



Combat of Gender Superiority in *The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman

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ABSTRACT- This study focuses on *Combat of Gender Superiority in The Power* (2016). It's a qualitative study which deals with the textual analysis of the mentioned literary work. The theoretical framework for this work is feminism. The plot of the novel shows that women acknowledge that they have some special powers. They make use of that power and control almost all the fields of life. They behave with the male lot the way male are behaving with female these days. It shows that women are filled with furry revenge. They make men their slaves and impose different restrictions upon them. What women do in the novel, the same men are doing to them. This story is the wish of liberation of feminists. They want to break the chains of patriarchy. Their actions mean that they want that male should change their approach towards them as women are capable of performing all those activities which men are doing. They struggle for the bliss of equality. Though the actions of the female characters are rude and atrocious but actually they portray men's attitude with women in many countries. They want to give the message to the society that if you do not like some of their actions, then you should give equal rights to female everywhere. They should be dealt as human beings and not domestic animals. These points are analyzed and proved from the text of *The Power* (2016).

Key Words: Feminism, Patriarchy, Power, Equality.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study explores feminism in *The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman. Feminism has been a hot issue and is thoroughly searched out from its day first. This is such an issue that cannot come to its end. It is not a mathematical problem that has a fixed answer once and for all. Feminism prevails in each and every human society as there is no single human society which does not have male and female together. When male and female live together, there exists feminism. It is simply inevitable to separate female gender from male gender in a human society. Almighty Allah has created every living being in pairs i.e. male and female. The growth in population of human or any other specie is only possible if there is female gender in that society. This whole discussion means that male and female are inseparable in any society. A single gender cannot live forever in complete isolation. Resultantly, there would be feminism in that society and this concept will not come to its end even if there is a single female on the face of the earth. The concept of feminism is explained in the next section.

Peter Barry (1956) writes that feminism is the struggle for women's rights. Whoever speaks for the rights of women whether male or female is feminist. In some societies and places, the term feminist has got negative perception. It is a social and political struggle for the safety and to make sure women's birthrights. In short, it is a movement to get power and be above or equal to male world.

Research Questions

1. Do the fiction, *The Power* (2016), have the elements of feminism?
2. If yes, how are they present in the fiction?
3. How the current study relates *The Power* (2016) to the contemporary society?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is the analysis of different critics about some literary work. Here, the researcher is concerned with the opinions of critics about *The Power* (2016). The researcher has collected articles related to feminism in one way or the other. They are analyzed and commented by the researcher. At the end, he mentions research gap that the current study fulfills.

In the novel, women tried to limit even the movements of men. They made new laws for them the way some countries have made for them in contemporary life. One of them was that “every person should keep one’s own passport. This means that every man was supposed to show his identity to everyone all the time. Women tried to keep men in their own territories. Further, it was necessary for a man that he must have a female guardian. She would permit him to move around and travel from one place to another. The possession of men was given to women. Now, men were recognized and identified by their women and not vice versa. (Kulic, 2018)

For Stähler and Vice (2014), Naomi Alderman is a “contemporary British Jewish writer” (Stähler and Vice, 2014, p.8) who has much interest in her religion.

Rattanakantadilok (2017) writes that if mothers have only task and they are forced to do that i.e. reproduction, they would feel suffocated. This is a reality that most of the societies take only this task from their women. They are considered as child-producing machines. These kinds of issues are addressed in Alderman’s novel and “*The Power* has gained prestige since it won a major literary award.” (Rattanakantadilok, 2017, p.54) The critic (2017) says that Alderman presents conventional struggle for power by the two sexes. For the first time, she wrote such a work which “is the first piece of science fiction to win the Baileys Prize for Women’s Fiction.” (ibid.) The plot of the fiction is an interesting one. A future dystopian world is presented if women were given or they got absolute control of the world. In the fiction, teenage girls get the power to emit electrical jolts from their hands. These jolts are so powerful that they could hurt anyone. If they were in a series then they could kill a person as well. The fiction tells a man that how it feels when he is in the control of a woman and he is treated as a weaker sex. In other words, it is the expression of grief and anguish what patriarchal societies do with their women. Further, the critic writes:

. A new religious leader is ready to feminize faith as shown in the following excerpts: They say, “Why do you call God She?” Eve says, God is neither woman nor man but both these things. But now She has come to show us a new side to Her face, one we have ignored for too long. (Rattanakantadilok, 2017, p.54)

The critic talks about pronouns used for God. Alderman questions that why the pronoun ‘He’ is used for God and not ‘She’? Then he answers his question that God is both male and female. Till now, male pronoun was used for Him, but now, female pronoun would be used for Him as we have been ignored for a long time. As the whole fiction is on the side of women, it would not be a new thing if God is called by the pronoun ‘She’. (Rattanakantadilok, 2017)

Brooks (2019) writes that it would be a wonder if we were ruled by our women. Then he asks few questions that is a woman more peaceful than a man? Is it a biological difference or she has such acquired behavior? Or it is because of their weak physique that they are so meek? Or women are dominated by their societal rituals? These are questions which may have varied answers depending upon the experiences of a person. The novel starts from a war between men and women where women come out victorious. They have become more powerful than men. They compete and challenge their earlier physical dominance by men. When they come to know that they have some electrical power, they make use of it, bring destruction upon men, limit them in their homes, and impose too many bans upon them. It was difficult to dominate their new power as the number of these powerful kept on increasing.

They gradually improve, some by themselves, others at the North Star training camp for girls. As the young women have the ability to wake up the power in older women, the number of women who have ‘the power’ grows rapidly. Women around the world start gathering together, fighting against the patriarchal oppression of which they have been victims. (Brooks, 2019, p.3)

Cooke (2018) writes that patriarchal societies take benefit of women as being weaker sex. They are raped with no mercy and are maliciously used when men want to fulfill their interest from women. Further, rape is used as weapon in patriarchal societies as “the threat of rape, as much as rape itself, keeps women in subordination to men. The issue of pornography and prostitution is also raised in the novels and given attention in this thesis. (Cooke, 2018, p.1) The critic, in his thesis, writes that women are fearful of rapes by men. They may treat women badly if they stand for their rights. They are blackmailed through various ways. They are driven towards prostitution. Men have the major role in devastating women in patriarchal societies.

(Cook, 2018) Another critic, Chmielewska (2018) writes about women's silence on their suppression; Silence is not power. It's not strength. Silence is the means by which the weak remain weak and the strong remain strong. Silence is a method of oppression". (Chmielewska, 2018, p.26) Women remain silent when they are treated badly or deprived of their rights because they think that men can do worse than what they have done. Not only their rights, but at times their lives are in danger; but, the critic suggests that they should not be silent upon such maltreatment.

These are the comments of different critics about *The Power* (2016). Many of them are comparative studies and the novel is studied in relation with other works. There is not a single work completely dedicated to the theme of feminism in contemporary times in relation to Pakistani society. The current project fulfills this gap.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Barry (2017) writes that feminism was already started before 1960s. It was renewed in that decade and kept on flourishing till today. He (2017) points out few important regarding feminism. The first point is to "rethink the canon, aiming at the rediscovery of texts written by women." (Barry, 2017, p.156) This is the first demand and need of feminism and feminists. They want the literature written by female writers to be acknowledged. Though there are many male authors, but at the same time, authorship by women should not be ignored. They deserve high place and attention to their works if their works fulfill the parameters of a good work. In other words, good authorship is not inherent to male authors, rather, female can also write good literature e.g. Emile Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Next point is to revalue the experience of women. The critic (2017) is of the opinion that women were considered a lower gender in earlier times and that situation continuous in contemporary times as well. The qualities of women were not given proper value and response. They were regarded as slaves. Whatever was weak and low-graded, that was associated with women, while, all good and powerful things were associated with men. Women were limited to domestic chores only. In Victorian period, they were even not allowed to publish their works or show the authorship of their works. This is why, few great female authors published their works by pseudonyms. Before 1960s, women literary figures were not given due value and importance. (Barry, 2017)

Donovan (1990) writes that the movement for women's rights of the nineteenth century focused that woman should be considered and treated like persons as any constitution says. This means that women were not given their birth-right as to consider them 'persons'. The critic (1990) writes that they were degraded to animal's level and considered equal to them. They were thought to be devoid of many humanly feelings.

Papke (2008) talks about feminists' experiences in her poems. She considers "the complexity of motherhood and maternal activities as a sexual, biological, psychological, emotional, cultural and political experience." (Papke, 2008, p.15) She writes in her article that women have more experiences than men. Men cannot give birth to children and they are unaware of the pain and complexity of motherhood.

Men are aggressive and physically strong than women. This is the reason that like other activities, men dominate women easily. (Simpson,1989; Atkinson, 1974; Barry, 1979; Firestone, 1970; Rich, 1980; Stacey and Thorne, 1985).

Jackson and Scott (1996) write that men and women are different but it is a matter of biology. The critics write; "Biological theories of difference focus on women's and men's different reproductive roles and comprise physical, emotional and intellectual features." (Jackson, Scott, 1996, p.17) Till 1970s, the term 'gender' was used only to make difference in men and women, but then it changed its meaning and usage. Then, it was used "to distinguish between the social and cultural representation of women and men and the biologically determined sex." (ibid.) What men and women performed were measured through the parameters of 'gender'. Some of the activities were regarded as purely of men and others of women. It was tried to explore the hidden talents of women and bring them on equal grounds to men. (Jackson, Scott, 1996)

Rich (1977) writes that feminism minimizes the difference between men and women and brings them close to one another. He writes, "Second-wave feminism, also called revolutionary or radical feminism, developed in the 1960s and changed the political climate with its revolutionary principle that "the personal is political". (Rich 1977, p.57) They struggled for political power and got that. They started playing their role in politics. They were no more politically oppressed but this was not the case all over the globe as still there were and are societies which deprive their women of their political rights. But, those who struggled for political liberation, they succeeded. Then they moved for another success which was sexual liberation. This "sexual

liberation” and improved methods of contraception and birth control created the condition for politics that emphasized body, sexuality and procreation.” (ibid.) They want their bodies to be free of any upper hand upon them. They demanded that they should be allowed to do that what they want to. After political liberation, sexual liberation was comparatively easy step for feminists. They targeted the term ‘gender’ and called it a relative term to patriarchy.

This means that the nature of truth lies in the hands of men. They are the ones who decide parameters for different things. It seems that only men exist in a society and there are no women at all, they behave that women in such a manner, the critic adds. In feminism, woman is the major and main focus of inquiry. The critic writes that “feminism has become more encompassing, taking into account the gendered understanding of all aspects of human culture and relationships.” (Simpson, 1989, p.606) Feminism is not limited only to “women’s equality of opportunity and freedom of choice. (Simpson, 1989, p.607) It encompasses all fields of life.

The critic (1989) opines that “Socialist-feminists attempt a synthesis between two systems of domination, class and patriarchy (male supremacy). Both relations of production and reproduction are structured by capitalist patriarchy.” (ibid.) In this quotation, the critic says that even reproduction depends on the choice of men. If they want to have such relationship, women cannot stop them. There is not a single field of life where it is not tried to control the women lot. On the other hand, men are not equal to other men in capitalist society. Some men cannot enjoy the liberty that other men do in white supremacist society. So, with what kind of men women want to be equal with? This is the question that few critics ask the feminists. (Simpson, 1989; Hooks, 1987; Hart-mann, 1979; Mitchell, 1971)

Schochnwille (2018) writes that science fiction was dominated by male authors. These works focus on sexuality and power. The “complex relationship between the individual and societal power is discussed through a reevaluation of gender relations and institutionalized racism and sexism.” (Schochnwille, 2018, p.33) These fictions “often radicalize the inferior position of women in contemporary society and present a social reality in which captivity and severe oppression of women is the norm.” (ibid.) It is a fact that women are suppressed in almost each and every society. Until and unless there is this suppression, there will be feminist dystopian literature. (Ferreira, 2018; Pearson, 1999; Alison, 2004).

Alegre (2015) writes that she does not hate me. I have respect for them and want respect from for women from them. But it is a fact that “women have always been subjected to male power and I believe in the equality of the sexes.” (Alegre, 2015, p.4)

Textual Analysis

This is the central part of this study. It relates the theoretical framework with the text of the science-fiction, *The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman. Those elements are searched and analyzed which have feminist elements in one way or the other.

This literary piece is about women who get some special powers but then use them against male lot. They take revenge from men who have kept them under the clutched of patriarchy for too long. This is the indication of women coming into power in almost all the fields of life. Here is the analysis of the novel:

Allie was the central character whose every word was recorded and was shared with the rest of the world. She conveyed God’s message to the congregation that men

have said to you that man and woman should live together as husband and wife. But I say unto you that it is more blessed for women to live together, to help one another, to band together and be a comfort one to the next. (Alderman, 2016, p.100)

This means that if women and men live together, there will be inequality on the part of women as men consider them a lower sex. To avoid this inequality, women should live with other women and not men. They should be partners to one another instead of being mates men. If women live with other women, there will be equality at each level, as they will have no gender difference. She says to the gathering that men would not allow to practice what we listened now but we should achieve this goal at any cost. She further says that They have said to you that you must be contented with your lot, but I say unto you that there will be a land for us, a new country. There will be a place that God will show us where we will build a new nation, mighty and free. (Alderman, 2016, p.100)

All this happens in almost every society as in the novel. Men do not allow women to have their own free territory and rule over there according to their will. Now, they are planning to get away with this upper patriarchic hand and breathe with their choice. The following extract taken from the novel well represents the researcher’s own society in general:

The girl has always looked down and shaken her head fiercely, blinking her moist, stupid eyes. The women think the girl may be deaf. Or she has been told to be deaf. Things have happened already to these women to make them wish they could be deaf and blind. (Alderman, 2016, p.109)

This is the description of a girl in the novel but stands for all the women who are under strict hands of patriarchy. They are not allowed to express what is there in their upper storey. They are choice-less in different occasions. The girl, as discussed in the above quotation from the novel, seems to be mad. In reality, she is a normal girl with good consciousness but she has made so to behave and act. She can see and observe everything happening in her surroundings but is made blind to them. Likely, she is deaf which in reality she is not. Controlled and subjugated minds cannot think what they want to, rather, their controllers guide them and make them like robots. Feminists want that no one should control or affect their minds and actions.

In a male-dominated society, men think too low of women. They think that women are used only for sexual pleasure and reproduction. The novel writes; "Women are just animals," says UrbanDox. 'Just like us, they want to mate, reproduce, have healthy offspring. One woman, though, she's pregnant for nine months. She can care for maybe five or six kids well across her life." (Alderman, 2016, p.200) Here, women are considered like animals. Many men think that women have no feelings. The only purpose of their lives is to provide pleasure to their men. She is a child-producing machine and not more than that. Feminists say that they do not deny the process of mating and reproduction but they want to do that according to their choice. When and how they want, men should do in that way and they should not impose their wish upon women. For this purpose, they want to free themselves first from sexual slavery. They want complete freedom for their bodies. In the novel, they get this liberty and make relationships with other men the way they want. The novel writes;

He feels it. It is exhilarating. In the streets there are still shouts and crackles and sporadic sounds of gunfire. Here in a bedroom covered with posters of pop singers and movie stars, their bodies are warm together. She unbuttons his jeans and he steps out of them; she goes carefully; he can feel her skein starting to hum. He is afraid, he is turned on; it is all bundled up together, as it is in his fantasies. (Alderman, 2016, p.75)

The above passage shows the control of a woman in her love making process over a man. Outside of the room, there are sounds of gunfire and bombs but she does not care about that. The man in the process seems to be dominated by the woman. The outside fearful situation has no effect on the inner romantic atmosphere. She is busy in removing his clothes. This is another sign of dominance by her. As this is the time when women are powerful and have special powers, if she is happy in such a relationship, it means that she has an upper hand in intercourse.

Many of the men "are worried about where this thing is heading" (Alderman, 2016, p.200) as they do not know how to control the electricity emitted from young girls' fingers. They kill and butcher men. The powerful women impose many bans on men. Women overturn governments. They become the controllers and governors of the states and countries as the novel (2016) states; "Forty three border towns are now effectively being run by paramilitary gangs, mostly composed of women who've freed themselves from sexual slavery." (Alderman, 2016, p.112) They even kill some of the kings whose countries they cannot rule but still they satiate themselves by killing men. A female character says, 'I want to humiliate them. Show that this ... mechanical power cannot compare with what we have in our bodies. (Alderman, 2016, p.210) As they have got powers, they want to make legal or illegal use of it. There is revenge in their actions.

Twelve days later the government has fallen. There are rumours, never substantiated, about who killed the King; some say it was a member of the family, and some say it was an Israeli assassin, and some whisper that it was one of the maids who had served in the palace loyally for years feeling the power between her fingertips and no longer able to hold it back. By that time, anyway, Tunde is on a plane again. What has happened in Saudi Arabia has been seen across the world, and the thing is happening everywhere all at once now. (Alderman, 2016, p.76)

Kings die in different countries and their people do not know who have killed them. Men, everywhere, are in danger.

It wasn't just those men who hurt us,' a twenty-year-old woman, Sonja, tells him. 'We killed them, but it wasn't just them. The police knew what was happening and did nothing. The men in the town beat their wives if they tried to bring us more food. The Mayor knew what was happening, the landlords knew what was happening, postmen knew what was happening.' (Alderman, 2016, p.111)

Sonja, a female character in the fiction, tells that she killed men on a reason. Everyone committed some blunder due to which she killed one. She says that many men were silent what happened to us in the past. They treated us like animals when we were not having this power. Now, we have gained this power, now we use it the way we like. Men beat their wives and no one stopped them. The Mayor was aware of his state and

the crimes going on but he did not move an inch from his seat. The police was also silent on the criminals' activities. Almost every person was aware of the bad deeds going on but no one paid any heed to their stoppage and salvation. Now, as we are the rulers, it is our choice how to treat and run the country. Every girl having one and the same slogan; 'I want justice,' she says. 'And then I want everything. You wanna stand with me? Or you wanna stand against me?' (Alderman, 2016, p.227) Those who stand with them were safe, though doubted a lot; while, those who stood against them, they received powerful electric shocks. When they lost the war against a country, they said that it is because of our men, and not women, that we lost the war. They said that our

country has been betrayed by some of its men. We know this. We were defeated in the recent Battle of the Dniester because the North knew where our troops would be. Men from Bessapara have sold information to our enemies in the North. Some of them have been found. Some of them have confessed. We need to take action. (Alderman, 2016, p.246)

They think that the men fighting on their side have sold some secrets due to which our enemy easily found the place where our troops were. We trusted men and that was our fatal mistake. Men should not be trusted. Words like these are, in practical life, are used by men about women. Women, in the novel, think that they are able to run the governmental machinery:

Bureaucracy. Welfare. And. Bureaucracy ... welfare ... 'INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT!'... I've shown that I can manage large-scale projects; our North Star camps for girls have been replicated in twelve states now. They create jobs. They keep girls off the streets. And they've given us one of the lowest rates of street violence in the country. Infrastructure investment will make our people confident in a secure future ahead of them. (Alderman, 2016, p.167)

They are hopeful that if they continued to run for some time, this world would be a happy abode for them. There would be no more deprivation and suppression of women. They will not be considered as a weaker sex. This whole discussion is summarized in the following extract from the novel; "Land of freedom. Land of opportunity. Good music... We want to live freely, to pursue our own way of life. We want opportunity. That's all." (Alderman, 2016, p.245)

IV. CONCLUSION

This is the last part of this study. It concludes the whole research study. It explains the findings of the research. The title of this thesis is 'Feminism in *The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman. The elements of feminism, as discussed in the theoretical framework, were searched and analyzed throughout the analysis chapter. This thesis discussed them in two ways; in relation to the context of the novel and the relation of those elements with practical life. Further, this project answers all those questions that are asked in the earlier section. Those questions are as:

4. Do the fiction, *The Power* (2016), have the elements of feminism?
5. If yes, how are they present in the fiction?
6. How the current study relates *The Power* (2016) to the contemporary society?

The above questions are answered number-wise. The answer of the first question is an easy one. Yes, *The Power* (2016) has the elements of feminism. It is written by a female author, this is one of the major reasons that the novel would have feminist elements. The answer of the second question is that these elements are present in different forms. The researcher has analyzed those elements both denotatively and connotatively. Denotative interpretation is in relation to the novel while connotative meanings are related to practical life. Those elements are as; women are limited to their homes. They are not allowed to move freely and according to their choice. There are bans on different actions performed by women. Men do not give them proper education. If some parents pay attention to their daughters' education, they consider themselves the best parents. If girls sit with other boys, their parents call them with awfully bad names. As the girls in the fiction get electric power, they perform different activities. Those activities mean that they want to do them in practical life as well but their patriarchic society does not allow them.

In earlier times as well as in contemporary times in some parts of the world, the electrically powered girls and women take the same revenge from men and deprive them of the right of casting their votes. They ban

men from driving cars. They kill those men who have suppressed and badly treated them or beaten their wives. They treat men, in the novel, as parents treat their children.

The answer of the third question is that this study well-relates *The Power* (2016) to contemporary society of the researcher. The way girls find that they have some special powers and they should make use of it, in the same way, women are struggling for their rights. they have got some of them. For example, women were not allowed to drive cars in Saudi Arabia but now they can drive cars. Now, women are running countries. They are prime ministers and governors. The way they have free relationships with other women instead of men, in the same way, there are lesbian relationships and girls marry other girls instead of boys. In other words, they have got freedom from sexual slavery. Electric power can be taken as a symbol of waking conscious in them that they should strive for their rights. These days, women participate directly in wars and are no more passive warriors. They are doing almost all those activities that men do and women were considered incapable of doing that. They drive vehicles from bicycles to airplanes. In short, they are no more a weaker sex.

This study is a new addition to the existing criticism on the fiction. The recommendation for further analytical studies is as: Marxism in *The Power* (2016), Colonial Study of *The Power* (2016), Power Relations in *The Power* (2016) etc. Like these, many other analytical studies are available for further research.

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