

Mechanisms of Patriarchal Control in Sufia Humayun's *A Text Divorce*

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Abstract

This paper examines Sufia Humayun's short story *A Text Divorce*, published in the anthology *Shattered Echoes*, through the theoretical framework of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970). The study focuses on six thematic notions drawn from Millett's (1970) theory of patriarchy: patriarchy as a system of control disguised as love and protection, the internalization of male authority, surveillance and the loss of female autonomy, female obedience as a cultural expectation, psychological manipulation and emotional dependence, and divorce as a patriarchal instrument of power. The current study adopts a qualitative interpretative research design and uses Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis to analyze the textual data. The story centers on Saira, a Pakistani woman who separates from her controlling husband, Nomi, only to receive a text message bearing a single word: "divorce." By reading the narrative against Millett's (1970) framework, this paper argues that the story dramatizes patriarchal domination not through physical force but through socialization, surveillance, emotional conditioning, and the legal privilege embedded in divorce. The analysis reveals how Humayun uses the ordinary texture of Pakistani domestic life to expose the extraordinary violence that patriarchy can commit through silence, surveillance, and a single text message.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Sexual Politics, Kate Millett, *A Text Divorce*, Sufia Humayun, surveillance, internalization, Pakistani women's fiction, feminist literary criticism.

Introduction

Patriarchy has remained one of the main topics of feminist studies, as it helps to understand the imbalance in power relations that affect social, cultural and domestic life. According to feminist theorists, patriarchy is not just about individual instances of male supremacy but is a broader social system that gives power, privilege, and control to men over women in subordinate roles. In a patriarchal society, gendered notions of obedience, sacrifice and dependence are strongly linked to women, while notions of authority and decision making are strongly linked to men. These ideas slowly become natural via social traditions, family structures, and cultural norms (Walby, 1989). Feminist criticism thus focuses on how the patriarchy functions in everyday life, particularly within marriage and domestic life.

Kate Millett is a foundational feminist theorist due to her influential work *Sexual Politics* (1970). Millett believes the relation between men and women is political because it is based on power. She argues that patriarchy is perpetuated by ideology, socialization and family institutions that reinforce male supremacy and female subservient roles. She further notes that, women are socialized from early childhood to internalize certain expectations of men, thus accepting male control as natural or even protective (Millett, 1970). Millett's (1970) writing moved feminist criticism from a focus on public life to a focus on private life, such as marriage, sexuality, emotional dependence and domestic authority. Her work is still relevant in highlighting the invisible forms of domination that are present in everyday social relationships.

Subsequent feminist writers developed Millett's concepts as they explored patriarchy as a structural and cultural system. Walby (1989) describes patriarchy as a system of interrelated social institutions that incorporate family, culture, employment, and the state. This method demonstrates that women's status as social subordinates is not merely an institutional product, but the result of the interaction of various systems reinforcing each other. Likewise, Kandiyoti (1988) asserts that women in male dominated societies may deal with the systems they are subsumed by rather than challenge them outright due to the fact that "survival often

requires compromise." Her notion of "bargaining with patriarchy" helps to understand why many women are able to endure emotional control, surveillance, and unequal relationships despite the restrictions to their freedom.

Marriage has been a focus of feminist literature as it is one of the strongest sites of patriarchal authority. Feminist critics contend that patriarchy often conceals the fact of unequal power relations in marriage and simultaneously frames it as a sacred and protective institution. According to Ahmed (1992), women in many cultures are expected to identify love with sacrifice, patience and obedience. Likewise, Ismail (2018) expands that in patriarchy societies, marriage can perpetuate values of ownership and domination rather than equality. These expectations influence women's perception of love and emotional attachments. Therefore, for many women, it can be difficult to distinguish between care and control in intimate relationships.

Surveillance in marriage has also been a growing concern of feminist debate on power in domestic settings. Patriarchal control does not always manifest itself in physical violence or direct restriction. It is manifested in many instances through emotional surveillance, possessiveness, frequent checking and psychological manipulation which erodes women's autonomy over time. Feminist scholars thus stress the possibility of subtle, hidden, and normalized ways in which patriarchy manifests in everyday life. Emotional manipulation and silence can be the mechanisms of authority, as can be direct coercion. This insight is especially relevant in modern societies, where technology enables more sophisticated means of domestic surveillance via phone, messaging apps, and social media.

These concerns have been expressed quite prominently in Pakistani society and literature. According to Jalal (1991) and Rouse (2004), the authority of the father in Pakistan is exercised through family structures, cultural traditions and legal inequalities that influence the personal and social lives of women. Women are expected to uphold family honor by being subservient and silent, particularly in marriage. Another key reason for the social sensitivity of divorce is that women who leave marriages often have to deal with social judgment and stigma. These realities have

affected the women writers of Pakistan, who often depict the emotional and psychological effects of patriarchy in domestic settings.

Feminist fiction has thus emerged as one of the crucial topics in Pakistani literary criticism. Bapsi Sidhwa, Kamila Shamsie and Sara Suleri, among others, frequently depict women struggling to find a way out of an oppressive family dynamic, conservative gender roles and unequal relationships within the marriage. According to feminist critics, a common way in which women's suffering is depicted in Pakistani fiction is in terms of physical inaction, emotional breakdown, and social pressure instead of dramatic physical violence. The hidden forms of patriarchy that influence everyday domestic life are the special focus of contemporary short stories. According to Sadiq (2023), there are emotional suppression, restricted autonomy of women, and the normalization of male control as a dominant feature in many short stories in Pakistan, which demonstrate the presence of patriarchy.

In this literary context, *A Text Divorce* by Sufia Humayun illustrates a fascinating portrait of patriarchal dominance in the present-day Pakistani society. The story is about Saira, whose sense of identity and independence is gradually being taken away by the possessive and controlling nature of her husband, Nomi. The story is told through memories, conversations and introspection, and it concludes with a text message which delivers divorce in one word. The narrative presents patriarchy not through acts of physical violence, but in the form of surveillance, silence, manipulation of emotions and unilateral authority in marriage.

The existing research on *A Text Divorce* is still limited, and recent research has begun to consider how this story is being explored from a feminist standpoint. Sana et al. (2025) examine the story in the light of postcolonial feminist perspective and explain that the story reveals women's voicelessness in the male-dominated marriage and divorce system. This research brings to the fore new perspectives on marital authority and the marginalization of women, but little research has focused on the story from the point of view of Kate Millett's theory of the patriarchy, specifically in terms of surveillance, possessiveness, and divorce as forms of domestic power.

The present study attempts to address this gap by applying Millett's theory of patriarchy to Sufia Humayun's *A Text Divorce*. The study focuses specifically on patriarchal control through surveillance and possessiveness and on divorce as an instrument of patriarchal authority. Through this analysis, the research aims to show how the story exposes the emotional and institutional mechanisms through which patriarchy continues to shape women's lives within contemporary Pakistani society.

Research Objectives

The following objectives guide this research study:

1. To examine patriarchal control through surveillance and possessiveness in Sufia Humayun's *A Text Divorce*.
2. To analyze divorce as an instrument of patriarchal power in Sufia Humayun's *A Text Divorce* using Kate Millett's theory of patriarchy.

Research Questions

The study is guided by two research questions stated below:

1. In what ways do surveillance and possessiveness reflect patriarchal control in Sufia Humayun's *A Text Divorce*?
2. How does divorce function as a form of patriarchal power in Sufia Humayun's *A Text Divorce* when read through Kate Millett's theory of patriarchy?

Significance of the Study

This study is important because it investigates the subtle way in which patriarchy manifests itself in everyday relationships. The study uses the analysis of surveillance, possessiveness, and divorce in *A Text Divorce* by Sufia Humayun to illuminate emotional and social pressures experienced by women in patriarchal societies. It also adds to the feminist literary criticism by adapting Kate Millett's theory of patriarchy on a contemporary Pakistani short story. The study also demonstrates the ability of literature as a medium to reveal gender inequalities that are not seen or tolerated by society.

Research Methodology

The current study uses qualitative research design to examine Sufia Humayun's Short Story *A Text Divorce* by applying Millett (1970) theory of patriarchy. Qualitative research design is appropriate for this study because it prioritizes depth of interpretation over quantitative measurement, and enables the researcher to engage with the textual complexity of the Humayun's Short Story *A Text Divorce*. Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is used to analyze the text which consists of six stages: Familiarization with data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and writing the report. By applying these different steps of Thematic analysis, the study delves deeply into various aspects of the text, offering a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of key patterns related to patriarchy, surveillance, psychological Manipulation and divorce as an instrument of power in *A Text Divorce*. The purposive sampling is used to select the text due to its thematic relevance to Millett (1970) theory of patriarchy in Humayun's *A Text Divorce*.

Theoretical Framework

Sexual Politics by Kate Millett's 1970 is a foundational text of second-wave feminist literary criticism. The book's theoretical chapter, *Theory of Sexual Politics*, argues that the men/women relationship is a political relationship, defined as a relationship with structured power differentials between groups. Millett (1970) states that patriarchy is "a social constant so deep rooted that it passes through all other political, social or economic forms" (p. 25). She brings to light several dimensions of patriarchal power which interrelate with one another: ideological, biological, sociological, class based, economic, educational, force based, anthropological, and psychological.

The most relevant dimensions for this analysis are the ideological, the sociological and the psychological dimensions. The ideological dimension is exercised through the socialization of men and women into patriarchal values, making them appear as if they were natural and not imposed. This socialization is described by Milles (1970) as involving temperament, sex role and status. Temperament described here is "the formation of the human personality along stereotyped lines of sex category" (p. 26): male is given dominance, aggressiveness and intelligence, and female; passivity, docility and compliance. Then sex role establishes consonant behavior and attitude for the sexes, confining the female to the domestic and reproductive role. These assignments create this status, thus the female is demeaned and the male elevated in all recognized aspects of human life.

The sociological aspect focuses on the family; Millett (1970) describes the family as "patriarchy's primary institution" (p. 33). The family is a reflection and a link to society; it is an interface between the person and the social system. It "effects control and conformity where political and other authorities proved inadequate" (Millett, 1970, p. 33). The family is therefore not only a place of personal interaction, but also an instrument of patriarchal rule, passing values onto the next generation and claiming

legitimacy as a way of ensuring the subservient role of women and children to the male.

The psychological aspect relates to the ways in which patriarchal power is asserted by conditioning rather than force. Patriarchy's socialization is so pervasive and so universal that it is "an ideology without peer" and has been so thoroughly successfully practiced "that it has exerted 'such a complete control over its subjects' that it rarely requires 'violent implementation'" (Millett, 1970, p. 33). Temperament is manipulated, romantic love is used as a means of emotional exploitation, the chivalrous attitude is a strategy of disguise of domination, and subtle domestic isolation is the means to woman's dependency and compliance.

This framework is used in the context of *A Text Divorce* as a set of analytical lenses that shed light on the power dynamics present in the domestic sphere of the story. The Islamic legal right of talaq, by which divorced women in Pakistan are excluded from the process of divorce and divorced men can declare 'talaq' without their wives' consent and presence, is another factor of specificity that Millett's (1970) framework is able to name and analyze as a tool of patriarchy in Pakistan (Jalal, 1991; Chaudhry, 2010).

Analysis and Discussion

Patriarchy as a system of Control Disguised as Love and Protection

Millet (1970) says that patriarchy hides its domination within the guise of care, love and protection. She characterizes the chivalrous attitude as "a game the master group plays in elevating its subject to pedestal level" (Millett, 1970, P.37), observing that such gestures function as "a technique for disguising" domination rather to eliminate it (Millett, 1970, P.37). The idea of romantic love, according to Millet (1970) is "a mean of emotional manipulation which the male is free to exploit, since the love is only circumstance in which the female is (ideologically) pardoned to sexual activity" (p.37). Romantic love therefore denies the truth of womanhood and works for the benefits of patriarchy.

In the short story, *A Text Divorce* this aspect of Millett's theory of patriarchy can be seen in the Nomi behaviour. Initially in the story Nomi is describe as "overly protective and possessive" (Humayun, 2024, p.125), the qualities Saira her wife sees with some ambiguity. Although it is mentioned in the story that "she finds some comfort in his over-protectiveness, yet there have been many a time, she has had to conjure up that comfort or brush the discomfort away" (Humayun, 2024, p.125). This tension between comfort and discomfort is structural effect of patriarchal condition not the personal failing of Saira because the women are schooled from the childhood to equate the control with care and to feel reassured with self-surveillance. Similarly, these line "he would call to confirm her safety every half an hour whenever she went out for lunch with friends" (Humayun, 2024, p.125), exhibits that he is not a man of knowledge, he is a man of surveillance in the guise of concern. The first call unexpectedly "ten minutes after leaving" (Humayun, 2024, p.125) and asking "Hey! are your friends there yet" shook her because he had dropped her ten minutes before outside KFC, so she wondered how he know that her friends had still not arrived. Saira smiles sweetly, when Her friend say he is possessive and laugh at him, following the societal script that patriarchy expect from women who are subjugated by men who pretend to love them.

This over-protectiveness and control can be identified with the help of Millet (1970) analysis. Nomi protection is not a by-product of his control; it is the form his control takes. Millet (1970) states that patriarchy does not always manifest itself as domination. It presents itself as a devotion and it relies on women reading devotion in the context of domination. Saira's ambivalence,

her sense of comfort and discomfort, is the internal track of this structural deception. This is in line with patriarchal tactics described by Bhasin (1993) of transforming authority into an act of care and love in order to make female resistance seem like ingratitude.

The Internalization of Male Authority and The Erosion of Autonomous Selfhood

Patriarchy survives through both male dominance and women internalization as Millet (1970) highlights that Patriarchy continues to exist not only because it is upheld by men but because women accept it as a way of life. The socialization process teaches women a set of values, expectations and self-perceptions that are compatible with the authority of men; women learn to police themselves for the benefit of the system that is policing them. She calls this "conditioning" which "runs in a circle of self-perpetuation and self-fulfilling prophecy" (Millett, 1970, p. 31). The female is trained to take on the attitudes of compliance as if they were natural rather than learned and to have a self that is entirely dependent on the expectations of the dominant group.

The internalization of male authority is evident through the Saira interiority throughout the short story. The passage she has "lost track of what decision or choice was her own and which was the one she had made her peace with due to him" (Humayun, 2024, p.125) after years of marriage to Nomi highlights what Millet (1970) calls the loss of autonomous selfhood under patriarchal conditioning, which is quietly devastating in its precision. In the short story it is difficult for the Saira to distinguished between her own desires from the ones that have been shaped by her adherence to Nomi's expectation.

Similarly, the process of unlearning describe by Saira in the short story itself reveals the erosion of autonomous selfhood. The passage "she has unlearned many things and relearning is a process which never stops" but that "in the process of unlearning and relearning she has lost track of what decision or choice was her own and which was the one she had made her peace with due to him" (Humayun, 2024, p.125) reinforce the idea Millet (1970) points out that internalizing the values of patriarchy requires them to be present so deeply that, once a woman begins to challenge them, she is not easily able to distinguish between her conditioned self and her real self since the conditioning has permeated the self from the inside. The same is echoed by Mohanty (1988), who argues that the colonial and patriarchal subject is produced through structures of representation, which render resistant internally incoherent.

The Saira resistance in the short story is symbolically portrayed through the image of Nomi back as Saira calls "a wall, erect and firm" (Humayun, 2024, p.129). Saira wants to look him in the eye, look him in the eye for real, and is not angry, but overwhelmed, "by something that comes when even anger exhausts" (Humayun, 2024, p. 129). This emotional exhaustion is the result of protracted process of suppression rather than a sign of weakness. The choice she makes from this state is not a choice woman that has come to her at once and without pain, it is a choice that has been made gradually, as she has started to distinguish her own will from the will of the authority that has taken over it.

Surveillance and Loss of Autonomy

Millet (1970) states that patriarchy restricts women freedom of movement and keep them in dependent position by limiting their ability to act independently and control their access to public spaces. She notes that in all form of patriarchy the role of women is always determined by their connection with male power and the family is the tool by which the restrictions are normalized and enforced (Millett, 1970). Even in the contemporary modern and democratic societies, where women legally have more freedom and

rights, women's surveillance by male kin remains a tactic of control and maintaining their psychological subordination and social existence within the context of their relationship to men.

Now considering this aspect of Millet (1970) patriarchy in the context of the short story, *A Text Divorce*, the following instances suggest its presence in the short story. Nomi surveillance of Saira is prevalent and continues throughout the narrative. When she is out with friends, he calls her frequently and checks on her so consistently that it embarrasses her in public, her friend beings to pretend they do not notice who is on call (Humayun, 2024). Nomi uses technology for surveillance, including phone calls and WhatsApp, which allow the Nomi to reach Saira outside of domestic sphere and into the public space where she could otherwise have some independence. According to Ahmad (1992), one of the most enduring characteristics of patriarchal culture across different historical and theological tradition is the control of women's movement and social interaction. Nomi's action serves as an example of this pattern in a modern digital form.

Saira's complicated reaction to this constant surveillance is also present in the narrative. Saira understands that "privacy was a luxury where she came from," that her parents would not call her "unless she was abnormally late" (Humayun, 2024, p.126). This juxtaposition of the relative lack of surveillance in her family and the constant surveillance of Nomi suggests that his surveillance is not a normal concern, but rather an intrusion that she has had to learn to endure. It is clearly mentioned in the narrative that "she was not used to being under watch all the time" and that "praying puts her off, especially in front of others" (Humayun, 2024, p.126). In the end, she simply yielded to the rhetorical question her mother asked; "After all, what's the big deal in getting extra bit of attention?" (Humayun, 2024, p.126). The question exhibits that Saira gradually give up resisting her situation because her mother treats the surveillance as something harmless and normal. According to Millet (1970), this give in is not a personal failure but a structural outcome of patriarchy. The most sensible short-term solution is compliance when women are unable to organize into traditional political struggle and when the institutional framework views female submission is normal, and the female complaint as excessive. Saira's compliance is not a sign of weakness, rather it is a reaction of an individual navigating system that rewards submission and makes resistance expensive. The narrative depicts the price of compliance as well as the long tiring journey by which Saira gradually starts to recover enough of herself to resist.

Female Obedience as a Cultural Expectation

According to Millet (1970), patriarchy is sustained not only by the direct power of individual males but also by the larger cultural infrastructure that teaches women that male domination is normal and acceptable. She points out the "entire culture support masculine authority" and that "the general effect of conformity" is contributed by classmates, school, the media and families (Millett, 1970, p.35). The primary place for this socialization is the family, where patriarchal ideology is pass down through the example and admonition of parents and elders. Women uphold patriarchal standards among themselves because of socialization, often without intending to do so.

This instance of cultural reinforcement can be seen in the short story *A Text Divorce*, particularly in the figure of Saira's mother. Saira expresses her unhappiness at Nomi's intrusive surveillance, but her mother wraps it up with a single question, "After all, what's the big deal in getting extra bit of attention?" (Humayun, 2024, p. 126). This rhetorical gesture is in line with Millett (1970) idea of the family role in the creation of conformity. The mother does not justify Nomi's actions; she makes the point

that it's unreasonable for her to object to surveillance. Saira's pain is thus rendered ungrateful or overstated, silencing her. The narrative depicts that after she was exhausted, "she merely nodded in half affirmation (Humayun, 2024, p. 126).

The scenes with Saira's friend reveal the social dimension of this cultural reinforcement. During her lunch outing with friends when Nomi calls her repeatedly, initially her friends make fun of her by calling him possessive in loving rather than judgemental tone. However, "her friends acted as if they did not notice who was on the call" (Humayun, 2024, p. 125) when he called her the fifth time in two hours. The transition from playful taunting to deliberate non-acknowledgment is a type of social choreography that colludes with the patriarchal norms. Rouse (2004) noted that these informal social institutions, apart from legal forms are equally significant in maintaining patriarchy in the Pakistani context.

What Millet (1970) framework reveals is that this cultural reinforcement does not rely on the participation of openly individuals. The mother of Saira is not the cruel one, she is influenced by the same patriarchy that influenced the culture around her. She has explained her advice in such a way that it shows a true sense of caring for women and giving them the attention that they deserve. Similarly, the friend's response is not driven by ill intent, instead it reflects compliance with the norm of patriarchal social order that prioritize politeness over confrontation. Everyday social interaction, such as the mother rhetorical inquiry and the friends averted gaze allow the system to continue without anybody having to intentionally cause harm.

Psychological Manipulation and Emotional Dependence

Millett (1970) focuses specifically on the psychological strategies used to uphold patriarchal control, in addition to the legal and economic. She believes one of the most compelling devices of the patriarchy has been to make women emotionally dependent, which is accomplished through a cycle of warmth and coldness, guilt associated with a woman's complaint, and the use of romantic love as psychological ammunition. She notes: "The idea of romantic love offers a means of emotional manipulation that the male can use without any restrictions or consequences; for the female it is an inner state of feeling that can be assumed at any moment, and seems to be a freely chosen one, but in fact is not" (Millett, 1970, p. 37). Thus, psychological patriarchy does not have to assert itself; rather, it can function in the name of the feelings that women are supposed to have more authentically than anyone else.

This psychological aspect is well captured by the story. Nomi's responses to Saira's attempts to address his controlling behavior follow a recognizable pattern of deflection and emotional withdrawal. When she tells him that she is tired and "sometimes I think you don't trust me," he responds with "Not today! Please not today" and lies on the bed with eyes closed, the narration records that he seems to be "at peace at last" (Humayun, 2024, p. 128). The way he handled her distress in his apparent peacefulness is also psychological aggression: it takes her right to grieve and puts the responsibility for the conflict back on her. This is the psychological practice of the oppressive position, says Millett (1970) when men claim superiority without ever having an argument, but by playing the role of a silent individual and emotional unresponsiveness.

The following cold war is described as precise. No one said anything, no one shouted, not even a frown was there, but silence kept things hanging in midair (Humayun, 2024, p. 128). This lack of conflict can be identified as an active instrument of control through Millett's (1970) framework. Avoiding confrontation, Nomi leaves Saira forever stuck in a limbo, unable to resolve, move on or find any sense of closure. The end of the cold war is his choice, and the resolution of the silence is dependent on his choice to speak or

embrace. It is said that the silence "crept on for days," ending only when "the silence would be filled by an embrace" (Humayun, 2024, p. 129), which does nothing to answer the questions, but only to make it look like things are normal.

The most psychological part of the story is when Saira decides to try to reconcile, opening Nomi's profile picture on WhatsApp. Looking at his image, "there is a sense of softness in his eyes, all of sudden, and all her complaints seem to vanish as she gazes at him. She can smell him even through the DP" (Humayun, 2024, p. 133). She concludes that she "can live without him but not without the feelings that come with his scent" (Humayun, 2024, p. 133). It is not sentimentality on Humayun's part, it is a poignant literary description of what Millett (1970) calls 'emotional dependence' caused by the conditioning of patriarchy. The woman is attached to the affectual state that the man's presence brings up, and this is the state that the system has taught her to depend on as essential to her. As Millett (1970) would say, her desire itself is the conditioning, and after she realizes that it is harmful, it keeps her in the relationship.

Patriarchal Punishment: Divorce as an Instrument of Power

The final scene of the story ties up all the strands of the patriarchy that the story has been following. Saira has chosen to reconcile with Nomi. She has spent the afternoon talking with Farooq, going over her decision to leave, and finally getting to a tentative resolution to go back to the relationship. She let herself feel the emotion of Nomi's profile picture, too. She knows that when the phone rings, it is him. It is not a call; it's a text message. "After a few seconds, the words became large, larger and larger still until the only word that covers the whole screen is 'divorce.' It stays there for a while, frozen like her, and then the message box closes on its own" (Humayun, 2024, p. 136).

Millett (1970) discusses divorce in her analysis of the sociological dimension of patriarchy. She observes that "in modern patriarchy the man's de jure rightness has been recently expanded with the acquisition of divorce rights by the woman, but she also points to the historical pattern of divorce rights being exclusively in the hands of men, and the use of divorce for male interests to reinforce male control of wife and children" (Millett, 1970, p. 34). A Pakistani woman's right of divorce is defined as the unilateral declaration of divorce by a husband, and this is the very asymmetry of law that Millett (1970) outlines. As recorded by Chaudhry (2010), a husband can dissolve the marriage by uttering the word three times, whereas the wife must go for a khul divorce, which involves returning the dowry to the husband and/or obtaining a court's permission to dissolve the marriage. Nomi takes advantage of the legal imbalance in his text message. He never argues and never negotiates, and he never shows up. He sends a word.

The formal decisions of the story further emphasize the violence at the end of the story. The word expands and expands until it eventually fills the entire screen, and the text box self-disappears (Humayun, 2024, p. 136). This visual element illustrates dissociation of a person receiving information that is not immediately understood by their mind. The message comes when Saira is at her most vulnerable time, after she decides to return, when she is picturing his picture in her mind and the emotional need to rely on him is pulling at her. It is not a coincidence: it shows that the patriarchal tool of divorce does not depend on the emotional condition of the woman, her choices or her will. She can't make the decision.

Millett (1970) characterizes it as the highest form of male power in the feminine realm, the one-sided power to finish off what the feminine power cannot finish off on its own terms. The credence given to this dynamic is based on the Pakistani state's

historical handling of the question of legal personhood of women, which has been deliberately limited through legal frameworks and social pressure, as expressed by Jalal (1991). In the story, however, Saira's efforts to assert her will have been a long, hard struggle against a system that has infiltrated her own will from the inside. The final pages reveal that even when she partially and hesitantly makes her own choice, the system undermines her choice, with one single word. The title, *A Text Divorce*, now reveals its full irony: the story's devastating point is not that the divorce is delivered via text but that the text is all it takes.

Conclusion

In Sufia Humayun's *A Text Divorce*, patriarchy manifests itself not in actual violence, but in everyday domestic conduct. The story brings out the influence of male authority over the emotional and personal life of women through surveillance, possessiveness, silence and unilateral divorce. Based on Kate Millett's theory of patriarchy, this study has demonstrated that Nomi's actions are an example of control disguised as care and protection. The analysis also shows how the social expectations and emotional dependency affect Saira's sense of autonomy. The final text-message divorce reveals the power imbalance between men and women in marriage and the continuing presence of patriarchy in both culture and institutions. The study also demonstrates the applicability of Millett's theory in relation to the modern Pakistani fiction and domestic life. Further work could explore the portrayal of patriarchy in other Pakistani short stories and women's writing.

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Credit authorship contribution statement

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