

PATRIARCHY AND FEMALE OBJECTIFICATION DEPICTED IN THE POETRY OF FOROUGH FARROKHZAD AND KISHWAR NAHEED

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Abstract

Forough Farrokhzad and Kishwar Naheed astonishingly share themes and issues in their poetry. They are considered as the major and the successful feminist voices in their countries. They belong to the same period, age and gender who attempted to gain a voice for their country women. A comparative study is required to measure their contribution to the feminism. This paper attempts to provide a different angle of feminism as it is intended to analyze and interpret patriarchy and objectification of women displayed in their selected poems which might help to understand their poetry better. Moreover, the paper is aimed to analyze and interpret their selected poetry as responses to the nuances and effects of patriarchy and objectification of women and to find out different shades of patriarchy and objectification of women displayed in the selected poetry. The researchers have placed the voices and words under a microscope and found how the works release and reveal these major issues in their various forms.

Keywords: *Comparative Study, Forough Farrokhzad, Kishwar Naheed, patriarchy, Objectification*

Introduction:

A real revolution is, in fact, shaking the foundations of Iranian society, a revolution with women at its very center. Veiled or unveiled, Iranian women are reappraising traditional spaces, boundaries, and limits. They are renegotiating old sanctions and sanctuaries. They are challenging male allocations of power, space, and resources. Exercising increasing control over how reality is defined, they are redefining their own status. It is in this context of the negotiation of boundaries that the veil is now worn by some women, not to segregate, but to desegregate. The genealogy of this revolution can be traced back more than a century. Women writers, at the forefront of this movement, have consistently spoken the previously unspoken, articulated the once unarticulated. Their voices can be heard loud and clear in their literature. And the formerly silent, the supposedly invisible have discovered surprising resources in their re-appropriated voices and presences and sheer dynamism of their mobility. (Milani, 1992)

Discussion:

A) Patriarchy:

According to almost all feminist scholars patriarchy refers to 'rule of the father in a male-dominated society as a social and ideological construct which regards men as superior to women'. They are of opinion that men's domination over female sexuality is central to women's subordination. In fact, man is the head of the family who controls women's sexuality, labor, production, reproduction and

mobility. Moreover, the effect of patriarchy can be traced in politics, public life, and economy as well as in all aspects of social, personal, psychological and sexual existence. Sylvia Walby in “Theorising Patriarchy” calls it “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby, 1990). Zillah Eisenstein in “Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism” (1979) argues that ‘male supremacy and capitalism are the core relations which determine oppression of women’ She defines patriarchy as a “sexual system of power in which the male possesses superior power and economic privilege’ (Eisenstein 1979:17). Furthermore, Patriarchy refers to a social system in which the male acts as the primary authority figure central to social organization, and where fathers hold authority over women, children, and property. It implies the institutions of male rule and privilege, and entails female subordination. Many patriarchal societies are also patrilineal, meaning that property and title are inherited by the male lineage. (Malti-Douglas, 2007) Regarding the concept ‘patriarchy’, both the female poets criticize patriarchal structure of their societies seriously displayed in their poetry.

Farrokhzad criticizing Iranian male dominant society or patriarchy where women are totally marginalized having no voice in such a society and seeking voice and identity in modern literature and particularly in modern Persian poetry. Explicitly, Farrokhzad states:

I, in this corner of the cage,
am a captive bird.
(Farrokhzad’s *The Captive*)

The stanza portrays, in fact, the situation of Iranian women totally marginalized and imprisoned in the traditional frames of the society. She continues in the following stanza:

From behind the cold and dark bars
I am thinking that in a moment of neglect
I might fly from this silent prison,
laugh in the eyes of the man who is my jailer
and beside you begin life anew.
(Farrokhzad’s *The Captive*)

that the society suppressed and silenced women’s center of thinking is gain voice to make themselves free from the male dominated and men made rules and to begin anew free life.

In the opening lines of "*Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season*", Farrokhzad looks into both the past and the future. Once she was a child in a pleasurable world and now a woman alone at the beginning of the cold season, provides the fairest and saddest perspective from which to portray Farrokhzad's life and art, especially insofar as it was one of her last major poetic statements. (Hillmann, 1987) In fact, according to one critic, the poem is "a review of her whole life, a look at exciting past moments and empty present male dominated society, the last look of a drowning person who will be silenced by patriarchy and marginalized in this society. And later on, she criticizes the hollow men of this society where they silenced women. These men are portrayed as savage creatures know nothing about social justice.

Hollow man
Hollow man, full of faith
Look! His teeth
Chew at songs
And his eyes
Devour while staring.
(Farrokhzad’s *Let Us Believe in the Beginning of a Cold Season*)

These hollow men are in the center of power enjoying their happy savage life in a so called desired society formed by male domination where there is no space for women and they are treated as objects.

Happy corpses
Weary corpses
Thoughtful silent corpses
Well-behaved corpses, well-dressed, well-fed
(Farrokhzad's *Let Us Believe in the Beginning of a Cold Season*)

More metaphorically and precisely, Farrokhzad portrays these hollow men as dwarf having their own mean criteria and knowing nothing about justice. In such a society built by such mean tyrant men, women have no right as they are objectified.

In the land of dwarfs,
the criteria of comparison
have always traveled in the orbit of zero.
(Farrokhzad's *It Is Only Sound That Remains*)

In such a suffocated and dark condition, she wishes a window through which she may overcome her hopelessness. She shows that justice has no meaning and the law is dark and male oriented in the patriarchal male dominated society provides no voice and dehumanizes women of the society. The poetess, resembling all society women, is imprisoned in a room having a monotonous empty life. Life is meaningless for her in such a terrible condition.

When my trust was suspended from the fragile thread of justice
and in the whole city
they were chopping up my heart's lanterns
when they would blindfold me
with the dark handkerchief of Law
and from my anxious temples of desire
fountains of blood would squirt out
when my life had become nothing
nothing
but the tic-tac of a clock.
(Farrokhzad's *Window*)

Later on, in the next stanza, Farrokhzad ask for a savior to record and complain for the long history of the massacre of women in the male dominated society of Iran in other planet since she believes that all women are marginalized by patriarchy. Actually, she indirectly shows that the condition of women all over the world is the same.

Oh friend! O brother! O blood fellow!
When your reach the moon
Write the history of the massacres of flowers.
(Farrokhzad's *Window*)

In her famous poem "*Later On*" Farrokhzad believes that the only resolution to end such a miserable patriarchal life is death which will come to her soon or late to makes her free from the boundaries and limitations of the male-dominated society. She maintains that she will be free of all her pains and sorrows ultimately.

My death will come someday to me
One bittersweet day, like all my days

One hollow day like the one past
 Shadow of today or of tomorrow.
 My eyes tune to half dark hallways
 My cheeks resemble cold, pale marble
 Suddenly sleep creeps over me
 I become empty of all painful cries.
 (Farrokhzad's *Later On*)

Quite similarly, Naheed's *I am not that Woman* shows that the Pakistani patriarchal society and men-made law of men's power that torture women are biased. As for fathers 'crushed' the women '*with the weight of custom and tradition*', they would just use them for the house jobs and get rid of them as soon as possible by getting them married by force and not giving them a choice as well. These customs and traditions are men-made ones in the male dominated or patriarchal society. Their fundamental rights are violated completely in the Pakistani society. She uses a metaphorical statement that patriarchal society can pick up flowers (or suppress women) but their chain and cruelty cannot smother and imprison their fragrance at all. Naheed strongly declares that this condition will not last forever and Pakistani women will be able to gain their violated rights in future.

I am the one you crushed
 With the weight of custom and tradition
 Not knowing
 That light cannot be hidden in darkness.
 Remember me,
 I am the one in whose lap
 You picked flowers
 And planted thorns and embers
 Not knowing
 That chains cannot smother my fragrance.
 (Kishwar Naheed's *I am not that Woman*)

Naheed's "*My Nation, Listen to My Entreaty*" criticizes the patriarchal society controlled by wolves imposing the heaviest limitations and restriction on women. Such a society makes use of Maulvis (Islamic religious leaders) and tyrants and their fatwas and declarations to marginalize women and pushing them back to marginal spaces and suppress them to have a voice and identity. It is displayed in the following stanza:

Our nation accepts everything and every person
 This nation accepted **tyrants**
 it accepted **lackeys**, accepted **impostors**
 If it did not accept,
 it did not accept **maulvis**
 it did not accept **vampires** and **wolves**,
 did not accept declarations and fatwas.
 (Naheed's *My Nation, Listen to My Entreaty*)

Consequently in the next stanza, Naheed continues that if the suppressed and silenced women in the patriarchal society ask for their right, they will be instantly deleted from sphere of Islam and someone who breaks the Islamic rule has to be treated like a criminal.

Yes, but if any woman emerges with a banner in hand –
 instantly they will speak
 instantly delete her from the sphere of Islam,
 from every reward of life.
 O my nation!
 (Naheed's *My Nation, Listen to My Entreaty*)

Naheed's *Fulfillment of Borrowed Joys* claims that patriarchy defined the position and identity of women. They have to be imprisoned in kitchen to prepare food and taking care of children and giving birth to children like a machine according to man-made rules in the patriarchal society. They are, in fact, in charge of production and reproduction in their family. These women are degraded, marginalized and silenced in such patriarchal society.

After the setting of the sun
 every color loses its existence
 When I come to the kitchen
 to take care of everyday things
 then all the colors of my being sink.
 (Naheed's *Fulfillment of Borrowed Joys*)

Her poem *Ants Consume the Elephant* complains for forceful condition of marriage for Pakistani women in which they have no will and choice to choose their husbands. Force marriage is the bitter fruit of Pakistani radical patriarchal and male-governed society deviates the fundamental and natural rights of country women.

On whom should I write a poem now
 That girl
 who cannot marry
 of her own accord
 and those who point fingers,
 her own blood,
 are petitioners of justice
 (Naheed's *Ants Consume the Elephant*)

B) Objectification:

Objectification of women is a distinguishing theme for contemporary feminist theorists. Objectification of women constitutes the loss of women's humanity; they are no longer having dignity, absolute value, but only relative or instrumental value. More specifically, objectification can be defined as treating a person as an object, a mere instrument for someone else's purposes, in such a way that the person in question is reduced to the status of an object for use. Female objectification also refers to the sexual objectification and treatment of an object to be valued for its use by men and male sexual desire in the patriarchal society. Objectification of women or sexual exploitation is another major theme significantly depicted and displayed in the poetry of Farrokhzad and Naheed.

In the well-known poem, *Let Us Believe in the Beginning of a Cold Season*, Farrokhzad reveals the mean nature of men to make use of women as objects and dolls to fulfill their desires. Farrokhzad claims that I as a woman am imprisoned in the world of indifference among snakes (men) where their aim is to make use of women as toys having two faces following their mean desires.

I come from the indifferent world of thoughts, words, and sounds
 And this world resembles the den of snakes
 And this world is filled with footfall of people

Weaving a rope in their minds to hang you with
 While they kiss you
 Hail to you, innocent night!
 (Farrokhzad's *Let Us Believe in the Beginning of a Cold Season*)

Later on, *It Is Only Sound That Remains*, she criticizes sexual exploitation of women and claims that women must be treated like flowers. They are sources of emotion and kindness. They are very delicate like flowers. They are not only sources of sexual joy and pleasure for men. They need equality, participation in society and justice in a free world.

in What is the lengthy whimpering wildness
 in animals sexual organs to me?
 What to me is the worm's humble movement
 In its fleshy vacuum?
 the bleeding ancestry of flowers
 has committed me to life.
 are you familiar with the bleeding
 ancestry of the flowers?
 (Farrokhzad's *It Is Only Sound That Remains*)

In *Window*, Farrokhzad portrays that how she is treated like a doll imprisoned in an artificial world just like an object. In fact, she is crucified motionless, hopeless and powerless. The speaker is a doll or an object in a drawing book. It is the male dominated society of Iran that provides such a terrifying condition to make the country women paralyzed and inactive marginalized to marginal spaces having no voice. This condition provides a trauma and mental illness.

I come from the homeland of dolls
 from beneath the shades of paper-trees
 in the garden of a picture book
 from the dry seasons of impotent experiences in friendship and love
 in the soil-covered alleys of innocence
 from the years of growing pale alphabet letters
 behind the desks of the tubercular school
 from the minute that children could write "stone"
 on the blackboard
 and the frenzied starlings would fly away
 from the ancient tree.
 I come from the midst of carnivorous plant roots
 and my brain is still overflowed
 by a butterfly's terrifying shriek
 crucified with pins
 onto a notebook.
 (Farrokhzad's *Window*)

Recurrently, in her poem *Question*, Farrokhzad criticized and raise an important question that whether you all women have ever touch freedom or heard about that? In fact, she portrays that Iranian women are treated as colorful objects or fishes imprisoned in the walls of men's desire. The possessive approach of men to exploit women's body is clearly depicted in this stanza. The town or Iranian patriarchal society is dark like a prison for these women.

All hail fishes! ... all hail fishes

All hail reds, greens and goldens!
 Tell me, in that room of crystal
 Cold as the pupils of dead men
 And blocked and quite as the drawing nights of the town
 Have you heard the sound of the pipe wafting towards... glass lamps of light?
 (Farrokhzad's *Question*)

Men are driven by sexual desires entering bloody battles to gain immature girls to fulfill their sexual urges. Thus, these immature girls or society women are the objects of men's lust. The title of this poem which is a reference to Holly Quran signifies the male-written laws as earthy verses to imprison and exploit women's body as an object.

Men cut each other's throat
 With knives
 And in a bed of blood
 Copulated
 With immature girls.
 (Farrokhzad's *The Earthy Verses*)

Farrokhzad, in *I Pity the Garden*, expresses her deep sorrow and suffering for the women of her society treated like objects and machines. She signifies that women live in artificial lives just like dolls in artificial crystal rooms playing the role of a machine to produce children. This is another role of the Iranian imprisoned women.

My sister
 In sheltering love of her artificial husband
 And under the branches of artificial trees
 She sings artificial songs
 And makes natural babies
 She is pregnant
 Whenever she
 comes to see us.
 (Farrokhzad's *I Pity the Garden*)

Kishwar Naheed's *I am not that Woman* portrays that the fathers use to use them as an object of trade, 'you bought and sold in the name of my own chastity'. They were sold to people for marriage just to get more wealth but still women are a 'light that cannot be hidden in darkness'. Another reason they just got their daughters on a force marriage was to 'get rid of a burden', this is a strong proof to show they had no love for women they were totally like normal objects for trade or wealth and they were like trouble or a burden for everyone. Kishwar Naheed talks about women that are sold only for money basically so that the people who are selling them can get money out of it to spend on their own desires they want. 'I am the one, whom you bought and sold, in the name of my own chastity', the way she starts this stanza saying clearly 'I am' alerts the reader that she wants to emphasize a point where she was dealt with unjustly. Then she talks about her chastity because their moral backgrounds are to abstain from sex whilst their own family trade them to other people not worrying about the fact that they might be sexually abused after being traded to any strangers.

I am the woman
 Whom you bought and sold
 In the name of my own chastity
 Not knowing

That I can walk on water
When I am drowning.
(Kishwar Naheed's *I am not that Woman*)

Later on in the next stanza, Kishwar Naheed declares they don't notice this objectification because they just have the desire to earn the money by trading women. She proves that this is the case because it '*is a nation of captive minds, cannot be free*'. She expresses the point that that people trade them for money because they have 'captive minds', basically they are restrained from happy thoughts, they have no emotions, they are just controlled through their desires and their anger but have no love.

I am the one you married off
To get rid of a burden
Not knowing
That a nation of captive minds
Cannot be free.
(Kishwar Naheed's *I am not that Woman*)

Naheed's *We Sinful Women* is a poem in which she criticizes that men call the country women are sinful women and so be treated as objects and properties to be exploited due to an unknown reason according to man-made law of power and men's justice. Women's body is a harvest to be exploited by men. Women are objects to be suppressed.

It is we sinful women
while those who sell the harvests of our bodies
become exalted
become distinguished
become the just princes of the material world.
(Naheed's *We Sinful Women*)

Naheed in her poem, *My Nation, Listen to My Entreaty*, criticizes objectification of women particularly sexual exploitation of women in the male dominated society. The third line of the following stanza '*In every shape of woman they see lust*' clearly shows the degradation and objectification of women in which men consider the women's body only to fulfill their sexual desires as they are driven by their lusts.

They hate woman,
as if they hate their own mother and their own daughter
In every shape of woman they see lust
and decorate their dreams as such
(Naheed's *My Nation, Listen to My Entreaty*)

Conclusion

Kishwar Naheed and Forough Farrokhzad as two famous modern Muslim female poets from Pakistan and Iran, two neighbor countries with the same religion and social situation depicted both patriarchy and objectification of women in their poetry distinctively as far as the feminist prospective is concerned. Forough as the best representative and the most significant Iranian feminist poetess of the twentieth century and Naheed as the best known modern feminist female poet of Pakistan suffer from inequality, injustice, lack of freedom and suppression in the male dominant society which are depicted in their poems clearly. The patriarchy and objectification of women resulted in marginalization of women from their fundamental rights in society. Thus, the poetry of these iconoclast female poets deals with and displays patriarchy and objectification of women as feminist major issues. Their poetry

reflects various nuances of feminism in all forms and degrees in the context of gender, region, religion, race and class.

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