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THE STUDY OF ARABIC FEMALE'S SUBJUGATION UNDER PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM BY
NAWAL EL-SAADAWI: WOMAN AT POINT ZERO

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Maharashtra.ABSTRACT



The current paper examines the different sorts of subjugations, oppressions and sufferings that women have been subjected to over the world. Such oppression and marginalization of women have become controversial issue among writers, intellectuals, rightists and thinkers and in due to the oppressions and suppressions of women, many of theories have been emerged such as feminist theory which has come into existence to defend the rights of women. They have been subjugated and oppressed by patriarchal system. As for the religion of the Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam have regarded women as an evil. In some religious beliefs, women were/are only used for sexual pleasure and reproduction. Therefore, freedom of the Arabic woman has become restricted in Arabic society due to customs and traditions. She has been oppressed by social and patriarchal system. This paper further investigates how does the society dominate and oppress a woman. In Saadawi's novel *Woman at Point Zero*, she has mentioned a terrible status of female at every page through her novel. Male dominated-society controls her position and status. Saadawi depicts subjugation of women through the leading protagonist Firdaus and her struggle in out shadowing the masculine domination.

Keywords: women at point zero, subjugation, patriarchy, female oppression.

Introduction

There is no one of famous Arab writers and intellectuals who wrote about the female oppression in Arabic country like Nawal-El-Saadawi. Nawal-El-Saadawi is one of the most leading campaigners for women's right in the Arab world. She is Egyptian novelist, feminist, Physician and psychologist. She has written about controversial issues, such as religious fanaticism, domestic violence and prostitution. Saadawi depicts subjugation of women through the leading

protagonist Firdaus and her struggle in out shadowing the masculine domination.

Woman at Point Zero presents a patriarchal society as depicted by Nawal El. The book is an allegory for women's struggle against patriarchal and colonial power in Egypt, an allegory narrated through the life-history of Firdaus who seeks to gain financial independence through prostitution, an Egyptian woman convicted for murder and awaiting for execution.

Patriarchy is a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways such as discrimination, disregard, insult, control,

exploitation, oppression and violence. The woman suffers inequalities in everywhere, in the family, at the place of work and in society. Patriarchy is the prime barrier against women's modernism and development. So, due to patriarchy, women were deprived of their legal rights and opportunities. In fact, patriarchal values restrict women's mobility by rejecting their freedom over themselves as well as their property.

Female oppression is a problem that still exists in most of societies till our present days. In Arabic society, the oppression of female has been revived up to now. Although we live in an era of development and modernity, women are still marginalized and oppressed as a result of patriarchal system in Arab society in particular. Male patriarchy degrades female and keeps her position under his control and domination. The process of domination and suppression of women is conducted by Arab society. Therefore, the women in Arabic society encounter great deals of difficulties to get rid of patriarchy domination against female. In Saadawi's negotiation, Firdous asserts that, her protagonist struggles against "the pressures of poverty, patriarchy, marriage and social customs that assail her." (2006, 136)

Many of Arabic women have been oppressed in many different parts of the world and Islamic governments due to religious laws. The only solution for emancipating the oppressed woman in Arab society is to separate the religion from the state.

Woman at Point Zero is a novel about a prostitute who is executed for murdering her pimp. That has become a classic in feminist literature. Its grim look suggesting that death is the only liberating for women in a world where abuse is as quotidian of breathing. Saadawi very skillfully handled the role of oppression in this novel for the subjugation of Arabic female.

THE ROLE OF SUBJUGATION IN WOMEN AT POINT ZERO

Society used different types of devices for subjugation of women. The word patriarchy means the dominance of males. Patriarchal society distributes the power unevenly between men and women in which men have the advantage of being

superior to women. In society, the power of decision making and to dominate is given to the males of the society. In Arab society, the women have been trapped in the boundaries set by the patriarchal system. The condition of women in Arab society is majorly affected by the patriarchal system. This paper observes the meaning of patriarchy and its effect on the conditions of women. This paper also observes the women characters from Arabic mythology who have been the victims of male dominance. The women writers in Arabic English Literature have also shown the patriarchal system in Arabic society through their writings. This paper also sheds light on the female characters as the victims of male dominance in *women at Point Zero*.

Most of societies have a culture so their structure is different from culture to another. And men from Arab society try to preserve their culture through such cruel activity for patriarchal system. In case of Arab society, male authority behaves like that under the custom of culture. Husbands treat their wives cruelly as inferiors. Husbands sometimes use the violence against their Muslim wives. They have beaten or abused them sexually. They also blame them on the recipe of cooking treating them as a soil giving birth to a male child. Such incidents happened due to cultural habits of people. Same incident happened with the character Firdaus who does society culture violate her so she doesn't have taken good respect from them.

El-Saadwi refers to the persecution by cultural communities of Arabs. Firdaus believes that she is powerless to resist her husband's oppression because all the time culture denies her.

"When one of his female children died, my father would eat his supper, my mother would wash his legs, and then he would go to sleep, just as he did every night. When the child that died was a boy, he would beat my mother, then have his supper and lie down to sleep (18)"

The Arab female suffers from oppression. The husband mistreats his wife. This dilemma shows us how the Arab culture humiliates the female up to now. In Arab culture, the wife should give everything to her husband. El-Saadwi illustrated that the woman seems as living in prison. Firdaus suffers

more oppression at her father's house. She was looking while her father was beating her mother several times. Firdaus's father was using the power and domination over his wife

"With her husband she is incapable to stop him as he beats her whether he had a reason for it or not --- Because of their culture Firdaus believes as a wife her duty was perfect obedience (44)"

The husband uses his power and physical power against his wife due to the incapability of women to find any house to live in. The women have been deprived from education in some Arabic societies, because education gives the women the power and makes her independent economically and aware of her rights as women. Hence the patriarchal society prohibits the education of women as visualized in *Women at Point Zero*,

"When my uncle would clamber into train, and bid me farewell, I would cry and beg him to take me with him to Cairo. But my uncle would ask, 'What will you do in Cairo, Firdaus?' And I would reply: 'I will go to El Azhar and study like you.' Then he would laugh and explain that El Azhar was only for men. And I would cry, and hold on to his hand, as the train started he pulled away with force. (14)"

In this novel, Saadawi portrays the social oppression in Arab world. The social class plays great role in the world especially in Arab. Many of women have been oppressed due to social status, one example in this novel about social oppression is that the wife of Firdaus' uncle believes that she belongs to higher social class than Firdaus one. She wants from her husband to neglect Firdaus. She treats Firdaus as servant. Saadawi tries to tackle the social oppression through her novel.

"On a cold night I told her to come and sleep with me in the bed, but when my uncles' wife entered room and saw us, she beat her. Then she beat me also (23)" "The skillful lines penciled around my eyes hinted at just the right combination of attraction and rejection favored by the wives of men in high positions of authority.

Only my make-up, my hair and my expensive shoes were 'upper class.' With my secondary school certificate and suppressed desires I belonged to 'middle class.' By birth I was lower class. (10)"

From the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that these women are subjected to male oppression and abuse. These women struggle to endure the humiliating experiences because they are in a patriarchal society that prefers the men to the detriment of the female. These oppressive, inhuman, subjugating and cruel environments in which these women find themselves retard their social, economic and physical growth.

Gender inequalities have been created and reproduced in the societies. It is the use male acts for violence, abuse, power against female society. Many types of inequalities have been used against women due to the social and political dominance of male society against female society. Many of women have been abused and oppression and discrimination between male and female. Gender oppression is the dominance of political and social against women. Gendered oppression is based on the discrimination of race, sexuality, ability, class, age, history of incarceration, religion, language, and citizenship status. "Firdaus says, 'a man cannot stand being rejected by a woman' (97)"

Saadawi uses gender to show the theme of sexism and shows that gender plays a vital role in society. Saadawi explains that Firdaus's culture degrade of the value of women and makes the woman less powerful than man due to the dominated male society. Firdaus suffered and experienced sorts of persecutions, oppressions.

"All my life I have been searching for something that would fill me with pride, make me feel superior to everyone else, including kings, princes and rules. Each time I picked up a newspaper and found the picture of a man, who was one of them, I would spit on it. (9)"

El Saadawi further demonstrates the gender oppression of men when Firdaus discovers that all male rulers have the same things in common, having an avaricious and distorted personality. Firdaus proves that majority of men are

selfish and they have the same avaricious, distorted personality. Firdus shows that women have right to get job in order to be proud of herself in her society but she can't do that due to cultural and traditional customs and norms of Arab society. The culture and tradition deprived woman from education, deprived woman from working in any sector .the woman has right to be famous for her society but that is impossible for women to be famous, to work outside to gain money but woman only works at home and not allowed to work outside and hence women have oppressed and subjugated not only in Egypt but also in all over the Arab world. The women don't have power like men; the man is superior to woman from perspective's cultural and traditional Arab country.

"I discovered that all these rulers were men. What they had in common was an avaricious and distorted personality, a never ending appetite for money, sex and unlimited power. They were men who sowed corruption on the earth, and plundered their peoples, men endowed with loud voices, a capacity for persuasion, for choosing sweet words and shooting poisoned arrows. (27)"

Female oppression is deeply ingrained in the culture of the societies which ensures the continuation of patriarchal control. patriarchy system has become the dominator over women from generation to the next generation .Thus the woman has been suffered and abused by the past generation to the next generation .The patriarchy system destroys women of all social classes. Firdaus's life, in marriage, streets or even in business does not protect her from the destruction by the system. As a poor girl, she is married off to an old man, thus cutting short her education. As a young woman she is subjected to a biased violence and escapes to the street as a prostitute. However, changing her social-economic status does not protect her in the male world society, the woman is used for sexual satisfaction .the woman regards as commodities in the perspective's Arab society.

"No, your holiness, no,' as she pulled her arm or leg away from his embrace. 'No your

holiness, for sake of prophet. No, this is sinful.' Then his stifled tones hissing back: 'You woman,you... What sin and what Prophet? I' m your husband and you are my wife'. (40)"

Al-Saadawi described the marriage of Ferdous in her novel that patriarchal dominance against women has become dominant and common and that the blind does not have the right or the right to choose the right husband. She also explained through her novel that the husband in the Arab society has the freedom to hit his wife and humiliate her. Some husbands believe that the wives should be enslaved for pleasure only. They must follow their orders and obey them in everything. These women remain under their dominance.

"He left on me like a mad dog. The hole in his swelling was oozing drops of foul-smelling pus. I did not return my face or my nose away this time. I surrendered my face to his face and my body to his body, passively, without any resistance, without a movement, as though life had been drained out of it, like a piece of dead wood or old neglected furniture left to stand where it is, or pair of shoes forgotten under a chair.(47)"

"As a child Firdaus uncle uses any opportunity to exploit her sexually. While she is kneading dough to bake for family use, her uncle, under the guise of reading books, rubs her thighs and gradually moves up words to her private part. (13)"

Firdaus was confronted harassment by men wherever she stays and this was because of the man's view of the woman as a mere sexual element. The woman has been exploited sexually by abusing physically that indicates that woman has been oppressed by Arab society.

"In fact I never left the bedroom day and night. I lay on the bed crucified and every hour a man would come in. there were so many of them for they were all married, educated, carrying , swollen leather bags and wallets in their hands . They dug long nails in to my flesh and I would close my lips tightly trying to stifle any expression of pain to hold back a scream. (57)"

Firdaus tolerates this marital rape several times which is called sex instead of enjoying it because men see sex untimely pleasure as their sole right. Saddik Goharm argues that Firdaus all her life was exploited physically as well as psychologically. Firdaus suffers from humiliation, rape, incest and violence and the text reinforces her identity as an abused subaltern (184). The present study explores how humiliated treatment gives Arabic society to female but she also has a sex power but she couldn't obtain success on it due to dominance.

Clitoral dichotomy, also known as Female Genital Mutilation is a one of the form of sexual oppression, is a common practiced in many traditional African societies especially in Egypt. It is a traditional customs by that cruel weapon society oppressed female in childhood.

Women are subjected to various degrees of physical and sexual abuse from their spouses. One of the types of sexual oppression is mutilating of clitoral dichotomy the woman due to many traditions in the Arabic society. This reveals that Female Genital Mutilation is at the detriment of women and concerned only with the satisfaction of man's pleasure.

"In which a person, sometimes unskilled or health worker, cuts off parts or whole organs of the female gentile usually using the knife or razor blade, which for the post part is unsterilized---- it is considered, variously, a cleaning ritual from evil spirits." (An international Journal of Language Literature & Gender studies, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia Vol. I (1) April-July, 2012.)

El-Saadawi begins to utilize this motif in the first few pages in the novel when Firdaus receives a clitoral dichotomy. It is concerned only with the satisfaction of man's pleasure. She delineates the worse condition of Muslim women in the Arab world through this belief

"She brought a woman who has carrying a small knife or razor blade. They cut off a piece of flesh from between by thighs (12)".

By adding a childish tone to the opening of the novel accomplished by her ignorance and cruelty of clitoral dichotomy, through this incident you realize however society used patriarchal oppression,

Firdaus who is seen as victim of patriarchal society's cruelty therefore Saadawi's novel signifies for female oppression. El -Saadawi presents sexual encounters with men as battles which are a symbol for how she has to fight against oppression of the patriarchy. The following incident shows such oppression experienced by Firdaus. For the sake of dominance and control over her male society that behaves brutally. Under patriarchal control Firdaus bear terrible tyranny. Saadawi consciously presents the drastic condition of said society's brutality such evidence.

"The humiliating pressure of male bodies on mine when I rode in the bus, and the long morning, queue in front of a perpetually overflowing toilet.... Where he made me lie down on a bed----What are you waiting for? I have no money on men tonight; I will give you money the next time---- (67)."

On such incidents, you can take into account, of patriarchy is how used female as a source of pleasure and don't care about her feelings, pains while doing sexual intercourse. In male dominated society women don't have a right more than a housewife. Arab society due to cultural beliefs harassed and made her in low position while he maintained his status on high position. After husbands violence Firdaus left house. She meets a coffee shop owner. He accommodates her in his apartment and provides her basic needs. While living in his house, she expresses her wish to get job.

"He jumped up and slapped me on my face. His hands was big and strong and it was the heaviest slap I had ever received on my face---- the next moment he hit me with his fist in the belly until lost consciousness immediately(51)"

Violence against women is increasing daily. Women are subjected to various degrees of physical and sexual abuse from their spouses. Firdaus' father always beats her mother. In Arab society people never left women alone in any profession. The man developed his prestige over her. In the novel, Firdaus accepted the life of prostitute but patriarchy didn't leave her without harassments. Under power of dominance and how society cheated women, men used their authority on them. Even as a

prostitute, Marzouk, a pimp threatens Firdaus. He tells her that

“Every’ prostitute has a pimp to protect her from other pimps, and from the police you cannot do without protection, otherwise the profession exercised by husbands and pimps would die out.....I may be obliged to threaten. I had escaped from menI could buy him off with a sum of money and insisted on sharing my earnings (92)”

In the novel, *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus, the main female character in the novel, has experienced unbearable suffering in her life which leads her to hate men so the hatred makes her wants looking for her own self-esteem. Like other nations, Arab society grants priority for men more than women. And women don’t have right of equality and freedom like men. Firdaus suffered by the hand of oppression from childhood up to adult because of patriarchal system. People in society regard Firdaus as criminal women because of killing the pimp while she tries to defend herself.

“*Death* is a journey to a place unknown to everybody on this earth fills me with pride. All my life I have been searching for something that would fill me with pride, and make me feel superior to everyone else, including kings, princes and rulers.(101)”

Saadawi’s rational and radical attitude shows us by incident for dominance, emancipation, and victory on patriarchal oppression she prepares her character by deliberate operation to kill oppression of oppressor by their power.

CONCLUSION

Patriarchy and its detrimental effects on the lives of women are the central of feminist studies. Thus, Nawal El Saadawi tries to deliver messages to Arab society through her novel ‘*Woman at Point Zero*’. We can conclude from this novel that the Patriarchy plays an important role in the construction of both gender and sexuality. Through our reading the novel *Women at Point Zero*, we find and conclude that woman don’t have right of equality in Arab society. *Women at Point Zero* is a short polemic written from the perspective of a woman enduring much suffering and oppression in

Egypt. Although it is fictional, the author Saadawi created this novel from the influence of real life events.

Patriarchy is based on male hegemony that has evolved certain rules and regulations for the prolongation of the oppression of gender. Women’s oppression is one of many forms of oppression – including racism, homophobia, and sexism. In a patriarchal society, women have to struggle to be educated, and to have property. She doesn’t have the right to choose their partners in marriage due to these choices they will be more or less given and flexible for men. To conclude, I believe notions of patriarchy manifest in almost every aspect of our daily lives and therefore, it’s important to understand and study patriarchy and its elements for the proper realization of every individual talents and emotional well-being.

With this understanding we can also develop ideas of how to fight women’s oppression that is considered as the deep concerns of subjugating conditions of women in Arab society. Under such circumstances, woman attempts to emancipate herself from such solemn conditions. At the end, we get the positive vision of woman from this novel. Firdaus didn’t only accept defeat but also got victory by killing pimp as a sign of rational attitude of woman. She succeeded in her life, but Arab society didn’t leave her. Her punishment for the crime is a symbol of woman who hasn’t a part of liberation under patriarchal convention.

In this study it has been observed that male dominance and their persecuted behavior denied the progress of women in a given societies. Woman in this selected research study is stunning, diligent, caring and ambitious but due to the cultural notion as well as patriarchal oppression she breaks down mentally, psychologically and physically. So she suffered by the hands of male power. Whole novel detects that woman is use only for sexual satisfaction and follow the duty of husband and caring child in said society.

Being a part of postcolonial feminist Saadawi casts the picture of female oppression distinctly. The picture of Firdaus gives a contribution of Arabic female in the Arab society that is considered as a savage region where religious,

cultural beliefs prevailed in order to provide the male with high respect and female doesn't take a high respect. Said society doesn't give them freedom to survive on their own way. Patriarchal society also misuses religious teachings for their own sake; it uses such types of customs for subjugation women under cultural and religious beliefs. She tangled by the forms of oppression. For emancipation of female, Saadawi depicts the life of prostitute, because sex is only one power where man inclined their power against women. The fanatical culture of Arab didn't change their nature of existence, so Arabic women wouldn't acquire her liberate position among them. Muslim women around the world have a need to join hands together and fight for their liberation. To sum up, these efforts aimed to improve the social status of women and should change the attitude of men from oppression, violence and prevailing equal standard on each institution.

Saadawi advocates social equality for all. The comprehensive liberation of the entire social body and real liberation of woman is impossible within an oppressive and exploitative social system.

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