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Abstract

This study focuses on Feminism in *The Power* (2017) by Naomi Alderman. It's a qualitative study which deeply focuses on the text of *The Power* (2017) with its relation to the contemporary world. The theory selected for the analysis is Feminism which means to rise voice for the rights of women. It highlights the area where women are neglected, subjugated, and suppressed. The novel is the story of women who realizes some special kind of power in themselves. They get the power to emit electricity from their hands. In other words, this is the hour of need for women to realize their power and role in real world. It's a call for them. In the novel, through these special powers, they are able to control, defeat, and subjugate their men-fellows in different fields of life. They start running the whole machinery of governments and vividly show that they have the capability to perform those acts which are only limited to male lot. This claim is already by real world politics where women have become even Prime Ministers of few countries. In this study, those elements are highlighted and analyzed which women perform in the novel and they show their desire to do that in real world as well. It does not seem from the plot of the novel that women are second or weaker sex and that is the focus of the current study as well. In a nutshell, this study focuses on women's desire of complete freedom from their patriarchs and equality with men on each and every ground in real life and that is the cry of the day as well.

Key Words: *Feminism, Women's rights, Subjugation, Power, Capability*

Introduction

Feminism is the concept of raising voice for women's rights. It is not fixed with one gender. Anyone who writes for or favors women's rights is called a feminist. In this way, this study explores feminism in *The Power* (2017) by Naomi Alderman. Feminism has been a hot issue and is thoroughly searched out from its day first. This is such an issue that cannot come to its end. It is not a mathematical problem that has a fixed answer once and for all. Feminism prevails in each and every human society as there is no single human society which does not have male and female together. When male and female live together, there exists feminism. It is simply inevitable to separate female gender from male gender in a human society. Almighty Allah has created every living being in pairs i.e. male and female. The growth in population of human or any other specie is only possible if there is female gender in that society. This whole discussion means that male and female are inseparable in any society. A single gender cannot live forever in complete isolation. Resultantly, there would be feminism in that society and this concept will not come to its end even if there is a single female on the face of the earth. The concept of feminism is explained in the next section.

The Power (2017) is a fictional story where women found in themselves some strange powers through which they can control anything. They become the heads of social institution. They run governments. They rule over their opposite gender. It seems in the fiction that they have got that they were longing for. They try to take revenge of every that thing which they considered their right but their opposite gender have deprived them. They get that what they wished before the recognition of the special power. Though this strange power remain active for a limited time but it shows that women are capable of what responsibilities and what powers can they absorb. This fiction shows those fields of life in which women are thought inferior and low to male sex.

The researcher thinks feminism and *The Power* (2017) akin to each other. The very title of the fiction tells us that it is a piece of writing about getting or maintaining power. Likely, feminism is also a concept of getting power. Resultantly, *Feminism in The Power* (2017) is a good study to be conducted.

Literature Review

Critics express their opinion about literary works. They differ from one another because of their background knowledge and experience. Likely, many critics have expressed their views about *The Power* (2017) by Naomi Alderman. Those views along with the researcher's comments are given below.

Leire Martin Anton (2018) compares three works in his article: Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*, and Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2017). The critic (2018) writes that earlier science-fictions were written mostly by male authors. Hardly there were any female writer there but after 1970s, there came females with good pen and name. Those authors wrote something that changed the whole perception of science-fiction in 21st century, particularly. The mentioned female authors wrote fictions where females are superior to males in each and every regard. It seems from their works that female authors and female major characters would dominate the future science fiction. (Anton, 2018)

Anton (2018) writes that the genre of the novel as science fiction. Adult females “all over the world start to develop an ability that allows them to provoke electric discharges at will. The fact provides women with a power men do not have”. (Anton, 2018, p. 26) This was the beginning of their power. The critic is of the opinion that women have not recognized their real powers. They are more powerful than their male partners. This fiction seems as the wish of many females all over the world. In the critic’s opinion, every person, whether male or female, wants their own powers and free will but if one is deprived from that blessings, one is more in want of that. Almost every society of the world have suppressed and female and considered them meek and unequal to male. For this reason, they are more in need of their free will and power. Naomi has spoken the tongue and heart of all those women who wish so in *The Power* (2017). There is an important point in the critics extract i.e. ‘young females with electric charges’. This means that young people, in general, have some energy and enthusiasm about putting aside their problems and moving forward. This is why the young ones felt that power. As the plot shows, those young females made use of those specific powers and soon became the rulers and superior to males. (Anton, 2018)

Pigmans (2018) writes that “Alderman has written our era’s “Handmaid’s Tale”, and, like Margaret Atwood’s classic, “The Power” is one of those essential feminist works that terrifies and illuminates, enrages and encourages”. (Pigmans, 2018, p.14) The critic opines that this is a feminist book which deals with the rights and demands of women. It makes aware women what they should ask for and should demand. According to the critic, this novel terrifies those who are taking benefits of women’s suppression. They are happy with the prevailing conditions as women are silent on their subjugation. In this way, this book terrifies males. Further, it illuminates those who want to do something for the rights of women. If they are silent but have some willingness to perform for women’s rights, this book enlightens them and gives them emotional support to perform some practical activities. This book talks about those people who depend on others struggles and results. They want to keep this situation going on. It encourages those who have no courage to stand and express something for themselves. They are under the control of male authority or customs of society which deprive them of their expression. In short, this book is a voice of feminism.

Literature review is the analysis of different critics about some literary work. Here, the researcher is concerned with the opinions of critics about *The Power* (2017). The researcher has collected articles related to feminism in one way or the other. They are analyzed and commented by the researcher. At the end, the researcher mentions research gap that the current study fulfills.

Yebra (2017) writes that Naomi Alderman was included in the 2013 Granta selection of most promising British novelists under 40. She is the author of *The Power* (2017). (Yebra, 2017).

Meijer (2018) writes that religion is one of the major themes in the works of Alderman, especially *The Power* (2017). Orthodox Jewish hands brought her up. Her fiction talks the peculiar power that women have got. They are able “to emit electricity through their hands, as a result of which gender hierarchies are slowly reversed.” (Meijer, 2018, p.27) Emitting electricity from their hands was the new power. This power was related to apocalyptic sign by some people while others called it genetic mutation. The critic (2018) compares *The Power* (2017) with Biblical apocalypse where one thing is common which is the theme of reversal. He says that power relation was changed between Roman and Christian church. Those with low power and

authority appeared with high power and control. In the same way, this fiction by Naomi presents such reversal in hierarchies of gender. The story starts and a battle is there, these new power takers control the battle fields and turn as winners. They are the winners who have never been in the history as women have never won any battle single handedly. In history, these are the men who fight, die, or win battles. Though there remains some part of women but they have not led any battle completely on their own shoulders. This is what the ‘New Order’ is, according to the critic (2018). (Meijer, 2018)

Kulic (2018) writes that Alderman “enables women to gain the physical upper hand and thus also exert their social power over men. In the novel, the author speculates about the changes that would ensue if women would no longer be "the weaker" sex.” (Kulic, 2018, p.17) Women are given some power through which they control men all over the world. They exercise social power to snatch away the belongings of men. This fiction shows that such drastic changes may happen in real life if women do not remain a weaker sex. To give them extra power and control, it may have positive and negative effects. In *The Power* (2017), there is hardly any positive proof of their positive usage of powers. It seems that they are taking revenge of all those sufferings that men lot has exerted upon them. For example, in the fiction, “to soothe the parents’ worries, the Government segregates schools instead of closing them down, separating the boys from the girls: “Boys-only buses took them safely to boys-only schools.” (Kulic, 2018, p.18) This is what men-dominated societies are doing. They have separated schools, sections, and buses for male and female. As in such societies, parents do not want that their daughters may study or go together with other boys. In the same way, parents in the novel do not want to send their boys together with girls. As girls harass boys, this is opposite to the events of life in real world. (Kulic, 2018)

There are other critics, along with those mentioned above, who analyze *The Power* (2017) from different perspectives. To make it clear, the above analysis are from feminist perspective and the current project also talks about feminism but there is a big difference in dealing with this subject. The difference in analysis of the fiction is that it does not analyze feminist elements directly rather it analyzes those elements which do not speak directly of women’s rights. It expresses the unexpressed feminist elements. This is the gap that this study sought to fulfill

Research Questions

1. Do the fiction, *The Power* (2017), have the elements of feminism?
2. If yes, how are they present in the fiction?
3. How the current study relates *The Power* (2017) to women’s conditions in the contemporary society?

Significance of the Research

The current study focuses on feminism in *The Power* (2017). It has the significance that the researcher analyses the fiction through feminist lenses in relation to his own society. The researcher tries to relate his society’s prevailing conditions with that of the text of the fiction. There is a connection between the fictional world of the work with the real human society. The condition of women in the fiction is not a suppressed one but connotatively conveys the same meaning and interpretation. The readers, after reading this study, come to know that what women of their society want and wish for. In case, they are granted that much power and authority that

they long for, how would they handle that and how would they treat their male partners. More than that, this fiction is a call for equal rights in the words of non-calling.

Theoretical Framework

Barry (2020) writes that feminism tries “to examine power relations which obtain in texts and in life, with a view to breaking them down, seeing reading as a political act, and showing the extent of patriarchy.” (p.157) According to these words of the critic, feminism seeks power relations within the text and out of the text. Power has always been a bone of contention between men and men, and men and women in practical life. The same happens in a literary work as well. Both the genders try to dominate the other. Their depiction in a work depends on the mind of the author. Feminism explores the relationship between different characters and their outcome in real life if those characters are brought in real world. Further, it explores the political activities of both the two genders. The impact of patriarchy is observed by feminism. Patriarchy is the mental and physical control of female by male authority. This kind of control affects the psyche of female. Consequently, this kind of ‘order and follow’ has negative impact on a character or person in real life. (Barry, 1979)

The critic, Simpson (1989), opines that “Socialist-feminists attempt a synthesis between two systems of domination, class and patriarchy (male supremacy). Both relations of production and reproduction are structured by capitalist patriarchy.” (ibid.) In this quotation, the critic says that even reproduction depends on the choice of men. If they want to have such relationship, women cannot stop them. There is not a single field of life where it is not tried to control the women lot. On the other hand, men are not equal to other men in capitalist society. Some men cannot enjoy the liberty that other men do in white supremacist society. So, with what kind of men women want to be equal with? This is the question that few critics ask the feminists. (Simpson, 1989; Hooks, 1987; Beauvoir, 1960; Hart-mann, 1979; Mitchell, 1971)

Ferreira (2018) writes that violence is one of the major elements of utopian or dystopian literature written by women. They try to propagate peace and to defend non-violence. At times, they took violent measures in order to attain peaceful results. Their violence is presented in a positive way. In this way, they present the non-violence of women in the guise of violence. At the same time, they talk about some other traits of women which are really full of love, care, and non-violence e.g. woman as a mother and a nurturer. (Ferreira, 2018; Pearson, 1999; Alison, 2004).

Textual Analysis

In this chapter, the text of the dystopian fiction, *The Power* (2017) by Naomi Alderman is analyzed through the lenses of feminism. Every society has men and women as its members. It is not possible that there will be only men or women in a society. Life is only possible and can move forward if the two sexes live together happily and peacefully. But, the fact is that it happens rarely that there exists peace and equality between men and women all over the world. This inequality is searched and analyzed in the science fiction.

It is a fact that women are on the receiving end of this inequality in a society. Barry (2020) writes that men are powerful and subordinate their women. In *The Power* (2017), women characters are not allowed to do something according to their choice. Here is a character, Roxy, who receives such treatment when commits any mistake. The novel writes, “The men lock Roxy

in the cupboard when they do it. What they don't know is: she's been locked in that cupboard before." (Alderman, 2017, p.17) Two men attack Roxy and her mother, when Roxy makes noise and disturbs them; they lock her in the cupboard. This act of the two men and Roxy's experience of the cupboard is the symbol of men's authority and control over female. This cupboard can be a woman's home, or society, or any other limited space. The words of the novel shows that Roxy has been treated like that before other men as well i.e. her father. Overall, this shows men's behavior towards those women who commit any mistake or become a hindrance in their path. If they want to go out for a purpose, they are said; "You're not going, you're staying in." (Alderman, 2017, p.17) This sentence is related to the context of the above quotation as well as real life. In the novel, Roxy wants to go out and ask someone for her help but the attackers stop her. On the other side, in practical life, many men compel their women to stay indoors and not go outside. Feminists object this kind of limitation imposed by men on their women. If they are seen with men somewhere they are called and addressed with bad titles and words as in the novel writes, "Saw you. Saw you in the graveyard with those boys. Filthy. Little. Whore." (Alderman, 2017, p.42) Such treatment is too vivid particularly in Pashtun society and commonly in Pakistan.

One of the two attackers was short, catches Roxy's mother "by the throat; the tall one chases Roxy through the kitchen. She's almost out the back door when he grabs her thigh; she falls forward and he's got her by the waist. She's kicking and shouting." (Alderman, 2017, p.17) The attack can be real in the story or it can be symbolic for men's attacks on women. The text shows that both daughter and the mother are attacked by the two men. It means that women are not safe in the presence of other men. If women have something, they are not safe with that as men would try to deprive them of their property and other belongings. Coming back to the story, one of the attackers catches Roxy and pushes her inside the cupboard. As she was familiar with that place and that kind of treatment, she had now learnt how to deal and to escape from such torment. She tries and "turns one of the screws on the lock with her fingernail. There's one, two, three twists, and it's out. A spark jumps between the metal of the screw and her hand. Static electricity. (Alderman, 2017, p.18) She succeeds in her struggle. She observes something new. For the first time, there happens something which is new for her. There was a spark between her hand and the screw of the cupboard. This spark can be taken as a realization of sense of struggle and opposition in her against the two attackers. In short, there was electricity in her hands. She came out of the cupboard, one of them saw her. Her mother requested the attackers to leave her. She yelled, "Please. Please don't. Please. What is this? She's just a kid. She's just a child, for God's sake." (Alderman, 2017, p.18)

Roxy was feeling some changes in her. She felt "like needle-pricks of light from her spine to her collarbone, from her throat to her elbows, wrists, to the pads of her fingers. She's glittering, inside." (Alderman, 2017, p.19) Electricity was gathering to emit from her fingers. She was a little disturbed because of the change in her as her whole body was literally vibrating. She determined to attack one, of the two attackers, who was not aware of the presence of Roxy. She knocked him down with a single blow. That was the power of the electricity, which was recently observed by Roxy. The man was not aware of it and he thought that he is struck with some metal. He roared, "she's got anything behind her back. 'You dropped it, dintcha, little girl? (Alderman, 2017, P.20) He wanted to grasp the thing with which he was struck but that thing out of his control.

After that, the emitting spark was recorded and telecasted by a news agency and people all over the world came to know about the change in the young girl. “‘Fox News would say whatever makes the most people tune in to Fox News.’ ‘Sure. Still.’ ‘What are these lines coming out of her hands?’ Electricity”. (Alderman, 2017, p.29) Finally, the world came to know that a girl is emitting electricity from her hands. This was a kind of arouse in women against their suppression and for the defense of their rights. Every person who watched Roxy on television screen was surprised and was exclaiming, ‘I saw a girl in the park doing that to a boy for no reason, he was bleeding from the eyes. The eyes. Once you’ve seen that happen, no mom would let her boys out of her sight.’ (Alderman, 2017, p. 32) Roxy was applying her new power on a boy. That scene was filmed and spread all over the world by Fox News.

If anyone “had that stage when he liked to think of himself as a good man educating a little girl in the men’s world.” (Alderman, 2017, pp.38, 39) Women are not given proper concentration regarding their education in most of the patriarchic societies. They are kept bound in their homes by their male-dominated society. There are some parents as well who are so proud daughters are when they get education of do something great. While, in the researcher’s society, many female students are advised to get religious education, as well in the novel. They have only few things to opt in their lives; “A husband and Children” (Alderman, 2017, p.55) Except these, they have no other responsibility and purpose in life. On the other hand, men think opposite of that. If they make any strict roles for their men, they do that for the safety of their women. A father thinks of his daughter that “dad’s body is a castle for her. A shelter and a weapon. When he puts his arm around her shoulders she feels a mixture of terror and comfort. (Alderman, 2017, p.60) Fathers’ thinking is not wrong but at the same time, it deprives many daughters from enjoying liberty. It cannot be denied that a father’s body is like shelter and weapon for the daughter. If she feels any terror, it means that she is worried about the departure of that shelter. Alongside, she is comfortable because she knows that in the presence of father as a weapon, nothing and no one can hurt her. This kind of feeling is not limited to a specific society; almost all of the daughters would feel the same when they would be in the lap of their fathers.

In the fiction, there is a reversal. Young daughters are observing new powers in them in the form of electricity. They also “awaken it in older women. This is the Devil working in the world, passing from hand to hand as Eve passed the apple to Adam.” (Alderman, 2017, p.58) They pass the power from one to another. The older women learn from younger girl the use of that special power. The novel writes;

I’m not talking about the girls. We’ve got that under control, for the most part.
I’m talking about grown women. Teenage girls can wake this thing up in older women. And they can give it to each other. Grown women can do it now, Margot, you’ve seen that stuff. (Alderman, 2017, p.77)

Some women make negative use of the power. There was “fight between two women on the beach at midnight, the electricity lighting up the eager faces of their audience as the women grunt and struggle to grab each other’s faces, throats.” (Alderman, 2017, p.68) They were unable to tolerate the presence of the power in other women, how could they produce the same power in men against whom they have generated it. The above scene was recorded and then shown to the people who amused to see the astonishing change a female lot. The women with the power arranged a gathering in which a male, Tunde, wanted to participate and cover the meeting but

they say: “you cannot walk with us, CNN,’ says one of them, her English a little better than the others’. ‘There will be no men with us today.” (Alderman, 2017, p.71) They even do not call him by his name but by his channel. The women tell him that they do not allow any man to be parts of this forgather. The women with the power transfer the same to other men. They want to make a force with the like powers and then to attack men all over the world. They want to take revenge from men who have kept them under subjugation since history long. They were never so powerful as today. This is the reason that they recognize and inhale the power in other women. In the novel,

Allie can feel the electricity inside Luanne’s body: in her spine and in her neck and inside her head. She can feel the signals going up and down, stuttering, and trying to right themselves, confused and out of sync. She can see it, clear as with her own eyes: there’s a blockage here and here, and this part just at the base of the skull is mistiming what it’s doing. (Alderman, 2017, p.93)

Allie knows that Luanne has the power to emit electricity from her hands and she would be a good addition to our force. Connotatively, the above quotation means that each and every part of Luanne’s body is in want of freedom. Liberty has been snatched away from every organ of her body by men. However, there is an arouse now. Though there are still some blocks in her body which means something is stopping her from getting absolute freedom and liberty. Luanne’s patriarchic society still poses hindrances in her path but Allie encourages her that it our moment not only to live but also to rule over the male-dominated world. Allie gives first aid to every girl and woman who faces any problem. She cures anyone who is “in need of healing. Sometimes she can lay her hands on them and feel out their pain. Sometimes it is just that something is hurting that need not hurt. A headache, a twitching muscle, giddiness.” (Alderman, 2017, p.94) She can diagnose and heal any disease that give strength to her and make her famous. People talk about her talent and good attitude towards women but at the same, they are worried about her treatment of male sex. However, some women, with the electric power, treat men badly. Still, the goodness of Allie overcomes all these and people “start to believe in her. That there is something within her. The girls believe it, anyway, if not the nuns.” (Alderman, 2017, p.94) Allie was claiming to be friend of Eve who was receiving messages from God, for this reason, nuns did not believe in her. Allie talks Eve tongue and quotes her that “then God will show us what She wants of us.” (Alderman, 2017, p.95) Eve says that we should wait for the orders of God and should not follow nuns because they stop us from using our special powers and getting freedom. She says that, “men have misinterpreted the words of God and have made themselves superior to us. Now, we will follow the commands of God as she is on our side and wants our benefit”. (Alderman, 2017, p.95) Eve leads a group of young girls towards the sea and wants to show them the powers that God had bestowed upon her.

There were around ten girls in the ocean that morning to witness the miracle. They had not been, before that moment, leaders in the group of five dozen young women dwelling with the nuns. They were not the charismatic ones, not the most popular, or the funniest, or the prettiest, or the cleverest girls. They were, if anything drew them together, the girls who had suffered the most, their stories being particularly terrible, their knowledge of what one might fear from others and oneself particularly acute. Nonetheless, after that morning, they were changed. (Alderman, 2017, p.96)

Eve showed her miracle to the ten girls. In other words, Eve told the girls to get freedom their patriarchs. She urged them to protest and say no to male authority. These were simple girls with no special background. Alderman (2017) wants to show through these lines that for freedom and liberty, it is not necessary that one would have high and powerful background. As in the group of Eve, neither were they the most beautiful ones nor were they having big names. They were not the funniest, prettiest, or the cleverest but common girls like others. She chose simple girls and turned them into preachers. When Eve uses the pronoun 'she' for God, some girls object that "Why do you call God "She"?" Eve says, 'God is neither woman nor man but both these things. But now She has come to show us a new side to Her face, one we have ignored for too long.' (Alderman, 2017, p.96) Eve says that God can be taken in male or female genders. Till now, God was called by male-pronoun, 'He', but now this has been changed to 'She'. Men have used this term in their favor and have used it for their purpose to suppress us. Now, she has come for our help and we will be no more subjugated to men rather equal to them. Eve says, "Do you think a single thing could happen without the will of God? There's going to be more than this, sweetheart, believe me." (Alderman, 2017, p.97) These are the prophetic words said to Eve when she asked Her for help. She assured Eve that "good days are coming for you if you follow that what you are ordered. Eve addressed "her congregation. They record it on their cellphones and send it across the world. Mother Eve wears a hood, the better to preserve her humility, for it is not her message she preaches, but the message of the Mother." (Alderman, 2017, p.100) What Eve told her women, these were the words of God and not of Eve.

Conclusion

The researcher analyzed feminist elements in *The Power* (2017) both denotatively and connotatively. Denotative interpretation is in relation to the novel while connotative meanings are related to practical life. Those elements are as; women are limited to their homes. They are not allowed to move freely and according to their choice. There are bans on different actions performed by women. Men do not give them proper education. If some parents pay attention to their daughters' education, they consider themselves the best parents. If girls sit with other boys, their parents call them with awfully bad names. As the girls in the fiction get electric power, they perform different activities. Those activities mean that they want to do them in practical life as well but their patriarchic society does not allow them. In earlier times as well as in contemporary times in some parts of the world, the electrically powered girls and women take the same revenge from men and deprive them of the right of casting their votes. They ban men from driving cars. They kill those men who have suppressed and badly treated them or beaten their wives. They treat men, in the novel, as parents treat their children.

This study well-relates *The Power* (2017) to contemporary society of the researcher. The way girls find that they have some special powers and they should make use of it, in the same way, women are struggling for their rights. They have got some of them. For example, women were not allowed to drive cars in Saudi Arabia but now they can drive cars. Now, women are running countries. They are prime ministers and governors. The way they have free relationships with other women instead of men, in the same way, there are lesbian relationships and girls marry other girls instead of boys. In other words, they have got freedom from sexual slavery. Electric power can be taken as a symbol of waking conscious in them that they should strive for their rights. These days, women participate directly in wars and are no more passive warriors. They

are doing almost all those activities that men do and women were considered incapable of doing that. They drive vehicles from bicycles to airplanes. In short, they are no more a weaker sex.

The current project focused on the aspects that women did in the novel but they cannot perform them in real life due to the pressure and subjugation of male-dominated society. Those elements are considered as wishes of female lot.

This fiction can be searched for class-struggle, psychoanalysis, patriarchy, neo-Marxism, post-colonialism and many other perspectives. The current project highlighted the feminist role of different characters in the fiction. It is explained to them that if they understand their role, value their talents, and raise voice for their rights, they will not be the downtrodden members of the society anymore.

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