

The Desire for Freedom in Raja Alem's

The Dove's Necklace

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Preface

Feminism is one of the greatest movements that promote women's rights on the basis of gender equality. It includes a system of ideas that examine the roots of subjugation and oppression of women. By examining women's social roles and lived experiences, feminist theory, which has emerged from the feminist movement, attempts to understand the nature of gender disparity. The women's movement has given rise to feminist literary criticism, and its impact has ushered in a new era of literary studies. Problems faced by women and their reaction to it can be clearly understood by studying women's writing. *The Dove's Necklace* written by Raja Alem, is a novel that can be considered as a good example for women's writing which portrays crises that women face and also their resistance to it especially in a highly patriarchal country like Saudi Arabia.

The dissertation titled "The Desire for Freedom in Raja Alem's *The Dove's Necklace*", is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is the introductory part which deals with feminism in general, gynocriticism, and details about the author and the book which I am working on. The second chapter throws light on Alem's depiction of the plight of women who faces cruel and unfair treatment from men. The third chapter shows Alem revealing the desire of Saudi women for freedom by portraying resistance of strong women against injustice done to them. The fourth and final chapter concludes the project with a brief summary of the project and some observations.

Chapter One

Introduction

Feminism is a kind of political, social, cultural and economic movement that tends to modernize the social role of women. It is one of the greatest movements of the nineteenth and twentieth century which is still continuing. It aims at laying out equal rights, legal security for women, advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for their rights and interests as well as deals with issues of gender difference.

Feminism is the result of men shaping and governing society to suit their demands and interest at the expense of women's basic needs and pleasure.

“Feminism means the doctrine which advocates for women's complete equality with man in all spheres of life - political, social, and legal, economic, familial, cultural, academic etc. and the feminist movement is an organized effort for achieving such an equality and rights for women. In other words, it aims at providing women with full freedom in all respects - sexual, professional, personal, educational, political, cultural, religious, etc. and thus liberating them from all conventional, cultural and political restrictions”. (Sharma 192)

Patriarchy is a key concept in feminist analysis, as it emphasizes the totality of oppression and exploitation to which women are subjected.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) written by Mary Wollstonecraft is the first seminal work that might be considered as a feminist manifesto. In her work, she discusses on women should have the

same rights as men in terms of education, earnings and property. In his book, *The Subjection of Women* published in 1869, John Stuart Mill argued that women should have the same legal rights as men. Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is another significant step towards modern women's quest for self-realization, self-definition and self-assertion.

Virginia Woolf is often considered as first a word defender of feminism in the twentieth century. *A Room of One's Own* as well as the other essays collected under the title *Women and Writing*, are outspoken attacks on patriarchal society, in which she believes is the root cause of educational, economic and cultural backwardness as well as disabilities that impede women's creative culture, social growth and stature. However, it is Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) that sparked a revolution and a tidal change in western society, and so it can be correctly considered as the true foundation of modern feminism.

The history of feminism according to Maggie Humm and Rebecca Walker can be split into three waves ("Political Ideologies"). The first wave which occurred in the late 1800s was the first significant political movement in the Western World. The first women's right convention commonly known as Seneca Falls Assembly was held at Seneca Falls, New York. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was in the forefront for getting equal rights. Sojourner Truth's famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech at a women's convention in Ohio in 1851, initiated women of other races to be the part of the movement ("Feminist Movements"). During the first wave, the feminist movement was primarily concerned with the fundamental political rights, such as the right to vote; economic rights such as the right to own property

separate from a spouse; educational and employment rights, fair marriage laws etc. The women's suffrage movement which arose in the 1840s and 1850s was closely associated with the first wave of feminism. Later New Zealand became the first country in the world to allow women to vote. Earlier feminists were also concerned about reproductive rights. But their focus was only on the rights of white women.

The second wave of feminism emerged in the 1960s and it articulated the more revolutionary urge of the emerging Women's Liberation Movement, in addition to the established concern. It was based on the first wave feminism and questioned the position of women in society. Traditional gender and family roles have been called into question. Betty Friedan in 1963 inspired by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, wrote the best-selling book *The Feminine Mystique* in which she argued that limiting women to the status of housewives limited their potential and wasted their skill. This book is widely regarded as one of the seminal works of second-wave feminism. The Equal Pay Act of 1963, *Roe v. Wade* cases in 1973 and other Supreme Court cases were key successes during this time. Mainstream or liberal feminism, radical feminism and cultural feminism developed as the three primary forms of feminism.

In comparison to previous waves, the third wave is more diversified and divergent. Many women exhibited their sexuality more openly in the way they spoke, dressed and acted. Race became more prominent in third wave. In 1989, gender and critical race researcher Kimberlé Crenshaw invented the term 'intersectionality'. The word describes how, many forms of oppression such as those on gender and race interact with one another.

While first and the second-wave feminism mostly disregarded or ignored the racial differences with the gender, the third wave did.

The fourth wave feminism is an extension of third wave and is linked to the usage of social media. It is focused on women's justice, fight against sexual harassment and violence against women. With the development of technology and increased use of social media, the new wave feminists are speaking out against discrimination.

Feminist Theory which arises from the feminist movement tries to comprehend the nature of gender disparity by investigating woman's social role and lived experience. Feminist theorists have developmental theories in a range of disciplines to address gender issues. It is concerned with advancing women's rights and interests. Feminist theory in particular is a means of studying a literary work with the mindset that considers how concerns of female identity and female characters assist shape and give significance to the literary work.

The feminist literary criticism arose as a result of the women's movement and its influence has ushered a new age in literary studies. Several key assumptions have been changed as a result of this new approach. It provides a fresh take on literature and underlines the need for new paradigms to emerge. According to feminist criticism, women readers and critics contribute different perspective and expectations to their literary encounters. It asserts that major cultural stories have also been told by women.

It is critical to distinguish between 'feminist', 'female' and 'feminine' to have a good knowledge of the critical, political and the theoretical challenges of contemporary feminist criticism. Toril Moi defines

'feminist' as a 'political position', 'female' as 'a matter of biology' and 'feminine' as 'a set of culturally defined characteristics' (Barry 117). Thus, femininity is a social construct. To illustrate that these social norms for femininity are natural, patriarchal oppression enforces specific social standards of femininity on all biological women. As a result, a woman who does not adhere to the established standards is seen as unfeminine and so unnatural. Patriarchy's interest is to persuade women that there is such a thing as an essence of femaleness known as femininity.

Elaine Showalter, the American literary critic and feminist writer distinguished between two types of feminist criticism. The first is feminist critique in which women is reader and consumer of male produce literature. It demonstrates how a female reader's hypothesis alters the meaning of a specific text, bringing to light its sexual codes. Feminist criticism enquires into the ideological underpinnings of literary phenomena. The images and stereotypes of women in literature, the exclusions of and misconceptions about women in criticism and the cracks in male constructed literary history are among its key concerns (Showalter 128).

Elaine Showalter refers to the second type as gynocritics after the French phrase "la gynocritique". Women as writers, women as producers of textual meaning, and the history, themes, genres and structures of women's literature are all addressed in this specialized discourse. The psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics of female language; the trajectory of an individual or collective female literary carrier; literary history and studies of specific writers and works are among the other topics covered. Gynocritics is a more self-contained and experimental kind of

feminist inquiry with ties to other forms of contemporary feminist research (Showalter 128).

Elaine Showalter coined the term 'gynocritics' in her essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics". Gynocriticism is the study of women's writing. Its goal is to emphasize what distinguishes a literary work as belonging to a specific literary tradition of women's writing. This type of literary criticism can be seen of as a subset of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Freud's Focus on male sexuality and psychology underlined the necessity for feminist philosophers to critique the female equivalent. On the other hand, it is women writing about women's writing. It is a women's centered method to study a literary work. It posits that women have a distant experience that requires separate analytical tools to comprehend and it focus on understanding how literature of women both communicates and influences these experiences. So even though gynocriticism is a form of Feminist Theory, it is not synonymous with Feminist Theory.

The French concept of 'écriture féminine' is a key term in related to gynocriticism. The literal meaning of this phrase is 'feminine writing' or 'women's writing', but philosophically, it refers to a variety of narrative styles that differ from their counterpart's linear univocal narrative. The term 'écriture féminine' was coined by Helene Cixous in her essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976). Her key point is that despite previous attempts to discourage women from writing they should continue to do so. She also uses the material to demonstrate how feminine writing might appear.

Women rarely wrote in history because they were in chains at that time. It was considered as absurd if a woman wrote. The goal of encouraging women to write is to make them able to write women; women

who are produced and written by women rather than men. Cixous emphasizes the need of women avoiding internalizing male projected images which have distanced women from a sense of self-worth found in writing. Even when women did write, they tended to follow a male point of view, resulting in a deeply phallus centric history of western writing. Only a woman can understand another woman. No man can write true experience of women. Only a woman can understand pangs of giving birth. So, they should write. According to Cixous, writing will restore woman's assets and pleasures as well as set her free. She will be able to return to her body because female body was also restricted by a censoring women's literature. On a broader historical level, a woman's writing signifies her active entry into history as an agent of change (Cixous).

Showalter not only coined the term gynocriticism but also put it to into practice throughout her life. She worked on pre-Victorian, Victorian and modern female writers observing their social, cultural, religious and financial standing in their respective times, as a specialist in Victorian literature.

Showalter's female research style was focused on aberrant psychology which aided her in reading female sensibilities, and reactions on printed pages. After a thorough examination of female consciousness as expressed in both female and male works, she came to the opinion that women are misunderstood and misdiagnosed as a result of others lack of attention and sensibility. Woman cannot be comprehended by man; hence woman is expected to study and write about her own sensibility. She wrote and edited several books in order to establish theory of reading, writing and thinking about woman and critiquing in order to recreate a space of identity

as a writer, poet, critic and a greater advocate of her own favored right.

"Toward a Feminist Poetics" (1979), *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English culture (1830-1980)*" (1985), and *Sexual Anarchy* (1990) are some among them.

In her *A literature of their own* (1977), Showalter chronicles three phases of women writing. She claims that the "feminine" as the initial phase in which women started writing, but they were afraid so they used male pseudonyms and mimicked the established form of male writing. In order to get approval, they disguised. The "feminist" phase saw women writers' struggle against governing male ideals and values. They depicted the harsh treatment of female characters at the hand of male writers. In the last phase that is "Female", female writers seek self-discovery and quit becoming mimics by attempting to create their own work. This phase has seen the rise of gynocriticism (Showalter 137-139).

Gynocriticism offers critics four models to use when analyzing the character of women's writing: biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and the cultural. The biological model highlights how the female body imprints itself on a work through a plethora of literary images as well as a personal, intimate one. The linguistic model investigates the disparities in how men and women use language to address the demand for a female discourse. The psychological approach examines the female psyche and shows how it influences the writing process highlighting the flux and fluidity of feminine writing versus the rigidity and structure of masculine writing. The cultural model looks at how society moulds women's aspirations, responses and point of view (Hines).

Gynocriticism is concerned with the development of specifically female criticism that critiques work written by women with the goal of identifying the differences between women's and men's writing in order to pave the way for the next generation of female writers who are free to know and develop their own female literary greatness without relying on male templates and models.

In the past feminist literary criticism has attempted to re-examine the classic works from the canon of literature. The development and rediscovery of female writing traditions, the rediscovery of old texts, the interpretation of the symbolism of the women's writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by the male point of view and the resistance to the inherent sexism in the majority of mainstream literature are all specific goals of feminist criticism. These objectives were formulated by Lisa Tuttle, an American writer in the 1980s and have since been adopted by the majority of feminist critics, coupled with the intention to analyze women writers and their writing from a female perspective and raise awareness of the sexual politics of language and style.

The book selected for the present analysis of women's writing is *The Dove's Necklace*, a novel written by Raja Alem. The novel was actually written and published in Arabic language in 2010 as *Tawq al- Hama*. The English translation copyright of the book belongs to Katherine Halls and Adam Talib which was translated in 2016. Katherine Halls is an Arabic to English translator from Wales. She received 2021 PEN/ Heim Translation fund grant to translate "Things that can't be Fixed", a collection of short stories by Haytham EI- Wardany. The other one, Adam Talib, Dphil (2014)

Oxford, works as an assistant editor for the Journal of Arabic literature and teaches Arabic language and literature at Durham University.

Raja Alem is a Saudi Arabian author who was born in Mecca and currently resides in Paris. Alem is the author of eleven novels as well as numerous plays, short stories and essays. She frequently makes appearances on the global literary and cultural scene particularly to speak on and conduct workshops on spirituality, children's creativity and the connection between the east and west. She has won numerous awards in the Arab world and in Europe including one for creative achievement from UNESCO in 2005 and one from the Lebanese literary Club in Paris in 2008.

She has founded and supports a cultural club and Recreation Center for the girls of Mecca with her sister Shadia Alem, which is a trailblazing move in enhancing woman's understanding and providing them with a creative outlet. She is the first woman to win the international price for Arabic fiction for *The Dove's Necklace*, which also won the price for the best book translated into German. Alem's work has been published in seven languages. Being a joint winner of the award, she shared the Arabic Booker prize with Moroccan writer Mohammed Achaari. Alem broke the world of men's domination of the Arab Booker prize, three years after its launch.

As a woman, Alem exactly knows the hardships, troubles, abuse, sufferings, repression, cruelty etc. faced by women especially in a country like Saudi Arabia which is highly patriarchal. Even though the country is advancing in the field of women's rights, the country still has a lot of restrictions on women. Alem being a Saudi Arabian writer addresses women's issues and gender roles within a discussion of wider social issues such as the judiciary, corruption, divorce, travel, work etc.

Novel writing by Saudi women did not start till the late 20th century. In addition to delaying the publication of the first Saudi women's novel, the delay in the introduction of formal education for Saudi women also hampered the advancement of their social and cultural status. And many Saudi detractors attacked them when they first began to write. The social restraints of society forbade the voicing of issues and concerns such as their rights, forced marriage, and emotional issues such as love and relationships between the sexes since they were deemed objectionable. Despite the fact that they started writing, their inability to write about their own concerns has been inevitably caused by social customs and habits. At the time, it was viewed as socially and culturally inappropriate for women to express their emotions or engage in social or emotional topics. It was assumed that they were autobiographical.

Alem's *The Dove's Necklace* is labyrinthine. It has an exploratory story structure. Like crafted by Vladimir Nabokov, it revels in its turmoil and does not give any obvious responses. The novel uncovers the logical contradictions in Mecca and its staunch heritage that resists assimilating modern practices. It transports us to contemporary Mecca while exposing us to many of the challenges that women deal with on a daily basis. The central mystery in the plot involves an unidentified female corpse that is discovered naked in an alley in a working-class neighborhood of the city. The body is left unclaimed due to the deformity of her body and the stigma associated with her nudity. So, the search for her identity and the cause of her death starts.

From her personal experience, Alem provides us with a glimpse into the private lives of local women who experience pressures very different

from those experienced by the typical female visitor to Mecca. Alem contrasts this with the opinions and viewpoints of main male character Detective Nasser al- Qahtani. She addresses the problem of women seeking to identify their identity by illustrating the reality of being continually veiled and unable to express themselves through any visible methods.

The Dove's Necklace is an effort to transcend physical boundaries by building virtual, spiritual and occasionally intelligent spaces. It is a spiritual journey through time and space. The female characters are encircled by the walls and their lives are dominated by legends, harsh societal restrictions and the economic system and its powers. Among them, some choose to remain silent in their current situation while others make the decision to react in order to liberate themselves from the constraints of time and space rather than submitting to the physical limitations of their bodies and the oppressive laws of nature and society. It is a journey towards the freedom of the soul.

The novel shows how women become victims of estrangement and social disregard. They are abused, oppressed and pressed in the battle between the individuals who are attempting to keep up with the notable city of Mecca and the individuals who are attempting to annihilate it for the sake of innovation. Alem also demonstrate how women try to resist them. She reveals the desire of Saudi women for freedom by resisting traditional oppressive culture and demonstrate women who express their feelings openly. This project aims to throw light on various crises faced by women especially the Saudi women in their highly patriarchal society and also focus on their aspiration for liberty. The next two chapters deals with the analysis of the book by giving emphasis to how Alem being a woman

addresses the plight of women there and how they try to hold out against to survive.

Chapter Two

Plight of women under oppression

The Dove's Necklace is a stunning novel that aided its author Raja Alem to become the first woman to win the international prize for Arabic fiction. The novel which explores the secret life of Mecca interweaves Saudi woman's desire for freedom. Raja Alem is one of the most important women in Saudi Society at present. She is distinguished by her bold and deep narrative style. She is a novelist who obviously looks to give her fiction a general weight and to make a certified amount of expression that raises the victory of humanistic soul over social troubles. Her writings uncover a striking excitement for doing things that those numerous other Saudi novelists do not do and freedom from the restrictive cultural taboos of her society. *The Dove's Necklace* is such a book.

At the point when the body of a woman is found in the Lane of Many Heads in Mecca, no one claims it as all people in the lane are ashamed of her nakedness. Dead body's face is totally smashed up so it is difficult to identify the body. Detective Nasser takes up the case. He suspects that the body is either of Aisha, the schoolteacher or Azza, daughter of Sheikh Muzahim because the body is found deep in the cleft between their houses and both of them have gone missing just prior to the fall.

The novel has two parts. The first part of the story infuses many confusions into the head of readers. The second part tries to solve not all but many confusions in part one. The story starts at the Lane of Many Heads which itself is a character. Other characters include Halima the tea lady, aunt Etra, Umm al- Sa'd, Turkish woman, Lebanese woman, Jameela,

Ramziya, Yousria, Yusuf, Mu'az, Khalil, Salih known as the Eunuch's goat, Mushabbab , Sheikh, al- Ashi etc

At first Nasser suspects Yusuf who loves Azza and then Ahmed, Aisha's ex-husband. He questions Yusuf mother Halima and he is reminded of the cruelty done by his father to his sister. Then he checks Aisha's emails to her German boyfriend and Yusuf's diary while looking for clue. Aisha has married Ahmed, the son of sewage cleaner and he has divorced her after two months. After two years, he comes back to reconcile with her as if she is an object that he can throw away and then take back. Aisha is the victim of a motor accident in which her whole family dies and she ends up with a broken hip. When a kind Prince send her to Germany for treatment, she falls in love with the doctor whom she sends emails. Azza's mother has died at her young age and she grow up with Halima and Yusuf. She becomes good at drawing.

As the investigation continues, suddenly one day Azza's father comes to the police station and says to police that the dead body belongs to his daughter and then he does her funeral rites. The first section ends as they close the case.

The Next section opens with the Nora, who is the woman of Sheikh Khalid al- Sibaykhan. She is protected by bodyguard Rafi but she is not under protection at all. She is in her twenties and one thing is sure that her native land is Mecca. When Nora's art exhibition is done at Jeddah, Mu'az finds out that she's really Azza. Yusuf manages to find out Azza in the hotel where she is staying. When he tries to rescue her, she refuses and goes back to hotel. She knows wherever she goes she will be found out by Sheikh. So, she goes back inside.

The novel is charming that allures readers to its great depth. Alem draws our attention to female population that is subjugated and oppressed and also the other side of those who are strong and able to challenge and confront taboos. Thus, the work is a great example for women's writing and is worth for the study of women's writing and biological, psychoanalytical, linguistic and cultural depiction of the female characters.

Instead of reviewing women's writing as a result of sexism or misogyny, gynocriticism examines it as a fundamental component of female reality and it still continues as a remarkable contribution to the feminist literary criticism. By examining the economic, social, political and psychological dynamics that are present in literature, this school of thought aims to study and characterize the various ways that the story of male dominance is portrayed in literature.

Although second-wave feminism is frequently regarded as the start of more mainstream feminist literary criticism, numerous works published before that time made significant contributions to the area. First wave of feminism also made significant contributions to literature and the representation of women in it during that time. One of the foundational pieces is unquestionably Virginia Woolf's *The Room of One's Own* published in 1929. In it, she makes the case that a woman needs to own her own space and have financial security in order to write creatively and be successful critically. Despite the fact that the plot's central event is a speech by her at a conference for women's literature, the author speculates that there is still a long way to go for women in the creative sector particularly in light of the disparities in educational attainment between man and woman. But most of the foundations of contemporary feminist literary

criticism can be found in second-wave feminist movement. Theorists like Mary Ellman, Kate Millet and Germaine Greer questioned male centric literature that had a humiliating and oppressive view of women and also earlier concepts of the feminine in literary studies. By this time scholars, were more concerned in building a literary space for female scholars to validate experience in a true way that values the aesthetic form of their works also with focusing on narratives of oppression.

The Madwoman in the Attic, a study of women's poetry and prose and how it fits into the greater feminist literary canon was published in 1979 by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Particularly in the 20th century this publication extended the range of works regarded as feminist works and has since remained a mainstay of feminist criticism. In particular the book makes the case that men in academia have traditionally classified women as monsters or angels. Gilbert and Gubar believed that being constrained by these categories restricted women writers to particular genres of literature and writing, leaving the remainder exclusively open to men and that this caused a distinct anxiety among women writers to stick strictly within those genres or face mockery. Gilbert and Gubar emphasis on literary criticism in the context of poetry and other brief works has opened up new avenues for feminist literary contributions which were previously regarded as less significant than longer works.

In the book selected for present study, the Lane of Many Heads starts the narration of the story. The Lane which observes the people within its borders is biased to men. The only reason that lane starts narration is because of the woman's corpse. It is Mu'az, the photographer's apprentice who finds the corpse deep in the cleft between the two houses. The

important matter here is that the dead body is totally naked, so nobody is ready to take responsibility because they believe that it will bring shame to the family. Among the crowd on the lane, when women are asking to cover the dead body, the eyes of men are settled on the corpse's nipples and the bloom of darkness between her legs. They are enjoying even the nudity of a dead body. But here, Alem makes a remarkable statement that:

“For the first time, the woman lay unveiled in the alley for all eyes to see” (Alem 16). This statement shows another plight of Saudi woman who are obliged to wear abaya.

When Detective Nasser questions Halima, mother of Yusuf, in suspicion of him, Nasser is reminded of what has happened to his sister years back. When he was five, he has witnessed his father killing his sister for returning home without any clothes.

“As if possessed, he wrapped her up and dragged her into the house. He shoved her through the door. Fatima was getting to her feet when his father seized the first thing he could find, a coffee pot: whack” (Alem 20)

Nasser's father did not question why the girl was coming naked, instead he attacked her in the head with a coffee pot and gave the cause of death as asthma attack. The family was ashamed when they learn that their daughter was seen undressed by neighbours. The community also accepted the fact that their father had killed his daughter to protect the family's honor. The father had made a story that his daughter went out into the street naked because she became crazy when he did not allow her relationship with neighbour's son. The neighbours also played their part perfectly in burying the reality and they came to the house to mourn with

the mother and father, telling countless stories of death caused by asthma attack, insect bite etc.

In Arab culture, men hold themselves accountable for the sovereignty and dignity related to preserving the physical integrity and body parts of women. Furthermore, this explains why men discriminate against women from an early age but go to war to uphold a sense of honor after a particular loss or catastrophe. In the past, fathers in Arab society had the choice to get rid of their daughters out of concern that a girl may grow up and bring the family into unacceptable humiliation, which is seen to represent the behavior of the entire family (Alghamdi 12).

Each day, dozens of cases on either murder or rape comes to the police station, but at the end, most of them go to the files of suspect unidentified. After ripping of the lives of innocent girls, they escape by using their influences.

Aisha tells the stories about oppressed and estranged women in her email to her boyfriend David. She tells a story about a girl whose father detaining her in the cellar and preventing her from using a single masculine object. The girl was born to a man who was obsessed with chastity. From the moment she was born, the man imprisoned his daughter. Even grammatically masculine words weren't allowed in the area. Therefore, he sent her dinner on a feminine sauce rather than a macho plate. He never gave his daughter lamb, only meat from cows. He made sure she slept on a chaise longue rather than a bed that belonged to a man. Only bracelets were permitted on her, not earrings or necklaces. She used a male object—a scissor—that accidentally slipped into her grasp to set herself free. Aisha

shows how desperate the girl feels and how she sees the world her father has confined her in.

Aisha realizes that in school she was like an executioner in a doll factory. A smile, a meaningful glance, any simple string of beads, coloured hair ribbon, trace of nail polish etc was enough to subject a girl for punishment. Any attempt of self-expression was strictly prohibited. In her question “Does the Lane of Many Heads have a problem with girls?” (Alem 51), Aisha reveals the domination of the patriarchal society and reflects her feeling of oppression in the lane. Women in the lane are intended to be super women, a cross between their grandmothers who never raised their face veils, not even when eating with their husbands and the Popstars and dancers who writhe and scream in music videos. This illustrates how women are totally devoid of freedom and their proposed role is to be remain chaste and meet their husbands’ sexual desires.

The tale that Aisha tells about the girl imprisoned in the basement is similar to the real story of Umm al- Sa’d, the wife of al - Ashi the cook and mother of the adopted son Salih. It is a shocking affair what has happened to her. One night at the Lane, a foul stench draws the barking dogs to a plastic-wrapped mass that has been dumped there. It appears to be some leftover animal flesh. The smell reaches Al-Ashi, who was a young trainee at the time. He manages to chase the dogs away despite how unbearable it is. He encounters a body that resembles a skeleton when he rips the plastic bag apart. It is a moment he will never forget, and the physical odour is so overpowering that he is unable to determine whether the body is female or male, living or dead. After grabbing the body, he sprints to the hospital.

Nurses take a woman with a compressed chest, enlarged abdomen, and fever—most especially in her genital area—from the plastic bag. They reluctantly start washing her body even though they well anticipate its impending collapse. With each swipe of the alcohol-soaked sponge, stench of body decay deepens. To prove that they are treating the body like a live entity, the team takes more than an hour. The instant the doctor touches her stomach, her body reacts fiercely because the doctor's hand has dared to get close to the area where her swelling in the pubic region.

The physicians check her vagina after giving her an anesthetic injection, and they are astonished. They discover many kinds of gold jewelry there, including necklaces, bracelets, earrings, solid gold coins, and more, in the womb and vagina. They realize her identify only after police investigation. She is the only girl among four brothers and is the daughter of the milkman. Her brothers have imprisoned her and taken away her inheritance. They just provided the poor girl with scraps of stale bread and apple peels to eat. They finally throw her out in the alley for the dogs to eat after locking her up for years, under the assumption that she has ceased to exist.

It's really shocking and the way Alem describes the story make us visualise the situation as if it is happening right before our eyes. She makes us to emphasize with Umm al- Sa'd and also at the same time to probe into the situation which is an extreme form of assault that can happen to a woman.

Her brothers, they are not humans but cannibals. How can brothers behave to their only sister like that? It is because she is a woman. If she was a man, they shouldn't have done this to her. They know nobody in the lane

will question them because it is not a rare incident for the people. Each day, many women are subjected to various types of violence and nobody dares to question that. What the brothers have done to her is the uttermost brutality that is done to a woman. Locking up own sister for years and without giving any decent food to eat. She has suffered a lot while in imprisonment. Any person who is under detention by law will be given good food to eat, but here she is only given apple peels and stale bread and at the end she is thrown to dogs to eat. It is a fierce form of savagery that is done to woman even though they thought that she has died.

The girl in the story that Aisha tells and Umm al- Sa'd clearly demonstrate that patriarchal oppression of women, their social marginalization and cruelty done to them are based on the biological difference that separate women from men.

Even the Lane of Many Heads sees Umm al- Sa'd from a patriarchal mind. The lane abuses her by saying that she has enormous vagina that is capable of engulfing anything, she has broad shoulders, flat chests and masculine frame. It even sees women as a threat to men. Even a mere lane thinks like that, it means that each and every thing in lane is socially conditioned by patriarchal minds. It also shows that if a woman does not have a biological shape, she will be marginalized.

Women does not even have a freedom to read the book they love. Reading romance novels are culturally forbidden in the lane. A book that Aisha reads when she is in first year at the teacher's college is smuggled by her friend Leila. She has got when it has fallen out of one of her uncle's vehicles. He has been thinking about leaving it to his son. Women can't talk about love and also cannot read love related novels. Women are also not

allowed to have entertainment like men and this is evident when Mu'az talks to Nasser. Mu'az sisters does not even know what life is. Watching television is forbidden to them. Covered in black abayas from top to toe, they peak through a narrow crack in the door at the television in the nearby café. There is restriction for each and everything. Women in the lane are living as if they are born to little boxes. It is like magic when they can get out or stand in the doorway of their houses to get some fresh air.

The novel's language makes clear the notion that women are possessions to be passed between fathers brothers and husbands. The words Aisha employs in her email demonstrate how socially constrained women are and they are there unable to travel or explore without the consent of male guardians.

“My passport is temporary, for one trip only: I need a close male relative or guardian to renew it for me. Not having any male relatives left, I won't bother looking for a miracle if I'm going to be stopped by a piece of paper in the airport. Guardian's consent: “I allow this woman to travel and vouch that she will return”. That form gets men's blood pumping with visions of rulership and regalia. Try asking your father or husband or brother to sign that form and you'll understand what's meant by the phrase, “The sky shut in on itself”. Without it, I can't even choose to jump” (Alem 151)

Her father, her brother, then her husband is in charge of her. She needs their permission to travel. The disparities between the sexes serve evidence that women are underrepresented. Even though the country has

made some relaxation in female travelling in a recent year, there is still the restriction from the side of family and society.

In Mecca, arranged marriages are common custom. In accordance with her father's wishes Aisha marries Ahmed and after two months he divorces her. Two years later he comes back to make amends with her like a hunter who comes back to take back a prey which he forgets for two years. The Turkish Empress who made Aisha's wedding dress reminds that she was making her up to be presented to her husband as if she is some sort of presentation. Aisha also recalls her wedding day and compares herself to a doll. She remembers how he has carried her like he was carrying a load of firewood. Women are considered as possessions of men.

Tyranny against women is evident when Aisha's father pays her a visit the morning after her wedding while carrying a knife in his pocket with an intention to stab her to death because she does not show signs of being a virgin. But he hides the knife in his pocket and hand her a piece of paper, a sealed certificate that is given by her mother stating that Aisha has a rubber hymen. Aisha has done nothing wrong; she becomes like that because of her surgery. But everyone looks at her as if she has done something wrong.

This incident makes us to point our finger towards age old customs in Saudi Arabia. According to some experts, a girl's unbroken hymen represents her family's pride or honour because it is customary in the conservative Arab society for a female to only have sexual contact with her husband on the night of her wedding. It is considered shameful for a woman to no longer be a virgin before being married since women are still expected to act as a vehicle for male gratification and reproduction. Additionally, it is

believed that in ancient Arab societies, families were permitted to bury women alive if they felt that she would bring shame to their household. This belief also applied to women who were pregnant and attempted to induce miscarriages if they knew that the fetus was female (Alghamdi 13).

In the community, men view women as objects whose primary goal is marriage, which is also the reason why women pursue marriage. For instance, Yousria, Khalil the taxi driver's sister, experiences difficulties as a result of the single status and also growing older. Assuming that the only position to women in Saudi Arabia is marriage, she says:

“Khalil used to terrorize me by saying ‘I can picture you as a silent bride in one of those cages for dead women!’ And here I am, a spinster. I never married and never even went out into the world, and I’m waiting here in my cage for my funeral procession to set off. Death and I know each other pretty well after all this time”. (Alem 163)

Being isolated and shunned, Yousria spends her life in Hajj Silahdar's home for destitute to care for the aged and the sick. She thinks that she lives there because she is not married. She thinks so, because society has conditioned her in that way. So, she is awaiting death to embrace her.

Men who look at women's body with the eyes of vulture are not less in the society. When they don't get a human female body, they will look for other options. Salih is an example of this. When Nasser searches Salih's room, he cannot believe his eyes. Salih's room is filled with mannequins of women. He smuggles in mannequins and derive pleasure from sleeping

with them. He becomes addicted to mannequins. Salih's this mentality shows the mind of men who does not spare even mannequins.

Alem with her skill in writing depicts some other women also to infuse to us the pathetic condition of women there. When it comes to Ramziya, Khalil the taxi driver's wife, he hates her because she is the daughter of a sewage cleaner. He views her only as a toy to play with and fancies on Azza. Then comes Jameela. Azza's old father marries Jameela, who is only fifteen years old. He at first, considers her as a sexual device that will give him a male heir. But then he treats her as an inferior creature and sends her to her own family after a few days of marriage. He sees her only as an object to satisfy his sexual desires. The female characters are described by male characters as tools for satisfying their sexual needs.

In the second part of the novel, which opens in Madrid, we see Nora who is under the captivity of Sheikh. She appears to be a young woman staying in the most opulent hotel in the centre of Madrid, but only she is aware of her true situation.

While talking about her father she makes clear that her father did not like her because she was not a male heir. She was afraid of her father, so she used to look down on him from above. He used to send bar candy sometimes but that had gone past their expiration date. The only thing she shared with him was a yearly feast day breakfast. From this it is evident that how much hatred a father has to his daughter because she is not a male heir.

Now she is with Sheikh but her condition is not better than before. He uses her for his sexual enjoyment and often she is subjected to Physical violence. He considers her as a sexual slave. She has been sold to him by her father and she is living as if she is a prostitute. Sheikh uses Nora for his

material gains. He presents her to other man for his achievements. He takes her to a business tycoon known as building crow and there she is exploited physically and sexually. One of the men of building crow, Bundug tries to abuse her. When she reacts, she is subjected to cruel punishments. What Nora bears is above the bearable level of any human.

At Jeddah, during Nora's art exhibition, Mu'az finds out who really, she is. He sends this message to Yusuf that Azza is alive. When Yusuf tries to take her with him, she rejects. She knows wherever she goes, Sheikh's eyes will be on her, so she goes back to hotel. This situation of hers throws light on the plight of women who is under the clutches of men.

Alem, with her extraordinary ability, portrays the problems of women because they are born as so-called "woman".

Chapter Three

Resistance of strong women against patriarchy

Nobody can subjugate anybody for a long time. For example, when we look at the history of several countries in the world, they have been subjugated by colonial powers, but soon all of them started gaining freedom from their oppressors. They have gained their Independence because they resisted and fought for their rights. From several parts of the world, today women are raising their voice against oppression. Today's women are strong. They do not sit back by tolerating the sufferings. They may be subjected to abuse, but they will resist and fight against oppressors. # Me too movement is an example. It is an international resistance against sexual harassment. It started in the US and expanded rapidly throughout the world in 2017.

Raja Alem through her novel *The Dove's Necklace* not only draw our attention to several abuses faced by women, but also resistance of strong women for gaining freedom. Alem, in the novel depict strong women who include natives and residents of Saudi Arabia. In a country like Saudi, they show the guts to show their courage. They are able to challenge the rules and the men around them and also confront taboo subjects. Strong women in the novel includes Aisha, Azza, Aunt Etra, Umm al- Sa'd, Halima, Turkish women, Marie the Lebanese women etc.

Halima is a single mother who is illiterate. Even though she is illiterate she knows how to live in such a society. After the death of Azza's mother, it is Halima who takes care of Azza. She equally considers Azza and Yusuf. She protects Azza as if a hen protects its children under its wings. She becomes the real mother of Azza. As a single mother who is

young and beautiful, she faces several hardships, but she bravely confronts all of that.

After her husband has been kidnapped, Halima raises her son with the low-income she gets from her small business. She is not bothered about other people talking about her. She goes to weddings by wearing dresses that other single women in the society refuses to wear because of the fear of the society and she also wear high heels. When people criticize her for being the mother of Yusuf who is accused of murder, she does not feel bad and she firmly believes in her son.

From the words of Nora, it is evident that the woman she talks about is Halima. Nora's father did not like her. During her difficult days it was Halima who was always with her. To her, Halima is her own mother. Halima becomes an example for all single mothers. Instead of crying and thinking about her fate, she bravely fights the odds in her life and raises her children.

There is no doubt why aunt Etra comes to Detective Nasser's mind when he questions Halima. This happens because aunt Etra is a strong-willed woman like Halima. She is portrayed as queen of Wadi Mehrim in the Surat mountains. In Muslim society, men are allowed to marry more than once and have many wives. Nobody questions this even the bride is many years younger than the men. But what happens when a woman does this. Then, there will be total chaos. There are so many rules and regulations for Muslim women. When a woman wants to remarry her husband after divorce, she has to marry another man and consummate the marriage. There are so many weird rules that restrict the wishes of women.

Aunt Etra is an exception in this case. She has married half a dozen men and most of them are younger than her. Aunt Etra really is a brave woman. She shows the courage to go against the rules of religion. She has used her own life to resist against the evils of the society. Her snake-like ability to immobilize a man with a single glance and drive him insane with desire made her famous. She has ability to see straight through a guy to his semen. Her eyes can penetrate all the way to his spine and she knows how to touch all most vital points on a man's body.

Aunt Etra is a strong woman. When detective Nasser's father has murdered his sister Fatima, there was only Aunt Etra who dared to stand up to his father at his sister's funeral. She knew the exact reason for Fatima's death even though all the family members and neighbors stated it as asthma attack. She goes to the police station to tell them what had happened with the coffeepot. During that time, it is rarest of rare for women to step her feet on police station. But she has only met with pitying eyes. She comes to the realization that it would be simpler for her to get into the Guinness Book of World Record than to penetrate those people's thick, almost armor-plated skulls and their concepts of honor.

Aunt Etra vows she would never again enter his home. She really is an inspiration for other woman who has a spark of resistance in their mind. Instead of woman among relatives and neighbors who chose to close their mouth in name of honor, she showed the courage to question injustice done to Fatima.

By analyzing the language used in the novel, it is understandable that on contrary to the conventional stereotype, the female characters openly express their affection as well as utilize vocabulary that is specific to

women. Despite being a female writer from Saudi, Alem presents women who express their feelings openly, in a society where it is a shame for a girl to announce her name. Aisha is one woman among them. Aisha means 'alive'. Even though it is evident that the dead body belongs to Aisha, she is very much alive in her email. She is one among the two protagonists of the novel.

Aisha was in her thirties. After the accident, she goes to Germany for treatment and she falls in love with the German doctor. This is unlike other Arab women who does not look at the face of other men other than their husband. Aisha is an exception from other Arab women. If it was any other woman other than Aisha, being divorced by husband and had lost all other family members, she would have committed suicide. But she, Aisha rises from ashes like a Phoenix. She is the lone fighter in the path of life which is filled with thorns.

Unlike other Arab women who are afraid of expressing their desires, Aisha expresses her feelings and desires openly in the emails she has sent to her German boyfriend. Language used by Aisha reveals an unexpected side of Saudi women who discuss taboo topics like sex. Aisha is the new generation's representative in Mecca. Aisha's emails show her daring attitude to discuss on her relationship with David.

“My heart took me by surprise that day and slipped away to alert my body, as your hand massaged this shattered pelvis of mine. I no longer know which bits of me are metal and which are living bone. I imagine that now, in the heart, it's becoming actually sensitive, that it burns at the touch of your large hand, those fingers” (Alem 50)

“I finished last in that race-it took me thirty years to have my first organism. The whole world is built around two bodily orifices. Everything else is just padding that disappears at first contact” (Alem 236)

Aisha is different from all other girls in the lane. Even though the email is sent to her lover by herself, she is not afraid of mentioning about the relationship they had. Other girls born and brought in that society does not have the courage to do like this. Her emails are poetic, open love letter and they are outpourings of a woman’s secret heart. Alem has succeeded in exploring women’s heart. Only a female writer like Alem can do this. Only a woman can explain women’s experience of sexuality, and sexual pleasure from a woman’s point of view.

The girl in the story Aisha mentions in one of her emails is another valiant woman. Despite being imprisoned by father in the basement, she does not give up on hope and makes her own way to the outside world when a scissor falls into her hand. The escape she has done is what the women of Mecca has failed to achieve.

Aisha is a feminine miracle. Her adolescence began in distress and she had a history with scalpels. But she has over come all of that. Even though her husband has accused her for rubber hymen and divorced her for that, she does not criticize herself and not think it is because of her inability to satisfy her husband. That’s why she enters into another relationship and she is not afraid of that. She recovers from the after effect of the accident because of her will power.

Aisha’s confidence is evident in her resistive deeds. Even if she knows that they are not allowed to read love novels, she does so. There is

resistance in Aisha's each word and deeds. She depicts a society that includes everything from criminality and religious extremism to the exploitation of foreign labourers by a building contractor gang. When she realizes that David has a wife, Aisha decides to end her relationship with him. It shows her refusal to be a mistress. She has a strong identity.

Aisha is an intriguing character. She is enraged and frustrated by the way her community treats women and how those same women put up with it. She is honest about her identity and her beliefs. She is the epitome of feminism, confident in her own character and in her entitlement to equal treatment.

There is a desire in every woman's mind to break the shackles of restrictions and live in their own way at least for one day. This desire comes out during the National Day. Aisha presents a vivid portrayal of girls in Jeddah enjoying their one-day freedom. Without fearing anyone, they show the guts to represent them in their own way to everyone. Girls hangout with boys, they dance, exchange victory cries etc. In this one single day they express who they really are without even minding headscarves they have to wear all other days.

Azza is like a bird who wants to stretch her wings and soar high in the sky. She is a girl who has no fear. Even Aisha is envious of Azza. Through her charcoal drawings, she escapes from the state of repression imposed on her by her father. In contradiction to other girls in the lane, Azza is always cheerful. She runs to the vendors selling micro kebab in order to snag one of the deep-fried beefs and the Millet balls. The doughnut vendor is also generous, sprinkling his fried delicacies with sugar or liberally peppering them. She has used to pause to admire the enormous

pots of Java beans simmering in homemade ghee and hear the sound of wooden pestles chopping bread into large vats to be combined with honey or banana to make a ma'soub.

“Azza was like a time bomb in the Lane of Many Heads”

(Alem103). Azza with her charismatic behaviour become the centre of attraction of the lane. Many men get attracted to her. She is not only the beloved of Yusuf, but also a desire for other men including Khalil, Mu'az, Mushabbab etc.

Women in the lane are embarrassed of their body. But Azza is never embraced of her body. During puberty, even Aisha was shamed to see her body transforming into an adult woman. She did not want her female teachers, other woman or even her mother to see her body. But Azza is not like her. She considers there is something wrong with those women who are embarrassed of their body. She is a charming woman.

“She'd wear a rocket bra that pushed her breasts out for all to see. She'd add a belt to any skimpy thing she wore to cut her in half at the waist and accentuate her curves. Even without a belt, the way she stood was seductive: hands on her hips, as if she were re-sculpting the latent thrill of her body.” (Alem128).

Azza is an example of modern Arabic women. In a highly patriarchal society, where women are afraid and embarrassed to show even their faces, Azza stands away from the norm. By wearing rocket bra and showing her exact body shape she was declaring an open war to those who make women to cover up fully as if mummies. In a society where they are not allowed to even wear the dress they like, Azza shines distinctly with her brave action.

Azza talks about everything. She does what she wants to do. Azza has used to sneak into Mushabbab's garden. She breaks away from the little container into which the girls of the Lane are born into. She knows how to flirt and talk in ways that society does not accept. She has been doing exactly the things that a normal woman in the lane is afraid to do. When she catches a glimpse of a swarm of bees, she does not flee but instead laughs and marches right into the attack and survives the stings. She is not ready to fit into the cage every woman in the lane is thrown to. She wants to explore everything. She flies like a wild bird.

The conflict between men and women can be explored by looking at the psychology of the female characters in the novel. Umm al- Sa'd is the mighty woman in the novel. She has fought and triumphed against the injustice of men. To men in the alley, she is a woman who fell from Azrael's jaws. This is somewhat true. Azrael is the angel of death according to Islam. She has fallen from the clutches of death. She truly came back from death which is impossible. She came back to life again because she was not ready to give up her life to those monsters. She wants to fight against them.

From the time of imprisonment, when she was nearly dead, she was resting against them. She has been resisting, resisting to live, resisting against the whole mankind until she was thrown out after several years of imprisonment. She hid all the jewelry she had inherited from her mother inside her body. Necklaces, bracelets, earrings, solid gold coins etc. all were safe inside her vagina. Even though they become suspicious of her, her brothers did not dare to profane their sister's virtue. She is really above the level that all mankind can think of.

Umm al- Sa'd's survival is really heroic. In other words, it can be said that she is the hero of the lane. After marrying al- Ashi, she scatters apple crates throughout the alley and showers the neighbours with roasted seeds, husks of which would be chewed on and spit out, in remembrance of her valiant survival. With her flourish as a stock broker, she calls out for an open rebellion.

“Her Internet browser was open at the website of the national stock exchange and the women from the neighborhood were arrayed around her, munching their way through roasted sunflower seeds and the latest news and rumors. They all watched her when she sat up straight and with a heart like steel-clicked to confirm the purchase of a thousand shares in Shams Ltd., which had been losing value over the past few days.”

(Alem79)

She acquires the knowledge to use the stock market online and enhance her money and surpass the male stock brokers. She raises money for the local people by collecting money from them. In record time, she declares victory. The other women also start imitating her. She is viewed by the woman as a representation of tenacity in their fight against men.

The Lebanese woman Marie is a representative of progress and modernism. Marie is the wife of al Lababidi the photographer. She is not like the ordinary Arab women who are engulfed by black abayas. She is not afraid of living in her own way in such a society.

“Standing there at the top of the staircase, he was bewitched by the woman reclining with her legs crossed. She was perhaps in her sixties, though she could easily have been in her forties, and

the adolescent Mu'az did not notice the flabbiness around her knees--only the shimmer of the silk stockings hugging her bare calves, which stood like two of heaven's white-sugar columns. He had been startled for a moment, astonished to see a woman like her within the circle of the Haram Mosque.” (Alem136)

She does not seem to be living in Saudi Arabia. She does not even once wear dress like conventional Arabic women. Even though she is in her sixties, she is like a young girl. Even Mu'az becomes astonished to see her. She is unlike the women in the society. She does not obey restrictions that are put on women by men. She is good at making smoke rings with cigarettes even if she knows smoking is forbidden in old Mecca. Even before Mu'az discovering his talent and the artist in himself, Marie realizes that with her trained eye. She gives him a professional camera and teach him how to use the camera. She instructs him to how see, what to see and click photos. Therefore, Marie is capable of instructing him to adore photography and arts. This woman offers hope by showing that women are strong enough to fight oppression.

The Turkish Seamstress or the Turkish woman is the next one who stands in the line. She is not as oppressed as other women in the society. Even though she is not facing as much struggles, she is not standing back in showing her opposition against age old customs, traditions and beliefs with regard to women. She is entirely different from all other women in the lane. She has showed her resistance in the form of her attire. When wearing abaya is a cultural feature for Meccan women, Nazik the Turkish women does not adhere to such type of customs. She wears shoulder length chandelier earrings and jubbah with sequins and stud. Wearing what she

like itself shows her bold attitude. When other women in the lane are afraid to do this, even though they have the desire, the Turkish woman stands out in the line. She also tries to make other woman like her. She introduces new fashion to the place where women are not allowed to wear according to their wish and restricted to black abaya. She is known by the name the Turkish Empress of fashion as she swore to atone for all that the harm her Ottoman ancestors had done to the women of the nation. Her aim is to end the isolation of women, use of mask of black colour, black abaya covering their body from head to toe like black tent and their covering of faces with white veils.

Her breakthrough in the Lane of Many Heads come in the form of Aisha's wedding dress. She designs the wedding dress in entirely new form which the lane has never seen. It is Turkish women who got the first bride ever to forgo the Hijazi attire. She does not cover her face like other women in Mecca. She expresses her sexual feelings openly. She shows her desire towards Khalil and does sex with him. She is almost similar to Aisha who expresses her feelings without any fear unlike other women in the lane who suppresses their desires. Turkish woman is strong enough to speak to detective Nasser when all others in the lane are afraid to talk to him.

Azza is always bold whether she is Azza or Nora. Her transformation into Nora is really astounding. Although she is under the Sheikh, she has become braver than before. When Sheikh physically abuses her, although her body becomes weak, her mind does not become weak. She attacks him back with all the energy she has. She has fire in her heart. when Sheikh think that she is always under his control by using Rafi, on the other hand Nora sneak away from the hotel at every time she gets a chance.

She uses the time to spend face to face with world and she begins to explore herself and love herself. When she is under the subjugation of Sheikh, she fights back with her strong will power. She is able to teach the girls in the lane to be brave enough so that they can go out and have their own lives. Even at the time when Bundug is physically abusing her as her soul is being torn away, she does not capitulate to him.

According to her wish, Nora becomes one of the most important women artists of Saudi Arabia and her exhibition done at Saudi help people who know her to realize her. Although she goes back inside the hotel by denying Yusuf's offer, she does so to confront Sheikh. She is not ready to flee like a coward. Even though she had a chance to escape earlier she does not do so. She does not want to run away and live in a hide out. On the other hand, she boldly takes the decision to confront him.

Alem with her mastery in writing, not only depicts attitude of men towards women but also demonstrate how women resist these issues and how much strong they are.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Women have always been oppressed since the dawn of history. Even in the twenty-first century, women struggle for survival and respect. Women face challenges and they have to deal with a variety of concerns in every aspect of life. The acknowledgement of rights as a human being is hampered by the oppression of women.

Women are obliged to fulfill a multifaceted role in society as care givers, mothers, wives, daughters etc. Despite the fact that women contribute equally to the development of a country, prejudice based on gender still persists. Women are denied of their fundamental rights and are left to struggle. Women face problems, including dowry, female foeticide, domestic abuse, disinheritance, rape, human trafficking etc. In addition to this, incidences of women disappearing from their married homes are related to the oppression of women.

Patriarchy is a major contributing factor to violence done against women. Desire for a male child plays a major role in that. Husband abuses wife for not giving a male child to him, father does this because she is not male heir and brothers for getting her inheritance. Violence takes forms of beating, hitting, humiliation in public and other physical and psychological abuse. Majority of violence occurs to women from within their house hold.

Most societies are entwined with a patriarchal normative world from which women seldom ever receive actual justice. The ideal of equality between men and women is scarcely found. By compelling people to follow conservative behaviours that are harmful to women, religious organisations frequently make the lives of women worse. The oppression of women is

often aided and perpetrated by the indigenous cultures and religion. This will be greater in especially highly patriarchal countries like Saudi Arabia. While facing oppression, there are some women who are strong enough to resist the patriarchal giants. Many writers have written about the plight of women in a patriarchal society, but only a female writer can explicitly portray what are the problems a woman faces from her society and also her reaction to that. Raja Alem is a writer like that.

Raja Alem's *The Dove's Necklace* is worthy to be analysed as a women's writing. She draws attention to the continuous conflict between Saudi Arabia's religious conservatives and those who are viewed as liberals and also how society is divided on gender lines.

According to Alem, literature's primary purpose is the freedom of the individual. Because of this, she contends that intellectuals can leave their imprint by breaking the pattern of thinking that the culture imposes on individuals.

Through her master piece, Alem has carefully drawn our attention to desire for freedom among women in Saudi Arabia. Starting with the dead body of a woman, she calls our attention to the Lane of Many Heads in Mecca. Portraying the lane itself from male perspective, Alem makes clear on the fact that it is a highly patriarchal society where it is challenging for a woman to live.

As the investigation continues, Detective Nasser suspects that the murdered women are either Azza who may be murdered by Yusuf or Aisha who may have been murdered by her ex-husband Ahmed, when he learnt of her relationship with her German boyfriend. When questioning Halima, he remembers what has happened to his sister years back. His sister is

murdered by their father in order to preserve the family's honour. And the way his father kills his sister is extremely cruel. He has smacked her head with a coffee pot and she has died at that instant. Killing one's own child, it's really barbaric. Even the animals do not kill their own children. What his father has done is beyond justification. Instead of asking her and supporting her, what he tries to do is to protect the family's honour. He puts his honour above the girl's life.

Women in the lane are not allowed to live in the way that they want. Greater than societal restrictions, what women face is oppression from their own houses. All women in the lane know this as they have grown up by hearing stories like that. In one of her emails sent to David, Aisha tells the tale of a girl who has been imprisoned by her father for several years. The girl's father is like detective Nasser's father who is obsessed with his daughter's chastity. From the moment the girl is born, she is imprisoned by her father by not allowing any masculine object fall into her hand.

This tale Aisha tells about the girl is almost similar to the tale of Umm al- Sa'd. What has happened to her is an extreme form of violence that can happen to a woman. Imprisoning their sister by not giving anything decent to eat and finally throws out her for the dogs to eat. The girl in the story and Umm al- Sa'd is the correct example of violence done on the basis of biological difference. They are the victims of the cruel deeds of patriarchy.

When a woman is not feminine enough, she will be criticized by the society. Umm al- Sa'd is again an example for this. Even the Lane itself criticises her for having broad shoulders and flat chest. It considers her as a

masculine frame. When a mere alley thinks like that, what will be in the mind of so-called masculine people.

From a very small age, girls in the society are trained according to the wish of society. Alem compares the girls to dolls, who can't do anything of their own and have to be like what others want them to be. She does this because it draws attention to how they are required to confirm to imposed rules that not only obliterate their public appearance but also alienate from them from their physical needs and desires. For instance, Aisha refers to the girls school she worked at as a doll factory where the girls' individuality is murdered and for any attempt to show their uniqueness through their thoughts, attire, body language etc., they have to face punishment. Aisha acknowledges that she was a part of that system and realise that she was like one of the arms of the lane that strangle young girls.

There is restriction for women for everything in the lane. They can't even read the novel they like. They are restricted from reading the romance novels. When anyone finds out women doing this they will be punished or else they have to read without being noticed by anyone. They are also not allowed to watch television programs.

Wearing abayas is their cultural aspect. The expectation about women in Saudi is that they always have to wear abayas when they are outside. Women are respected in their society more the more they are covered. As though abayas are the only appropriate clothing for women, police men do not check any cars whose riders are women. When anyone wants to escape after committing a crime they can easily escape if they wear abaya. Women are made to wear that. Even at times taking photos,

they have to fully cover their head. When young women show a few locks of hair in the photo for official purposes, it will be sent back to be replaced by another perfect photograph.

In the novel, Aisha discusses how Saudi women have been unable to break away from the societal confines they have experienced. For instance, they were strongly forbidden by religion from traveling, conducting business, attending college etc. without the consent of a male guardian. Even though the country has now made relaxation for travelling, it was not the situation a few years back. Aisha ridicules this control on women because especially in her own case, she can't travel outside of Saudi Arabia anymore because she cannot obtain the necessary permission as she has lost all of her male guardians. She also discusses on the concealment of women's bodies in public places, particularly with reference to the manner in which they cover themselves from head to toe which includes concealing the face, which renders them invisible to both themselves and society. According to her, young girls develop a dread of the outside world which is exacerbated by the rigid education system because it further isolates them. When they hit puberty, their bodies are heavily covered and therefore they lose their sense of identity.

Saudi society is centered on the strict segregation of gender, where women are permitted to interact with men only in their homes and not in public places. Dating between the sexes is prohibited and marriages are decided by men in the family. Men however harass women if they get a chance. Alem's argument here criticizes the alliance between the Wahhabi religious establishment and the Al- Saud rulers of Arabia and how their patriarchal interpretation of Islam has shunned women and their bodies

from the public sphere. Alem like other Saudi female writers criticises the misogynist interpretations of faith rather than its principles.

According to the traditional beliefs in Saudi Arabia, a woman's virginity should be lost only at the intercourse with husband after marriage. If a woman loses her virginity before marriage, she will be subjected to contempt. Aisha and Umm al- Sa'd is the instance for this. In the case of Aisha even though she loses her virginity due to her medical condition, she is not accepted by her family and her husband's family. When we take the case of Umm al- Sa'd, instead of criticizing her brothers for imprisoning her, people criticize her for hiding ornaments in her vagina and thus losing her virginity.

Yousria, Jameela, and Ramziya are powerless women who are under the feet of patriarchy. Because of the reason she is not married, Yousria is living in a house for destitute. She also thinks in a way that she is living like that because she is not married. Jameela is a young girl who falls into the trap of old father of Azza. He treats her as an object to satisfy his sexual desires. When he finishes his job, he sends her back. While talking about Ramziya, she is only a toy to play with for Khalil.

It is when Azza turns into Nora, Alem throws light deeply into her life. Azza's father does not like her because she is a girl, not a male heir. He does not spend time with her. When she is with Sheikh, she experiences the worst days in her life. He not only uses her for his sexual satisfaction, but also gives her like a slave to other people for his personal gains.

Through her brilliant work, Alem also shows how these women characters try to overcome these problems and how they express their emotions openly. During the time, when all the people remain silent when

Nasser's father kill his sister in fear of honour, there is one person who dares stand up against this injustice. Even though aunt Etra does not get justice from police station, she shows the courage to stand against the whole family, neighbourhood and Society.

Halima is a woman like aunt Etra. Despite being facing several challenges as a single mother, she raises her son and Azza, who is ignored by her father. Without giving ear to others talk, she lives her life in her own way and boldly fights against all the problems in her life.

Aisha and Azza are the two open minded and combatant women in the lane. They live like as if they are sisters and they are neighbours also. After surviving the accident, Aisha does not spend her life by weeping like other women. Her life goes on with the course of time. She is not afraid of falling in love. Although she had bad experiences from Ahmed, she daringly starts a relationship with the German doctor. She is also open in expressing what she feels. She expresses her desires in the emails.

Despite knowing that society has prohibited women from reading love novels, she does so as an open rebellion. The girl in the story she mentions about is also a brave girl., she digs her way out from her father's oppression. But even though Aisha tries hard to gain freedom by resisting using all her energy, she does not get the type of freedom she has dreamt off. But, thinking in another way, it can be said that Aisha has achieved her freedom when her soul has separated from the body that had been controlled by men all those years.

Azza finds Solace from her oppressive father through charcoal drawings. Azza is not embarrassed of her body unlike other girls in the lane. Even though she is wearing abaya she is always careful in wearing it in her

own way. She is not afraid of darkness. She sneaks out of her house during night and uses the time to explore the places she like and explore herself too. She breaks away from the restriction that society has put on the dream of women.

Umm al- Sa'd is the strongest woman. She bravely faces her brothers by hiding her jewelry inside her body. After her heroic survival, she flourishes as a stock broker, by surpassing all the men in the lane. She also become an inspiration for other women in the lane.

Marie and the Turkish women are strong enough to fight oppression even if they are not as oppressed as other woman characters. They are not afraid of violating restrictions put on women. Like Azza and Aisha, they also express their feelings openly.

While facing physical assault from Sheikh, Nora is not becoming mentally weak. Although her body becomes weak, she confronts him with her strong will power. She is not afraid of sheikh. She sneaks out from there at a times. Azza continues to articulate her existence and opposition to dominance through her artistic creativity, but this time she does so professionally and through a public display in Jeddah. As her paintings feature figures with amputated hands and legs or with severed limbs, they focus on the topic of the repression of the body. Both male and female viewers of her work express their identification with the paintings and acknowledgement of their repressed bodies in the damaged figures.

The fact that she is not afraid of sheikh becomes visible when she returns into the hotel room. Even though she goes in, she does so to confront him instead of running away.

Through the novel, Alem has become successful in portraying the plight of women in her society and also shows even though they face several problems, these women have lions chained in their heart that will come out at any instant.

Saudi Arabia is a country which has several restrictions on women. Even if women's rights are expanding in the country, the kingdom provides extremely little freedom and autonomy for women in comparison to the rest of the globe. The country's guardian system historically accounted for a large portion of this social control, requiring a woman to get permission from male guardian in order for her to travel, pursue education for job, have surgery, get engaged or get married. Despite the fact these prohibitions on women have been reducing the pace of these shifts is really startling. Women could not obtain ID card prior to 2006 without the consent of guardian. And it is in 2018, only a few years back, the Saudi government declared that women would be allowed to drive and join sporting venues for the first time.

Wahhabism, which is practiced strictly in Saudi Arabia, is a form of Islam that demands strict gender segregation unless the woman is married or related. Segregated public transportation, building entrances etc. institutionalize this. Even if they are married, public shows of affection between the opposite sexes are inappropriate.

Women are directed to follow their Guardian's orders and dress modestly. Although it is no longer necessary for women to cover their head in public and wear Abaya, it is practical only in the case of foreign women. However, by law, foreign Women must wear modestly which mean they must cover the whole body in loose, non-clinging clothing and not show

any skin on the chest, arms, legs or waist. The hair can, however, be left uncovered if they want.

The native Saudi women will continue to wear abayas, because they are moulded in that way by the society. Because it is no longer strict donning the abaya and head scarf, it does not prevent Saudi women from continuing to do so. Islam mandates wearing of abaya or similar cloak and families and Saudi society as a whole demand it. They are still worn by women for religious reasons and as a sign of respect for their customs, traditions and culture. If we go to Saudi Arabia, it will be rare to see a Saudi woman without abaya. It will take some time, if ever, for Saudi women to go out in public without wearing an abaya.

Even though laws on guardianship system-allowing women to travel, pursue their education, get married, get a job, have eased, there are significant issues with implementation. Some people are concerned that guardians will still be able to formally or unofficially circumvent these laws. In reality, most women still require their guardian's permission. Women have to rely on the male relatives to determine the course of their lives.

There have been some changes, but no real difference in the Nation's perspective on freedom. Gender equality remains a desirable goal for the distant future, notwithstanding recent easing of several restrictive rules in the kingdom. There is a long way for the country to go on for achieving freedom of women.

Raja Alem has brilliantly woven together the desire of Saudi women to achieve this freedom despite being oppressed. She suggests a radical shift in thought towards female empowerment and sexual autonomy.

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