

Gender Discourse and Stereotypes in Literature

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Abstract

Men and women share the same space geographically, yet women are accorded a lower status than men. In reality, there exists inequality in women's access to education, health care, physical and financial resources and opportunities in the political, economic, social and cultural field. It may be possible to accept totally Simone de Beauvoir's view as argued in "The Second Sex" (1949) that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" in a society controlled by men. Gender consciousness is a socially given notion and sex roles are defined by society. Given this constraint, it stands to reason 'how women writers and women characters define freedom and relate to power structure differently.' George Orwell in his essay "Inside the Whale" (1956) stated that "Novel is a protestant form of art; it is the product of the free mind, of the autonomous individual". Taking this definition in its full implications, one is compelled to examine the nature of this freedom, of the kind of freedom available to women, who are also cultural constructs, a culture which is dominantly male despite the feminist positions. Women's discourse is a serious subject one fraught with complexities and contradictions and with a long history, one as long as mankind. It is imperative to pay attention to women writers, who might well be considered as the most privileged among women in the historical terms. In the writings of the post-colonial women writers such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, and Margaret Laurence, the quest for identity is enacted as a journey of the woman protagonist, whereas traditional literature has been concerned chiefly with the adventure journeys of men. This journey of the female protagonist is more psychological than physical, and the journey in space is also a journey in time. In fact, there is a parallel between the female protagonist's journey and her psychological journey in time. The present study attempts to highlight the socio-psychological implications of the prevailing gender discourse as reflected in literature, social and cultural discourse, depicting the stereo-type of gender roles. It puts forward an important question, 'Is there no space beyond that of being a daughter, a wife or a mother that a woman can occupy in the society?' It attempts to expose the hypocrisy of the affluent patriarchal society and show how female protagonists, in search of their meaning of life, undergo a journey in isolation by withdrawing and alienating themselves from it.

Key words: Gender consciousness, cultural constructs, sex roles, women's discourse, stereotypes.

"Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
Man for the sword and for the needle she:
Man with the head and woman with the heart:
Man to command and woman to obey;
All else confusion."

Alfred Lord Tennyson (*The Princess*, 1847).

Introduction:

Women's discourse is a serious subject, one fraught with complexities and contradictions and with a long history, one as long as mankind. It is imperative to pay attention to women writers, who might well be considered the most privileged among women in historical terms, since they have been accorded equality with

men from earliest times. Yet, paradoxically, women writers are the most privileged of their sex; they are also the most acutely aware of what it means to be women functioning within a society that has evolved structures of power in which an imposed code of social behaviour has hitherto restricted their freedom. George Orwell in his essay, *Inside the Whale* (1956) stated that, “Novel is a protestant form of art; it is the product of the free mind, of the autonomous individual”. Taking this definition in its full implications one is compelled to examine the nature of this freedom, of the kind of freedom available to women, who are also cultural constructs, a culture, which is dominantly male despite the feminist positions. It may also be possible to accept totally Simone de Beauvoir’s view as argued in *The Second Sex* (1949) that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” in a society controlled by men. The truth remains that gender consciousness is a social given. Sex roles are defined by society. Given this constraint, it stands to reason that women writers and women characters will define freedom and relate to power structure differently. Marriage, family and procreation become their way of relating, while family relationships remain the normative pattern. They may also undergo a change through a subtle rebellion, a questioning, defiance, or surrender.

Oppressed women’s psychological trauma in Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain*:

Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* can be analyzed as a feminist discourse, often the oppressed women’s discourse. The women protagonists of Desai’s novel are involved in a continuous process of reconstruction, and also deconstruction as well. On another and more important level, they either choose or are forced to destroy and then reassemble and in that sense of the word, reconstruct the overwhelming traditions they have inherited as daughters, sisters, wives, mothers, grandmothers, widows and hermitage dwellers. Time determines this two-fold process of reconstruction. It sets out to tell a woman’s story, a woman as daughter, wife and mother, who has undergone these different phases of life. It is a female-centered narrative, which exhibits the lives of three women - the elderly Nanda Kaul, her great granddaughter Raka and Nanda’s lifelong friend Ila Das. Shyam M. Asnani (1981) puts it about these characters, each “live in a closed, sequestered limbo of private suffering.” Criticism of *Fire on the Mountain* has tended to focus Anita Desai’s detailed study of these three female characters, and in particular on her presentation of Nanda Kaul, the protagonist of the novel.

In reply to a questionnaire, Desai once stated that she writes about “human condition”, not the male or female condition. However, in most instances, Desai writes about the human condition pertaining to the women. The central characters in the novel are women, and in it she explores the traumatic psychic experiences of her major characters, which are caught in the gradual disintegration of a traditional value system. In the absence of satisfactory alternatives, they often find themselves in confronting and conflicting dilemmas. The characters are located within a certain social framework, and their environment conditions their responses. Hence, though Desai has stated that her novels are not reflections of Indian society, this aspect cannot be ignored in her novels. In post-colonial women writers such as Desai, Roy, and Margaret Laurence, the quest for identity is enacted as a journey of the woman protagonist, whereas traditional literature has been concerned chiefly with the adventure journeys of men. This journey of the female protagonists is more psychological than physical, and the journey in space is also a journey in time. In fact, there is a parallel between the female protagonist’s journey and her psychological journey in time (Macleod, 1996).

Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* deals with a destructive encounter between past and present, symbolized through Nanda, the wife of a retired Vice-Chancellor. In an attempt to escape the male-centred demands of family life, she chooses the isolation and has retreated to Carignano, a small villa in Kasauli, and does not want to be stirred into life:

What pleased and satisfied her so, here in Carignano, was its barrenness, its starkness... occasionally, an eagle passed through the clear, unobstructed mass of light rain. That was all (Desai, 1997: p.4).

In the opening of the novel, Nanda is a solitary figure in the hills. Carignano, to her, is more than a cottage. It is a symbol of the freedom denied to her over the years. She had created a glorified image of herself as wife and mother. However, all the while she was deceiving others and trying to deceive herself by denying reality. Carignano is her retreat from the world, from the tensions that had driven her from most of her marital life. To be sure, at one level, the house symbolizes a continuity of life while its different occupants come and go. This becomes understandable when we remember that Nanda is caught at the point in her life where, unable to recollect her past with pride or anticipate her future into a "motionless constancy". But at another level, the very choice of Carignano as a heaven, a retreat, points to the contradictions in Nanda's own life that emerge so sharply during the course of the novel. In fact, as the past filters through the consciousness of Nanda, we note with horror that the history of Carignano mirrors a heightened reflection of the traumas and psychic drives of Nanda's own life.

The concern of psychological reality by Anita Desai is clearly reflected in her novel *Fire on the Mountain*. The novel mainly deals with the loneliness and isolation as well as the resultant anguish and agony in the deserted life of an old woman. It deals with her determined detachment and non-involvement which is brought about by the unhappy conjugal ties which is also seen in Desai's other novels like 'Cry, the Peacock', 'Voices in the City', 'Where shall we go this Summer', 'Bye Bye Blackbird', etc. Her fierce desire to live alone is the result of her busy, but empty life as the wife of an ex-Vice Chancellor of Punjab University. She played the role of a dutiful wife and almost everyone envied her. However, the inner reality of her life is revealed to us when we learned that her relationship with her husband was an unhappy one. She led her life as he wanted her to live out of a sense of duty. Emotional deprivation is at the root of Nanda Kaul's disillusionment with human bonds. Her husband did not love her as a wife and treated her as some decorative and useful instrument needed for the efficient running of his household. She enjoyed the comforts and social status of the wife of a dignitary but deep down she felt lonely and neglected. Her husband's extra-marital affair with Miss David had been a source of agony throughout her life. Nanda Kaul's feelings of anguish and distrust of humanity also reveals itself when she learns the death of Ila Das, her friend who was brutally raped and murdered.

In her married life, Nanda always conformed to the existing moral ethics and social norms, but never without anger/protest, an anger that she couldn't articulate into concrete protests. During that phase, Nanda had no identity of her own; she was always the Vice-Chancellor's wife, always in silk (because Mr. Kaul wanted her in silk dress) at the head of his long rosewood table, entertaining the lecturers and professors and their wives over whom he had ruled. Or else she had been the mother of his children, always having an identity relative to his, never one of her own, and no one seemed to be interested to know how she felt about it. We are made immediately aware of the strictly structured framework of social obligations within which she had to live as an efficient housekeeper, a genteel nanny, a satisfying sex-partner; but what happened to the woman in the process? It is important to note that other than her name, the author does not give us any personal details regarding her, perhaps to emphasize her faceless identity in the Kaul household and also to universalize her problem. Violence, in the form of mental torture, had been unleashed on her by her husband. Outwardly tradition-bound, she could suffer only mentally. Deep down, there is awareness within her of the hypocrisy of her marriage and her relationship with her husband, her non-status in the family hierarchy; but this consciousness is so painful that she chooses to elude the truth. In seeking the desirable, she takes recourse to illusion and self-deception. Here lies the root cause of her conflict. Over the years Nanda had been longing for

love, for caring and affection, which she failed to get fulfilled in her affluent patriarchal society. There, she withdraws/alienates herself from it and searches meaning of her life in isolation, in gaps, in silences. Gradually she came to realize what she had failed. Nanda's journey in isolation is mental, psychological and spiritual one. The trauma she undergoes started revealing gradually through Desai's narrative pattern of abduction, withdrawal and alienation.

The narrative quickly moves between the external and the internal, the subjective and the objective, and through the use of images that suggest disintegration, discord, and terror. The writer conveys the tension in Nanda, between her desire to hold on to a vestige of privacy and solitude and her family's callousness towards it. The strain in her is evident; so is her terror of the hostile, discordant forces around her that she cannot comprehend and will not confront. Nanda Kaul's self-imposed isolation at Carignano is conceived as an escape from the patriarchally defined female trinity of daughter, wife and mother. Her early life as daughter offered none of the cherished memories she invented for Raka. Similarly, in the role of a wife her husband had failed her. Nor had her husband loved and cherished her and kept her like a queen. He had only done enough to keep her quiet while he carried on a lifelong affair with Miss David, the mathematics mistress, whom he had not married because she was a Christian but whom he loved, all his life loved. Nor did Nanda find her role as mother fulfilling: "...the children were all alien to her nature. She neither understood nor loved them". Her isolation at Carignano, however, is not entirely of her own choosing: "She did not live here alone by choice - she lived here alone because that was what she was forced to do, reduce to doing" (*ibid*, p.145). Desai seems to agree with the viewpoint put forward by Dr. Polanki Ramamoorthy and others that there is no space beyond those of daughter, wife and mother that a woman in India can occupy.

The psychological experiment of the writer in the novel can also be seen on the portrayal of Raka's character. Raka, Nanda's great - grand daughter, even as a child, has instinctively chosen to isolate herself from the system that she realizes is prepared to accept her father's violent treatment of her mother, Tara. She is "the one who married a diplomat and, as a result of his ill treatment of her, the affairs he had, his drinking and brutality, was reduced to a helpless jelly". She is not seen to collide with patriarchal oppression in any way; and as far as a child is able, she reacts against it. Her entrance into Carignano brings textual transposition into play. In the wilderness of the female space symbolized by both the house and the landscape, Raka is likened to a wild thing. Like the great grandmother, she remains silent and observant. Like Nanda, Raka wants to stay hidden but has the same desire to observe. Raka's perceptions, while subjective, have a validity that her own helplessness and despair cannot cancel out. And in making Raka, the object of her last desperate bid to maintain the illusion with which she has always deluded herself, Nanda makes her biggest mistake, for Raka has constructed barriers between herself and the adult world. Adult men and women to her are madmen, rioters and monsters - an impression rooted in her memory of her father: "...home from a party, stumbling and crashing through the curtains of night, his mouth opening to let out a flood of rotten stench, beating at her mother with hammers and fists of abuse - harsh, filthy abuse..." (*ibid*, p. 71). Her response to the adult world is seen as reversal of the normative.

Fire on the Mountain also uses the elaborate apparatus of several different voices through which the mother or woman attempts to speak her story that, in effect, signal the repression of her voice. The most violent of this transposition occurs in the third section of the text when Ila Das, characterized by her "shrilling screech" and her "hideous voice", comes to visit her old friend Nanda. She has also been presented as an isolated character from the moment her voice issues out of Nanda's telephone and she enters the novel for the first time. Ila Das's isolation has been imposed by the selfish cruelty of her brothers and by the failure of her father adequately to provide for her within the confines of the patriarchal system that all the characters inhabit. She

has never sought isolation as an escape as Nanda has, nor does she find comfort in isolation as Raka appears to do, not when that isolation is isolation from an oppressive patriarchal system. Ila Das belonged to an affluent family that did not believe in giving anything to the girls. Coming from such a background, Ila Das knows it is to suffer, simply because she has been a woman. In Carignano, as a social worker, child-marriage is one of the issues she takes up. As she says: “well, so long I go along my way, trying to do my duty..... Whenever I hear there’s a child marriage in the offing, and ‘threaten’ them and tell them how they can go to prison for committing a social offence” (*ibid*, p.129). But Ila Das was beating her head against a brick wall fighting illiteracy, superstition, and ignorance in a feudal, patriarchal society. And when she tries to stop the marriage of a seven-year old girl to an old man she pays heavily for it. The girl’s father, Preet Singh (an icon of patriarchy) attacks her in the dark, strangles her and then rapes her. Ila’s rape and murder are symbolic of the punishment a male-oriented society metes out to women who try to break the traditional patterns of life.

The rape has been viewed metaphorically and symbolically as an index of the falseness and futility of the life that Nanda leads, and as a reproach for not accepting her social obligation. The rape and murder of Ila forges an inexorable link with Nanda, who succumbs both physically and psychically when she hears the news. This “double death” renders it possible to read Ila’s death and rape as a consequence of the articulation of the mother. The sexual violence and assault of Ila has significance at the literal level as she is silenced for having dared to speak out against Preet Singh and patriarchal authority. The brutality of the rape is a measure of the sexual violence that silences women and keeps them confined to traditional spaces. The silencing of Ila Das works to silence Nanda and reveals that Ila had, in fact, quite literally spoken for the mother in addressing the issues of women’s powerlessness and victimization in the face of male abuse. Any resistance to male violence wreaks a desperate vengeance on both the maternal and the feminine and divests the mother of her privileged position, turning her into a woman who interferes with men’s transactions of female sexuality - an interference that results in sexual violence (MFS, 1993, Vol.39: 27-28).

Anita Desai establishes all these women characters as victims of a constricting patriarchal system, the nature of which is symbolized by the image of the noose that recurs through the novel and, of course, reaches its almost inevitable conclusion in the vicious, thuggee-style murder of Ila Das. Having thus revealed the nature of the oppression that these women face, Desai considers the ways in which each character “Kicks against the Pricks.” By kicking against the pricks of patriarchal oppression, it seems that Desai’s women risk only increasing their own suffering. The importance of this novel lies in the fact that Desai brings these monumental issues before us and keeps open the debate surrounding them, which is in itself an enormously positive act.

A very important point, which can also be cited here, is that to Anita Desai the family is the central core of existence for its members. Disharmony at this level creates disharmony and alienation within the individual, and in turn leading to social disharmony. Desai explodes the myth of the happy Indian family. Instead, she seems to suggest that families are sick to the core. Marriage is a trauma to most women who are sensitive. It retards their growth as individuals and their psychic illness may have many outward manifestations; for the women, who are tradition-bound, the dangers are much less. The self-aware woman who conforms to tradition has a much more difficult time. Most of the time she is lost, suffered both physical and psychological assault, and there is no adequate support system to help her.

Projection of Gender disparity in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*:

Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* brings forward many themes including those of class and caste antagonism, love-laws, and the expectations surrounding those issues. Considered to be a part of Indo-Anglian literature, Roy has been fighting against the stereotype of “what does it mean to be Indian.” Using repetition, Roy artistically explores the themes of the novel. The characters in the story battle with the expectations of their

class and caste all throughout their lives. There are love-laws from which no one is exempted and one cannot disassociate oneself from the cultural and religious laws of the community. It is these love-laws which dictate the events to come and which cause the demise of many of the characters in the story. The novel explores the predicament of the many women in India who are repeatedly repressed irrespective of their caste, religion or education. Roy in this novel engagingly explores the different kinds of women and how their lives are governed by many laws that rule women at the personal and social level even today. In spite of being from an affluent class, the four women (Ammu, Rahel, Mammachi, and Baby Kochamma) in the novel are deprived and oppressed.

The predominant woman character of the novel, Ammu, is a modern middle-class woman who divorces her alcoholic husband when he tries to sell her to another man. She does not passively accept her husband's decision and leaves him. In spite of her education, her condition is no better than the other women in the society. In fact from her childhood, Ammu's life is dictated by the patriarchal laws set by her father. While her brother, Chacko, is proudly sent abroad for further studies, Ammu is forced to remain at home as a college education was considered an unnecessary expense for a girl. Ammu constantly challenges the gender discrimination that she faces with little success. She is undoubtedly smarter than her Oxford educated brother, yet she has no social standing. Even though she constantly rebels against the social norms, she cannot escape the society's fury that views a divorced woman as a social stigma. Roy tells us:

....a married daughter had no position in her parent's home. As for a divorced daughter – according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well, words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage (Roy, 1997: 45).

This is in sharp contrast to her divorced brother Chacko who enjoys all the freedom and even reminds Ammu that 'what is yours is mine and what's mine is also mine'. She is treated as an inferior and even made to stand separately at Sophie Mol's funeral. Roy writes:

Though Ammu, Estha and Rahel were allowed to attend the funeral, they were made to stand separately, not with the rest of the family. Nobody would look at them (ibid: 5).

Ammu learns to accept the cruel treatment but does nothing to avoid the quarrels and confrontations. In fact, she seems to enjoy them, challenging her brother, the police, her mother, her aunts and others in her society. She tries her best to fulfill her dreams. She also has no rights to any inheritance and is socially and economically dependent. When she is repeatedly rejected by her family, she seeks refuge in the untouchable carpenter Velutha. The love affair between them causes further problems in her life and she is eventually disowned by her family and isolated from her children and dies a lonely woman. Thus, Ammu can be seen as yet another 'untouchable' within the pure 'touchable' Syrian community.

The next female character is Rahel, Ammu's daughter, who challenges the norms of gender in the society the most. In her childhood, she faces the brunt of being a child from a single mother and is constantly criticized and looked down by her grandmother, aunt and others. When she is eleven she is expelled from the convent where she studied. She is caught several times for her indecent behavior yet it does not deter her from being rebellious. She sets her house mistress's hair burn on fire, tries smoking. Even her incestuous love affair with her twin brother reveals her resistance towards the social norms that had previously wrecked her life. Unlike her mother who is not allowed to pursue her education abroad, she moves to America. She is reminiscent of the author with her wild hair, western clothing, and a bohemian lifestyle. Rahel's marriage to the foreigner, Larry McCaslin and later her divorce also reflects that she is finally in control of her own life.

Mammachi, Ammu's mother, also challenges the gender roles in her own way. Physically abused by her husband, she is a victim of her jealous husband who tortures and traumatizes her. When her violin teacher praises her exceptional talents, her classes come to an end. In the beginning, Mammachi is docile and submissive and suffers the abuse passively. Even when she is practically blind, she does not get any support from her husband. We are told that every night he used to beat her with a brass flower vase. But this does not stop her from starting her pickle business and becomes a successful entrepreneur. In spite her many limitations, Mammachi tries to make a positive change and be independent. When it comes to her two kids, we see Mammachi being biased towards her son and her daughter as a Patriarch would do. When she discovers Ammu's affair with Velutha, she is intolerant and treats her as an outcaste. Mammachi's patriarchal roles do not take her very far as her son takes away her pickle factory from her. Chacko replaces Pappachi as the patriarch of the house and dominates his mother. She, however, does not offer any resistance against Chacko. She succumbs and even encourages the belief that women need to be submissive.

Navomilpe, more popularly known as Baby Kochamma, is the other character from the first generation. She is the daughter of Reverend John Ipe. She falls in love with an Irish priest called Father Mulligan at a young age. In order to be with him, she goes against the family and gets converted to the Roman Catholic faith. When her dream of marrying the priest is not fulfilled she feels like a 'wretched man-less woman' and spends her life causing havoc in the lives of Ammu, Velutha and Rahel. Roy says:

Baby Kochamma resented Ammu, because she saw her quarrelling with a fate that she, Baby Kochamma, felt. She had graciously accepted the fate of the wretched man-less woman, the sad, Father Mulligan-less Baby Kochamma. She had managed to persuade herself over the years that her unconsummated love for Father Mulligan had been entirely due to her restraint and her determination to do the right thing (ibid, 45).

Baby Kochamma hates Velutha for being a low caste Hindu. Even though she does not challenge the gender roles, her unrequited love for the priest causes her to make life altering changes like going against her family and being a celibate in a society that does not respect single women.

Ammu, Baby Kochamma, Mammachi and Rahel are the four women characters in the novel who challenge the typical gender roles that are set for them. They are all smart, highly capable yet trapped in the male-dominated society that decided their roles and duties. Even though they are never fully emancipated from their miserable conditions, they are not entirely passive either. Caught between the patriarchal norms and traditional values on one hand, and individuality and independence on the other, these female characters are lost, yet they try their best to fulfill their aspirations.

Gender discrimination and violence in Khaled Hosseini's novel *The Kite Runner*:

Khaled Hosseini has written three novels *The Kite Runner* (2003), *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), and *And the Mountain Echoed* (2013), wherein he highlights the double subjugation in the form of patriarchal authority, ethnicity, love, poverty and the persistent conditions of violence and conflict etc. which has magnified and multiplied the agonizing experiences for its women. *The Kite Runner* tells us a story of a young Afghan boy Amir, with a traumatic past, a war stricken homeland, a guilty conscience and a dark and broken future. One notable issue that Hosseini explored in the novel is the representation of women. As it has been described by the writer in his notable works, women are seen as material goods, and they are shown as weak, marginalized, demeaned and subject to many double standards in course of history and in contemporary society. The novel *The Kite Runner* highlights the idea of womanhood as being marginalized in many varied cases. In this novel, there are only two major female characters that have any back story or focus: Amir's wife Soraya, and Soraya's mother Jamila. Hassan's wife is also briefly mentioned in some instances.

The rights of women in Afghanistan are restricted, allowing very limited feminist activity. Soraya's short stay with her lover may be cited as a clear example. Soraya ran away with her boy friend, which is considered a scandal in the local Afghan community. General Taheri, Soraya's father, quickly tracks down and brings her home. After bringing home, Soraya was forced to cut off all her hair and is being shamed over it. It causes the family to move from Virginia to Fremont to escape the notoriety and his daughter Soraya returns to a life of subservience to her father. Once Soraya refused to honour her father's request to become a doctor or lawyer and chose the career of a teacher instead. She says, "My father wants me to go to law school, my mother is always throwing hints about medical school, but I am going to be a teacher. Doesn't pay much here, but it is what I want." (Hosseini, 2003: 151). Thus, male dominance and patriarchal set up in the family is proved that does not allow women to decide even their career. Soraya raises the issue of injustice through her past.

The central characters in the novel *The Kite Runner* are all Afghan men. Although women are on the periphery, there are a few instances when we get a glimpse inside the life of an Afghan woman. There are differences between male and female roles in the novel. Women have no voice to choose whom they can marry. This proves to be a big problem with Soraya. She has no chance and freedom to decide whether she wants to marry Amir or not. Amir and Soraya's marriage would not have been possible if general Taheri had not given his consent. It is all up to him to decide things in family. They are not allowed to be alone together until marriage. They get a few chances to speak a few times before their marriage, especially when Soraya's father is not around.

From Jamila's (Soraya's mother) story, we came to know about the traditional role of the Afghan wives. General Taheri never claimed to marry Jamila for the sake of love, but because of honour and lineage. Jamila had once been famous in Kabul for her enchanting singing voice. As a condition of her marriage to the general, she had to agree to never again sing in public. Hence, women are expected to give up parts of their life to please husbands or male members of the family. General Taheri is very cold towards Jamila that they sleep in separate rooms. His relationship with his wife is very unloving. He was often rude and would make her cry because he did not like the food she prepared for him. Juliette Simmons highlights their relationship in her essay: "People here marry for love; family name and ancestry never even come into the question which shows that, to him, it is most important to marry for reputation, rather than love or happiness." (Simmons Juliette, 3). The general did not approve of women drinking alcohol. So, Jamila did not drink and Soraya would wait until her parents were gone before having a glass of wine with her husband. Soraya particularly frustrated about the double standard between what is expected of women and what is expected of men in Afghan culture and heritage. She expressed her it to Amir: "Their sons go out to nightclubs looking for meat and get their girl friends pregnant. They have kids out of wedlock and no one says a god-damn thing. Oh! They are just men having fun! I make one mistake and suddenly everyone is talking *nang* and *namoos*¹, and I have to have my face rubbed in it for the rest of my life" (*ibid*, 216).

In Afghan culture, if you are a man, you are superior to all others. But if you are a woman, you are considered second class. If a woman succeeds in something, the encouraging words she will receive are "What a manly thing you did! You are so manly!" If a man does something wrong or inappropriate, the adjectives used to describe him are "girly, womanly, wearing women bracelets and submissive to women". Women, in Afghan culture, are portrayed in the novel as morally weak. The idea of woman's being morally weak is proved in the beginning of the novel by leaving of Hassan's mother and Soraya's history with running off with another man.

¹ Nang and Namooos- defined as 'pride' and 'honour or dignity' in *The Kite Runner*- are probably the most important elements of Baba's character.

There is lack of women's role in the novel. The lack of women playing a major role in the novel gives the idea that women are not as important in the Afghan culture as men are. The characters in the novel support their stereotypical gender roles.

The reader, throughout the novel, observes many grave injustices committed due to cultural conflict and the presence of Taliban in Afghanistan. Taliban implemented the laws restricting the actions and movements of women in Afghanistan especially in public places. For instance, women living in Afghanistan are not allowed to speak at a high volume:

"Farzana once asked the vendor how much the potatoes cost, but he did not hear her.... So she asked louder and suddenly a young Talib ran over and hit her on the thighs with his wooden stick... He was screaming at her and cursing and saying that the Ministry of Vice and Virtue does not allow women to speak loudly" (ibid, 216).

Gender discrimination and violence against women, as it has been observed, is an aged-old practice which has now become a major issue of concern. It has been witnessed that in any kind of war, whether it is civil strife, communal clashes or world wars, women have been the major victims of violence, torture, and humiliation. Khaled Hosseini throughout the novel *The Kite Runner* explores different issues concerning the representation of women in the oppressive patriarchal culture.

Conclusion:

Men and women share the same space geographically, yet women are accorded a lower status than men and they are not treated equally everywhere in the world. In reality, there exists inequality in women's access to education, health care, physical and financial resources and opportunities in the political, economic, social and cultural field. In literary studies, now-a-days, gender discourse has exceeded its former definitions of logical and orderly extended thought, myths, characters, gestures, pregnant protests, etc. Women's discourse is said to be illogical, repetitive, sentimental, hysterical, and unreasonably lyrical and preoccupied with the monotonous procession of victim-image of women, having no eye for complex ideas and thoughts and so on. However, a woman's discourse throws into relief her point of view regarding race, class, gender, religion and life itself. It is commonly believed that feminine inscriptions are different from male expressions. Words and allusions often have different meanings for men and women: Sita, for instance, is the female archetype of ideal womanhood for Indian men; but for women, she is the replica of a downtrodden, oppressed, and exploited woman. The stereotyping of gender discourse and gender disparity can be seen in the depiction of characters like Sita in *The Ramayana*, Draupadi in *The Mahabharata*, Tess in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles: A Pure Woman*, and Desai, Roy and Hosseini's women characters, etc. Established images of mother, wife, sister, mother-in-law and step-mother are universally acknowledged by patriarchal societies; their names may differ, but not their qualities or fates.

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