhere in the world is a common practice and that no place on earth is free from discrimination based on gender (Rights, 2011). In the same way, the novel And The Mountain Echoed Hosseini highlight the sufferings of women who become easy victims of the patriarchal structures. He has shown it in the novel that women are treated as an object rather than human beings. It portrays the plight of women who are exposed to male dominance. In the course of the novel when Saboor's family needs money, and he sells his daughter to a rich family. Keeping in mind the patriarchal ideology, the writer questions the rules and tradition laid down by the patriarchal society of preferring a son over a daughter. He does not sell his son Abdullah and chooses his daughter, Pari, as daughters are considered to be less valuable as compared to sons, which minimises women status in the society only to commodities, where they are bargained for the sake of the family.

There are always struggles among feminists on gender stereotypes striving for fairness. Wilchins (2004) likewise, calls for attention over such issues since neglecting the due rights of these communities not only affect the lives of such gender minority groups but also affect the opportunity of everybody to live their lives. Likewise, in the novel And The Mountain Echoed Hosseini points out such disparity in the right between male and females. Nila goes against what society expected her to do, and what a woman does. She is expected to live a life according to the standards devised for women by the patriarchal society, however, she does what she thinks is right. Furthermore, she does not succumb to the stereotypical role assigned to her, rather, she stands against the odd and fights for her right. She does not agree with what her father expected her to be, rather she does what she thinks is best for her "what I wore, where I went, what I said, how I said it, who I said it to" (Hosseini, 2013, p.208). Thus, through the character of Nila, Hosseini tries to reject the stereotypical portrayal given to women by society defying the traditional role assigned based on genders.

A study reveals that gender-biased illustrations adversely affect the thinking of children reading it in shaping their opinions about the different gender construction in society (Ullah and Haque, 2016). Opinions of readers have shaped bases on the kind of literature they read. Hosseini gives his readers female characters who are not a week and can go shoulder to shoulder with men. He discards the idea of men as naturally active, strong, dominant and logical. Moreover, he also rejects the notion of females being emotional, passive, talkative and foolish in the novel. In an interview Nila describes how female are projected in the society, "And women, don't you know, are emotionally, morally, and intellectually immature" (Hosseini, 2013, p.212), and defies such portrayal of women by enjoying the freedom of speech and writing poetry to show women intellectually strong enough to stand on her own and write poetry against the well of patriarchs

like her own father.

Vats and Tantray (2019) study suggest that Khalid Hosseini throughout the novel The Kite Runner discussed various issues, however, gender issues are notable of all other issues that he raised through his writing. Furthermore, the study highlights that women are shown as weak, marginalized and subject to many other double standards in life. In the same way, female characters in the novel *And The Mountain Echoed* are shown weak and marginalised, where they cannot go against the well of patriarchs even if they want to go. "Perhaps she had accepted out of fear of her husband. Or a bargain for the life of luxury she led" (Hosseini, 2013, p.275), Hosseini tries to highlight the helplessness of women in such societies through the character of Commander Sahib's wife. She is unable to leave him despite the fact she knows that her husband is a gangster and turning his home into a warzone. Furthermore, the point Hosseini wants to focus on is the marginalisation of women and their inability to speak in front of the patriarchs. She stays with Commander not because she enjoys staying with him, rather, she feels helpless and is unable to leave him because of the fear of persecution.

In Afghan society, there are thousands of other silenced voices like Commander's wife, which go unheard because they are not raised and discussed need further investigation. Female are demeaned, oppressed and marginalised based on their gender. They are unable to highlight such issues due to certain reasons like lack of adequate education to express their views or because of the standards set by patriarchal societies where they are dependent on male, which stops them from raising these issues. This leads many women to suffer depression as they feel inferior to men where they are not treated equally.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that different issues faced by women in the Afghani context has been highlighted in the selected study. The issues about feminism in general and postcolonial feminism in particular also finds manifestation in the portrayals. Analysis of the present study suggests that the role of women is intentionally derided at the hands of patriarchy deeming them valueless humans in comparison to men. Women are shown as marginalised and subject to double standards of living based on their gender; however, they are empowered towards the end of the text to question the norms and traditions laid down by patriarchy. They are made to go through the process of self-actualization to stand against the monopoly of patriarchs who try to silence their voices. Through the portrayal of Nila, Hosseini successfully breaks down the stereotypical image of women in the selected text. Furthermore, the idea of considering women inferior to men is challenged by defying patriarchal rules enabling them to enjoy the freedom of speech, through the character of Nila. Nila writes poetry to show women intellectually strong to claim independence for themselves. Furthermore, through her poetry, she highlights the malpractices of patriarchs like that of her father. Multiple symbols stand against the social ostracization of women and seek to pave way for a harmonious coexistence of both genders. At various points in the text, Hosseini's intentions become didactic since he considers literature to be an apt tool for raising awareness. Backer (1999) refers to patriarchy as a graveyard of women development where it reinforces the traditional role of women. Portrayals within the selected text try to take the plunge of independence from patriarchy; however; even fatherly figures curtail their progress and become a hindrance for women. Patriarchal norms are challenged to a fair

degree and consequently uprooted within the course of the selected text.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The study highlights inequalities faced by women in Afghanistan and the Pashtun belt around Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. Women suffer from lopsided and abusive treatment generally and in Afghanistan specifically; therefore, it is recommended that gender studies with the help of electronic and digital media spread awareness to safeguard women rights. Women need to be given proper exposure and their existing misrepresentation may be given serious thought. Curriculums need to have a section spared to women; their rights and problems.

Alienation based on gender is the worst thing to happen in today's world; therefore, it is recommended that the policymakers may facilitate women providing them with sufficient representation in jobs and administration. Their social rights need protection and parity with men.

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