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Gender, Power, and the Politics of the 'Hijab' in *Hijabistan*

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze how patriarchy, like gender, is socially constructed through the perpetuation of patriarchal ideals. Using Sabyn Javeri's short story collection Hijabistan (2019), this research explores how patriarchal institutions like family, clergy, and culture instill patriarchal values in the minds of the people. The analysis also includes how the concept of 'hijab' is depicted as a symbol of societal norms and expectations that not only segregate genders but also limit their agency. Through content analysis and textual interpretations based on the theoretical frameworks from Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1970) and Judith Butler's Gender Trouble (1990) the study tries to explore how patriarchy and gender performativity is used for gaining and sustaining power dynamics at home and in society. The research finds that 'hijab is one of the most powerful tool patriarchy uses to subjugate women however, the study also finds that Javeri has shown the sparks of resistance among females through her protagonists in the stories. The characters are shown opposing this concept of 'hijab' as a symbol of their servitude. This research aims to contribute to the understanding of how radical feminist discourses interact with sociocultural and religious beliefs in Pakistan, highlighting the implications for family structures, social norms, and individual well-being.

Keywords: Feminism, patriarchy, politics of hijab, self-identity, women emancipation

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Introduction:

Feminism is a profound and far-reaching struggle that pursues not only the liberation of women but also their self-determination in regards to their bodies, economic independence, life choices, sexual freedom, and emancipation from diverse forms of oppression. While recognizing patriarchy as the primary cause of women's discrimination and oppression, Radical feminists focus on the 'most intimate enemy at home' i.e. man (Butler, 1990). This study is grounded in radical feminist theory, which posits that patriarchy is the primary cause of women's oppression and discrimination (Millet, 1970). The concept of patriarchy is understood as a system of power and domination that perpetuates gender-based violence, discrimination, and oppression. The study also draws on Judith Butler's gender performativity theory, which argues that gender is not an inherent trait but rather a social construct performed through cultural and social norms (Butler, 1990). This theory is used to analyze how the 'hijab' is used as a tool of patriarchal control, perpetuating gender norms and expectations.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the development of radical feminist theory, providing an in-depth analysis of how patriarchy operates in Pakistani society and its impact on women's lives and experiences. By amplifying the voices and experiences of Pakistani women, this research provides a platform for their stories and perspectives to be heard, challenging dominant discourses that perpetuate gender-based oppression and discrimination. The study's findings have important implications for social change, highlighting the need for policies and interventions that address gender-based violence, discrimination, and oppression in Pakistan. Moreover, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex ways in which power operates to perpetuate gender-based oppression, shedding light on the ways in which cultural and social norms are used to control and regulate women's bodies and lives. Ultimately, this study has the potential to inform and shape feminist movements and initiatives in Pakistan and beyond, working towards a more just and equitable society for all.

Literature Review:

The Concept of Veiled Women in Literature

The idea of 'Veiled Woman' in literary traditions denotes a woman who is either actually or symbolically veiled, most often pointing at her oppression, repression, or limitation due to culture and religion. Such a picture usually occurs in works of fiction set in places where veiling is standard—in the countries of the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa. One of the most

common allegories in literature, with reference to patriarchal norms and values, is that the veil hides everything: the appearance, identity, thoughts, emotions, and desires of the woman. That could well symbolize the defying nature of the woman against such social norms and even an inner contradiction that she develops between the desires approved by society and her own.

Riaz (2012) contends that the veil has the potential to be used as a politically strategic tool, giving women the ability to block out male gaze and assert their own chastity. However, Riaz points out that within a community, patriarchal, feudal, and geographical factors have an impact on how the veil is perceived. While Mohanty (1988) criticizes Western discourse on the veil, contending that it tends to stereotype 'Third World Women' as a single, homogenous group, ignores historical and regional contexts, and disregards the discursive exploitation that is less obvious but no less important. The veil can be empowering for women in the Islamic context, according to Jadoon (2015). She points out that the veil gives a woman a private space where she is protected from male gaze and her family's honor.

Aboulela's novel *Minaret* (2005) portrays the veil as a metaphor for the Arab woman's positive and negative experiences, representing the struggle to maintain religious faith in a non-Muslim or non-practicing Muslim environment; Al-Sudeary (2012) compares representations of the veil in the English works of comprador intellectuals with those found in Arab texts in order to come to an understanding of what these differences mean with respect to the power/knowledge dichotomy of modern-day oculacentric society. Whereas, Toossi (2015) examines the semiotic complexities of the Muslim veil as a defining feature of Muslim female subjectivity. The paper mentions the deployment of the veil by Mohja Kahf and Princess Hijab in ways that do not conform to familiar perceptions among Muslims and non-Muslims.

Furthermore, Ali (2021) discusses the concept of the veil in Islam as depicted in Randa A. Fattah's novel *Does My Head Look Big in This?* (2006). The paper provides insights into the broader implications of the veil beyond just a piece of clothing, probing into its significance in the context of religious beliefs and societal norms. While, Zuhur (2022) asserts that hijab and niqab have become widely adopted by Cairene women, Egyptian women, and Muslim women worldwide. The paper also highlights the discourse on the veil in contemporary Cairo, suggesting ongoing discussions and debates surrounding its practice.

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Zuhur (2022) asserts that hijab and niqab have become widely adopted by Cairene women, Egyptian women, and Muslim women worldwide. The author claims that efforts have been made to discourage the niqab, with bans and rules against veiling in certain locations in contemporary Cairo, which resulted in a small deveiling movement, indicating a shift away from veiling. The paper also highlights the discourse on the veil in contemporary Cairo, suggesting ongoing discussions and debates surrounding its practice.

As such, the debate on the veil becomes an ongoing debate that is challenged and contested by different feminist and, indeed, Western perspectives. However, critical attention must be directed at the context and the many social variables dictating the experience of the women putting on the veil. This study, therefore, engages critically with the discursive exploitation determining our perception of the veil.

Female Autonomy in Islam and Literature

The issue of female autonomy in Islam has always been central debate, with literature analyzing it from any possible view, and especially from the radical feminist perspective. The radical feminists express that it is through the traditional, cultural, and religious norms by which women are oppressed, and their freedom is curtailed in many ways.

Arimbi (2009) focuses on the writings of the most prominent Indonesian Muslim women writers and their representation of gender in Indonesian Muslim culture. According to her, literature seemed to give women the ability to lay a claim over their own lives and establish their own perspectives. For Imtiaz and Haider (2011) the problem of violence is male dominance, and it ritualizes women's minds and bodies so that they can be oppressed further. They view this as the influence of gender equality and how women are being used in literature. Moreover, Anjum (2020), in her work, considers the phenomenon of women's activism and political engagement in modern Pakistan, particularly in Karachi, to properly learn how perspectives and experiences of women seem to reflect such notions of feminist ideology

and nationalism. Her study includes interviews with women from both liberal and conservative organizations.

Anjum (2020), in her work, considers the phenomenon of women's activism and political engagement in modern Pakistan, particularly in Karachi, to properly learn how perspectives and experiences of women seem to reflect such notions of feminist ideology and nationalism. This paper focuses on intricate perspectives about the role of female independence in reference to Islam in Pakistan. According to Saeed and Leghari (2019) Islam assures the protection, respect, and dignity of a woman with her rights and freedom. The authors also emphasized the adverse consequences of radical feminist ideals such as the advocacy of open relations and gay and lesbian rights for women's rights and freedom. The authors criticize and condemn the west for drawing negative influences related to the status and respect of women, and the most destructive are its radical feminist's influences on the Islamic ideologies which are considered as a complete code of life offering salvation and mercy for mankind.

Radical feminist writings, in general, tend to provide a critical review of how traditional patriarchal norms in Islamic societies tend to hinder women from exercising their free will over their lives and making decisions pertaining to the lives of their own. The present research highlights how radical feminist ideals are considered applicable in Muslim cultures and what impact they can have on such societies.

Women's Representation in Pakistani English Fiction

One vital area that Pakistani women writers have touched on is the portrayal of women in fiction in their home country. Such writers believe that literature may also carry strength and authority to upset gender boundaries, even to rebel against the male-dominated society. They show the need for freeing and empowering women by presenting them as one form of exploitation and injustice toward women in Pakistani society. These writers depicted the lives of Pakistani women according to the norms of social, economic, and religious realms that depict traditional to modern expectations as restrictive (Siddiqi, 2016). Feminist writings have exemplified patriarchal resistance in Pakistani English literature. They have also highlighted female characters challenging and resisting the practices of patriarchal norms and values.

While referring to the detailed analysis of how Pakistani English writers portray women, Rida et al. (2022) elaborate on the kind of empowered women despite hailing from patriarchal backgrounds. Rida claims that writers like Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi, Saadat Hassaan Manto, Hina Faisal Imam, Zulfiqar Ghous, Mohsin Hamid, Muneeza Shamsi, Mohammed Hanif, and Bapsi Sidhwa, have enriched the Pakistani English literature with their service to the feminist cause and of movement by focusing on the effects of British Imperialism and also bringing forward new concepts related to women's rights. Furthermore, Nabi, U. R., Tabassum, M., & Akhter, S. (2022) studied the pejorative condition of Pakistani women in the light of two novels: *The Holy Woman* (2001) by Qaisra Shahraz and *Slum Child* (2010) by Bina Shah, examining both the communal and gendered subalternity of women and their struggle for selfhood in the male chauvinist society of Pakistan. This paper looks at the issues like dispossession of identity, lack of choice, and social standing disguised as honor.

For Fatima (2020) Pakistani society has a variety of customs, laws, and social norms, therefore, patriarchs from such a society take the opportunity and give themselves the mandate to oppress women with the religious customs and traditions as the reason to justify their dominance. Virginity of a woman is an honor in this society. Jalal (1991) further explains that women fall victim most of the time to the array of abuses that are given legitimacy by religious and customary laws. Tyson (2006) brings in the patriarchal power structure that gives the men the liberty to look into and rule the world and, at the same time, oppress women into objects.

Dar (2013) has given a feminist review of the novel *Ice-Candy-Man* (2000) by Bapsi Sidhwa, where he points out the subjugation and exploitation that women have to be exposed to in a patriarchal society; further, he points out the contrast between masculine discourse. In the majority of the cases, the women suffer pain and humiliation most of the time, while the men almost always use them to show their power and satisfy their egocentric tendencies. Likewise, Parveen and Qadir (2019) found that the selected short stories from Shahraz (2013) deviate from the conventional depiction of women and show women breaking free from societal norms. Even being tied down by traditions and norms, the female characters work unpretentiously to redesign their own selves in order to reach the threshold of emancipation and empowerment. Neerja (2020) has done a similar kind of study, following the depictions of women in Pakistani literature, more precisely in the novel *The Pakistani Bride* (2008) and *Water* (2006) by Bapsi Sidwa. The author denoted the low place of women in Pakistani society and the barriers they encounter in their lives, induced by the patriarchal system. The paper underlines the significance of

women's self-emancipation and importance of making their decisions by themselves, without being dependent on others.

While extensive research exists on women's resistance to patriarchal norms in Pakistani literature, less attention has been given to exploring the intersections of gender, power, and the politics of the hijab in Pakistan. Although the hijab is a widely debated symbol both within and outside Muslim societies, few studies specifically address how it functions as a marker of autonomy, empowerment, or resistance in Pakistani society. Further research is needed to investigate how the hijab, as an element of women's identity, interacts with cultural, religious, and political dimensions within Pakistan. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the role of the hijab in relation to power dynamics, gender identity, and social politics in Pakistan, highlighting how it might serve as both a tool for empowerment and a site of contested meaning in the broader context of feminist discourse and cultural practices.

Discussion and Analysis

Patriarchy and the Politics of 'Hijab' in *Hijabistan*

According to Jorden and Hepworth (1995), women writers in Western prose fiction have a long history of presenting feminist ideas and articulating women's viewpoint, often in opposition to the dominant misogynistic voice of the novella tradition. Their contributions established a dialogical counterpoint that influenced the rise of novelistic discourse. However, similar efforts have been made recently by female authors in the Asian countries as well. For instance, in the short story collection, *Hijabistan*, the author depicts the protagonists' experiences along with the prevailing attitudes and behaviors to develop a deeper understanding of the exploitative nature of patriarchy and its detrimental impact on women's lives.

Millett, like her fellow radical feminists, challenges the notion of male dominance being biologically determined, contending instead that gender identities are shaped during early development through societal and parental constructions, "Because of our social circumstances, male and females are really two cultures, and their life experiences are totally different – and this is crucial" (*Sexual Politics*, 1970, p. 31). "The Urge" (*Hijabistan*, 2019) reflects similar ideology, an account of a young Pakistani girl's experience being forced to wear an 'abaya' and a headscarf as markers of her gender and devotion to Islam. Her family uses her 'hijab' requirement to control her body and limit her libido in an attempt to protect her virginity. Nonetheless, the story shows how this young girl starts exploring her sexual, physical, and

material urges in a very patriarchal environment. As she reaches the age of thirteen, she is made to wear an 'abaya,' which symbolises confinement and limitations on her mental, physical, and emotional development. However, the protagonist, who is very ambitious and sensual, gives in to her desires and continues to defy patriarchal boundaries by taking advantage of every available chance.

When her mother asks her to wear 'abaya', she uses the terms like "dark garment" and "all-encompassing" for the garment, perpetuating hatred for the hijab (p. 13), which also indicates how women are exploited in the name of religious obligations, to which she is entitled right from her teenage. Furthermore, the author portrays the girl's (protagonist's) mother as a conduit for reinforcing patriarchal attitudes, as she considers it 'fortunate' for her daughter to be required to wear the 'hijab and abaya' (The head covering scarf and long gown to cover the body), thus emphasizing the notion of women's inferiority to men and their requisite submissiveness. The following lines, for instance, from the protagonist's mother indicate such philosophy:

> *'You are lucky,' Amma told me later that day. 'Nowadays, girls in Pakistan get away with so much. In our days, it was a baggy shuttlecock burkha thrown over our heads, with just a few tiny holes to peer through. And then, before we could even learn to walk without tripping on them, we were packed off to the husband's house*. (The Urge, *Hijabistan,* 2019, p. 13)

The preceding dialogue highlights the gendered experiences and societal expectations that are entrenched within a patriarchal framework. Her portrayal of the 'burkha' is a powerful illustration of the physical and societal obstacles that have kept women from attaining complete independence and mobility. Likewise, the reference to young girls being sent off to live with their spouses is a criticism of the deeply ingrained patriarchal traditions and practices that have inhibited women's independence and self-governance. When she marries, she experiences the gloomy reality of the romanticized notions (fancy cloths, jewelry, makeup, loving husband, etc.) around marriage, as she is forced by her husband to wear the headscarf, abaya, vest, leggings, and long shawl on top of several layers of clothing—even in the blazing heat—because her husband has strict control over her body. Furthermore, he confines her within their room, employing locked doors and obstructed windows and stairways to restrict her movements and prevent her from establishing communication other than her husband. Through the depiction of the husband's deep-seated fear of the protagonist 'flashing someone else', the author exemplifies a sense of male entitlement and ownership over women's

bodies, epitomizing the objectification and commodification of women within a patriarchal framework (p. 21). The story establishes Millett's view that the family, as the preeminent institution of patriarchy, not only mirrors but also perpetuates patriarchal structures within society, effectively establishing and regulating behavioural norms: "… expectations the culture cherishes about his gender identity encourage the young male to develop aggressive impulses, and the female to thwart her own or turn them inward" (*Sexual Politics*, 1970, p. 31).

The protagonist's mother, in her belief that the husband 'loves her too much' and wishes to shield her from the gaze of other men, perpetuates the notion that a woman's worth lies primarily in her physical appearance and reinforces the prioritization of men's desire over women's autonomy and agency (p. 21). This mindset also reflects Millett (1970) argument that the process of socialization, whereby individuals acquire learned behaviours, operates so effectively within the patriarchal system that the use of force is rendered largely unnecessary, as the story reflects how women themselves perpetuate the devaluation of women within patriarchal systems.

Furthermore, the description of the scene when the protagonist gives birth to a baby girl while being alone and locked up in her room in a pool of blood, and found at the last moments of her delivery by her husband, seem atrocious. The husband calls a midwife immediately seeing his wife in this condition. The midwife wraps the baby girl tightly in a piece of cloth and 'handed the parcel as if it was something repugnant' (p. 21); her comment is very significant at this moment as she says, "The first one doesn't matter, ... But the second-born must be a boy. Remember, a boy is a provider. A boy will bring you status. A girl is a liability" (p. 21). The midwife's (who herself is a woman) treatment of the newborn baby reflects a similar devaluation of female life. While her remark that 'the first one doesn't matter' and the emphasis on the importance of a male child over a female child reinforces the societal bias. Similarly, her remark that 'a girl is a liability' is a commentary on the deeply rooted patriarchal thought system that sees women as burdens or inferior to males. The continuance of violence and discrimination against women may be aided by this devaluing of girls and women.

The lines also highlight the gendered expectations and inequalities portrayed within Pakistani society. The perception that women are dependent on men for their worth and social position is perpetuated by the emphasis on the second-born child being a boy, who is considered as a provider and a source of status. This again is a stark criticism on marginalization of women and the gendered power gap.

Likewise, in "Radha" (*Hijabistan*, 2019), the author describes the situation of a female sex worker who is subjected to patriarchal tyranny. Radha, who comes from a close-knit family, has abandoned her pre-medical studies in order to support her family; when it comes to financing her education, Radha's mother puts her boys' academic goals ahead of her own, forcing her to work part-time jobs. The narrative in the story suggests that it is the patriarchal oppression that led Radha to choose a career in sex trade as she is forced into this field by an older model who serves as her mentor for her. According to Dworkin (1981) and Brownmiller (1975), women usually participate in sex work because of external pressures or uncontrolled circumstances rather than out of their own free will. Sex work is seen as an exploitative industry driven by patriarchal forces. As Walby (1990), claims that patriarchy is an unjust system that controls various aspects of women's lives, including reproduction, sexuality, finances, labor, and respect. It is also reflected in the portrayal of Radha's circumstances, in which her mother feels that a suitable marriage of her daughter will restore her social status and respect in society.

In "The Lovers," another story from *Hijabistan*, the perpetuation of patriarchy by females who have been raised and restricted by patriarchal structures is starkly evident. The narrative follows a young girl living in London with her family, whose life is disrupted by the visit of her Pakistani aunt and her family. The aunt imposes her self-proclaimed pious ideals on the family, warning the mother to monitor her daughter's behavior, lest she "run off with a foreigner." The aunt's solution is to enforce the girl to wear a headscarf, but when she is later discovered holding hands with a boy in a store, she is swiftly sent back to Pakistan. The aunt's reaction, "Who knows what shame-vame she would have brought to the family's honour?' (p. 51), reveals the superficiality and triviality of patriarchal ideals, which are often perpetuated by females themselves in such societies. This perpetuation suggests that living in strict patriarchal societies has stripped these women of their sense of self-identity, freedom, and assertion.

The story perpetuates the internalization of patriarchal values, as the Pakistani aunt enforces her niece to wear a headscarf, reinforcing the control over her body perpetuating gender stereotypes. The aunt's concern about the family's honor, defined by the girl's chastity and modesty, highlights how patriarchy relies on the complicity of women in their own oppression. The narrative illustrates how women, like the aunt, collude in perpetuating patriarchal values, reinforcing the system's power dynamics.

In “Coach Annie” from the collection *Hijabistan*, Javeri critiques the patriarchal norms that govern physical appearance, particularly the disparate standards for men and women. The protagonist, a young Pakistani girl living in Yorkshire, suffers from eczema that causes hair loss and facial scarring. Her mother, ashamed of her appearance, forces her to wear a headscarf to conceal her baldness, perpetuating the notion that female baldness is shameful and repugnant. The girl’s eczema and baldness make her a curiosity and nuisance to society, and a source of hatred for her family. Her mother’s insistence on hiding her baldness under a headscarf is presented as a symbol of the girl’s femininity and piety, even though she doesn’t regularly practice her prayers. This irony highlights the superficiality of societal beliefs, where physical appearance is prioritized over religious devotion. The author mocks how the headscarf, worn out of necessity, is touted as evidence of the girl’s religious devotion, exposing the flaws in our understanding of faith and identity. As Javeri (2019) writes:

> She couldn’t gloat enough about how we were all going to heaven thanks to her virtuous daughter, how proud she was of me for wearing the hijab and embracing God’s will, of my big, big sacrifice. I usually stared blankly while she babbled away, wondering how slapping a piece of cloth on one’s head could guarantee free entry into the pearly gates. And why she didn’t wear one herself if it was, indeed, so special. (Coach Annie, *Hijabistan,* 2019 pp. 137-138)

This also highlights a common misconception among people - the belief that they will be granted paradise based on the good deeds of others. Many assume that a man is responsible for ensuring that the women and children in his family fulfill their religious obligations, and that mothers will be rewarded by God if their daughters are pious and obedient. However, this thinking is misguided and overlooks the importance of individual responsibility and personal accountability in one’s spiritual journey.

“Coach Annie” through the lens of Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970), shows patriarchal control over women’s bodies, as the mother’s insistence on hiding the girl’s baldness under a headscarf reinforces societal beauty standards. This control is further underscored by the disparate gender roles and stereotypes presented, where male baldness is normalized, while female baldness is deemed shameful. The objectification of women is also apparent, as the girl’s value is tied to her physical appearance, perpetuating the notion that women’s bodies are sites of shame and control. Moreover, the narrative illustrates the internalization of patriarchal values, as the girl accepts her mother’s insistence on wearing a headscarf, validating her femininity.

Ultimately, the text exposes the superficiality of societal beliefs, highlighting the flaws in our understanding of faith, identity, and gender roles, thereby reinforcing Millett's arguments on the pervasive nature of patriarchy.

The story also comments on how patriarchy shapes women's relationships with their bodies, identities, and sense of self-worth, often leading to the internalization of oppressive norms and values. As the girl in "Coach Annie" feels, "…my hair never grew back. Instead, the hijab grew on me. It became an extension of me. A part of me. It kept me grounded. Reminded me that God was watching out for me. I was no longer just the odd-looking girl with the wrong skin, wrong colour, wrong hair. Instead, I was that Muslim girl" (p. 138). The hijab's transformation from a piece of clothing to an 'extension' of the protagonist's body highlights the ways in which women's bodies are sites of regulation and surveillance under patriarchy. Furthermore, the girl's internalization of constant divine surveillance and judgment underscores the pervasive nature of patriarchal norms that even manipulate religion as a means of subjecting women. The trade-off between individuality and a socially accepted label, as seen in the shift from 'the odd-looking girl' to 'that Muslim girl,' demonstrates how patriarchy shapes women's identities and sense of self-worth. Ultimately, her embrace of the hijab as a means to feel 'grounded' and accepted illustrates the insidious nature of patriarchal socialization, which often prioritizes religious and cultural identity over personal autonomy and agency.

Similarly, in the story titled, "The Girl Who Split in Two" (Hijabistan, 2019) the character of Abu Jihad is introduced in these words, "… I look up to see Abu Jihad's tall frame approaching. Two guns slung casually over his shoulders, he walks slowly, the crowd parting to let him pass. He is known for his ruthlessness." (p. 81). The main subject of this story is Abu Jihad, who is characterised as having a tall build and carrying two rifles over his shoulders. The usage of masculine pronouns and the mention of weapons are consistent with long-standing social norms that men should be physically strong. Abu Jihad's presence inspires respect and causes the crowd to part for him, illuminating the gendered presentation of authority and control.

Butler emphasises that gender is formed through social practices and performances rather than being purely determined by a person's outward appearance or biological traits (*Gender Trouble*, 1990). In this situation, Abu Jihad embodies the ideal of what it is to be a man, as seen by his tall stature and demeanour, among other manly characteristics (*Hijabistan*, 2019). Abu Jihad exemplifies the ideal of what it means to be a man in this scenario, as evidenced by his tall stature, temperament, and other macho traits.Another

example from the same story describes how women are commonly treated in our societies:

> '*Subhan Allah,' Abu Jihad strips me with his eyes as he praises to God. His pupils burn through my black niqab and set alight my toe-length abaya. I feel naked. He rubs his fleshy lower lip with his thumb and says, 'Get closer, sister.' Here, everyone is a sister or brother. The word is like the local currency – useful but of little value*. (p. 82).

Abu Jihad is depicted in these lines as stripping the narrator with his eyes. In patriarchal countries, the male gaze is frequently associated with power dynamics, which emphasises how objectifying and intrusive it is. It illustrates how gendered expectations and conventions influence and how people perceive and relate to one another. In addition, Abu Jihad's usage of the pronoun 'sister'; to refer to the narrator and other people in the van emphasises how gender is socially constructed and how language shapes gender identities and relationships (p. 82). The phrase 'sister' is compared to local money, implying that while it is widely accepted and utilised, its value has decreased. This can be seen as an illustration of how gendered terminology and identities can confine people to predetermined roles and relationships. As Butler asserts, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (p. 25).

In the same story when Abu Jihad tries to bully a young French boy who is also travelling in this van, he calls the boy 'Lucy'. He says, "'So Brother Lucy, you kill a man yet? No? You start with chickens.' The passengers snicker. Liam turns a deep shade of red. 'No guts, huh, Lucy boy?'" (p. 83). By claiming that Liam resembles Lucy, a name generally associated with femininity, Abu Jihad casts doubt on Liam's manhood. Abu Jihad attacks Liam's gender identity to establish his supremacy over him. Liam is made fun of by Abu Jihad when he suggests killing a man and starting with chickens, suggesting that using violence and acting aggressively are necessary for establishing one's manhood. The snickering of the other passengers and Liam's embarrassed response serve to further enforce traditional gender standards and the pressure to uphold preconceived ideals of masculinity.

In the eleventh story titled, "The Malady of the Heart", (*Hijabistan,* 2019), Javeri depicts the power dynamics and gendered expectations that exist within the institution of marriage. In this story the protagonist wants a divorce from her husband because she feels she does not love him, her mother tries to counsel her, "Twenty-five years have I been married to your father. Never

thought of leaving. Not even the times when he left me.' ... 'He always came back. Men always do." (p. 96). The mother's statement reflects a societal expectation that women should persevere and stay faithful to their marriages despite abandonment or abuse. Despite his departure, she claims that she never thought about leaving her husband, which suggests that she has accepted the relationship's unequal power dynamics. Men are considered to be free to leave and return at any time, and the statement 'Men always do' supports this idea of male privilege and entitlement in partnerships. This claim is in line with Butler's criticism of gendered norms and expectations that uphold traditional gender roles and promote uneven power relations (1990). The mother's conviction that men would eventually return serves to further reinforce the belief that wives should wait for and accept their husbands' decisions, regardless of how they behave. This illustrates how gender roles are established and how society pressurizes women to put the stability of marriage before their well-being.

In another instance, the protagonist struggles to break free from societal expectations and norms associated with gender roles:

> All I knew was that I was no longer the Zara who grew up on a steady diet of fear. Fear Allah. He is watching you. Fear the society – people will talk. Keep your mouth shut – even the walls have ears. 'I want to leave my husband,' I said, silencing the voices in my head. (p. 100)

This picture shows how femininity is constructed in society to be defined by adherence to social norms and religious observance. The narrator's admission of her metamorphosis and self-doubt emphasises the influence of social constructs of gender on one's self-perception. The narrator's internalization of limiting signals, such as social gossip and the fear of religious obligations, demonstrate the pervasive influence of gendered norms and expectations on women's behavior and decision-making. Her pronouncement, 'I want to leave my husband,' expresses her desire to break free from the constraints of a typical gender role within marriage and assert her autonomy (p. 100). This claim contests the gender-specific expectations and roles that patriarchal societies place on women.

Conclusion

These stories offer a powerful indictment of patriarchy and its perpetuation of gender-based oppression and discrimination. Through their

exploration of the ways in which patriarchy operates, these stories offer a crucial feminist critique of dominant discourses and power structures. Through a meticulous analysis of the text using the lenses of patriarchy and gender as a social construct, the analysis demonstrated how these pivotal radical feminist concepts are woven into the fabric of this literary work. One of the prominent themes highlighted is the patriarchal control exerted over women's bodies, evident through restrictions on clothing choices and limitations on movement enforced by family members, husbands, and clients in the case of sex workers. The stories depict that gendered inequalities and expectations, prioritize men's desires over women's autonomy and agency. Women are often depicted as commodities, objectified for men's pleasure or labor, which reinforces patriarchal ideals and marginalizes them in various aspects of society. The narratives also depict instances of resistance and challenges to patriarchal norms. Javeri shows the struggle, protagonists make initially to survive in suffocating environment, although ultimately succumbing to the patriarchal control. In all her stories in *Hijabistan,* Javeri depicts the struggle, these women make to assert their self-identity and autonomy against all odds. Although none of them is shown achieving any success at the end, but it seems like Javeri has tried to show a beacon of hope in their resistance to deeply ingrained patriarchal control.

The psychological implications in *Hijabistan* as depicted by the author are profound, with a significant impact on identity, self-worth, fear, and anxiety among women. The enforced wearing of the hijab, as portrayed in "The Urge, The Lovers, and Coach Annie" denotes a broader societal control that distorts women's sense of individuality and autonomy, leading to a loss of self-worth. This is compounded by internalized misogyny, where women, such as mothers and aunts, perpetuate patriarchal norms, creating psychological barriers to recognizing or resisting systemic discrimination. Additionally, the extreme actions of characters, by reflecting deep psychological trauma and hopelessness from sustained abuse, the author underscores the need for mental health support and recognition of the psychological dimensions of gender-based violence. Likewise, the clergy and religious ideologies are depicted in the stories as a perpetuator of patriarchy resonating the ideas of a male god who is completely unconcerned about the plight of women and positing that religion is one of the biggest contributors to the oppression of women, as expressed by Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970). Characters like the uncle in "The Urge", or the spiritual healer in "Melody of the Heart" or Abu Jihad in "The Girl Who Split into Two" all reflect the depiction of God as exclusively male reinforcing gender hierarchies, marginalizing women and excluding them from divine representation and authority. Characters navigate their religious beliefs

alongside societal expectations and personal desires, highlighting the complexities of reconciling religious faith with individual autonomy.

The findings have illuminated a more unique dimension of the subject matter, vividly portraying both the struggles and resilience of individuals, while simultaneously questioning the deeply ingrained cultural and religious principles that define the essence of the Pakistani ethos. The analysis foregrounds the double function of the anthology as both a feminist discourse campaigner and a prospective challenge to the central values in Pakistani society. *Hijabistan* provocatively deals with the issues such as sexual independence, the demolishing of societal and religious taboos, and the deconstruction of traditional family and gender roles.

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