

REPRESENTING STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN EMANCIPATION IN FICTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF *I AM THUNDER* BY MUHAMMAD KHAN AND *SAFFRON DREAMS* BY SHAILA ABDULLAH THROUGH FEMINISTIC PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The current study aimed to analyze the role and struggles of women in other cultures through fiction. By applying theory of feminism on I Am Thunder (2018) and Saffron Dreams (2009), this study found themes of integrity, individuality, religious and cultural identity, resilience and self-empowerment. This research has focused on similarities between the characters' battles for identity, self-determination, and sovereignty by analyzing both works through the lens of intersectional feminism. Abdullah and Khan revealed how multiple layers of oppression intersect and shape identities of female characters and how these females, Muzna and Arissa, resist and navigate the situations. The nature of the current study is qualitative. Textual analysis and close reading methods are used. The primary texts for this research were I Am Thunder (2018) by Muhammad Khan and Saffron Dreams (2009) by Shaila Abdullah. The journals, articles and several books related to theories have been studied for this research as secondary source. The findings of the present study showed that challenging cultures and using one's voice is important, feminist principles are reflected in Muzna and Arissa's paths to autonomy and self-determination. This study has provided a deeper understanding of their experiences and their potential to ignite revolutionary societal change by investigating their intersecting realities. In addition, further studies should be carried out, such as on hypocrisy of societies who give freedom to only their women and their people.

Keywords: Emancipation, Feminism, Gender, Identity, Intersectionality, Resistance, Struggles of women

Introduction

This study explores journeys of protagonists towards empowerment in both novels *Saffron dreams* (2009) by Shaila Abdullah and *I am thunder* (2018) by Muhammad Khan. This study has analyzed texts by applying theory of feminism. Being women, Muslims, and people of color in today's culture means that Muzna and Arissa must both negotiate the complexity of their intersecting identities. Their personal narratives demonstrate how these identities impact their life experiences and mold their agency and resilience. Muzna and Arissa had to contend with various facets of bias and discrimination stemming from factors such as gender, culture, identity and religion. From a critical analysis of gender inequity to a more nuanced focus on the social constructions of gender and sexuality, feminism has historically changed along its history. Social theories, political

movements, and moral ideologies come together to form the varied field of feminism. Certain versions criticize social interactions in the past and today.

Many devote their attention to study what they see as gender and sexuality social constructions. Female politics, power dynamics, and sexuality are the main topics of feminist theory, which seeks to explain the nature of gender bias. Inequalities and disparities based on ability, class, gender, racism, sex, and sexuality are currently the focus of feminist theory, and feminists work to affect change in those domains where these intersectional ties give rise to power imbalances. We can help our kids to become conscious of injustices and strive toward altering unhealthy dynamics in any situation by having an intellectual and academic conversation about these disparities.

According to Ferguson, K. E. (2017) the world is examined through critical intersectional viewpoints in feminist theory, which is not only about women. It has its roots in and is accountable to the movements for justice, freedom, and equality. Global ecologies, global neoliberal geopolitics, and subjectivity, narrative, and materiality are three pertinent current problems in feminist theory. To answer these issues, feminist theorists use the instruments of intersectionality, interdisciplinarity, and the blending of action and study.

Garland-Thomson in her book *Feminist Theory Reader* (2020) discusses a complex and conflicting web of ideas, tactics, pedagogies, and practices which make up academic feminism. The collaborative, multidisciplinary study of gender, race, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, and class, as well as a self-aware cultural critique, constitute feminist theory, which examines how subjects are multiply, or how the representational systems of these categories mutually establish, inflect, and contradict one another. It is fruitful to include disability into feminist theory because it challenges our presumptions, widens our field of inquiry, and strengthens the intersectionality of feminism. Including a disability analysis does not exclude other forms of feminism or restrict the investigation to women with disabilities alone. The radical criticism of feminist disability theory rests on a wide interpretation of disability as an omnipresent cultural system that stigmatizes certain types of physical differences.

Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* (2009) and Muhammad Khan's *I am thunder* (2018) are two novels that explore the struggles of women in their particular situations and how their struggle strengthen their characters. Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* (2009) is a story of Arissa, a Pakistani woman who went to America after marriage and where she experiences death of his husband in 9/11 incident. The novel explores her struggles as woman in a completely racial discriminating society. On other hand *I am thunder* is story of Muzna whose character presents the struggles of women as a young girl from other cultures living in Britain and facing racial discrimination. Arissa and Muzna, two protagonists of different novels, grew up in a different cultures.

In *Saffron Dreams* (2009), a book by Shaila Abdullah, the story of Arissa is told, a widow turned recovered lady who went from being a broken daughter and then a shattered wife to a single mother who was committed to her son with impairments and an accomplished editor. The pivotal event in *Saffron Dreams'* plot is her husband's death in the World Trade Center on 9/11; nonetheless, *Saffron Dreams* is ultimately a book of optimism, teaching us via Arissa how to accept life's unforgiving turns with grace and patience. Abdullah is primarily focusing on telling the story of a Pakistani Muslim marriage; she is not so much providing an examination of the false guilt-by-association that Arissa is subjected to. Arissa is physically abused by a racist group of young guys in a scene that occurs soon after 9/11. They chase her off the train, harass her, and cut her clothes.

They flee as soon as they find out she is pregnant. Under such situations, one could comprehend how religious defensiveness develops into religious shame or how assimilating into the dominant culture becomes a survival tactic. The narrative really begins with an act that seems to be a rejection of the veil on a cultural or religious level. At this late hour, Arissa is strolling towards the Hudson River. The events of 9/11 happened two months ago. It appears as though she is about to plunge into the shadowy waters.

In *I Am Thunder* (2018) the plot revolves around Muzna, a bashful adolescent who is pleasantly surprised when her fellow Muslim, Arif, decides to ask her out in spite of interest from a few other girls at school. Her joy wanes, though, upon learning that Arif has grown enraged by Western society as a result of his brother Jameel's manipulation. It would be simple for Muzna to come across as quite unlikeable given that the main character of this book is a teenager who finds herself in an unusual circumstance where someone is trying to radicalize her. Instead of portraying her as the irate young woman who might anticipate and would resort to radicalism, Khan actually succeeds in creating a character that speaks to a lot of teenagers by making her shy and awkward in social situations. If anything, Khan's character development can be criticized for being a little too stereotypical of a teen in the book's opening sections.

Problem Statement

The study focuses on struggle for women emancipation. This study aims to study feminism particularly from these two novels point of view that how programs and activities are designed to improve women's self-worth, autonomy, and opportunities in a variety of spheres of life. This study is deep analysis of the struggles of female protagonists from novels *Saffron Dreams* (2009) and *I Am Thunder* (2018). The findings highlight complexities of race, class and identity crises within feministic discourse. This study analyses similar themes of identity, belongings and cultural conflicts. This study contributes to understanding of nature of feminism which talks about empowerment of women rather than about their being oppressed.

Research Objectives

- To examine issues faced by protagonists because of 9/11 background
- To analyze similar narratives of racial discrimination and struggle for women emancipation
- To contrast character portrayal of women and narrative structures which are influenced by gender

Research Questions

- 1) What are predominant issues faced by protagonists because of 9/11 background?
- 2) How does novels depict struggle for women emancipation among racial discrimination?
- 3) How characters of women are portrayed and narrative structures are influenced by gender?

Significance of the Study

Studying how these stories represent the difficulties that women actually experience in the real world is important because it promotes conversations about gender equality, cultural hurdles, female empowerment, and the various ways that women defy and negotiate social expectations. Analyzing these works can help one understand the complexity of female emancipation in various cultural contexts as well as the role narratives play in fostering social change. The importance of these stories is highlighted by feminist theory, especially intersectionality, which shows how gender interacts with other factors like ethnicity, culture, religion, and social conventions. These

books highlight the complexity of women's issues and the necessity of addressing multiple, interrelated types of oppression.

This study is important as it challenges the dominant factors in form of patriarchy, rich cultural societies to figure out how people living in those cultures try to express their problem through fiction writing. This study mainly focuses on female characters of novels. This study is important as it highlights the journey of two main leads towards empowerment and emancipation. This study is beneficial in order to study the struggles of females from different cultures struggling so hard to get their identity, to survive, to live up to their own values and choices. This research highlights experiences of women through lens of feminism.

Delimitation of the Study

This study has been delimited by choice of limited texts and by application of only feminism theory. The selected novels can be analyzed by numerous lenses but this study has analyzed themes of religion identity, cultural radicalization, racial discrimination and intersectionality. It has also focused on how the female characters fight for liberation of their rights as woman. It has studied that their inner conflicts are also impacted by the intersectionality of identities, including those of race, religion, and socioeconomic class. Both novels emphasize the difficulties that women face in particular culture contexts, Muslim-American in *Saffron Dreams* (2009) and British-Pakistani in *I Am Thunder* (2018).

Literature Review

The purpose of the feminist movement's foundation was to promote the rights of women and their freedom. It has also held a significant position in literature since women's writings have served as a source of inspiration for feminism. In the 1880s, it was said, feminism has gone through several stages and is still fashionable today. It has undergone various modifications, and the writings of numerous women writers have enhanced it (Burkett, 2024).

Transnational feminism has the potential to transform itself into a force that opposes colonialism, Western capitalism, and post socialism in Eastern Europe. They advocate for a shift away from Eurocentric thought, promoting inclusive methodologies that emphasize understanding and experiential learning. Bangstad critiques Western secular feminism's narrow view of female agency, suggesting a Universalist approach. Indigenous feminists, like Andrea Smith, face unique challenges, balancing cultural traditions with gender equality. In Vanuatu, Mitchell highlights the clash between women's rights and local customs. The overarching issue is Euro-American feminism's ethnocentrism, which hampers global feminist efforts. Achieving a balance between universalism and cultural relativism is crucial for an inclusive feminist movement (Tlostanova, M., Thapar-Björkert, S., & Koobak, 2019).

Men have been freed from patriarchy and social and economic subjugation as a result of women's empowerment through increased access to the job market, including political office. But this empowerment takes the shape of capitulating to the neoliberal capitalist system's demands for productivity. "Leaning back" or "leaning in" would not provide the freedom we still long for. The next step is to refuse to surrender to the competitive production of profit that has already crept into every aspect of our lives. We need to alter the intended "all," not strive to "have it all." It wouldn't be detrimental to the guys either (Azmanova, 2016).

A Marxist Examination of Intersectionality Examining how different types of oppression such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism intersect and intensify to produce distinct experiences of marginalization is the concept of intersectionality. This word was created by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s to draw attention to the complicated realities that people who are

experiencing various forms of oppression at once must contend with. Intersectionality has proven to be a useful framework for explaining social inequality, but it is not a perfect explanation. One criticism is that it ignores the core causes of the capitalist socioeconomic system in favor of highlighting the results of oppression. For example, it could not go far enough in explaining how these oppressive institutions came to be or why specific groups are subjected to systematic discrimination (Harris, Leonardo, 2018).

According to some, feminism is a movement that aims to give women the same status as men. It might even occasionally allow women to do better than males. Benefits from feminism have been felt by both wealthy and impoverished women. Pakistani fiction authors have also presented similar things, mostly because they aim to present an idealized image of women having equal rights to males. In the process, they reveal the psychological growth of women, which is evident in the evolution of diverse female personalities. Compared to male writers, Pakistani women writers have approached this with greater enthusiasm (Ahmed, 2009).

Throughout their lives, humans run into difficulties and hardships. They advance to new heights as a result of these efforts. The unfortunate events and state of life are also glimpsed in Shaila Abdullah's art. Abdullah investigates the world of emotions and delves deeply into women's psychology. Abdullah studies the scars or conflicts that immigrants experience from the outside in. With time, Arissa strives to adapt on all fronts, including language, diet, style, and lifestyle. Even as she grows accustomed to the new customs and culture, she also changes. She changes to such an extent that it's hard to recognize her. She experiences numerous setbacks before becoming a self-sufficient person. Fighting the identity crises of adolescent minority people is part of the struggle theme. There are, at last, a number of things to consider, such as quantifiable objectives like education, which is vital in the fight against ignorance and building self-esteem. While women must achieve self-esteem in order to endure life's challenges, it is imperative that they not place an excessive emphasis on men (Rajenthiran, M., & Vijaya, K. 2022).

Robin Cohen claims that there has been recent discussion of the term "diaspora". Cohen notes the shared textures of the universal diaspora. The search and development of work, written works about the history, suffering, and achievements of the motherland, the establishment and upkeep of an idealized home, fulfilling relationships and a return to the motherland, communication about a shared religion and culture, a sense of understanding one's place as a member of other countries, and the possibility of a creative and productive life in the host societies are all examples of the traumatizing diffusion from the motherland. Diasporic literature is literature written by authors who don't live in their own nation but nonetheless write for it. Diasporic literature is distinguished by a number of important elements, including memories, a sense of suffering, the need for identity, eradication, and origin, as well as a sense of disorder (Cohen, 2022).

According to Robin Cohen (2022), the diaspora might be categorized as military, commercial, polluted, industrial, Native American, or civil. It suggests that writers from the diaspora are similar in that they may live in other nations yet express their cultures in languages other than their own. Their compositions all mirror the situations that they, or their natives, have gone through.

Pre- and post-9/11 writers are the two groups of diasporic Pakistani writers in the twenty-first century. They are recognized as the pioneers of the English-language Pakistani novel diaspora. Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Ali Sethi, and H.M. Naqvi are post-9/11 writers who have published in the new century; their works rectify South Asian literature. Other post-colonial writers include Bapsi Sidhwa, Hanif Qureshi, Nadeem Aslam, and Sara Suleri (Blackman, 2010).

In order to determine the position of Muslim female characters while negotiating their agency, the texts of both novels are examined. It shows how Pakistani English fiction, non-fiction, drama, and poetry industrialized and evolved with time, evolving into a distinctive work in the present day, through a review of Pakistani English writing from Pakistan's founding in 1947 to 2015. The writing of Pakistani residents and emigration writers demonstrates connections and contrasts. Three modern poets of today include Shahid Suhrawardy, Ahmed Ali, and Taufiq Rafat (Shamsie, M. 2017).

Intersectionality, this term was first formulated by Kimberle Crenshaw, a legal scholar, in her paper *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist theory, and Antiracist Politics* (1989). Crenshaw debated how legality many times failed to embark on quirky discrimination faced by Black Women who confront both race and gender-based oppression.

Intersectionality emphasizes how various facets of an individual's identity are interconnected rather than distinct. The consequences of these identities may be amplified, compounded, or lessened by one another. It acknowledges that people encounter several forms of privilege and oppression at the same time, creating complicated and individual experiences. The concept of intersectionality challenges one-dimensional grouping of people (such as only "women" or "Black people") as the basis for identity and oppression. It emphasizes the significance of identifying and resolving structural and systemic injustices brought on by the collision of many identities (Crenshaw, 1991).

Tehseem, Arshad, & Hassan (2021) highlighted the various social threats associated with women in study entitled *Taking off the veil: A Discursive Feminist Perusal of American Brat*. She explored the depravity of women while living in a society with diverse streams. It is an attempt to expose the various threats of subordination of women portrayed under the framework of the normal process of this novel. This study investigated conflict in the development of personality in the novel *American Brat* (1993).

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The nature of the current study is interpretive and qualitative. The chosen literary work has been interpreted from a feminist viewpoint through the use of textual analysis as a research technique. Qualitative research is an approach aimed to comprehend, analyze, and investigate social events in their natural settings. Unlike quantitative research, which is primarily focused on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research emphasizes the richness and diversity of human experiences, opinions, and meanings. It is particularly useful for studying complex social concerns, subjective experiences, and complex human behavior. This study's technique is textual analysis the text has been studied from lens of subjectivity to avoid unclear ideas.

Through close reading of the works of both novelists, this research seeks to establish a theoretical framework, incorporating feminism theory. This study views novels from feministic perspective and cultural identities. By employing comparative analysis technique, this study aims to find difference of choices despite of having similar background and identity issues. An additional crucial framework for comprehending the experiences of oppressed populations is offered by Bell Hooks' feminist theory. This research has applied theory of intersectionality by Collins (2019). The investigator has endeavored to investigate the elements of marginalization by means of the intersectionality lens. The book *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* by Patricia Hill Collins (2019) is adopted as theoretical framework in this thesis. Intersectionality is appropriate for researchers because it increases analytical elegance and offers theoretical application of the ways

in which distinct members of specific groups might face social injustice depending on their ethnicity, race, class and other social locations. (Atewologun, 2018).

Data Analysis

This work eloquently illustrates how different identities disappear, reappear, and change in the face of difficulties that endanger lives. The focus of the analysis is Arissa, who is marginalized by society following the abrupt breakdown of her happy marriage. Arissa is able to prepare for life even if it means giving up her “hijab” because of her strong desire for a new identity. On another side its also story of a girl who is living in immigrant society. Her parents migrated from Pakistan who are trying to adopt culture of another country America but also not able to give up on their real identity. Women are not oppressed only on the basis of gender inequality or patriarchy rather multiple factors intersect to shape the identity of women like race, class, religion, and color.

Human experiences demonstrate that each incident reveals a multitude of causes that cultivate complex discrimination within various societies. The prevalent notion that individuals ought to commit themselves to social justice and equity represents a systematic dialogue. The systems that are responsible for guaranteeing justice and fairness for diversity are rarely described. Hierarchies that are shaped by the political and social environment establish policies related to power abuse and unjust systems. In daily life, people's access to resources and advantages, social interactions, meaning-making, and personal growth are all impacted by the intersectional hierarchy of dominance based on class, race, and gender.

Abdullah portrayed life of women who migrated from one country to another after marriage in her book *Saffron Dreams* (2009). She emphasized how various types of oppression interact to influence Arissa's identity. Abdullah wants to raise awareness of the struggles, women experience in a system that is particularly repressive to Muslim women through this book. Women coming from culture where she was compelled to adhere to prescribed norms had to face issues in culture where women are claimed to have all social rights.

Issues Faced by Arissa because of 9/11 Incident

Arissa Illahi migrated from Pakistan to America with her husband Faizan after marriage. She was happy till news of her husband's death in 9/11 attack came. It changed whole life of Arissa. Her bed of roses was converted into bed of thorns. She was called as Bechari and Baywah.

“The war of terror wasn't mine to win or lose” (Abdullah, 2009, p.109).

Arissa refers to 9/11 incident as she was continuously receiving calls for interviews asking about her sentiments on her husband's death. It shows that how women are always been victim of intersectional identities. It damaged their growth as individual of society. Arissa also seemed too confused about her decisions, identity and autonomy. In all constraints, Arissa decides to take harsh decisions for survival.

“I wanted to take this journey myself, *Unseen. Unchallenged*” (Abdullah, 2009, p.5).

Despite of challenges, Arissa was ready to endure and face all difficulties, alone. Her whole world changes from depending on man of his life to earn living. Arissa consciously fights with society and unconsciously deals with inner conflicts.

“This year the trees of the mid-Hudson Valley were reluctant to shed their leaves. A few fallen ones...crackled under my feet, crisp and lifeless but not without a voice. There is an old saying that it will be a bad winter if the trees decide to hold on to their leaves” (Abdullah, 2009, p.5).

These lines can be interpreted as metaphor to Arissa's life. Arissa is on her way to give up her veil for sake of finding new identity. Situation of leaves can be compared to Arissa's inner conflict and unconsciousness of intersecting identities. "...*the veil or me*" (Abdullah, 2009, p.6). Arissa is justifying her upcoming action by metaphorically stating that when weather changes, its fall time, just like fallen leaves she has to accept her fate. Fallen leaves are lifeless but with voice. She is going through trauma and grief but she has not lost her power to be who she is.

Character Development of Arissa from Widow to Mother

Arissa belonged to upper class family of Pakistan. As she moved to America, she was living a happy life with Faizan. He was working in World Trade Centre. And died during dreadful incident of 9/11. Protagonist faces new challenges and struggles to survive. As her only source of reliability was her husband, she felt to be all alone. Living on her own was one challenge and living under circumstances where her identity was being questioned was another biggest issue she had to face. Arissa's social location made her experience the worst.

"I looked at him with love-stricken eyes. How flawed he was to the rest of the world, but how very perfect to me" (Abdullah, 2009, p.11).

Arissa has child name Raian who is reason for her to live. She was pregnant when her husband died in World Trade Center. She was attacked by group of ruffians blaming her for 9/11 incident because of her veil and Muslim identity. This situation has impact on her decision of getting rid of veil. Her baby was abnormal with not proper hearing and sight. It was another shock for her. This is dedication of mothers love for child. It doesn't matter to her how he is, just his presence in her life makes her satisfied.

"Maybe it's wrong to see perfection as the key to bliss" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 222).

Perfection can never be only blessing. Accepting imperfections can bring great bliss. As humans are not perfect. Arissa considered her son as symbol of love, perfection, power. Arissa's choice sets her apart from her mother who never loved her perfect children.

Struggles and Resistance of Protagonist

"As the wind gathered more speed, she "swatted at the fleeting [veil] with the other hand and gripped the cold railing with the other hand... [She] let it sail down toward the depths" (Abdullah, 2009, p.6).

The dichotomous idea of resistance is questioned by Arissa's story. It reminds us that resistance does not necessarily have to be loud; it can be simmer, observe, and silently protest injustice. It makes it difficult to appreciate the significance of silent witnesses, those who endure injustice without openly protesting but whose sheer existence motivates others to seek change. As seen by this, resistance is a multifaceted tapestry of defiance that is woven together with both silent and vocal threads of defiance. Through her modest bravery, she reveals that even among the most moderate forms of opposition may overthrow the stifling and silent regimes.

"It was a matter of perspective—to an onlooker I had removed my veil, but from where I stood, I had merely shifted it from my head to my heart" (Abdullah, 2009, p.7).

She considers how a Muslim bystander would interpret this ceremonial exposure as treachery, but she comes to the conclusion that she is only pulling back the curtain "*from her head to her heart*". Letting go of veil despite of desire to keep it can be hardest decision for women to make. Real empowerment comes from mind.

"Who was I bidding farewell to? I wondered: the age-old tradition or the husband I had kept alive in my heart?" (Abdullah, 2009, p.7)

Arisa is questioning herself. Because she thinks that she is saying farewell to culture to her roots and her husband. This reflects her pain. She thinks that situation might be different if she her 9/11 incident didn't happen. If she had her husband with her who was her biggest support system. It's not always man who is behind women's oppressed rights. Sometimes it can be society who claimed to be a voice for women's right. Reality is different, they only support those Muslim women who goes against their culture and ready to become like them. This analysis questions choices of society who never accepts women from other culture with their identity. She is a woman only if she is from them.

Art as Source of Empowerment

"In all fairness, colors define me. Red reminds me of my marriage, ... But black reminds me of all that is sad and wrong in my life... White, the bridal color in the West, is the color a widow is expected to wear in the East, the color the body is shrouded in before being buried in the earth" (Abdullah, 2009, p.9).

As Arissa is an artist so colours hold very significant place to her. Black colour is symbolism of something dark, hopelessness and sadness. For her incident 9/11 is black day, the day when she lost her husband, her whole world. Red colour is source of happiness for protagonist as her husband wanted that colour for his book cover *Soul Searcher*. In a society with patriarchal system and certain stereotypes it's hard for women to survive.

"Dreams are not easy to create; they take a lot out of you" (Abdullah, 2009, p.7).

Struggling to achieve dreams is a sign of reverence, enlightenment, and determination, demonstrating the consistency and determination that Arissa possesses within her.

"It took me six years to complete your legacy. I have no more goals, only a little gift left by you, our son and your parting gift that gave me the gift of hope and survival!" (Abdullah, 2009, p. 220).

Arisa completed *Soul Searcher*; a project of her husband. And she wrote a letter to Faizan in which she expressed her level of serenity and satisfaction.

Role of Arissa's Mother in her Life

"What can I say about the mother who abandoned us four times over a period of two decades?" (Abdullah, 2009, p.17).

Arisa discusses her mother's lack of loyalty towards her children and husband, who criticized poor men for societal crimes. She later realizes the upper class is corrupt and angered her mother for not loving her.

"Your mother never learned to love. It took me years to understand that, Abu said to me years later She was born to be a free spirit. You cannot assign roles to such a person" (Abdullah, 2009, p.17).

Arisa's mother is rebellious, breaking societal norms and breaking ethical codes. Her father, a man, sacrifices for his children. Research focuses on mothers' attitudes towards Arissa's identity and choices, with Arissa believing in loyalty to family. Arissa, a single mother, struggles with her mother's selfish life and sacrifices for her children. She questions her cultural and traditional values, leading her to question her relationship with Zaki and ultimately to live as a single mother with her son. *Saffron Dreams'* protagonist, Arissa, resists Muslim prejudices and simplicity in post-9/11 America. Her mother leaves for a romantic relationship, causing hardships for her siblings. Arissa eventually releases her mother from responsibility, revealing the mother's hopelessness in a relationship.

The irony is evident as the mother screams,

"You can't discard me like day-old trash" (Abdullah, 2009, p.7).

Abdullah portrays Arissa, a female character who breaks free from her culture's constraints. Despite her narcissistic mother and educated father, Arissa's self-determination is evident when she uses a matchmaker to marry Faizan, a single mother raising special-needs, while her mother's actions cripple her children and break the mother-daughter bond.

Textual Analysis of *I am Thunder*

The story explores the female character's resistance and ability to navigate situations, focusing on her struggle to find her true self.

"Because being a Muslim – even British one means different things to different people. I wrote Muzna's story for you. Muslim or non- Muslim? It doesn't matter to me. It should not matter to you" (Khan, 2018).

Patricia Hill Collins states right away that the goal of intersectionality is to achieve social justice. Intersectionality, like critical social theory as a whole, is a "knowledge project of resistance" (p.10) that seeks to reveal the ways in which structures, ideologies, and system disadvantage particular groups of people.

Role of Muzna's Parents in impacting her to be Timid

Her parents are controlling and they manipulate her to pursue profession of doctor if she wants them to be happy. In reality she wanted to be a writer. But she has to surrender in front of her parents black mailing. As she stated that her friend Salma wanted to become Hollywood royalty.

"But I was different and scared. Like I was so often reminded; Allah punished kids who disobeyed parents." (Khan, 2018, p.15).

As long as Muzna Saleem chooses to become a doctor, her parents will be happy no matter what she decides to do with her life. The writing of Muzna doesn't pique their curiosity. When Muzna enrolls at a new school and befriends Arif, she believes she has found her true love. The popular females find it hard to believe. With a beauty like Muzna, what does a handsome guy want? Because of her poor self-worth and her unwillingness to ask her parents for advice, Muzna is a great target for those who try to radicalize young people.

"I hope we'd got you away from that girls evil influences in time, but I was wrong to blame her. This is what England does to our children. Gives them freedom to disobey their parents and engage in whatever filthy acts they like!" (Khan, 2018, p.236).

Muzna's father referring Salma her friend as evil girl, because she got entangled in affair. Muzna's parents migrated from that particular town so they can protect their daughter. Their daughter is not allowed to disobey them and take any kind of decision on her own. She will always be bounded by patriarchal stereotypes. She often thinks that if her parents might have not migrated from Pakistan she might have been able to live a different kind of life.

Racial Discrimination Faced by Muzna

Muzna and Salma confronted two boys who made fun of them by saying "You dirty Paki!" An old man roared at them and ask them to apologize. Muzna's father came to pick them up but he was angry at Muzna. He used to call his boss racist whenever he used to have bad day. In other days he would praise them. As man from Patriarchal society always find it easy to blurt out their anger on weak women.

"Life favored the white and pretty" (Khan, 2018, p. 33).

Racism is so evident. It's more about color and looks not about intellect and ideas.

"You stupid girl, ripping my hijab in two with his bare hands. How many times do I have to tell you we are not that sort of Muslims?... Do you want someone to dishonor you and put you in gutter? Do you want some racist to throw acid in your Pakistani face?" (Khan, 2018, p. 234).

One day Muzna got late as she went to mosque with Arif. Her parents got worried and report it to police. When she came back her father was so angry on her and ripped her hijab. On one side her parents were stereotypes but on other hand they were taking off her hijab because they were afraid that their daughter can be harmed because of her identity. It seemed so pathetic but that's how they were living. Racism is social inequality and injustice.

- **From Inferiority Complex to Seeking for Identity**

Muzna was intelligent but she was not brave. She degrades herself. Whenever she got bullied she didn't speak up. Her friend Salma used to speak instead of her. When Salma was zapping bullies she wished for herself to be strong.

"I wished I could stand for myself. I was 'articulate and able to make keen logical arguments – at least that's what my last English Report said" (Khan, 2018, p. 33).

Muzna was born in Britain and lived there still she was not able to be a happiest part of this culture. She was more concerned about her Muslim identity. She asked;

"Why our parents came over here... don't forget your roots" (Khan, 2018, p. 34)

But when her father was heartbroken by getting fed up of racism he had to go through everyday he said

"Maybe we should go to Pakistan... My heart stopped. Had he forgotten I was born here and England was only home I'd ever known" (Khan, 2018, p. 41).

Researcher analysis is showing that seeking for identity is first step and struggling to attain self-identity is destination Khan has set for Muzna.

Thunder Broke Silence

One day police came to their house to take her father for getting a statement. Muzna was afraid and she said *"I have no voice"*. From being a timid girl who is always afraid of speaking, she grows into a kind of person who can speak so well about her own opinions. Injustices and inequalities might be able to stop person from speaking up for sometimes but once that voice becomes determination of mind it's hard to let it hold back.

Muzna's journey from silence to thunder shows strength of her character. The strain of societal expectations and her fear of the unknown have stifled Muzna's roaring quiet. Nothingness is not what it is. It talks about her tacit opposition to the route that has been set for her and her reluctance to tolerate being treated like a commodity.

Social Stereotypes

In patriarchal societies women never get a status of being a woman. They are linked to chain of being daughter, wife, sister and mother. In order to come upto standard of fixed notions they never learned to be who they are actually. They never question their identity, autonomy. Its major problem for women. They are always considered as weak and fragile creature, who are not tend to have dreams of their own. They must live upto standards of society.

"What will you girls do when you go to your own homes? Your sasural? Hain?" she reprimanded us. "Mothers-in-laws have little patience for such forgetfulness. Better eat some almonds daily. It will make you more alert, han" (Abdullah , 2009, P.27).

This dialogue is spoken by lady name Tehmina Bua who was match maker. These lines represent how girls are considered to be in patriarchal society. Its thinking of society about women. It's not always man sometimes it's society making it most tough for women. She also commented "You have a house full of girls, Allah ki den hai." Arissa felt irritated.

"We all knew what she meant—that girls are a burden to the family until they are married off" (Abdullah, 2009, P.28).

It's a kind of criticism on people like these who make girls questioning their identity and value. So its a kind of obligation live according to others. Match making is a service to humanity but Tehmina's character shows the traditional thinking of society where only purpose of woman is to prepare herself for other house.

Comparative Study of both Fictions

As goal of study is to compare and contrast the protagonists' decisions and attitudes toward maintaining cultural identity. This research has analyzed that their similar background somehow made them to have different choices but eventually they end up attaining their identity. In *Saffron Dreams* (2009), Arissa's life difficulties arises due to 9/11 incident. While on other hand Muzna was not living in America but this incident caused islamophobia in west which made Muslims suffer more, especially women. Both protagonists' characters have been portrayed as resilient. Resistance itself is element of intersectionality. As where there is oppression there is resilience.

Comparison through an Intersectionality Lens

Novels are compared in the examination of modern feminism through the lens of intersectionality reveals the power dynamics that result in radicalization of women. A statement made by Beverly Lindsay that "linguistic and cultural difference exist between Vietnamese and Black American women, but both groups are the victims of race, sex, and class" is cited by Chandra Mohanty in one of her articles *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse*. Thus, the phenomenon of intersectionality reveals the range of situations and classifications that render these women powerless.

"Racism, sexism, class exploitation, and similar oppressions may mutually construct one another" (Collins, 2019, p.46.).

The experiences of eastern women in west highlight particular privileged positions and power structures that are in charge of oppression. Women are placed under an organized system of power relations in every setting, which breeds oppression and struggle. This analysis examines how the combination of gender, class, and cultural expectations changes the experiences of female characters and add to their suffering because of racism on base of color, religion and culture.

The narrative centers on Arissa and Muzna, protagonists of novels who must negotiate questions of race and identity in a culture that oppresses the people on basis of their cultural belongings. Arissa and Muzna have a disadvantage in life because they are living in orient cultures, as they will always be marked as outcasts.

Integrity and Identity

"I am thunder, the cloud that brings rain" (Khan, 2018, p.306).

Muzna and Arissa goes through different circumstances. Their struggle for identity and integrity transformed them from fragile creature to strong enough to attain identity. In *I am thunder* (2018) "Muzna set her hijab" while in *Saffron dreams* (2009), Arissa removed her veil. Their choices seems different. But struggle to attain new identity by deciding to represent them without fear as whole creates a link between them. Both protagonist grasped their identity which is viewed and analyzed through feministic perspective.

Pride and Prejudice

"They are not my people, but I don't think you are smart enough to figure out"
(Abdullah, 2018, p.115).

These lines reveals how strongly protagonists reject the idea of prejudice. In name of Islamophobia in west women were targeted for who they are. In their pride and prejudice they blame Islam and Muslims for causing terrorism. Muzna exposes Jameel and Arif which shows not all Muslim are terrorists. It's just a narrative they are trying to build.

While an interviewer questioned Arissa how you feel to be betrayed by your people. In response she strongly rejects and explain her narrative that they don't have religion. So research clarifies through characters that when women decide to reject prejudice she will.

Choice and Voice

"I am thunder and I can't keep quiet" (Khan, 2018).

This has been analyzed through feministic lens that Muzna decided to address rather than choosing silence. She fearlessly challenged set stereotypes. She had option to betray her beliefs but she made choice in which she betrayed her heart. She decides to take her stand by her own voice.

"Crisp and lifeless but not without voice." (Abdullah, 2009, p.5)

Arissa was going through biggest loss of her life. She had no courage to live still she faces challenges and made her journey fierce and strong. She never allowed anyone to be her voice. She addressed issues like racial discrimination, religious identity bravely.

Self-Enlightenment

Arissa and Muzna both had accomplished enlightenment through art. Art is used as healing by both. To be talented is not goal but making that talent work out practically helped them out to represent their ides clearly. Intersectional feminism stresses people's agency and autonomy, supporting women's freedom to conduct their life according to their own terms as opposed to fitting in with preconceived notions of what society expects of them. Intersectional feminist analysis of these lines reveals upholding gender stereotypes and promote a more accepting and empowering viewpoint that respects and appreciates the many experiences and decisions made by women across a range of social identities.

Defying gender stereotypes

Both protagonists break presumptions and stereotypes set for women. Muzna loved Arif but getting suppressed by other gender she decides to speak. While in letter to her dead husband Arissa accepts that she didn't do the things the way Faizan would like but she made choice on her own in acceptation that she might have made right choices. They go against their will but never give up. They rejects gender stereotypes which was implied on them from society.

Socio-Political Background of Protagonists

Both novels are diasporic as they represent stories of women who migrated from Pakistan to America and Britain. This study focuses on social injustice and racial descrimination, protagonists had to face. Arissa was victim of 9/11 incident, still she was one to suffer. Because of her cultural and religious identity she had to go through alot even after death of her husband. This 9/11 incident leads to spread of Islamophobia in west. Muslims were blamed and targated. Since then Muslims were labeled as terrorist and extremists. Protagonist of both novels have Asian background , which shaped and build their pre image in west. Their identity was just not acceptable. So this research finds out that not only cultural identities hold specific place in one's life but it also impacts their social status in particular society.

Findings

This research demonstrates that altering your appearance never makes you weak, but altering your viewpoint does. Muzna and Arissa, two female characters, are shown by Abdullah and Khan navigating and resisting several oppressive layers that cross and define their identities. The purpose of this research is to examine the diverse challenges, resilience, and self-determination exhibited by American and British women coping with the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Arissa's character developed from being a wife to widow to being a mother of child with abnormality. Muzna's character developed from being a tame to brave girl, from looking herself through others eyes to looking at herself from her insight. Muhammad has shown Muzna's transformation to a girl who becomes thunder and betray her heart. The research has thrown light on other characters which influenced and effected protagonist's lives. Challenges in life has played most important role in Arissa and Muzna's changed self.

Discussion

The present study has analyzed the role and struggles of women in western culture. By applying theory of feminism, this study has analyzed themes of integrity, individuality, religious and cultural identity, resilience and self-empowerment by using comparative analysis of Protagonists. Patricia Hill Collins' book *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (2019) has been used as a model framework in this study to analyze *Saffron Dreams* and *I am Thunder*. The results of this study demonstrate the importance of speaking one's mind and questioning cultural norms, as both of the case studies demonstrate. The routes Muzna and Arissa took to achieve autonomy and self-determination are consistent with feminist ideals. This study has provided a deeper understanding of character's complex struggles and their potential to ignite revolutionary societal change by investigating their intersecting realities.

The current study explores the aspect of intersectional experiences of Muslim women in west. This study embraces efforts of these two protagonist in attaining cultural and self-identity. It has been also revealed in the study that the author examines the impact of race, culture, religious identity, and gender. The analysis highlights the importance of the research objective, which is to examine women portrayal and their character development in novels. It emphasizes the significance of protagonists' decisions and attitudes toward maintaining identity on face of racial discrimination. The analysis shows that survival of women is difficult but not impossible in any society which tries to oppress rights of women. These are fictional stories but very close to reality, give an insight into the challenging situation of women. This analysis also highlights the resistance of female characters how they navigate the situations.

Conclusion

The analysis of the present study reveals all the challenges faced by women in both novels. The analysis highlights the importance of the research objective, which is to examine women portrayal and their character development in novels. It emphasizes the significance of protagonists' decisions and attitudes toward maintaining identity on face of racial discrimination. It is common women are considered as easy target by racial societies. Abdullah and Khan also explores how different social injustices combine and shape the identity of characters. The analysis shows that survival of women is difficult but not impossible in any society which tries to oppress rights of women. These are fictional stories but very close to reality, give an insight into the challenging situation of women who are trying so hard to make living possible in other cultures. This analysis also highlights the resistance of female characters how they navigate the situations. It also highlights struggle for women emancipation and feminism.

Recommendations

In order to understand the struggles for women emancipation, the present study has answered many questions which needed investigation. This research highlights that women are strong enough to live with their self-identity. As Arissa has to give up on her veil just to survive. No doubt she finds new identity but there must be a way for Muslim women to live up to her choice especially in societies which are more vocal about women's right. In addition, further studies should be carried out, such as on hypocrisy of societies who give freedom to only their women and their people. The present study is limited from an Intersectional feminist perspective. The other researchers are recommended to work on these novels from lens of Neo orientalism by Franz Fanon.

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