

Politics of Women Subjugation: A Comparative Analysis of Nadeem Aslam's Leila in the Wilderness and Rooftop Dwellers by Anita Desai

Aleena Shahzad¹

<p>Article History:</p> <p>Received: 13 Oct, 2019</p> <p>Accepted: 18 May, 2020</p>	<p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>Women in the traditional social order and system have always been considered subservient to men. In patriarchal society, women from different sections of society are the product of utter marginalization and mental anguish. Women belonging to any particular arena from traditional to Post-modern, confront multifaceted problems which serve as a major predicament for them. The purpose of this paper is to probe deeper into the social context of two different countries i.e. Pakistan and India with the help of two different writers that how the lives of women in domestic and public sphere are colored by the predominant significance of patriarchy. It brings into limelight that the lives of women are constrained and circumscribed by the social and moral decorum of chauvinistic society. The research would be qualitative in nature focusing on the textual and discourse analysis of two different short stories i.e. by Nadeem Aslam and Anita Desai. The research would be descriptive and exploratory in nature illustrating the predominant features that act as a cornerstone of portraying the women perturbed state of mind and brings the meaningful existence of women on the canvas of society. As the thematic and stylistic concern of this research is feministic in approach, so the Theory of Sexual Politics by Kate Millett is used in order to peep into the subject matter of women subjugation which brings repercussion on the physical and mental outlook of docile females in a most comprehensive way at different levels. Theory of Sexual Politics is interwoven with multifaceted dimensions which gives the cursory glance on how women are maltreated in the wide social spectrum at different levels. Moreover, this research would be a fruitful attempt because it throws light that how the nefarious realities of two different societies i.e. India and Pakistan are carved on the fabric of literature by medium of short story and gives a reconciliatory note on female emancipation from the shackles and manacles of men dominance.</p> <p>Key Words: Sexual Politics, Patriarchy, Short Story, Women Subjugation.</p>
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1. **Lecturer** (Department of English Riphah International University, Islamabad)

1. Introduction

Among the multifaceted issues of South Asia, the marginalization of women in every shade of her life is of utmost concern which lies at the heart of South Asian debate. Women in the traditional social order and system have always been considered subservient to men. Women belonging to any particular arena from traditional to postmodern, encounter multitude problems which serve as a major predicament for them. I have selected this topic because the lives of women in the contemporary arena either in domestic or public sphere is colored by the predominant significance of patriarchy. It brings into limelight that irrespective of social context, class, and religion women in India and Pakistan are the product of docility and utter marginalization at the hands of the chauvinistic society. Both the writers i.e. Nadeem Aslam and Anita Desai have carved out the sheer perturbed state of mind of Pakistani domestic lady and Indian single working lady respectively. In order to elaborate this aspect that is much relevant in the terrain of South Asian literary canon, I have selected the primary text of *Leila in the Wilderness* by Nadeem Aslam (Aslam, 2010) and *Rooftop Dwellers* by Anita Desai (Desai, 2000) respectively. Moreover, I have selected the primary text of the theory of *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett (Millet, 1970) which encapsulates the power structured relationship between the both genders i.e. domination and subordination.

My focus in this paper is to see how far the theory of *Sexual Politics* is applicable to both the short stories because the theory itself jelled together different paradigms or issues which can vividly be seen in the fabric of both short stories by the medium of textual analysis. My paper gives voice to bifurcation: it not only illuminates women oppression and docility but it also brings into limelight the quest of both women for attaining individuality and freedom from the shackles of male dominated society. The world of two women, one who is constrained by the societal norms and patriarchy and the other one who stepped out from the threshold of the house for doing a job and her quest to attain freedom and individuality from the conventional rules, all issues are by and large interwoven in the

theory of Sexual Politics by Kate Millett (Millett, 1970). I have selected this theory because it addresses the problem of women from every nook and corner of their lives and it deals with different parameters which are recurrent in the existing scenario and the root cause of fostering the mental anguish among women.

Kate Millett's theory of Sexual Politics (Millett, 1970) emphasized on the omnipresence of patriarchy in the social decorum of women. She has given various illustrations from other fields particularly from social sciences to delineate this aspect that women are the product of utter marginalization. She has mentioned various parameters through which male dominance over women can be seen like Ideological, Biological, Sociological, Force, Anthropological and Psychological (Millett, 1970) I have selected the methodology of textual analysis because it is through this medium the underlying motives or the over dominance of patriarchy can be seen in the light of the theory of Sexual Politics by Millett (Millett, 1970). Textual analysis unfolds the nefarious reality of society about women oppression and the use of culture and religion to exercise male dominance on women. All these aspects can be manifested and observed in the text by means of setting, dialogue between different characters and their behavior with one another.

2. Literature Review

There is no doubt in the fact that any research work is considered to be enfeebled if the literature review is not up to the mark of brilliancy and authenticity. Thus, the literature review sets the directional arrow of the research work. It also helps in enabling visible reflection of the significant research target to be achieved which other researchers may have missed. This literature review will be focused on exploring the works of South Asian writers in context of women oppression; including how women are subjected to mental and physical abuse. This will also highlight the over dominance of men over women in terms of social, religious and personal life of women.

It is believed that the South Asian literature wears the postcolonial dress and caps itself with local traditional issues. The literary work produced under South Asian banner is highly specific to boundaries of cast diasporas and issues of personal life especially maltreatment of women. There are various writers, who have not only tried to sketch women abuse but also reflected the idea of women being socially, religiously and physically submissive to men. In other words, these works deeply examine the patriarchy in South Asian countries with relation to Kate Millett's theory of sexual politics (Millett, 1970) which is the political relationship between patriarchy and female gender.

The first source for this research work is the book of an Indian female writer Rinki Bhattacharya. This book 'Behind Closed Doors: Domestic Violence in India' is the explicit explanation of the maltreatment of women in South Asia especially India (Bhattacharya, 2004). It broadly discusses women's submissiveness to men in terms of being home slave, house laborer, social shame and a tool of beat up on. The writer of the book lays a focus on Indian women which are socially and mentally misshaped by their men. In the first chapter, the writer tries to describe domestic violence that women are beaten up black and blue for not producing sons even in the modern arena. Bhattacharya stated that men used to exercise their power and it is the women who is forced to remain aloof from every relation (ibid). The writer also shares the real-life examples in later stages of the book to make her point of view more justified. According to her, the Indian society has the highest ratio of woman oppression in the world. In this society, the women are taken as a play-tool, who can be used to amuse and entertain men, but if this play-tool urges for its rights then this is subjected to an outrageous assault of men (ibid). In another book *Violence Against Women in South Asian Communities: Issues for Policy and Practice* by Ravi K. Thiara and Aisha K. Gill (Gill, 2010), one of the chapter entitled *Charting South Asian Women's Struggle against Gender Based Violence* mentioned that patriarchy and violence is rampant and deeply ingrained in the society. Wilson stated the relation between both genders are based on exploitation and power (Wilson, 2010).

Several articles also delineate this thought-provoking aspect that family life is crucial to a female especially for a single working lady in India. In an article, *Strength and Challenges in the Indian Family* by Medora portrayed that family life is considered as a strong bond for a female (Medora, 2007). A female whose life is devoid of family is subjected to the eye of scorn by the contemporary Indian society. Medona stated that these social and marital relationships are part and parcel of any society whether India or Pakistan (ibid). Likewise in another article named *Problems faced by Women in India* by Dashora also illuminates this fact that women don't have a voice, their role is circumscribed by the society but in contemporary era they are also part of mainstream of different jobs but they are subjected to mental harassment by the society (Dashora, 2013). In the same terrain of discussion, another article by Jain *Women Agency in the Context of Family Networks in Indian Diaspora* also brings into limelight the traditional status of women that they are considered inferior and have indecisive nature (Jain, 2006) and in this critical situation women emerge either as a victim or strong woman (ibid). The article by Tonita Murray *The Oppressed Women of Afghanistan :Fact, Fiction or Distortion* is also a source of great help for the desired research work (Murray, *The Oppressed Women of Afghanistan Fact, Fiction or Distortion*, 2012). It elaborates the oppression of women in context of religion, restrictions of male dominant society, and forced under-age marriages on religious belief (Murray, 2012). This article speaks in a very loud voice on account of oppressed women in Afghanistan who are the sole victims of male dominant society and distorted religious belief (Murray, 2012).

The interview of Bapsi Sidhwa in *Dawn* is of immense importance because she talked about maltreatment of women. In her visit to Pakistan, she gave an interview and said that female oppression by men has become an international issue. She felt sorry that women are maltreated as slaves and they are subjected to severe mental anguish if they raise their voice against the conventional rules of society which are clearly demarcated by men (Sidhwa, 2013).

The review of related literature is of immense importance as it highlights that the problem of women subjugation under the umbrella of power politics by men is ubiquitous and is not only confined to the South Asian societies but it also becomes part and parcel of other communities as well. Statistical data has been reinforced by most of the researchers in the past and they were unable to give the main holistic view of the crucial aspect of women subjugation because it only focuses on one aspect. This research paper encapsulates several paradigms which are the key factors in the terrain of Sexual Politics by Millet (Millet, 1970) and helps to give a bird's eye view of the maltreatment and subjugation of women by men.

3. Methodology and Theoretical Orientation

Textual analysis has been used as a suitable method of research because it gives insight to the underlying perspective which is profoundly prevalent in the short story *Leila in the Wilderness* (Aslam, 2010) and *The Rooftop Dwellers* (Desai, 2000) by Nadeem Aslam and Anita Desai respectively. The method of textual analysis has been used because it brings out the feministic perspective thematically and stylistically which conform to the theory of Sexual Politics by Kate Millet (Millet, 1970).

Kate Millet has described that the term sex has not been used in the traditional sense rather it is a status category with political implication (Millet, 1970). The society is purely patriarchy oriented in every mode of life including industry, technology etc. (Millet, 1970). The theory is absolutely applicable to *Leila in the Wilderness* (Aslam, 2010) by Nadeem Aslam and partially applicable to *The Rooftop Dwellers* (Desai, 2000) by Anita Desai.

The short story *Leila in the Wilderness* (Aslam, 2010) by Nadeem Aslam encapsulates the same elements which have been delineated by the second wave feminist writer Kate Millet in her theory of Sexual Politics (Millet, 1970). For instance, Timur exercised his male dominance on Leila by maneuvering religion and culture (Aslam, 2010).

The family strictly follow book of omen in every shade of their life (Aslam, 2010). Timur wanted to exercise his power on the mental outlook of Razia by means of culture and religion.

The theory of Sexual Politics (Millet, 1970) encompasses seven parameters viz. Ideological, Biological, Sociological, Class, Economic and Educational, Anthropological and Psychological but the present analysis focuses on just five parameters. Through these different paradigms, the relation between both the genders can be analyzed in *Leila in the Wilderness* (Aslam, 2010) by means of textual analysis.

3.1 Ideological

Millett has described that patriarchal politics deals with three dimensions namely temperament, role and status (Millet, 1970). Temperament consists of stock notions and stereotypical roles assigned by the society to both genders. For instance, Leila was beaten up severely by Timur for producing a girl (Aslam, 2010). It shows that men are supposed to be aggressive in their matters. On the other hand, the traditional role of women is to remain submissive as we can see when the wings were detached from the body of Leila by the butcher, she experienced the excruciating pain but never uttered a single word of complain of this cruel behavior (Aslam, 2010). As far as status is concerned, it is imbued with more political implication that men are considered superior and women are considered inferior and this has been manifested by the textual analysis in which we can see that Leila has been called as "little witch" (Aslam, 2010), swine (Aslam, 2010) and child of adultery (ibid) by her Mother -in-law.

In *Rooftop Dwellers* (Desai, 2000), the application of this theory has a subverted impact because it deals with the single working lady who is not the product of societal norms; rather she stepped out from the threshold of her house to Delhi for her job in a literary magazine. She lived in a dilapidated bar sati (ibid) and was an object of suspicion by the neighborhood whenever she went to her job in the morning.

3.2 Biological

Millet has given distinction between sex and gender: sex is characterized by biological implication as male and female while gender as masculine and feminine is more psychological and cultural in nature (Millet, 1970). In *Leila in the Wilderness* (Aslam, 2010), the space allotted to Leila was limited as she was supposed to produce a male son for her family. She stayed in the house all the time and it was demanded by Timur and Razia that she should give birth to a male child as it was considered as matter of great pride and prestige for patriarchal dominance (Aslam, 2010). One of the astounding factor which this theory brings into limelight is that in political relation, physical strength of a man is not considered as a factor rather it is the reinforcement of culture and its values which encourage male to develop aggressive behavior (Millet, 1970). When the female child was born in the family, it was not accepted by Timur and his mother because according to them the female child was not included in their bloodline (Aslam, 2010). They used to look at a family tree and shape their lives and exercise power in a mutable way on Leila (ibid). Similarly in *The Rooftop Dwellers* (Desai, 2000), it was clearly mentioned that parents take decision for their girls as far as their marriage is concerned (ibid).

3.3 Sociological

The sociological aspect is of paramount significance because it shows how the power and institution of patriarchy works in a family. Male dominance works in three zones namely family, society and state (Millet, 1970). Millet has mentioned that position of men is strong in all spheres of life and its overwhelming impact can be seen on other family members (Millet, 1970).

In “*The Rooftop Dwellers*” (Desai, 2000), the concept of family is given importance for a woman especially of single working lady. Moyna was detested by her neighbors because her life was devoid of marital relationship which is considered as part and parcel of Indian culture (ibid). Even a widow has no place in society, as Tara used to wear her wedding jewelry at her office so that the people would not take this image that

she is a widow (Desai, 2000). Likewise, in *Leila in the Wilderness* (Aslam, 2010), Aslam has mentioned that a woman devoid of family life has no future in the society, as Razia said to Leila that if she was unable to find affection in the marital relationship, she should find sustenance in the hatred of Timur (Aslam, 2010).

In patriarchal set up, Millet argued that the group consisted of all the animate and inanimate objects like wife, children, land are subjected to subjugation (Millet, 1970). This can be seen that the rule of patriarchy is so profoundly jelled together in the society that there were separate graves allotted to those women who run from their houses, and they were not given proper burial (Aslam, 2010).

3.4 Anthropological – Myth and Religion

Religion has been taken as the source of manipulation and used it as a tool for the assertion of male dominance. It is the general notion that patriarchy has God on its side in all spheres of life (Millet, 1970). This aspect is only applicable to the short story *Leila in the Wilderness*[1] in which Razia said to Timur that he should devote himself to the glorification of the mosque because it would bring fruitful impact in their family life (Aslam, 2010). Leila was also sent to the group of nine personages in some shrine as they had firm belief that God is on their side and they hoped that it will bring a male child to their family (ibid). A strong sense of religion and how it is used as a tool in shaping their lives can strongly be seen in this short story.

3.5 Psychological

This thought-provoking parameter gives the inner perturbed state of mind of a woman who is either a part of domestic or public sphere. Millet argued that women are treated as second rate citizens and are marginalized in every mode of their life (Millet, 1970). This can be seen in *The Rooftop Dwellers* (Desai, 2000) in which Moyna was not appreciated because of her work by Mrs. Bhalla and the neighborhood. She faced multifaceted problems by living in barsati rooftop (ibid) and it disturbs her mind that she

felt alienated and become the victim of home sickness (ibid). This has been delineated by the writer by incorporating the imagery of cat named Mao who was with her all the time in her mental distress.

In the same terrain of this discussion, Leila was also the victim of psychological conflict as she was unable to give birth to a male child, she was continuously blamed that she had affair with another man. They were not ready to accept the female child as their own (Aslam, 2010).

Both the writers shared the same mode of imagery and symbolism to represent the perception of a character. Tiwari mentioned that they took the single event and amplify its intricacies by putting the characters in different situations (Tiwari, 2004). At the end of both the short stories, both the writers have used to delineate the mental landscape of two characters i.e. Leila and Moyna in respective short stories as illustrated by Tandon (Tandon, 2008). When Leila mustered up courage and asked about her missed children, Qes supported her. She was successful in raising a voice against societal norms and wanted to establish meaningful existence in her life. This has been manifested when all the animals Leopards, Cheetahs, Falcons and deer were given freedom from the mansion in which they were caged (Aslam, 2010). The freedom of the animals gives the implicit meaning of the freedom of Leila's mind from the norms of society which she used to obey for the couple of so many years (ibid).

In "The Roof top Dwellers" (Desai, 2000), when Moyna received a letter from her mother in which it was mentioned that she was supposed to get married in future with Arun. After reading this letter, she gave a sudden outburst of laughter and considered herself free as the wind. She was resolute to exercise her own decision in her life instead of hankering after the pre-established notions of the society (ibid). This situation is also portrayed by Desai by giving the imagery of cat (Desai, 2000).

To sum up, the textual analysis of both the short stories gives the critical insight of the feminist perspective that how women are maltreated and subservient to male

dominance. The above afore-mentioned parameters or yardstick of the theory of Sexual Politics by Kate Millett (Millet, 1970) is fully applicable to Leila in the Wilderness (Aslam, 2010) because the story itself is of domesticated nature and is imbued with the aspects which are vividly mentioned in the theory. On the other hand, the short story by Anita Desai The Rooftop Dwellers (Desai, 2000) is partially applicable to the theory of sexual politics because it is set in postmodern arena and deals with the issue of single working lady. As the story is not colored by the traditional notion of female docility and maltreatment of women by men, so the theory is not completely applicable to this story. It has the atmosphere of female empowerment and self-realization more as compared to strong adherence to conventional norms of society.

4. Conclusion

In the light of the above discussion, it is evident that every arena of society in the terrain of South Asian literary canon is imbued with certain problems which is profoundly ingrained in the fabric of society irrespective of caste, color and creed. Women subjugation in relation to power politics played by men is rampant in every community and it is so utterly enmeshed in every social and moral decorum of women life.

The key findings of my research paper clearly illustrate that although the short story by two different writers from India and Pakistan has carved out the women problems by means of short story which act as a fiction but in reality, this problem is also a part and parcel of contemporary arena in diverse fields. Even today, newspapers are replete with the issues faced by women in their working place such as mental harassment. These problems are profoundly permeated in domestic and private sphere of life. Women living in remote areas, who have feeble economic background of their own are also the product of male domination and suppression intensely. The focus of my paper was not only to delineate the traditional picture of male politics in the domain of women sphere through the medium of short story but it also has a currency in the contemporary era. Above all, it also shows that

female empowerment is crucial for a female in order to realize her individuality and existence.

The research is limited to the context of two South Asian countries i.e. India and Pakistan and the medium of short story has been selected to scrutinize the nefarious aspects of society regarding male politics and its oppression on women. The other researchers can explore the same theme by studying the context of other two different countries instead of India and Pakistan. Moreover, the paper gives a cursory glance of the theory of Sexual Politics by Kate Millett (Millett, 1970) and its application on *Leila in the Wilderness* (Aslam, 2010) by Nadeem Aslam and *The Rooftop Dwellers* (Desai, 2000) by Anita Desai. I have selected five out of seven parameters which is included in the theory of sexual politics by Millett (ibid), so it gives opportunity to the future researchers that they can work on other paradigms of this theory like *Class* (Millett, 1970) and *Force* (ibid) which has not been included in this research paper.

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