

## FROM OTHERNESS TO SELF-HOOD: AN EXISTENTIALIST FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF AYESHA BAQIR'S *BEYOND THE FIELDS*

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### ABSTRACT

*This research analyses Ayesha Baqir's Beyond the Fields (2019) to investigate the obstacles encountered by women and their lack of individuality that further aggravate their lives. The female characters—Zara, Tara, Saima Appi, and Sehr Madam—are portrayed as being subjected to gender inequality within a patriarchal system deeply rooted in Pakistani society. The novel highlights how institutions like marriage, family, and religion deprive women of their basic rights. Like many Pakistani writers, Ayesha Baqir raises her voice against gender disparity and marginalization of women as the "Other." This study incorporates Simone De Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1953) to examine factors responsible for women's submissiveness and loss of identity. It also explores how Zara's growing consciousness leads her to resist cultural oppression and gain emancipation. The research ultimately aims to enlighten women about their self-worth and inspire them to challenge male-dominated traditions.*

**Keywords:** Oppression, Simone De Beauvoir, Feminism, Empowerment, *Beyond the Fields*.

### INTRODUCTION

Allan (1997) states that feminism is a belief that advocates gender equality and supports women in terms of their rights. The writer states that it is not just an idea, but a widespread movement that makes people aware of women's rights. It is an arduous task to trace the evolution of feminism in political, cultural, and social paradigms in Pakistan. Literature acts like a mirror for society and depicts it as it really is. One can better understand feminism through Pakistani Anglophone Literature, as it portrays compelling female characters. Such characters have always been a matter of great discussion for prominent writers as Bapsi Sidhwa, Muhammad Hanif, Zulfiqar Ghous, Kamila Shamsie etc. In the same vein, Ayesha Baqir, another Pakistani writer, published her novel, *Beyond the Fields* in 2019, in which she writes about the atrocities and calamities of Pakistani women. Through this narrative, she attempts to highlight the conservative patriarchal Pakistani society and raises voice for the emancipation of women from the age-old customs of the male-centered society. The story is set in a rural village of Pakistan, Bahawalpur. The novel revolves around two twin sisters i.e. Zara and Tara who are adversely affected at the hands of the male chauvinistic society. They have no access to education and are not even allowed to step out of their home only because of their gender. By highlighting the issue of female education, Ayesha Baqir vindicates the society that snatches away the right to education from women and prevents them from having their own consciousness and identity. Later on, as the story proceeds Tara gets raped by the landlord's men. Instead of giving justice and solace to Tara and her family, all the villagers exhibit the same conservative patriarchal attitude towards this incident. One of the villagers says that our women carry the honor of our families, and nobody can reclaim this honor once it's gone. He advises Tara's father to keep silent and forbids him to tell this to anyone, as nobody would come to marry her other daughter, and ultimately his family would lose their

honor. Another man informs Tara's father about a new government rule that if a victim could not provide four eyewitnesses, then her daughter would be held accountable for Zina. Another person suggests that instead of bringing shame to his family, Tara's father should bury his daughter with dignity. By unveiling this heinous crime, Ayesha Baqir shows the crippled mindset of the people and their responses to such incidents. So, this research attempts to examine the oppression and injustice that women receive at the hands of men, and similarly, it unfolds the possible ways for resistance under Simone De Beauvoir's existentialist feminism, as discussed in her ground-breaking work *The Second Sex* (1953).

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Husain (2019) states that Tara's life best illustrates a village girl's conventional and chained life. "Her objectification, hardships, and her silence are common in rural areas. It seems that the only purpose of her life is to suffer silently. The novel shows similarities in the lives of women that indicate whether they live in urban areas or rural, they encounter the same hurdles. Women in both societies undergo the same pain. Zara is the only female in the novel who raises her voice against the patriarchy and is the only symbol of strength. She wonders if she will ever be able to cross these endless fields as she looks out at them. Her unyielding personality gives her the courage to cross these fields to reach out to her sister. He contemplates that every girl must have, at some point in her life, wondered if she could ever escape the patriarchal fields set in front of her" (Husain, p. 1).

Feminism aims to study the status of women in the society. It analyses the secondary role of women that they played throughout history and tries to reform and elevate the position of women in every aspect of life. A well-known feminist named Kate Millet contributed significantly to feminism with her book *Sexual Politics* (1970). She believed that domestic issues were more of a political than a private concern. Being the debut novel of Ayesha Baqir, there is a lot to be done on this literary work from different theoretical perspectives. Due to the limited available literature on this work, this research also discusses the feminist trends and calamities in South Asian literature. Khan (2006) states that women live in a marginalized culture where they are considered inferior, weak, and men dominate them in every walk of life.

Fatima et al. (2020) explain that women undergo the same fate of gender discrimination, violence, and oppression regardless of their color, race, and country. All of them face the same issues. Whenever she speaks against injustice, she is snubbed and forcefully suppressed. Ayesha Baqir depicted marginalization in various ways, how the village people snatched the right from women to cast their vote and deprived them for not taking part in social affairs. "After the rape incident, Tara's father and his male friends decide Tara's future. All the women from the village are assigned the secondary task of caring for their homes, children, and husbands" (Rauf et al., 2024, p.23). The deeply rooted patriarchal system left women helpless before society in the novel *Beyond the Fields*. When a girl is born, she is powerless against the misogynistic world. Zara was also helpless when people criticized her for her skin tone. She is powerless when she is not allowed to go outside. Rape victims and their families are seen as vulnerable and powerless before the Hudood ordinance. Victims of rape were powerless in the face of misogynists who exclusively blamed women for the crime. The rape incident involving Zara and Tara shows how women are powerless in a male-dominated society. Saima Appi is powerless in front of her in-laws and their superstitious beliefs (p.39).

In Pakistani English literature, women are commonly depicted as victims of cultural, institutional, and domestic violence. Mushtaq (2022) focuses on the misery of women in the context of Bina Shah's "The Wedding of Sundri," selected from the collection *Neither Night Nor Day*, edited by Rakshinda Jalil. The researcher asserts that Bina Shah traces a wide range

of social and cultural standards that lead to the voicelessness and subalternity of women. Sundri, a fourteen years old village girl, is the major victim of the story whose life is further made worse by her voicelessness. When she was only seven years old, she was engaged to Ghulam Farid, a family friend of Sundri's father. No one asks for her consent. Her father, Mohammad Karim, decided on her wedding as he was the family's decision-maker and never let his wife say anything about their daughter's wedding. During her Nikah, Sundri is taught by her parents to remain dutiful and devoted to her husband and in-laws and to have sons. The story concludes with the murder of Sundri. "She was declared Kari (amoral) by her villagers because, since childhood, she used to play with boys of her age, and now she is viewed as impure by her in-laws" (Mushtaq, 2022, p. 50)

Qaisra Shehraz aptly shows the dominant role of males in both of her novels. In the novel *The Holy Woman*, Zari Bano's father has a domineering position in the family. When he came to know about the death of his only son in a horse-riding accident, it made him sad and shattered. Hence, he decided to ask his older daughter Zari Bano to marry a Holy Quran to become a holy woman despite knowing the fact that she was already in love with another man (Seswita et al., 2015). Siraj et al. (2011) vindicates the marginalization elements that increase women's sufferings in the novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. The researchers state that Hanif has portrayed women as passive and submissive who rely on their males for their protection. Hanif also believes that if Alice in the novel, *Alice Bhatti* belonged to a Muslim community, she would still be treated the same way she is currently being treated. He emphasizes that in their society, the main issue is not differences in faith but rather the treatment of women. Hanif has also highlighted the unjust judicial system where the criminals belonging to the upper-class roam freely after committing crimes, and the victim does not get justice. Women living in such systems are exposed to various threats, violence, and discrimination. Alice and her mother encounter the same situation. Alice's mother was working as a housemaid when she got raped by the owner and then murdered by him. Later, he claimed she had just fallen from a marble staircase.

Yadav (2017) states that Taslima Nasrin as a writer focused on feminism and the enslavement of women. *Lajja* was written with an emphasis on women's problems at that time. Taslima Nasrin has depicted how the patriarchal society affects women's lives and their mindsets. The women in her novel *Lajja* were mistreated by their family, state, and law. According to Taslima, a woman has no desire in relation to her family. She merely needs to fulfill her obligations and disregard her wishes. One of her female characters, Kironmoyee, wanted to move to her family for safety in India during the time of distress when the incident of the Babri masjid occurred, but her wish remained unfulfilled. All she did was cry silently while conforming to traditional norms. This demonstrates how women must carry out men's wishes while keeping their desires a secret.

Safdar et al. (2022) trace the oppression and marginalization of women in Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* by analyzing it through the lens of FTDM (Fairclough's 3-Dimensional Model). Bapsi Sidhwa vindicates the deplorable and pitiful treatment of women in remote areas of Pakistan. Sidhwa illustrates the destructive institution of marriage, the idea of fake honor, the blind adherence to norms and customs, and the manipulative behaviors of men. Qasim is the father of Zaitoon, a selfish and dominating man who is only interested in money. He sells her daughter, Zaitoon to a stranger only for the sake of money. Zaitoon received harsh treatment from her husband, Sakhi. Sakhi used to beat his wife. Sakhi symbolizes the power-wielding attitude of males who believe that it is ok to abuse and mistreat their wives.

Ganaie and Chauhan (2014) explore the feminist elements in Arundhati's Roy, *The God of Small Things*. The novel revolves around the story of three women who live in a male-

centered society. It highlights the never-ending struggle of women against male exploitation and societal abuse. Three generations of women are depicted in the novel who undergo the same mistreatment by men and society. The unjust social norms and customs of Hinduism adversely affect the lives of all three generations. Mammachi suffers a lot through domestic violence as her husband, Pappachi, beats her with a brass flower vase. Men in South Asian countries take domestic violence as a symbol of pride for themselves.

Habib et al. (2013) trace out the deplorable condition of women in a third-world country in which they are deprived of their identities, social status, names, and right of choice. The central focus is the plight and struggles of Tehmina Durrani in her memoir '*The Feudal Lord*', which shows the male-chauvinistic society of Pakistan and also highlights the challenges that women face in a male-centered society. Tehmina Durrani got married to Mustafa Khar, a political figure and former chief minister of Punjab. Apparently, he is a great advocate of democracy, but in his private life, his behavior towards his wife is harsh and intolerable. Once, she was talking on the phone with her brother, and upon learning that, her husband got furious over her. She was not even allowed to read a newspaper, and it was liable to her to obey his command without objecting. It clearly shows the dominating nature of men towards their wives.

Zarger (2012) shows the plight of women in Pakistani society. Pakistani women suffer not only from patriarchal mindsets but are also unjustly victimized in the name of Islam. Women are not properly educated about their rights in light of Islam and are often misinterpreted by the male-chauvinistic society. Women in Pakistani society are treated as the property of men to whom they are connected, and this patriarchal attitude prevails universally and unwaveringly. Her principal responsibilities are as a mother, wife, and daughter, and her identity and honor are determined by the male to whom she belongs. She is not allowed to exercise her legal, political, social, or economic rights under the constitution or Islamic law. Women do not get acknowledgment for their efforts towards their families, society, and the advancement of the country.

Akram and Khan (2021) have vindicated the oppression and subjugation of women in the novel *How It Happened* (2013). Women throughout the world have faced unending discrimination at the hands of patriarchy and cultural norms. It significantly highlights the otherness of women in '*How It Happened*'. In the novel, through the character of Dadi, it is clearly evident that the elders of the family, particularly women, unconsciously mimic and support patriarchal beliefs. Dadi, Gulbahar Begum, in a story throughout her life, has shown submissiveness in her personality towards patriarchy and she wants the same subservient behavior from the younger generation of her family. A girl, according to Dadi, should be submissive, and by having such attributes, her life would be complete and she would be a perfect girl. No matter how harshly women may criticize men and their rules in their daily lives, at the end of the day, it is a woman who believes that adhering to these norms is the only proper way to gain acceptance from others.

Sahay (2022) probes the issues of women in Afghanistan after the takeover of the Taliban in 2021. Women's rights were highly secured in the Mohammad Zahir Shah, Amanullah Khan, and Hamid Karzai regimes. But in 1990, when the Taliban took over the government, women were bound in their houses. The extreme backlash against women was seen in that era. The researcher claims that people in Afghanistan, especially women, will experience the same horrific situations in the future after the Taliban takes over. According to Taliban rules, women are not allowed to go outside of their houses without a male. They cannot step out on the streets without wearing a burqa or hijab. It is a must for them not to wear high heels, as it will attract the male gaze towards them. Women were prohibited from speaking in a loud



voice in public places. They were not allowed to be filmed or photographed. The concept of free women is a myth for the Taliban.

Rehman et al. (2022) scrutinizes the deplorable condition of women in the novels i.e. *The Holy Women* (2001) by Qaisra Shehraz and *The Slum Child* (2010) written by Bina Shah. The female characters in both novels go through the oppression of the double standards of a patriarchal society that subdues and pushes them toward misery. Zari Bano from *The Holy Woman* lives a suppressed life inside the house. Despite being an educated girl, she has no identity of her own and she acts merely like a Puppet at the hands of the male members of her family. The powerlessness of women is depicted by the character of Zari Bano she was married to a Holy Quran and became a Holy Woman only because of her father's evil demands.

### RESEARCH METHOD AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The present study uses the qualitative method for analysis. It explores the issues of lack of individuality in the female characters of Ayesha Baqir's *Beyond the Fields*. The novel is interpreted and analyzed by Simone De Beauvoir's concept of Existential feminism presented in her famous work *The Second Sex* (1953). The researcher primarily discusses how women become responsible for the atrocities and oppression that they receive in the patriarchal society by their lack of consciousness and adhering to the norms of society. Being an Existentialist, Beauvoir refuses the concept of femininity. She asserts that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". It suggests that femininity is not inborn but is a social construct that is acquired through society, which supports the patriarchal system. Her main stance is that society shapes the mind and life of a girl and a boy. Neither girls nor boys, during their childhood, were aware of the biological differences. These social norms and cultures instill the concept of superiority (male) and inferiority (female) in the minds of both boys and girls to uphold patriarchy. De Beauvoir also believes that one cannot change sexual differences as they exist in the real world. However, they cannot become the source of injustice and inequality. She further claims that women become instruments and puppets for men by accepting such stereotypes, which results in oppression and subjugation of women in a society. According to Existential Feminism, women's right to express their free-will is denied since men annihilate their individuality. According to Beauvoir, the answer to the question of what a woman is and how she becomes a socially acceptable woman is that women are Other. As a result, women considered themselves as women through the men's eyes and never experienced their self-identity. However, women are not Other; instead, society makes them believe that they are other. Mother also plays a significant role in making their girls subservient/submissive or autonomous/ independent. According to Beauvoir "When a mother gives birth to a female child, she takes her as a curse and disappointment and welcomes her by saying 'You shall be a woman'" (Beauvoir, p. 533). Being a renowned thinker, she expresses her thoughts about existentialism and emphasizes on will of women to free themselves from the shackles and male-centered society. According to her, the principle of feminism is to know the value of free-will and freedom that will enable women to have better control on their bodies as well as on their lives. It is about embracing the notion of individuality by reverting the concept of the Other.

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The roots of patriarchy are deeply ingrained in Pakistani society. It constantly stripped women of their self-identity by using various institutional tools like gender ideology, social behavior, and gender discrimination. Similar to other patriarchal societies, in Pakistani society, men are given absolute power and a central position. Similarly, in *Beyond the fields*

the female characters particularly, Zara, Tara, Saima Appi and Amma are dictated with the same patriarchal ideology by crushing their self-identity and considering them as Others by fulfilling the needs and desires of men. Zara and Tara, perfectly depict the lives of every Pakistani woman. Ayesha Baqir explicitly portrays the horrific aspects of Pakistani patriarchal society, where women belonging to any class or any place go through the same traumatized experiences. Tabassum (2016) states that men and women from the very start have been dictated to accept and perform specific social and power roles in society. This social indoctrination delegates a right of control to men, while women are destined merely to obey the commands of men and become subservient to men. They show submissiveness in performing various roles, such as mother, wife, daughter, and sister. In their homes and families, they only represent male dominance by losing themselves.

### **FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR SUBMISSIVENESS AND OPPRESSION**

The novel starts with the main character, Zara, a passionate girl who embarks on a fearsome journey to Lahore to find the answers to the never-ending questions that society wants only from women and to get justice for her sister Tara. Born in a remote village in Bahawalpur, both twins Zara and Tara have different personalities. Tara is a very obedient and submissive child, and she does the same thing whatever she is told by her mother. She never says no to anyone in her family. From her childhood to adulthood, she has never thought about her own life and never made her own decisions, whether they are related to her education or her marriage. She feels content in carrying out the commands of her mother and has no purpose of her own in her life except to do household chores. Day by day she is getting used to and even gains perfection in all the preconceived roles that a girl needs to do in a patriarchal society. As it is stated in a novel “For the past few months, she’d been acting saintlier than our Pir. She did everything Amma wanted, even before Amma wanted it done” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 30). Tara is of the view that a girl has a good name in the family only when she adheres to their choices without any resistance. “Shush, you will get into trouble,” warned Tara (Ayesha Baqir, p. 97). Her submissiveness and passivity lead her towards her downfall and after getting raped by the landlord's men, her life is completely shattered. According to society, she has lost her honor. Her dear and blood relatives have left her isolated at such a crucial time. Her parents do not even bother to consider her situation. For them, society has greater value than their daughter. After the rape incident, Tara is not allowed to come out of the room.

Besides Tara, Zara's character is of great importance. She is outspoken, more resilient, and dares to stand up and defy the stereotypical ideas of society. She has a keen love for getting an education, and despite the discouraging behavior of her mother toward her studies, she never loses hope and tries to seek lessons secretly from her brother Omer. Her character is the epitome of bravery, as she fights against the odds of her family and society. The novel vividly depicts the story of injustice and oppression in which women are denied their due rights, freedom of speech, and access to education. Ultimately, they become the victims of domestic and psychological violence that is supported by law, culture, and society. Religion is also used to repress women. There is an incident from a novel that gives a clear illustration of this fact when Zara, after getting done with all the household chores, sees her reflection in a mirror, and then she swings away quickly by saying “Amma has forbidden us to look in the mirror. She said it was haram.” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 40).

### **PATRIARCHY**

Patriarchy is a concept that labels men as superior beings and women as inferior to men. In a lecture defining Hooks' concept of patriarchy, it states that “Patriarchy is a sociopolitical

structure that favors men and male dominance, insisting that men are superior, delegating power to men to control and dominate women in particular by using psychological terrorism and violence” (2019, p.18). The novel perfectly highlights the patriarchal hegemony that diminishes the social recognition of the female sex. It brings into consideration the social constructs that delegate power and central role to the male sex in a patriarchal society. The perfect example of patriarchy lies in the character of Zara’s father, who is dominant and the central figure of the whole family. He is the one who makes all the minor and major decisions in the family. No one in his family can go against his decisions. Amma, Zara’s mother is seen in the whole novel obeying the commands of her husband. She is like a puppet who has no identity or recognition.

Once Tara’s Nani brings some seeds for Amma, she does it so that Amma could plant them in the backyard of the home. Zara’s grandmother wants that by sewing these seeds in a garden, her daughter would help her husband financially and increase their income. Upon knowing her plan, Tara’s father gets furious and angrily says, “If Amma wanted to help, so she could learn to please her husband” That was the end of Amma’s vegetable garden and Nani’s visit (Ayesha Baqir, p.72). Once Zara’s family visits their uncle Khalid Chacha’s house and they reach there in the late hours of the night. Meanwhile, the Tonga-Walla is telling them about an upsurge of dacoity in the village and the risks of traveling at the late hours. During this discussion, the Tonga-Walla is dissuaded by Zara’s father from discussing such matters in front of the women. This incident is a clear depiction of the patriarchal and male-orientated society that how women are treated as weak, fragile, and domestic beings, who are not even allowed to hear about the outside world. Amma and Nani get sad at the birth of twin daughters, Zara and Tara. On their wall, there was hanging a beautiful portrait of a boy and Amma used to stare at it with longing. “And he was a boy. In our village, it made all the difference” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 40). The Dai requests Amma to visit their Pir and seek forgiveness (Ayesha Baqir, p. 39). It implies that in patriarchal societies giving birth to a girl is like sinning. The patriarchal mindset plays a dominant role in the wretched and traumatic lives of the females in a novel, whether it is about the heartbreaking situation of Chiragh or the hasty marriage of Tara, from physical and psychological violence to unequal opportunities for education. Chiragh has a love affair with Anwar who promises to marry her. Chiragh decides to elope with Anwar but when her family finds him, he leaves her. People talk about Chiragh’s abortion, and her family leaves the village and gets settled in some other place. She is left all alone and her lover Anwar never looks back and gets married to a girl of her mother’s choice. In Chiragh’s incident, it is evident that it is a mistake on the part of both Anwar and her but due to her gender, she pays a heavy price for her mistake while Anwar being a man is roaming freely and living happily. It shows the double standards of our society.

Different stereotypical roles are assigned to women to uphold the dominance of men. They are encouraged to be silent and invisible. When there is talk about women's participation in outdoor activities, they are shunned, whether they belong to the upper or lower class. Sehr Madam is the quintessential example of this. She belongs to an affluent family, but her status is no different than that of the other village women. She is also bound to live on the periphery of her home. Other than this, she has no other work to do. Her husband, Jameel Sahab, deals with all the internal and external affairs, i.e. from the hiring of the maids to their management. Her husband is the one who manages everything. The diminishing position of Sehr Madam has been expressed by Zara in the following lines: “Primped and preened in their suits, Jameel Saab and his friends strolled towards the line of gleaming cars. He was leaving Sehr Madam home again. Was she any better off than Amma?” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 204). Selinger (2014) in her article discussing women as Beauvoir’s “Other” holds that the

term self and other places men and women in the binary oppositions of gender, where women are completely denied their freedom and choices. All the women of the village are supposed to work incessantly at their homes, taking care of their husbands and children without getting any praise. Zara says, “As soon as we learned to walk, Amma set us on chores” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 33). Only Omer is allowed to go out of the house with his friends and has an excess to education.

### **Domestic Violence**

According to Young, social scientists define patriarchy as a social structure that gives absolute power and authority to men to maintain their dominance not only in society but also at home (Young, 1992). Saima Appi after getting married endures the most abusive and physical assault at the hands of her husband and in laws. She is helpless before a patriarchal society and the unjust behavior of her in-laws towards her. Her in-laws blame her for the destruction of the crop due to excessive rain and lock her in a room for several days and is cut off from the entire family. Likewise, she also undergoes physical punishment in the form of whipping when her sister-in-law’s baby dies (Ayesha Baqir, p. 157). Her husband like any other man never listens to and supports his wife. Saima Appi’s marriage is fixed without her consent. She is not allowed to make any choice about her husband as it is against patriarchy. “A thick gold chain looped from her nose to her ears, reminding me of a buffalo being led away by its owner” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 94).

Sexual abuse is an egregious form of violence that profoundly affects women’s emotional and mental states. Among all the violence and abuse that women suffer through, sexual abuse is the worst one (Campbell, 2004). Tara suffers most through sexual abuse. Being a member of a weaker or inferior group she is powerless in a male dominating society. She is brutally raped by the landlord’s men. Vulnerability and helplessness of a woman is aptly depicted in Tara’s narration about her rape incident. She says, “I lashed out but he covered my mouth with his hand and threw me to the ground” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 262). This rape has turned her life upside down. After getting married to her so-called husband Kamran she is humiliated and sexually abused by him every single day. “He raped me, again and again. It made no difference to him whether I resisted or cried. He was quicker if I didn’t. He laughed and said the marriage ceremony was a sham. He could do anything he liked with me”.

### **Marriage**

Otoom (2016) explains Simone De Beauvoir’s perspectives about marriage and says that she is of the view that marriage reinforces social norms and traditions that establish masculinity. Marriage is an institution that limits women to domestic responsibilities and excludes them from participating in any social, political, or economic engagement. Men, within the framework of traditional marriage, have greater access to freedom and opportunities, but on the other hand, women are deprived of all these. Tara, after getting raped, so according to Tara’s father and other villagers, marriage is the only escape that may give them again honor and prestige in a society. Tara’s Amma and Abba think that marriage will change her daughter’s fate and will bring happiness to her life. Simone De Beauvoir implies that the concept that marriage brings happiness in women’s lives is misleading. She is of the view that if a woman is restricted from expressing her individuality, that marriage would likely to damage woman’s well-being (Beauvoir, 1953, p. 496). Tara is married to Kamran a rigid patriarchal man who only exploits her for his benefit. He used to run a brothel where he kept Tara only for entertaining the customers. He forces her to sleep with other men to recover the money that he spent on his wedding. He makes her physically and mentally sick by overdosing her on high drugs. And after that, she is unable to think and move.



### **Submission**

“In De Beauvoir's theory, the biggest hurdle for women to attain their emancipation is their passivity” as stated by Craig (1979). Throughout history, women have been assigned such passive roles and responsibilities. When Amma discovers that her husband is dissatisfied with her desire to grow a vegetable garden, she happily accepts his decision. Such depiction of women reveals the cultural dynamics that prevail in some traditional societies where women are encouraged to suppress their desires and be sidelined. Zara while describing the position of Amma in her house says, “Our courtyard was crowded with two charpais, one for Abba and the other for our guests. Amma only sat on the charpai when while Abba was out. When he was home, she hovered around him or squatted by the cooking pit” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 35).

The cycle of gender-based inequality against women is further carried on by the mothers. They are the ones who are actively engaged in inculcating the values regarding women's submission to the traditional social norms in their daughter's minds. Daughters have an organic bond and intimacy with their mothers and being close with their mothers, daughters tend to adopt their behavior and imitate them. Resultantly, it contributes to the gender-based violence that they receive within their own homes as well as from the outside world. Simone De Beauvoir (1953) states that “The love and affection of a mother gets much increased when her daughter gets close and devoted to her. It makes their bond more intense. Her mother sees her reflection in her daughter. She does not see her as a member of the superior caste. She transfers all the complexities and issues of her life into her daughter or doubles of herself, and the mother feels dejected when her daughter exhibits her otherness and individuality. These differences are considered as betrayal by a mother” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 532). In this regard, Amma is the perfect example of such a stereotypical mother who wants her daughter to be like the other traditional girls who are in the pursuit of becoming perfect daughters who conform to patriarchal thoughts. Their mothers from their very childhood put them doing the household chores. Time and again they are reminded to be modest and obedient as it is a must for a girl to have all these qualities. Zara and Tara are deprived of their freedom and education. Whenever Zara opens up her books for study her mother tells her to close them as according to her mother education would never change her fate and life. Once Tara stops Zara from stepping out of the house and reminds her of Amma's instructions first to finish the household chores. They are told to clean the room for Sakina Masi, peel potatoes, and mend the winter blankets (Ayesha Baqir, p. 100).

Kalsoom chachi tells Saima Appi to be submissive and docile before her husband and in-laws and also advises her to tolerate the oppression after marriage. Saima Appi, after suffering extreme physical and psychological violence at her husband's place is still instigated by her mother to go back to her husband's house as according to her mother a dead daughter is more acceptable to her than a divorced one. This is a true depiction of how mothers make their daughters fragile and helpless.

### **Role of Law**

The novel *Beyond the Fields* shows a rigid Pakistani patriarchal society in which law and state also validate the violation of human rights specifically the rights of women. The authorities and law act as spectators when small girls and women get raped at the hands of barbaric men. In the words of Jatoti (2018) in Pakistan women prefer to endure sexual harassment and allegations of rape. They do not come forward with these social evils because they will be held accountable for being raped or abused (para, 4). Tara and many other girls in the novel become targets of Hadood's ordinance in Zia's regime. When Zara gets raped,

she faces a complex and challenging situation in which the law and state are against her. Under the Hudood ordinance, Tara would have to present four eyewitnesses before the court to prove her innocence. And if she remains unable to bring four witnesses to the court, then she will be accused of Zina (Rape). That new constitutional law snatches away a right to prove herself innocent as a girl can't get her justice in such a misogynist society that favors men over women.

## RESISTANCE

Simone De Beauvoir in her famous work *The Second Sex* states that “a transformation can take place one day if a woman instead of embracing her weaknesses, seeks solace in her strengths. This self-realization enables her to find herself rather than to escape herself” (The Second Sex 1953, p.678). Pakistani women are deemed inferior in every aspect i.e. marriage, divorce, and rape. But despite such demeaning and loathsome incidents that occurred with the female characters, they never gave up (Rauf et al., 2024). Amma who had always been a great admirer of such traditional social and cultural norms ultimately took up the courage to break away from these norms to get liberation. Amma, soon recognizes that being liberated and free holds greater importance than being oppressed. Amma gains consciousness after Tara's rape which leads to a close bond between Amma and her daughters especially, Zara and Tara. When Zara brings Tara back home from a heartless husband and an abusive marriage, Amma shows her disagreement with Tara's father's decision not to bring Tara to their house. She stands firm against her husband. At this point, she gains consciousness and decides to take Tara back with her. In a conversation with one of the villagers about the rights of the girls Amma says, “This is not what our religion says. Even women have rights” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 273). Ayesha Baqir skillfully shows the transition in Amma's character from being strongly against the education of her daughters and their choices to letting her daughters do whatever they want to do for the betterment of their lives. “But now I don't know.” Amma shook her head. “I don't know what's best for you both. You have to decide that” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 293).

Zara's character is the epitome of resistance. She has a great potential to stand against the injustices of a patriarchal society. She seems to be consistent in her struggles to make her future better and also plays a remarkable role in alleviating the adversities of Tara that she was facing at her husband's place. She has always been courageous and resilient. She has been different since her childhood as she never wished to spend her life like the other village girls. “But I wanted to be seen and heard. Like other girls. Like other girls who went to school. Like girls who chased their dreams” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 9). Zara very courageously handles the situation after getting raped in a brothel in a case of escaping Tara from Kamran. She unlike other rape victims shows resistance to the unjust patriarchal system where the affected endures all the blame and shame and merely considers it their fault the way Tara did,” but that man raped me, so it's his shame, his honor and his izzat that's lost, not mine. I can't accept that my honor and izzat are defined by one act, which I don't even have control over. And neither should you” (Ayesha Baqir, p. 281).

## CONCLUSION

This research scrutinizes the miseries and adversities of females in a rigid Pakistani patriarchal society. It also shows that in patriarchal societies, the distribution of power is gender-based. Within these societies, gender is taken as a cultural construct rather than a biological one that delegates such praiseworthy attributes to men like bravery, bluntness, and resilience and sideline women and expect them to be weak, silent, and submissive. Tara, Zara, Amma, Saima Appi Sehr Madam, and Chiragh are caught under the oppression of a

patriarchal society. Tara and Zara, are opposite of each other. Tara is submissive and submits herself to the patriarchal notions while on the other hand, Zara, due to her self-consciousness resists the atrocities of a misogynist society. This study also highlights that after a certain period, there comes a moment where constant violence and suffering become unbearable and unacceptable to women. It happens as a result of gaining consciousness where women decide to endure no more sufferings and vow to get emancipation from the clutches of men and society. Ayesha Baqir is of the view that women can shape their lives and make their destinies. Ayesha Baqir has proved it through the character of Zara who not only gets success in pursuing her dreams but in fact, sets her sister free from the clutches of her husband. In the end, Amma also shows resistance to the norms and traditions of society by giving her daughters the freedom to make their own choices.

### Recommendations

The suppression of women in a male-dominated society often appears inevitable, as deeply rooted patriarchal norms continue to exploit women. In the context of this novel, such oppression is evident through the denial of women's rights. However, the narrative also highlights the necessity of female resistance as a means of asserting identity and reclaiming space within a male-dominated society. Moreover, it is imperative that women challenge these societal constraints, not only to survive but also to affirm their existence and autonomy in a structure designed to oppress them. Encouraging and portraying such resistance in literature is crucial for fostering awareness and inspiring real-world change toward gender equality.

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