

LOSS OF SELF-IDENTITY: A FEMINIST STUDY OF SARWAT NAZIR'S NOVEL *UMM-E-KALSOOM* *

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ABSTRACT

The research study attempts to investigate the aspect of loss of women's self-identity through the feminist study of Sarwat Nazir's novel Umm-e-Kalsoom under the Simon de Beauvoir's theoretical framework of Second Sex. The purpose of this research study is to identify the elements of loss of women's self-identity in patriarchal society. The researchers attempted to find out the nature of representation of women and their struggle for identity through the feminist study of Umm-e-Kalsoom. A female character Umm-e-Kalsoom is forced to play gender roles and suffers identity crisis. This research also analyzes how women's self is constructed and resultantly what is the construction of identities in the male chauvinist society. The objective of this paper was to find out as to whether transformation of Umm-e-Kalsoom leads towards identity crisis or it leads towards the achievement of individuality.

Keywords: *Umm-e-Kalsoom, self-identity, identity crisis, Second Sex, gender roles, feminism,*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

The term feminism can be used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests. The history of feminism can be divided into three waves:

- i. The first feminist wave was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
- ii. The second was in the 1960s and 1970s
- iii. The third extends from the 1990s to the present.

Feminist theory emerged from these feminist movements. It is manifest in a variety of disciplines such as feminist geography, feminist history and feminist literary criticism.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was one of the twentieth century's leading intellectuals, and most famous feminist. Inspiring the second-wave feminism movement in the 1960s, Simone de Beauvoir's "*The Second Sex*" captures the true extent to which women have been oppressed throughout history as a result of being categorized as the *other*.

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The text of Sarwat Nazir's *Umm-e-Kalsoom* illustrates the issues of gender roles and self-identity. The researcher will analyze as to how Sarwat Nazir's novel *Umm-e-Kalsoom* struggles for women's self-identity in patriarchal society. Endeavoring to explain how this categorization has occurred, Beauvoir (1949) elucidates an evident duality in society: man represents the 'Self,' the essential, or the transcendent, and woman embodies the other, the inessential, or the sex. For Beauvoir, 'women' is a category imposed by society; women's selves, then, are also in large part imposed on them by society, and on her view women would do well to take hold of their claims to freedom and choice and thus reclaim their freedom and selfhood. Women are taught what they're supposed to be in life, what kind of roles they can or cannot perform in virtue of being of "the second sex." Today we might express this idea using the distinction between sex and gender, where one's sex is just a biological fact, but one's gender identity is socially constructed. In 1949, this was a truly radical idea.

So, how does this idea relate to existentialist concerns about freedom? One of the main questions existentialists worry about is how to achieve "radical freedom," or the kind of freedom that comes from making decisions in what Sartre called "good faith." These are the decisions that come from and express an authentic self. If someone is living in "bad faith," they allow themselves to be ruled by identities imposed on them from the outside. Their decisions do not reflect who they truly are.

The researchers will investigate how and in which respects Sarwat Nasir's novel *Umm-e-Kalsoom* speaks for women identity and face gender politics in two different and opposite contexts. Under the theoretical framework of *Second sex* discussed by Simon de Beauvoir, the theme of their 'self-being' in fragmented, disturbing and striking impulses of postmodernity.

Statement of the Problem

The works of the struggles for self-identity especially by the female writers are not easy to digest by the patriarchs. Women are suppressed not to speak for their rights and to celebrate their existence. Women do not dare to write and fight for their rights. Women asking for their unique positions are not appreciated as they go against 'traditional gender role' and considered as 'bad women'. In the same case Sarwat Nasir's novel which encounters social norms and taboos will be find out as resistance as she not only fights for other women but suffers political suppression personally. She openly resists and brings topics of desire, love, menstruation, motherhood, taboos, and cultural, social, political restrictions and restrains in order to resist against patriarchal values.

Research Questions

The researchers will find out:

- a. How does the writer Sarwat Nasir dismantle the women's gender roles?
- b. How women's *self-identity* is constructed in the male chauvinist society?
- c. What kind of negative or positive transformation came into the *Umm-e-Kalsoom's* character?

Research Objectives

The objectives of this research paper will be to:

1. Dismantles the women gender roles in the patriarchal society.
2. Identify the elements of loss of women's *self-identity* and representation of women through the feminist study of *Umm-e-Kalsoom*.

3. Find out that either transformation of Umm-e-Kalsoom leads towards identity crisis or achievement of individuality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of literary works and researches on the gender politics and identity of the women have been attempted in eastern contexts. The feminist study of this novel may be different in its expression. In Eastern context if we will observe, we find Kishwar Naheed, a Pakistani resistant poet like Sarwat Nasir. Her works like *We Sinful Women* is true representation of rejection of traditional practices of subjugated bodies, against the universal binary realities of men/women. She writes about sinful women/who come out and raising the voice of truth. Here we find the reversal of binary opposites as in this men/ women, truth/falsehood, a woman considered in negative and unprivileged strata represents herself as the preacher of the truth which is kept at higher level which the men belong to. Likewise, an Indian well acknowledged poet Kamala Das' poetry also identify woman a unique and complete identity. But, the themes of freedom and reliance on male dominant figure intersect. She confesses the strength and the valor of the manly characteristics. Her poems like *The Looking Glass* from *The Descendants*, the writer suggests women to give those things to men as 'What makes you woman'. The things and desires which are considered as taboos are supposed to give, the "musk of sweat between breasts/the warm shocks of menstrual blood" (Ikiz, 2005, p. 14).

Moreover, if we observe other female writers who speak for women identity and raise voice against gender discrimination include Pakistani Eastern writer Parveen Shakir, other writers from different corners of the world raise their voice in western world too, e.g. Maya Angelou and Sylvia Plath. Parveen Shakir's poetry discusses the shifting identity of a girl and her role as 'wife' and 'mother'. Her poetry is very close to Kishwar Naheed and Fahmida Riaz as in her poetic work '*Masla*' (*The Problem*), she writes her encounter with Fahmida Riaz and her dispossession from her works,

Parveen, as I watched you read
I remembered my old self
The days when I'd write like you
But now those poems are faint dreams;
I've 'disowned' all of them. (Naim, 2010, p. 171)

Her Poems like *It Has Been Written, I'M Happy to Remain a Butterfly, Who Then Had The Time To Meet Herself* depict the issue of identity and their struggle to find their presence in the society and locate themselves as positive active individual rather than submissive stature.

On the other hand, Western writers like Sylvia Plath, Alice Walker and Maya Angleou also show loss of self-identity and struggle for their freedom. . Maya Angleou's Poem *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Alice Walkers' poem *be Nobody's Darling*. Here both poets search for their own separate identity and escape from the social and political dogmas of the human society.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Simone de Beauvoir was probably best known as a novelist, and a feminist thinker and writer, but she was also an existentialist philosopher in her own right and, like her lover Sartre, thought a lot about the human struggle to be free. Beauvoir's most famous work was *The Second Sex* from 1949, a hugely influential book which laid the groundwork for second-wave feminism. Where first-wave feminism was concerned with women's suffrage

and property rights, the second wave broadened these concerns to include sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, and so on. All that started with Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, where Beauvoir outlines the ways in which woman is perceived as "other" in a patriarchal society, second to man, which is considered—and treated as—the "first" or default sex.

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman".

Simone de Beauvoir's formulation distinguishes sex from gender and suggests that gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired. The distinction between sex and gender has been crucial to the long-standing feminist effort to debunk the claim that anatomy is destiny; sex is understood to be the invariant, anatomically distinct, and factice aspects of the female body, whereas gender is the cultural meaning and form that that body acquires, the variable modes of that body's acculturation. With the distinction intact, it is no longer possible to attribute the values or social functions of women to biological necessity, and neither can we refer meaningfully to natural or unnatural gendered behavior: all gender is, by definition, unnatural. Moreover, if the distinction is consistently applied, it becomes unclear whether being a given sex has any necessary consequence for becoming a given gender. The presumption of a causal or mimetic relation between sex and gender is undermined. If being a woman is one cultural interpretation of being female, and if that interpretation is in no way necessitated by being female, then it appears that the female body is the arbitrary locus of the gender 'woman', and there is no reason to preclude the possibility of that body becoming the locus of other constructions of gender. At its limit, then, the sex and gender distinction implies a radical heteronomy of natural bodies and constructed genders with the consequence that 'being' female and 'being' a woman are two very different sorts of being. This last insight, I would suggest, is the distinguished contribution of Simone de Beauvoir's formulation, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."

The researcher will investigate these issues of identity and gender politics through the study of Sarwat Nasir's novel *Umm-e-Kalsoom* discussing sex and gender in feminist perspective. There is a focus on the cynical stereotypes about religion and gender roles being enforced in sugar-coated ways through most of these novels to a society that's still seeped in conservative dogmas. The researcher will also analyze that most of these novels objectify women as weak and helpless. Not only are women continuously illustrated as sacrificing machines who bear all the abuse, blame and humiliation because that is expected of a "good" Pakistani woman. The researcher will reveal that how Sarwat has dismantled the women's gender roles by portraying the transformation of Umm-e-Kalsoom's character into a *New Woman*.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper will be carried through qualitative research method. The researcher will find out significant features of gender politics and self-identity through the feminist study of Sarwat Nasir's literary analysis of her work *Umm-e-Kalsoom* under the feminist perspective. The Feminist study of this novel will help the researcher to examine the writing in a relevance of manner. The researcher will also analyze it by using online journals, books and articles. For this purpose, different texts of the concerned writers and library sources will be used.

After that the findings and conclusions will be drained, and recommendations will be made. Conceptual framework will be used for further analysis of the data. This study will aim at women awareness about their repressed rights and resistance in social and political context.

ANALYSIS

Feminist literary theory's focus was to interpret texts from feminist perspective. It was an attempt to interpret women's role and experience and issues regarding women in various kind of literature as drama, poetry and novel. Description of women as a stereotype, male domination, discrimination of women rights, image of oppressed woman, treatment of women as an object, woman as a symbol of physical beauty, economic position of woman, role of woman as a mother, wife and duties attached with her each and everything was subject of feminist studies to explore in the literature.

The character of a middle class girl Umm-e-Kalsoom and her transition from a simple religious girl to a glamorous, rich and famous singer. It shows the troubles she has to face, thanks to her *Bhabhi* who gets her married to a mental patient for the sake of money.

Umm-e-Kalsoom is entangled psychologically and sociologically in the web of society. As a woman she is struggling for making her a respectable place in the society. Society plays an essential role in everyone's life. According to Simon de Beauvoir

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”. (Beauvoir, 1949)

This is the de Beauvoir's famous proclamation about the construction of a woman character. For her, femininity is not a construct of biology, psychology or intellect, but it is raised by cultures and civilizations. There is only the difference of situation, and situation makes one's character. The character of woman is shaped by her society. She learns her role from society and society itself blames her. She is not born passive, secondary and dispensable, but there are external forces which make her so.

Ultimately, she gets married to the rich spoilt brat Nihal, and her life takes a complete new turn. Nihal who is the rich spoilt boy involved into drinking and women. He was attracted to Umm-e-Kalsoom just because of her beauty and femininity. Nihal is fond of beauty, so he married Umm-e-Kalsoom. It does not matter to Nihal that Umm-e-Kalsoom likes him or not, or is she of him type and status. He only wants to win that woman like an object/medal. He wins her with money and attempts to change her according to his wishes. She is presented as an oppressed woman, treated as an object and symbol of beauty by her husband. She has no personal identity or life. She is only known as a wife, mother and daughter. She is the central character but struggling for self-identity. In search of her self-identity she transformed from a religious girl to a glamorous, rich and famous singer. She has no choice or will of anything about her life. Every decision of her own life is taken by her husband. She has long hair which are considered the symbol of beauty, freedom and femininity, Nihal forcefully cut them into short. Even her hair cutting is also depends upon her husband's will. As she was a religious girl and *Hafiza* (memorizer), famous for her beautiful voice, i.e. she is into recitation. After marriage, Nihal wants her to adopt singing as a profession. It was a jolt for Umm-e-Kalsoom. She had never thought like this. When she denies to fulfill his desire, Nihal beats her on face, due to face swelling even she cannot face people. At last she capitulates and attends singing classes at home. He tries to change her according to his lifestyle. First of all, he modifies her dressing style and forces her to take off her Hijab. Then he takes her to his late night, preposterous and irrational parties. Whenever she resist, he threatens her that “Change yourself according to me otherwise I will change my wife, it's not a big deal” (Nazir, 2009). According to him, there is no shortage of women for amusement for me. After all he is a rich and handsome “Man”. A male can do anything that he wants to do. Even if he has an extra marital affair, no one will question. On the other hand, if a woman shows her feelings or likeness for someone, there is no place for such woman in the society. Actually then it becomes the matter of so called “Family Honour”. All these restrictions are only for a

woman not for a man. Here question arises whether a man has no respect or honour in society?

Umm-e-Kalsoom has to send her children to boarding school. Because she does not want to disclose her miserable situation to them. By compellingly when she becomes a singing star, and rises up as a powerful woman. For searching her self-identity, she has to deal with Nihal strongly. Eventually she converts into a totally different person, who can stand for her own sake.

In the beginning she was dominated by her husband, she was portrayed as submissive, passive and objective creature. But at the end she was completely changed into a pure feminist figure having awareness of her rights.

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