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## Empowerment of Women: A Feminist Aspect of Shahraz's "The Discovery"

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### Article Info

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### Abstract

Garner (1999) and Moghadam (1992) explicate that feminism keeps providing strategies for the empowerment of women. Their struggle against the male-dominating culture and effort to break traditional and patriarchal social shackles is a step towards the equality as well as empowerment of women. Zalewski and Runyan (2013) elucidate that feminism have boundary smashing activities along with philosophies for the empowerment of women with the help of re-ordering institutions globally for gender roles. Tyson (2006) relates this phenomenon to traditional roles regarding gender as a social construction for keeping women powerless and elevating men's point of view. Savitt (1982) explains that all stereotype characters in literature highlight the narrowness as well as confining nature of female characters in literature, where they are mostly portrayed as incompetent, meek, dependent, helpless, troubled, and fearful creatures, while at the same time, males are presented as authoritative and powerful. Women are allotted and given subservient and passive roles to facilitate men's depriving them of their rights easily. Shahraz's selected story breaks such tradition and presents her female protagonist as a confident, independent, educated, and empowered woman who refuses to compromise on her self-respect and decides to live alone with her future baby.

### Keywords:

Empowered Woman,  
Patriarchal Shackles,  
Social Construction,  
Reordering Institutions,  
Breaking Traditions

### Introduction

My focus of research, Delaney (2005), relates that Feminism is an aftermath of discrimination, oppression, as well as inequality against women, so it emerges as a movement of socio-political type which is actually women-centered with an ideology based on the idea that women should be empowered and should have equal rights in all strata of social life, as well as scarce opportunities. Ritzer and Goodman (2004) further take it that feminism is activist as well as critical because of women who are trying to have a better planet for women. Over the years, feminist theory has become an important perspective in the sociology literature where the oppression of women in the patriarchal social system has not only been highlighted but also given solutions for the promotion of women. Gradually, with the passage of time, we come to know about its expansion and variant forms.

Ferrante (2015) relates that in our daily life, we keep using words like gender or sex as indistinguishable, while actually the label sex shows a biological characteristic and gender is something which is specifically a social construct. Macionis (2012) further defines gender in a way that these are private attributes as well as social placements that people attach to either male or female. This very situation is further explained by Ferrante (2015) as this is the very reason why someone talks specifically about gender, one simply speaks out the ideas which he has learnt through cultural inheritance in the context of suitable appearance, conduct, intellectual, and psychological characteristics for men and women. Connell (1987, 1995) further relates that all the institutions have been substantially structured about gender ideology, so even gender does not seem to be of prime importance in the majority of instances. These covert kinds of practices cause the pervasiveness of androcentrism in numerous institutional cultures as well as discourses within which not only males but even females are concerned by way of their habitual participations in communal practices. The different courses of actions by which the gender inequality's institutionalization is coherently enacted are critically examined and explained such as in education by Remlinger (2005), Swann (1988), in the field of government by Lazar (1993, 2000), in the fields of media by Caldas-Coulthard (1995), Lazar (1993, 2004), and Talbot

(1998), and in different organizational as well as professional settings by Ehrlich (2001), Walsh (2001), West (1990), and Wodak (2005).

Feminism explains patriarchy as a social setup which is known as the supremacy of men in social institutions and culture, which seems to originate from already existing ideas about males and females. This gender difference appears to be prehistoric and as mind set of the people. Mitchell (1971) relates that these are kinship systems in which men keep exchanging women. Walby (1990) verifies that patriarchy is such a mechanism where one finds dominance in social structures as well as practices and keeps oppressing and exploiting women. People seem to follow these gender norms unconsciously and keep transmitting them to the next generations, and thus keep getting social conformity. This gender discrimination is a social construct of the patriarchal school of thought, which is based on biological sexes. This patriarchal social construction has been consciously generated and strengthened for the maintenance of male dominance. Foucault (1977) relates that one finds that pervasiveness is done on a very subtle level, where it becomes very difficult to recognize the power which is actually discursive in its nature. This particular kind of power is submerged and dispersed all over the nexus of relations, which is self-regulating and keeps producing subjects on either sense of the word. Bourdieu (1991) further explicates that modern power, along with hegemony seem effective because mostly they are cognitive, which are actually based on the internalization of gender identity norms that are acted out in our day-to-day life in texts as well as talk. This practice moulds it as an invisible power which remains misrecognized, and if recognized, rather as pretty legitimate as well as natural.

This research intends to analyze the theme of empowerment of women in a patriarchal social structure. Shahraz (2013) exposes women's condition in the contemporary Pakistani social setup. The author has high-pitched parallelism while portraying male and female characters in her selected story. Her female protagonist raises her voice for the deplorable and enslaved status of women and opens a new horizon of confidence and dignity for her species. The focus of research is the changing trends in Pakistani female writing, particularly in English fiction. It explores how female writers have been projecting the issue of women as inferior beings and struggling hard for their rights. Men and women are born either masculine or feminine by nature, but society discriminates. The male superiority does not emerge as an outcome of biological distinction between these sexes, rather it is a historically determined phenomenon. The process has been gradual and politically made natural. Smith (2005) describes that women seem living in groups for more than two million years in a kind of setup where there has not been any idea of the conjugal family as we have nowadays. This has been the time when one finds the absence of the concept of inequality between males and females. We find the clues by anthropologists, along with Engels (1993), that women seem enjoying high place and merit than men in the course of the prehistoric socialist community.

Literature created by such a woman as Shahraz is actually a powerful tool for the execution of the responsibility of women's consciousness raising in male-dominated social structures. Their creations in forms of fiction contribute a major role in the process of change as well as upgradation, which ultimately leads to reconsideration of women's status along with rights, presenting the readers with a new world of women's empowerment where one feels free of all undue gender bias and patriarchal authority.

Shahraz, as a female writer, raises her voice to reveal women's plight in a male-dominated social structure and presents her female protagonists who are not stereotype rather, but rather refuse to accept patriarchal norms and do not compromise on their self-respect and come out as symbols of the empowerment of women. Her female protagonist Rabiya, is not a stereotypical character who accepts prevailing norms in society, but rather resists against her manipulation and achieves her true identity. Shahraz realistically propagates the entire phenomenon of change, which still keeps demanding from women sacrifices of their sentiments, aspirations, and agency. The writer portrays the character who is entirely rebellious and turns this patriarchal world upside down for her respectful acknowledgement as a human being. She struggles and resists gradually to break away the suppression and achieve her true self.

### Research Questions

1. How do the characters of Shahraz challenge the contemporary traditional patriarchal cultural norms?
2. What are the elements in the story that reflect the empowerment of women?
3. Why is the inequality between sexes considered biased and illogical in the background of the selected story?

### Research Methodology and Framework

This research intends to engage descriptive methodology, which is an analytical approach, along with an analysis of qualitative content technique for exploring the intended theme running under the lines of the selected text.

The framework is Wollstonecraft (1792) "I do not wish them to have power over men, but over themselves" (p. 66).

The theoretical framework of this research is the examination of drawing the contribution from the background of feminist gender, social, and cultural stance. We find all gender theorists, along with authors pay great stress on women's empowerment and emancipation by means of condemning such schools of thought by suggesting that literature must be resisting and challenging all kinds of biased notions, which are the root cause of gender discrimination. Feminist literary theory may be seen in different variants, which display the woman's oppressions in all possible fields. Rossman and Rallis (2003) expound that one finds that coding is a kind of process, which is a procedure of organizing the available material in the form of chunks before bringing any kind of meaning to these chunks. This process involves identification, along with highlighting related expressions as well as sentences in the categories, along with labelling these categories with some terms, and in the end, these terms reflect the particular themes of that specific chunk. Tolan (2006) relates that feminism observes that literature is an instrument for keeping and creating a belief system. It is observed that a lot of great works have been male-authored, while there are a few exceptions of Brontë, Austen, and Eliot. The selected story by Shahraz is explained with a feminist lens of empowerment of women and digs out the theme between the lines.

### **Literature Review**

Kimmel (2004) narrates that the gendering system is not simply a classification of biological differences of man and women, but its socialization into equal sex characters; it also demonstrates inequality between males and females. One should know that mentioning gender is actually mentioning power, hierarchy, inequality and the differences. The issues of women, including social, cultural and political, have been under discussion by female writers. The literary creations of such writers are taken as feminist literature where they do not only highlight their problems but also suggest their solutions which can be a kind of bridge between both male as well as female genders on mutual terms. Auerbach (1953) expresses that feminist criticism is a particular type of political discourse, which is a critical as well as theoretical exercise of making an effort against patriarchy as well as sexism, and not just a simple concern for the discussion of gender in literature. We find literature as a form of social expression endorsing Firestone's (1970) solutions as her assertion that women are a class. All the women are actually one class, and that is the oppressed one. These women clearly point out that men are their oppressors. They declare the supremacy of men over women as the oldest as well as the basic type of supremacy. All the rest kinds of manipulations, maltreatments, and tyrannies like imperialism, racism, as well as capitalism are mere supplements. The actual situation is that all of the men command all the women while some of the men control the rest. These are all the structures of power. One finds from the beginning of history that the world is dominated by men, truly male-oriented. These are males who have overpowered politics as well as economics, and they keep enforcing all this with the help of their physical power. They seem to be utilizing their power to hold women back as an inferior species. We observe that all of the men keep finding the benefits from economic, psychological, as well as sexual forms of male sovereignty. We find all men oppressing all women. We are not going to ask for anything like a revolution or some kind of reforms; rather, our interest is just to have something good for women.

Fairclough (1992) expresses that the relationship between discourse and the social is a dialectical one, in which discourse constitutes (and is constituted by) social situations, institutions, and structures. Fairclough (1989, 1992) further expounds that the notion of constitution applies in the sense that every act of meaning-making through (spoken and written) language and other forms of semiosis contributes to the reproduction and maintenance of the social order, and also in the sense of resisting and transforming that order. The discursive constitution of the social can be analyzed broadly in terms of representations, relationships, and identities. Parveen and Qadri (2019) worked on this story under gender resistance. This research focuses on selected short stories from a new perspective of empowerment of women which has not been discussed in the past.

### **Textual Analysis**

Weedon (1997) relates that gender ideology in the context of patriarchy is structural. It is acted upon and renewed within social institutions and practices which is an interconnection between a person and existing social order. Thus one cannot explain these unbalanced gender connections through any individual's objectives though very often that very individual who is on acting part performs the role like an agent of suppression. Bhasin (2006) relates that we live in a society where males have the domination. This is a power relationship where women are dominated by men and always remain subordinated by men. The female protagonist of the selected story emerges as a symbol for empowerment of women for living a respectful life. Rabiya is a rebel against androcentric norms where woman remains haunted by any mistake done in the past. She becomes an essence of empowerment by showing that women are not disabled and dependent. She is a symbol of free, independent soul who is bold enough to cope up with the world around alone. She plainly refuses to get punished for a past dead issue for life long despite being loyal and loving to her husband. She is the symbol of empowerment of woman as she comes up with the awareness and enlightenment and wants to change and improve the environment around her and revolts against unfair attitude and takes bold steps to save her self-respect.

She realizes as sensible person that she is from planet earth and not the *hoor* of Heaven and to err is human. This rule goes both ways for men and women. She is pretty positive as she knows that her conscience is clear in the sense that she has never been touched by any man except her husband as mentioned clearly in the story that she always keeps her lover *at arm's length* distance. Foord and Gregson (1986) point out patriarchy as universal term for explaining male dominance. This is their dominance which makes them authoritative to oppress women. Rabiya in the story tries to explain her husband Jamil when he comes back that she is innocent and wants to save their marriage. He does not even bother to listen to her. After all this she gets ready to take up the responsibility of her wrong deed, wants to apologize and strongly wishes to take new start with Jamil. She is happy with him and wants to bring up their child together. Jamil refuses to accept any apology and makes it a routine to humiliate her all the time. Here she comes up as a new woman when she decides to save her self-respect. The writer ironically explains that how does society crush, exploit, and manipulate women. They are supposed to be angels who are quite unnatural to think and nonsense to expect. The society in general and husbands in particular expect everything good from woman. Slott (2011) expresses that Marx has suggested that for a free kind of development of everyone free condition for them is the prerequisite. Rabiya revolts against the image of oppressed and passive woman. She is not ready to accept perpetual black mailing, humiliation and disregard over one single dead issue and takes bold decision of *living by herself*. In traditional androcentric society like Pakistani women need to be supported, helped, highlighted and promoted. Pakistani female writers have continuously been making efforts to do that. Society is made of set structure, a product of process of transmission of social and cultural values in both covert and overt ways. It is done through different cultural products and institution of socialization. We observe the socialization of gender inequality strong and powerful but on the same time nature is opening up the space for challenging the existing order where women have always been kept dependent, inferior souls. Oakley (1972) expounds that it's not actually sex rather its gender which is really important. One finds sex as biological while gender is socially constructed.

Pakistani society is androcentric, follower of old social values. Jamil in *The discovery* behaves in the stereotypical way. He wants to have a woman from heaven for being his wife. The combination of beauty, brain and chastity who has never been seen or touched but unfortunately *hoors* are just available in Heaven. He is shown as a great admirer of her beautiful, educated and working wife. She is co-operating with him for running the house smoothly by doing job despite having three month's pregnancy. She is an all good in every respect unless Jamil comes across a piece of paper containing the details of his wife's previous affair and suddenly the world gets changed altogether as he breaks their marriage frame into *three pieces* by throwing it away. Enslin and Tjiattas, (2004) describe that present cultural system encourages men's dominance over women and forces women for unquestionable acceptance of this trend. Jamil becomes unforgivable for a past incident though he knows that she is sincere to him now and is going to be a mother of his child. After reading the paper he forgets about all sincerities and good times.

He takes Rabiya as an object under his possession. He does not consider her as a normal human with a normal life of present along with the past. He is all set to forget every good part of Rabiya as his wife. He does not bother to ask or confirm from her rather when she tries to save her marriage he simply refuses to accept any reason or apology. He takes a biased decision on his own perception as he feels her *vision sickened* him. The writer further explains his mind as Rabiya observes *loath, hate* and *another world* between them. Rabiya's bold step of setting up all again and alone for the protection of her self-respect or *pride* and rejects to be *smothered* under his feet. Eckrit (1989) relates that gender operates its pervasiveness more than any other kind of oppression while Shahraz's female character Rabiya refuses to be a victim of androcentric cultural norms. Shahraz shows empowerment of women in the form of her female protagonist who does not like to be smothered by the pervasiveness of patriarchy and decides to live alone with her dignity and respect.

### Conclusion

This research analyzes Shahraz's story as a true representative of the oppression of women in patriarchal gender ideology. Feminist theory believes in the radical transformation of contemporary social norms and opens up new horizons and unrestricted possibilities for women. Feminist theory, with the help of the selected story, points out the inherent flaws in the patriarchal power system and asks for equality for both genders. Rabiya finds herself unfit in the contemporary society where the yardstick has been decided by men and rebels against the prevailing present androcentric cultural norms. She refuses to be oppressed and exploited as she is an educated and employed person and decides to live alone rather than sacrificing her self-respect. Baxter's (2012) work elucidates that it is mandatory for women to make an effort to adopt a power hierarchy that is gender based. This work seems instrumental for challenging and contesting hegemonic assumptions that are strongly embedded in patriarchal ideology for redefining their positions as well as empowering them.

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