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Restrictive Gender Roles and Individual Autonomy: A Study of Pathan Daughter by Nabeela Imran Khan

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ABSTRACT

Abstract The present study is a critical review of how gender roles and autonomy are connected in the novel by Nabeela Gul titled, "Pathan Daughter" and the choice to make this work a feminist and postcolonial interpretation of the literary work. This work is aimed at locating the ways in which patriarchy and structures of female subjectivity are constructed, by considering the societal and cultural context of the Pashtun society. This work aims to observe and discover how and how the female protagonist of the work applies morality and ethics to have her own autonomy. This work incorporates the notions and views of the prevailing authors and theorists, like Simone de Beauvoir (1949), Helene Cixous (1975), Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak (1988), Chandra Mohanty (1991) and bell hooks (1984) and Kandiyoti (1991) so that the contextualization and the focus of the novel, Pathan Daughter is placed within the framework of feminist literary tradition and feminist consciousness. This work also involves textual analysis work to delve and bring out the way in which the text portrays issues like gender oppression, patriarchy and subjectivity, daughter and mothers, and morality and ethics. The possibilities of this work are to create and establish a new channel of research and development among the authors and scholars of the feminism literary theory and the feminine subjectivity and beyond.

Keywords: Gender role, Feminism, Patriarchy, Postcolonialism, Pashtun society, Autonomy, Indigenous feminist discourse, Moral agency, Nabeela Gul

Introduction

The gender, autonomy, and culture issue is still relevant to the existing research on feminist and post-colonial literature studies with a specific emphasis on the cultures in which the social and cultural pressures on honor and the role of women in this greater social and cultural context are significant. As with the example of Pakistan, the autonomy of literature, so far as the rights of women are concerned, would have necessarily had to follow a very complex and delicate path between opposition and compliance, considering both the general trends of feminist literary studies in the rest of the world.

Pathan Daughter by Nabeela Gul is also a most relevant case study on the same. Having a not-too-distant Pashtun socio-cultural background in mind, Pathan Daughter incorporates the dynamism of women being socialized by the patriarchal and the sociological forces, as well as offers a concept of autonomy founded in a certain connotation of moral and ethical freedom. In Pathan Daughter, the development of the heroine is the understanding of the transformation of the conscious mind on the feeling of internalized oppression into the identification with oneself under the frames set by the culture. This is how the feminist theory of women's writing by the French feminist writer Helene Cixous and her co-worker Simone De Beauvoir realize the feeling of freedom within the frames of the existing boundaries that society frames.

This novel is also a second place where the issue of the power of speaking subaltern is introduced and also elaborated by Gayatri Chakrovorthy Spivak, in which she indicates that subaltern cannot speak and this voice is also reflected by the researcher, as a voice is continuously suppressed by the oppression within and this oppression is furthered by societal rules.

The novel is even the embodiment of the criticism which has been developed by Chakravorty Mohanty over the idea of Western universalism and feminism and is itself the idea of indigenous feminism which has been developed by the very values and ethics which has developed within the confines which have been developed by the culture and is the location that has been developed by adherence and not rebellion which has been experienced by the individuals of the indigenous origin.

The internalization of the patriarchal value system in the works by Gul is also brought out in the portrayals of the inter-generational relations of oppression particularly the Mother Daughter relations in the texts where the value systems of oppression as well as change are ascribed. The women in the texts are not only the subjects of the oppression brought about by the social norms but also subjects of reflection, teaching and subversion in the texts and thereby mirror the ideologies of hooks (1984) about empowerment of women as a social process towards change. The approaches used by the protagonist to gaining independence in the texts are suggestive of a Pashtun feminism that labors on bargaining and ethical impetus as opposed to defiance in an attainment of cultural distinctness in feminist campaigns.

In the context of literary studies, *The Pathan Daughter* belongs to an area of overlapping between realism and feminist imagination, which provides a text in the study and representation of the psychic, societal, and moral elements of the subjectivity of women in a patriarchal, postcolonial world. The ethical and interpersonal conceptions of freedom that define this fiction question the mainstream Western discourse of feminist freedom with its one-sided concern with personal self-rebellion and rather provides an arena in which to explore the interaction between the communal and individual elements of freedom. The ethical issue of the text perfectly combines the concept of negotiation in everyday life, the power of women with education, and the moral decision in such a manner that it allows exploring the role of women as freedom mediators in a narrowing socio-cultural environment.

Although a large thematic study has been conducted on the Pakistani literature relating to the issue of gender, a gap in literature is observed which has specifically covered the topics of Pashtun identity and its association to female empowerment and moral autonomy. Although literature is available, as Bapsi Sidhwa, Tehmina Durani and Suleri (1992) reference, which seeks to respond to the phenomenon of oppression, which in this case refers to gender in Pakistan, Nabeela Gul attempts to give an account that is conscious of the issue of specificity when it comes to Pashtun society, and consequently, the influence that women exert on it through moral and well-informed choices that can assist in fostering female autonomy.

Research Questions

- 1.What is the battle of individual autonomy manifested in the play *Pathan Daughter*, which must operate in the environment of the Pashtun patriarchal societies which value honor?
- 2.How does the main character use moral, ethical and relational tactics in order to help him to exercise his agency without renouncing cultural practices?
- 3.What impact does the engagement of mother-daughter connection and the transfer of the gender role concept across generations have on the freedom perception of the protagonist in relation to the moral self-determination?

4. How, in what way, do Gul stories pass this message of indigenous feminism challenging the patriarchy of the local society and the universalisms of feminism?

Research Objectives

1. How does Pathan Daughter enlighten the relationship between the confining nature of gender roles, the notion of honor, and requirements of the society in shaping the subjective experience of women?

2. To test the strategies of moral, ethical, and relationally based autonomy of the main character in the culturally characterized environment of the Pashtun society.

3. To investigate how the inter-generational relationships, especially mother-daughter relationships, affect the performance of the patriarchal roles.

4. In a bid to situate the story of Gul within the framework of both the feminist theory and the postcolonial theory, and in that regard to establish the significance of the Gul story in the discussion of indigenous feminisms.

Literature Review

The relations between gender and autonomy, their connection to the cultural identity, represent a highly significant and ancient field of study and scholarly activity. The Feminist thinking and the scholarship revolves around how the oppressing structures work to suppress the agency of the female sex and how these same females work and relate to these structures to gain their autonomy and freedom as outlined in the book *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir published in 1949.

The paradigmatic shift of the research paradigm initiated by De Beauvoir entails a significant paradigmatic transformation in redefining female oppression as a naturalized phenomenon to a socially mediated phenomenon by theorizing that females are systematically repeated into predetermined roles and pushed to work in order to gain their own autonomy within predetermined terms which are determined, outlined and described by the male-dominant structures and society, which was the major paradigmatic shift that was undertaken by her work in 1949, and continues to play a key and central paradigmatic role.

In line with this de Beauvoirian vision, the essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*, published first in 1975, by Helene Cixous can be seen to discuss this matter in essence by coming up with the concept of the feminine writing known as *écriture féminine* which dwells on the emancipatory power of such feminine writing. Speaking of the fictional depiction of the expression of action in relation to own personal judgment, moral decision-making, and utterances, it can be stated that, in Gul's own fictional portrayal, it becomes a resistance of its own, commenting upon the remarks of Cixous that they always say, that this man or that one has a wonderful sense of music, but what I am saying is that no one hears women through the instrumental music or melody. Regarding this vision of opposition, the introduction to the text of bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* in 1984, states that even the morality of a certain type can become transformative and as such, becomes essential to this cause of independence. In fact, the critical question that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak posed way back in 1988 is "Can the subaltern speak? This question will certainly have consequences on the reality of Pashtun women that this novel, *Pathan Daughter* is trying to document. In fact, Spivak has proposed that the epistemology, production and structure of subalternity prevents articulation of the desire and denial of agency. Yet, the protagonist in Gul novel leaps through all of them shifting moral consciousness to a notion of an ethical self-determination. The act gauges the story in the context of a localized idea of sovereignty questioning the effects of subjugation, moral empowerment, and the Pashtun culture. This once again can be negated in the viewpoint of the perspectivist tradition that is advanced by Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her book *Under*

Western Eyes in 1991. It is a convention that appositively is anti-Western feminist universalism by means of tainted perceptions over the homogenization of particular cultural opposition.

The Pathan Daughter comes into its contextualization in the postcolonial feminist theory claims in a manner that gives rise to the need of regional and cultural specificity in the experiences of oppression and autonomy in the lives of women. Pakistan literature has not been an exception, and writers such as Bapsi Sidhwa and Tehmina Durrani have achieved unparalleled success in portraying how the processes of the society, family and religion restrict the lives of women (Suleri, 1992; Ahmad, 2020). Nabeela Gul, in her turn, creates a very specific niche by describing the experience of women in the relation to the Pashtun society where Izzat norms are very strict and transfer of these norms is carried out by one generation to the other.

The sense of psychological and inward experience of freedom is emphasized in the case of the book mentioned above through portraying an inner battle of the heroine along with her external struggle to adjust to the demand of the society.

Concerning the feminist literary studies, in Pakistan, it has been noted by many writers that the story of women has a general alternation between the struggles and the reconciliation. In Suleri (1992), Pakistani feminist literary expression is ambivalent since resistance must exist and justify itself in a concept of cultural and family allegiance. The complexity and ambivalence mentioned above traces to the recent literary works in Pakistan since, as Ahmad (2020) claims, the interrelation between defiance and reform is elaborate in the recent works of Pakistan literature. Pathan Daughter can fit in this complexity of defiance and reform above-mentioned since through argumentation of morality and ethics, the main character opposes and challenges norms and conventions through resistive approaches, even when it is not through aggressive means. This ambivalence and pragmatism go to reveal what Kandiyoti has defined as the patriarchal bargain.

Another aspect, which is quite topical in the interpretation of Gul, is called Internalization of patriarchal norms. "Relations between mothers and daughters are the manifestations of transferring and interrupting gender norms. The mother can be an indicator of some adherence to the principles of patriarchy, but is also an agent of biological development, of nurturance, of introspection. This point is in tandem with the fact that hooks said, this is where I have increasingly come to realize that the process of empowerment is not a once-and-for-all achievement. It is a process that is much contingent upon our associations in our personal environments that are most intimate.

Pathan Daughter would be placed within bigger subalternity discourses of women and indigenous resistance of Pathan Daughter by postcolonial theory. This fight of protagonist to resist community, honor and ethical duties is a process of internalization of a feminist consciousness against the alienation to local culture of patriarchy and universalizing thesis of western feminisms (Mohanty 1991). It is the articulation of the postcolonial imperative to read the agency of the women through the local histories and practices of the society that makes this piece of writing accommodate itself to the postcolonial standpoints of Spivak (1988) and Mohanty (1991). It, however, creatively turns the conditions of such a debate to propose that in honor societies, agency need not necessarily be aligned to ideas of resistance in western thought but rather internal logic and ethical arguments.

The psychological and emotional facet of gendered subjugation is also mentioned in the book. Using the example of increasing consciousness of the main character, Gul demonstrates how internalized patriarchy influences the process of self-conceptualization and decision-making of people. Cixous (1975) and Beauvoir (1949) posit that defining internalized patterns is extremely crucial in feminist theory, and they are considered as the need to identify cognitively in an

ethical manner. Such an active process of thinking and looking inwards by the main character occur in the short story *Pathan Daughter* to be an articulation of ethical agency where she is able to exercise her presence within spaces that are constraining which hooks (1984) views as a continuous process of negotiation, learning, and change.

However, Pakistani feminist writing has been largely researched in more familiar locations, be it geographic or urban, or narrations of more recognizable struggles with patriarchic customs (Sidhwa; Durrani; Suleri, 1992). The Gul literature constitutes a comparatively untapped area of scholarly studies, particularly in terms of details of feminist consciousness of the Pashtungooks that imply moral argument, relationship autonomy and ethical reasoning. Focusing on the presentation of these agency strategies which are too much culture specific, "*Pathan Daughter*" broadens the conceptual horizons of the postcolonial studies of feminist literature and challenges the academic thinkers to reconsider the concept about the patterns of autonomy, resistance, and liberation in a society where the principles of honor-based societies are dominant.

Research Gaps

1. Cultural particularity: Despite the fact that the Pakistani feminist literature had been studied in large number, the Pashtun society with the honor-based institutions had not been studied extensively, particularly as the issue of female ethical independence.
2. Moral and relational agency: Although the theme of rebellion or resistance has received much attention in the literature, the film *Pathan Daughter* has not received as much attention as a significant variant of the moral-relational agency.
3. Intergenerational relations: Mother-daughter relationships are a relatively under-researched oppressive/empowering location in Pashtun studies.
4. Feminist and postcolonial theory integration: The attempts at integrating the theories of indigenous feminism, postcolonial theories, and literary studies in the interpretation of culturally-specific forms of autonomy are extremely few.
- 5: Psychological and Internal Dimensions: The internal cognitive and psychological factors of negotiating autonomy within a patriarchal and honor-based environment are also not well represented in past literature.

This study addresses these gaps in the interpretation of such work as *The Pathan Daughter* in the framework of feminist and post-colonial theoretical paradigm. It, therefore, focuses on the investigation of the complicated intersection of cultural values, ethical logic, relations with generations, and ethical self-determination. A deeper reading can therefore be gained on the issue of agency, autonomy, and subaltern voice of women in a conservatory, honor-based society where the Links help them define their act of resistance which is empowered.

Methodology

The following qualitative literary analysis study is conducted in an attempt to explore the connection between the oppressive gender roles and autonomy in *Pathan Daughter* by Nabeela Gul. The themes will be characterized by the motifs of gender, honor, and resistance that will be used as the main subject in the reading of the text in this research study. Essentially the path of the character, silence to expression, is an exemplar of feminist idealists of restoration of autonomy in which the personal space is reduced to the space of similarity with the receptive patriarchal community. Within the context of this novel, obedience, modesty and conformity to the requirements of the society are the factors around which the social meaning of women in general is elicited; nonetheless, through moral cognition and ethical choice, the character inversed the expectations in a model outlined in the ecriture feminine of Helene Cixous, where writing, speaking and expression become forms of liberation.

The internalization of patriarchy is a valuable field to the methodology since Gul portrays women as the victims and the perpetrators of oppressive cultural matters. The significance of education, self-reflection, and relation-building in construction of identity and self in women is identified with the thematic code analysis. The mother-daughter style of relationship has been highlighted, as it is one of the key areas where the code is transferred and derailed. It assists the research to seize the fact that the cultural, Pashtun-centric feminist consciousness is founded on ethical and moral argumentations.

A critical analysis is done through the lens of a feminist and post-colonial approach. The research is guided by an intervention made by Spivak about the ability of the subaltern to speak, which is a very pertinent intervention when analyzing the structural/epistemological barriers to female speech. The intervention that Mohanty makes on the Western feminist universalism is beneficial in finding the story in an indigenous feminist scheme where agency needs are addressed without a direct resistance. Thus, in this respect, a tool is expounded that is capable of unraveling the subaltern morality, autonomy and agency in negotiating a patriarchal system within the Pashtun society.

Discussion and Results

The analysis of the Pathan Daughter by Nabeela GulOrfai provides an opportunity to reveal the details of the role of gender, culture, and autonomy within the national space of the Pashtun social. The significance of the national space involves the general existence of patriarchy and the code of honor of women, which does not just determine but predetermines the very existence, behavior, and actions of women. The women of the national space of the Pashtun culture already have a predetermined life, where their actions, particularly the honor, must directly have to be connected to the existence in the communal space, where the autonomy of the women is not simply proclaimed but rather is negotiated on the ethical foundations of their culture (hooks, 1984; Kandiyoti, 1991).

The manner in which the main character is treated concerning the regulation of gender matters is very close to what Beauvoir suggests in *The Second Sex*, in which women must create their freedom in response to what the society defines. She does so in a way that opposes not only concepts about modesty, obedience and wifely roles, but in fact is doing so in a way that opposes the very ideas. It is very much so in the case of the role of *écriture féminine*, the one offered in the *La Deluge*; or, *The Universal Recounting* by Helene Cixous, where communication, as in writing, is already an expression of freedom.

The fight the main character carries in discussing her inner world makes her attracted to do exactly this, to establish her place in the male system of her culture in such a way that in a collectivist culture of honor, empowerment involves negotiations but not confrontation.

The topicality of the analysis is based on the fact that the role of the internalization and intergenerational nature of patriarchy has been recognized. The way in which patriarchy operates and resists can be obtained in the context of the discussion of the patterns of relationships between mothers and daughters in the works of Gul. Naturally, the necessity of older women constructing and creating a framework of the society is indisputable, but the latter also serves as a place of reflection and mentorship in the area of autonomy ethics. The performance of the agency complexity thus becomes fashioned in the terms of its social interaction and construction within the Pashtun society where the power is based on the moral authority and social interaction as opposed to working within the constraints of individualism and revolutionary gesture of disobedience to the society (hooks, 1984; Mohanty, 1991). Ethical thinking and agency as the form of multiple defiance of the protagonist offer a subtle element to the multifaceted aspects of the self in a highly manipulated space and provides, as well, the

ability to conclude that the phenomenon of liberty is a process and not an act. The fate of the character in the novel presupposes that the freedom of women might in fact and ethically be based on the principles of integrity, culturally on negotiation and morally courageous when upholding the concepts of moral integrity instead of more difficult situations.

Lastly, some of the key themes that emerge out of these results are:

1. Cultural and patriarchal strengths:

Behavioral controls of honor cultures, social control and male

2. socialization.

Moral/ethical thinking: The limitations are overcome when the moral/ethical thinking is incorporated as moral/ethical agency as a choice that the protagonist makes.

Inter-generational negotiation: "The nursing mother-daughter relationship is one of the locations of

3. patrimonial ideology negotiation.

Relational empowerment: Autonomy is established on the basis of relational practices that put into consideration structural relationships and affirm moral agency.

4. Native Feminist Consciousness: In this novel, we have a representation of a context-specific and indigenous based feminism practice, which is concerned about countering patriarchy and the essence of morality in the Pashtun society,

By shedding light on these issues, this research project will be a novel contribution to the field of feminist and postcolonial literature to offer additional information on the agency of women in the non-individualist cultures.

Conclusion

Pathan Daughter by Nabeela Gul can therefore truly be viewed as not just the feminist novel in the Pakistani literary tradition but the high point of the female narrative trajectory that has the propensity to deconstruct the issues related to freedom, morals, and the placing of the women in the Pashtun tradition. The textual defining character does so challenge the notion that freedom can never be the radical and oppositional action but rather and more correctly is the feminist one when it comes to being allied to the traditions of ethics within the culture of concern. In fact, this is what characterizes the nature of this in the indigenous thought systems with relation to the feminist theory (hooks, 1984; Kandiyoti, 1991).

A significance of the study is in the fact that it focuses on the condition that feminist agency is neither performative nor dissenting not only in honor cultures but also in collectivist societies. Quite the contrary, it can be highly implicit, ethical, moral or and placed. In this aspect, not just does the novel by Gul refer to the feminist practices as proclaimed in the South Asian literature; it also adds a somewhat broader understanding of feminist ethics as defined in specific cultures.

Placing Pathan Daughter within the framework of the scholarly discussion regarding the notions of gender, culture, as well as moral autonomy, this work integrates the feminist viewpoint and a postcolonial viewpoint. It pours novelty in the debate on the applicability of agency strategies, the relational aspect and moral aspect of empowerment and the challenge to the universality of Western strategies to feminist liberation. The topicality of Pathan Daughter is consequently finally vested in the radiance of Gul story and in the stress of the radicalizing, ethically enhancing meaning of the agency of woman not in any way meaning loss of cultural identity but has a weight in the universal sense.

The research also has a few prospects of future research that may include comparisons that may involve other feminisms of the regions, studies about moral agency and other societies whereby a culture of honor exists, psychology, ethics, and post-colonial feminist theories. By

shifting the vision of feminist agency off the universal, and to culturally specific and ethically informed mechanisms of empowering femininity, this study positions the Pathan Daughter within a critical text, in which it has the potential of serving to point out the extremely diverse range of feminisms that exist throughout South Asia.

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