



Exploring Male Chauvinism and Gender-Based Violence in *Someone Like Her*: A Psychoanalytic Feminist Critique

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Abstract— This study examines Awaiz Khan's novel *Someone Like Her* (2023) from a psychoanalytic feminist perspective. It focuses on themes of male chauvinism, gender-based violence, and societal stereotypes. Male chauvinism is a superiority complex that violates a woman's dignity, and equality and subjugates her both physically and psychologically. It is based on the notion that men are regarded as superior gender to women. It is a concept that has been passed down through centuries and celebrated by society which creates a patriarchal system. Women have long been considered the 'weaker section' of society and subordinate to men. Man has perpetuated patriarchy through his physical force and used it for his own gain. Due to this inevitable superiority and subjugation of women, men tend to abuse them both physically and emotionally. The study adopts a qualitative method of analysis to explore how male chauvinistic attitudes lead to gender-based violence against the protagonist, Ayesha. It explores misogynistic maltreatment and examines the societal stereotypes that affect women's portrayal and treatment. Using Nancy Chodorow's and Juliet Mitchell's works as a theoretical framework, the research sheds light on how patriarchal structures and gender-biased norms merge to give rise to oppression and gender inequality. This study contributes to understanding the impact of literature in reflecting and challenging societal norms, advocating for gender equality, and empowering marginalized voices.



Keywords— Gender-Based Violence, Male Chauvinism, Patriarchy, Psychoanalytic Feminism, Societal Stereotypes

I. INTRODUCTION

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”

(De Beauvoir, 2023, p. 283)

1.1 Background of the Study

Chauvinism means that one's gender is always superior to the other. Whereas, 'Male Chauvinism' refers to male domination in family or society in general and the power of men. Historically, men have regarded women as the 'weaker section' of society and subject to them (Sultana, 2012). Male chauvinism is a kind of patriarchy which is based upon the notion of domination over women. The term patriarchy describes the dominance of men in both public and private domains. Sylvia Walby (1990) defines

patriarchy “as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (p. 20). Moreover, men are generally considered the superior gender, a concept that has been passed down through centuries and celebrated by society, creating a patriarchal system. Women have long been considered the 'weaker section' of society and subordinate to men (Sultana, 2012). Male chauvinism manifests when women assert their independence or engage in activities that challenge the male's sense of self (Woods, 1976).

Women disproportionately endure the brunt of gender stereotypes that serve as a means through which patriarchy is perpetuated, significantly influencing the representation of male and female characters in literature over time.

However, women are increasingly becoming victims of sexual domestic abuse due to social inequalities (Jacobson, 2011). There are many causes behind these disparities, but patriarchy and male chauvinism are two of them.

The study focuses on the novel *Someone Like Her* (2023) which is set in the city of Multan, Pakistan. It is the story of a young twenty-seven-year-old Pakistani girl named Ayesha. She is an independent woman who is contented in her singlehood and works in a charity organization to help victims of domestic abuse. The still waters of her life are rippled when Raza, an affluent Multani man, enters her life. Soon he is obsessed and wants her in his life at any cost. He subjugates and oppresses her in various ways and eventually compels her to have an engagement with him, without her consent. Despite all the hurdles, she musters up the courage to refute him in the face but eventually faces the brunt of it when Raza douses acid on her face. Pelting acid and harassing her is not enough for him to pacify his wounded male ego he even chases her to London to further ravage and humiliate her. Ayesha faces the brunt of his wrath and victimization of patriarchal stereotypes.

The current study analyzes the selected novel from a psychoanalytic feminist perspective. According to Kristina Wolff (2007), "Psychoanalytic feminism is a theory of oppression, which asserts that men have an inherent psychological need to subjugate women" (p. 3). The origin of men's urge to dominate women and women's limited opposition to subjection is deeply embedded in the human mind. Experiencing oppression and biases in a patriarchal society is not limited to women from a specific region or era, but rather it is a "shared psychology" (Chodorow, 1989). Similarly, violence against women is prevalent in patriarchal societies, regardless of social class, religious beliefs, or level of education. Men use their physical power to assert their control over the more vulnerable women. Traditionally, there is a set of expectations for women and young girls regarding their behaviour. They are socialized to conform to the role of the 'good girl' who assists in household chores and exhibits qualities such as being well-behaved, obedient, and polite (Boudet et al., 2013, p. 42).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Women are regarded as the subordinate gender and maltreated, leading to the prevalence of Male Chauvinism. It is frequently observed that men are regarded as the superior gender, a belief that has been passed down through many generations and publicly embraced by society. Psychoanalytic feminism asserts that it is men's inherent need to subjugate and dominate women. It is due to this belief that women are subjected to gender-based

violence in the form of domestic abuse and marginalization in the patriarchal society. The ingrained societal stereotypes and male-dominated cultural norms constitute to subjugate and oppress women.

1.3 Research Objectives

- 1) Analyzing the male chauvinistic attitudes and behaviours and in what ways these result in gender-based violence in the novel.
- 2) To identify and examine patterns of misogynistic maltreatment directed towards Ayesha by Raza Masood.
- 3) Identifying prevalent societal stereotypes depicted in the novel *Someone Like Her* that affect the portrayal and treatment of the protagonist, Ayesha.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The current study holds significance because it explores a newly-published novel from a psychoanalytic feminist perspective. The study is of prime importance both academically and socially. Academically, it serves as an instructive source for students, scholars, and readers with an interest in literature, gender studies, and psychoanalytic feminist theories. Through exploration of societal stereotypes and victimization portrayed in the novel, the study has emphasized the broader impact of these means of oppression on social attitudes and behaviours. Moreover, the study encourages readers to critically assess and challenge ingrained stereotypes. It also motivates readers to show empathy towards characters experiencing oppression and strive to promote gender equality within their respective communities.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Akram (2024) highlights that patriarchal standards constrain women through forced marriage as Leila's family-forced marriage exposes women's limited life choices. Forced marriages demonstrate women's weakness in societies obsessed with marriage. The story delves into the prevalence of domestic violence among women. The study also mentions that victims of domestic violence suffer from mental and physical anguish. It analyzes sexual abuse, highlighting women's vulnerability in a male-dominated culture. Violence against women exploits and dehumanizes them for masculine desires.

Khan *et al.* (2021) propound that feminism has emphasized challenges women face in male-dominated societies. Men and women were once biologically different. French feminist Simone de Beauvoir questioned the assumption that biological sex dictates gender identity.

Similarly, the study depicts the oppression of Afghan women due to the patriarchal structure of their society which limits their role. In *Thousand Splendid Suns*, Nana's character represents women's oppression in a male-dominated culture. She is brought to the level of an animal and Mariam is abandoned by her father and Jalil.

According to Malik *et al.* (2020), Ali's writing focuses on the marginalization of the female characters. *Twilight in Delhi* shows the influence of social circumstances on an individual's psycho-sexual development. The analysis of the novel demonstrates that South Asian women cultivate a distinctive and singular personality as a result of their socialization experiences. The narrative repeatedly shows how men have social and sexual privileges that women do not, raising a key question for readers to consider.

Rafiq Nawab *et al.* (2024) reflect on societal stereotypes in their study by asserting that social rules and conventions directed people of 19th-century European society. In *A Doll's House*, Henrik Ibsen attacks societal prejudices that restrict women to domestic roles, mirroring the greater limitations imposed by traditional societal structures. The play sheds light on the entrenched social standards that sustain gender inequality, constraining women's autonomy and personal development. Nawab (2024) points out that Nora must obey her husband and follow his opinions in all matters according to custom. This suggests that women must conform to traditional norms, preventing them from developing intellect and individuality. He says, "the norms, the conventions and the traditions thwarted individual liberty in a variety of ways" (Nawab *et al.*, 2024).

Rind & Larik (2016) shed light on the hardships faced by Pakistani women residing in Pakistan. The representation of women in Nadeem Aslam's oeuvre can be analyzed from a broader viewpoint. The novels offer a comprehensive depiction of the psychological, personal, social, and emotional challenges encountered by women. The challenges faced by women include honour killings, sexual abuse, kidnapping, alienation, marginalization, forced marriage, and injustice. Women face considerable challenges in a patriarchal and male-dominated culture.

Sharma (2015) traces elements of male chauvinism and patriarchy in Indian fiction by highlighting how Anand describes women's problems in Indian society in his work. The study reveals that a woman's only duties are cooking, cleaning, and satisfying her husband's sexual needs. The majority of the female characters in the novel endure the brunt of male chauvinism and the patriarchal system prevalent in conservative India. Ammu in the novel is a profoundly unhappy and unfortunate individual who endures suffering at every juncture of her life. Arundhati

Roy feels that social inequities, such as the exploitation of the poor by the rich and the abuse of women in patriarchal societies, are a major problem in modern India. This study aims to elevate downtrodden women who felt powerless to break free from the shackles of patriarchy.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Paradigm

The researchers have employed an interpretive research paradigm in conducting this study. The interpretive paradigm focuses on the subjective understanding of reality and facts based on individual experiences and with a backdrop of specific cultural context. The current study has adopted the interpretive paradigm to critically develop the understanding of the relevant data following both characters' and researchers' socio-cultural backgrounds.

3.2 Research Method

The current study has adopted a qualitative method in analyzing the text of the mentioned novel. The qualitative analysis of the text provides traces of male chauvinism and gender-based violence directed towards women in the selected novel. The textual analysis of the novel serves as the method for conducting this study. However, through textual analysis and qualitative approach, relevant excerpts and areas are explored in the selected novel.

3.3 Data Collection

The study has used both primary and secondary sources for data collection. The primary data has been collected from the novel, *Someone Like Her* (2023), in the form of excerpts, phrases, and sentences. The secondary data sources include relevant sections from books related to psychoanalytic feminism, views of psychoanalytic and feminist scholars, internet-based articles, research papers, journals and other relevant literature. The researchers have used LibGen, Google Scholar, and Anna's Archive to access the above-mentioned data sources.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

The study has used the theoretical framework of Psychoanalytic Feminism. Nancy Chodorow's *Feminism and psychoanalytic theory* (1989), and Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and feminism: A radical reassessment of Freudian psychoanalysis* (2000) are used as theoretical frameworks to conduct the research study. Only relevant sections have been consulted from these works and mostly secondary sources have been utilized to extract relevant data from the above-mentioned works. Psychoanalytic feminism asserts that men have an inherent inclination to subjugate women. Psychoanalytic feminism is founded on Freud's psychoanalytic theories. It asserts that gender is

not biological but rather focused on the psycho-sexual development of the individual (Ramsey, 2000). This theory claims that the unconscious mind, social, and cultural structures shape gendered identities and behaviors. Mitchell emphasizes the significance of Freud's contributions in unveiling the patriarchal ideology that both genders internalize and accept as 'normal'.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Beneath the Patriarchal Veil: Violence Begins at Home

“A woman’s life isn’t her own...Especially not in Pakistan” (Khan, 2023, p. 17)

The term patriarchy refers to a societal structure characterized by a hierarchy in which males are bestowed with greater opportunities than their female counterparts, who occupy subordinate positions and are deprived of fundamental rights. However, sociologists regard patriarchy as a social construct derived from the inherent biological disparities between males and females. This social organization considers women to be confined to domestic labour and limits their role as housewives, as it is believed that males are the primary providers for the family (Macionis, 2012, p. 332).

The deeply ingrained patriarchal values in the novel show the perception of a woman's independence as a direct challenge to traditional male authority and ego. Ayesha, being an independent girl, works for a charity organization, *Insaaniyat* (Humanity), where she works to help survivors of domestic abuse. Despite hailing from an educated family background, her father initially opposes her decision to work. He says, “Girls in our family do not work” (Khan, 2023, p. 10). It reflects a familial belief system within a patriarchal society in which the constraints imposed on women are regarded as an unchallenged norm and part of the family’s tradition that is passed on between generations. Nancy Chodorow (1989) in her seminal work, *Feminist and Psychoanalytic Theory*, explains that culturally expected behaviours are not simply taught but inherited across generations and are externalized and perpetuated by the unconscious of the majority of men (p. 54). By preventing Ayesha from working, her father, Safdar Khan, not only asserts control over her public sphere but also over her autonomy, hence curtailing her independence.

Similarly, Raza Masood retorts to Ayesha regarding her job when she expresses her desire to work after marriage. She believes that she will continue working in her charity organization, an observation upon which Raza takes a jibe at her, “[w]omen in our family don’t work, Ayesha. They

never have” (Khan, 2023, p. 66). According to Chodorow (1989), in most societies, men and women do not have a close personal relationship but rather based upon notions of power and dominance (p. 53). Therefore, women are perceived predominantly in terms of men's demands and expectations, rather than as independent individuals.

In an instance in the novel, Safdar shushes his wife, Ishrat, when she tries to take the side of her daughter. He gives her a shut-up call by saying, “I don’t remember asking for your opinion, Ishrat” (Khan, 2023, p. 19). Safdar’s dismissal of his wife's thoughts or his insistence on having the final authority shows that her voice is subordinate and her autonomy is constrained within the marriage. In the context of marriage, male silencing of women often manifests as control over decision-making, or emotional manipulation. These actions are rooted in the notion of ‘symbolic violence,’ as described by feminist sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2001), which refers to the subtle, often unspoken ways in which dominance is enforced without physical force. These situations may cause the male partner to fear that the woman's voice would disrupt the power balance (Benjamin, 1988). By silencing her, he preserves his dominance and psychologically suppresses her freedom. Chodorow (1989) quotes, “Men resent and fear women because they experience them as powerful” (p. 6).

4.2 Raza Masood: A Male Chauvinist Pig

“That is exactly how my world works...What I want, I get” (Khan, 2023, p. 43)

Raza Masood is a wealthy landlord and a spoiled brat of an affluent Multani family. He has a filthy past of indulging in debauchery and having been involved physically with multiple girls. It is through Neelum, her aunt, Ayesha meets with Raza at a wedding to ask for some charity for her organization. However, Raza agrees to offer some help but asks her for a coffee outside her workplace, something that Ayesha has never done, especially with her clients in the professional arena. Unfortunately, she has to agree because of the lucrative amount of thirty-million cheque that Raza wishes to offer to her organization. Getting this sumptuous amount would mean a world for her organization and could certainly ensure a pay raise for her.

Raza has enchanted all the people with his superficial efforts for philanthropy and his lavish lifestyle. When Ayesha refuses to dance with Raza upon request of Sabeena, she says, “[h]e doesn’t ask just about anyone for a dance. This is the kind of chance every girl in Multan dreams of” (Khan, 2023, p. 26). Such is a charm he has created around himself and therefore, he considers himself a demi-god to possess whatever he desires. When Ayesha out of courtesy and strictly on a professional basis meets

him, Raza gets the monster inside him unleashed. He starts harassing her by texting and calling her incessantly afterwards the meeting. Upon straightforward rejection from Ayesha, he in a deprecating manner expresses his bitter-sweet and lustful feelings. "Sitting there with your boobs thrown out, what did you think was going to happen? Of course I fell for you." (Khan, 2023, p. 52). These objectifying remarks from Raza unveil a defense mechanism known as projection, where he projects his own desire and frustrations onto Ayesha, blaming her physical body and dressing for his internal sexual frustration. As Jessica Benjamin asserts male dominance often relies on denying mutual recognition in relationships, treating women as objects rather than subjective individuals (Benjamin, 1990).

However, instead of feeling any shame he proudly boasts that "[m]y family is one of the richest in Multan" (Khan, 2023, p. 52) and therefore she should consider herself the luckiest person in the city because he has chosen her. Raza's assertion serves as a strategy to diminish Ayesha's value and a ploy to compel her to acquiesce. Raza believes that his fortune makes him liable to achieve whatever he desires by hook or by crook. This chauvinistic attitude views economic power as an authority, marginalizing female individuality. Coria notes that male chauvinism uses economic supremacy to create a sense of superiority and subtly pressure women into submission to the man's judgments and expectations (Bonino, & Szil, 2006).

Subsequently, her fear grows as the situation exacerbates because she could have blocked his number and moved on but he was the most influential person in the city and had connections and Ayesha knew that. Although Raza expresses his desire to marry her, deep down she knows that "[h]er father would never willingly allow her to marry a misogynistic, controlling pig like Raza" (Khan, 2023, p. 53). It is something that provides solace to her heart and a sense of security but until she discovers that their family's agricultural lands have been seized by Raza because the other day she simply refused to him. Ayesha is in love with Saqib and she has always dreamt of spending her entire life with him. But Raza being a shameless adamant warns her that "[n]obody says no to Raza Masood" (Khan, 2023, p. 59). According to Bonino, men depict their psychological hostility to reveal their male chauvinism. A strategy that induces fear and intimidation through various gestures by which a man conveys to a woman that in case of any rebuttal, there should be strong repercussions (Bonino & Szil, 2006, p. 18). So seizing their lands was one of his ways to intimidate her family and compel Ayesha to comply with his command. Male chauvinists typically have an inflated sense of self-importance, reinforced by societal structures that reward assertiveness,

dominance, and competitiveness in men. These men experience narcissistic affliction when confronted with women who challenge their perceived authority, leading them to reassert control as a way of preserving their ego (Mitchell, 2000).

When Ayesha even agrees to marry him, of course, under compulsion and gets engaged to him, however, Raza tries to abuse and mistreat her. "You little bitch...I'd have kidnapped you and had my fun" (Khan, 2023, p. 85). Raza's behaviour demonstrates an ingrained compulsion to subjugate and belittle women to bolster his tenuous masculinity. According to Chodorow (1989), certain men derive unconscious gratification from dominating and subjugating others. By subjugating women, they satisfy their yearning for dominance and reinforce their self-esteem.

4.3 Patriarchy's Puppets: The Cultural Programming

"Men rule our world, like they always have, and always will" (Khan, 2023, p. 43)

Patriarchal cultures enable men to adopt attitudes and behaviours that sustain dominance over women. Socially created 'maleness' and 'femaleness' are gender identities and "a collective iteration manifested in culture, social structure and social organization" (Schippers, 2007, p. 87). Pakistani society expects women to be pregnant, raise children, care for parents and husbands, stay home, and be meek, passive, and dependent. However, in the beginning of the novel Ayesha's father objects to her working. Safdar's patriarchal mindset and male ego are revealed when he asks, "[w]hat will people say – that Safdar Khan Khakwani is now incapable of looking after his daughter?" (Khan, 2023, p. 10). The father's apprehension regarding public perception reveals the connection between his self-esteem and masculinity with his capacity to dictate his daughter's life. His worry is not merely based on paternal love and a sense of care for her but rather on his societal reputation and personal authority. This mindset exposes how men perceive women's independence as a peril to their identity and social standing.

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, this need for society's approval shows a fragile masculine ego that depends on keeping traditional power dynamics in place. Jessica Benjamin examines how patriarchy depends on establishing a dichotomy between domination and submission, asserting that "the male figure must be dominant to maintain his sense of self" (Benjamin, 1988). Moreover, Safdar's male ego is further revealed when he proudly says, "Never let it be said that a Multani man cannot look after his family" (Khan, 2023, p. 11). This depicts the image of a conventional and patriarchal Pakistani society where a man's identity is staunchly

linked to his perceived dominance over women's behaviours, duties, and liberties. Moreover, Raza's character is also influenced by cultural standards of bigotry and biasedness against women. He humiliates Ayesha by asserting, "you'll be my mistress...[d]id you have dreams of becoming my wife...[y]ou are not fit to be anyone's wife" (Khan, 2023, p. 238-239). Raza's degradation of Ayesha is not merely a reflection of personal cruelty, but rather it shows deeply ingrained and culturally programmed patriarchal standards to see women as either virtuous wives or throwaway mistresses. Bhattacharya (2017) points out, "[g]endered norms are not simply a discourse but a set of everyday practices framed by a matrix of power relations" that continuously structure behaviour and social expectations (p. 185). These attitudes are both socially entrenched and psychologically ingrained, continuing a vicious cycle of subduing women.

4.4 Forms of Violence against Ayesha: Depictions in the Novel

"This world is very unfair on us women" (Khan, 2023, p. 266)

Patriarchal beliefs are assimilated into Pakistani society, ensuring the subordinate role of women. Patriarchal supremacy over women is perpetuated through institutionalized behavioural constraints, gender bias and violence. "Patriarchy incorporates all forms of exploitation" (Mitchell, 2000, p. 201). In Pakistan, violence is perpetuated through heinous practices such as honour killings, rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment, acid attacks, burnings, kidnapping, domestic violence, forced marriages, and torture. In the novel, Ayesha is subjected to both physical and emotional abuse and violence. She suffers the brunt of patriarchy and male chauvinism from various men in her life. She is compelled both by the inevitable circumstances created by Raza and her parents to eventually agree to marry him. After seizing their agricultural lands, he indirectly threatens her family and compels them to persuade Ayesha to marry him. Instead of taking the side of her daughter Ishrat tries to make her understand that "[a]ll you have to do is endure his touch for a couple of years. Men tire easily" (Khan, 2023, p. 56). In this way, her mother cajoles her into marrying him and she eventually agrees that "If marrying him will solve all your problems, I'll do it" (Khan, 2023, p. 64). Due to Ayesha's lack of consent, she is stripped of her autonomy and subjected to a forced marriage. The lack of consent from at least one of the parties is a defining characteristic of forced marriage.

However, she is also subjected to physical violence in the form of sexual abuse and harassment. Sexual harassment refers to deliberate, repeated, and unwelcome comments,

gestures, or physical actions of a sexual nature. The predominant victims of sexual harassment are women due to institutionalized hatred and a patriarchal mindset towards them. (Welsh, 1999). Similarly, Raza touches Ayesha inappropriately without her consent and makes her uncomfortable as he slides his fingers, "venturing inside her kameez, touching her bra strap" (Khan, 2023, p. 84). When society sexualizes and objectifies women to the extent that they become 'mere sites of fascination,' then men feel entitled to impose their sexual fantasies upon them, regardless of their consent. This mindset creates an environment where harassment is normalized as simply acting on what is deemed 'natural' or socially acceptable. On the occasion of the engagement ceremony, Raza molests her by harshly groping her waist and causing her extreme pain. When she is no longer to withhold the pain she sighs that "[y]ou're hurting me" (Khan, 2023, p. 92).

Likewise, in another instance when she comes to meet Raza upon her invitation to his friend's place, he extends his arm and starts "deliberately pressing it against her breasts" (Khan, 2023, p. 97). Ayesha also faces domestic violence in the form of physical and verbal abuse from Raza. There are several instances where Raza physically mistreats and mishandles her. When he suddenly appears before her in London, in all his rage, he puts "his fingers around her throat" (Khan, 2023, p. 232). According to Sultana, various forms of violence stem from a male-dominant system to dominate and oppress women. Such kinds of violence are deemed acceptable because of the heedless response of state authorities and the silencing or reluctant nature of women to raise their voices against it. This attitude may lead to more heinous kinds of domestic violence and rape that further exploits and socially subordinate women (Sultana, 2010, p. 10).

The core concept of sexual violence primarily centres on power rather than sexual desire and should be viewed as an aspect of gender stratification. Certain feminist theorists contend that men have historically employed rape and the apprehension of rape to assert dominance over women (Brownmiller, 1975). Likewise, Ayesha is repeatedly abused and raped by Raza when he kidnaps her in London. The novel quotes that "[h]e violated her three times that day" (Khan, 2023, p. 239). Rape and sexual assault are regarded as acts of vengeance or retribution in a patriarchal society. A prevalent misconception regarding rape attributes responsibility to women for allegedly provoking men's sexual desires by their provocative attire or behaviour, or for contravening societal norms (Roze, 2000). Contrarily, Ayesha did nothing to Raza apart from voicing her wish to choose Saqib over him. He malignantly says to Ayesha, "I'll keep raping you, and when I'm done, I'll have my servants rape you, and then

when they're done, I'll have my dog rape you too" (Khan, 2023, p. 247). He not only ravages her but also humiliates her by inviting his close friends to poke fun at her.

In patriarchal societies, rape and other manifestations of sexual violence against women are conspicuous as such acts enable men to assert and perpetuate their dominance and control over women. Angela Davis writes that "sexual coercion was . . . an essential dimension of the social relations between slave master and slave. This 'rape culture,' as it is now commonly known, outlasted the specific conditions of slavery" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 187). Millett (2000) also asserts that "sexual domination is probably the most widespread ideology of our culture and provides its fundamental concept of power" (p. 25). Millet examines the fundamental theme of power, vividly exemplified by the central character, Raza. When Raza tries to subjugate and humiliate her by ravaging and sexually abusing her, in other words, he tries to exert his male power over her. In this way, it creates a master-slave relationship between Raza and Ayesha, hence treating her as a slave.

4.5 The Love That Burns: Raza's Vitriolage

"In Pakistan, a woman's appearance is her most valuable asset. It is also her honour. She must guard it with her life" (Khan, 2023, p. 119)

In a country where a woman's beauty and looks are frequently linked to her worth, damaging her face serves as a means of exerting complete control and diminishing her societal value. Acid attacks seek to cause not only physical injury but also to undermine a woman's social standing, self-assurance, and independence. Since gender-based violence refers to acts intended at women due to their gender. Acid attacks constitute a kind of gender-based violence, predominantly affecting women, and are frequently perpetrated as retribution for violating gender roles and constraints (Zia, 2013). Domestic violence, rejection of marriage proposals, sexual harassment, and other forms of rejection are the predominant reasons for such assaults (Ismail et al. 2020).

In the context of the novel, when Ayesha resists to advances made by Raza towards her, he in all his snobbishness becomes infuriated. She makes up her mind that she will not marry Raza, no matter what, and rejects his proposal, although initially agrees to him due to pressure from her parents. Particularly, romantic or sexual rejection is one of the most common causes for motivation to undertake such attacks of acid in many Asian countries (Calcini, 2022). This leads to a major face-off between them and Raza starts insulting her and calls her a *gushti* (a wanton woman). When the situation exacerbates, Ayesha suddenly winces as she feels a burning sensation on her

face, "Acid. She knew before it hit her skin...The acid splashed all over the right side of her face and neck..." (Khan, 2023, p. 103). She feels the liquid as if it is digging into her skin deeper and becomes numb for a moment and then the pain starts searing and she experiences the anguish that she has experienced never before. "Ayesha felt like something was eating her alive" (Khan, 2023, p. 103). She yells and bellows in agony at the top of her voice, yet it doesn't affect Raza by any means as he keeps on insulting her, calling her a *gushti* and vitriolage is something he believes she deserves. Nevertheless, by throwing acid on her face Raza knows that a woman's most valuable asset in a society like Pakistan is her physical beauty. He intends to humiliate and brand her for life, therefore acid is aimed at her face.

According to Calcini (2022), depending on the social context, vitriolage might have several meanings. It serves as a tool of control over the victim's life in Asian and South American nations where physical features are regarded as a significant means to search for a partner (p. 12). Zia (2013) notes that "[t]he woman's face is usually targeted in these attacks because a woman's worth is linked to her appearance" (p. 18). This is something Ayesha is also aware of as she asserts that "[n]othing else matters in Pakistan except for your appearance" (Khan, 2023, p. 195). In this manner, Raza tries to deprive her of her beauty and her physical features. According to Zia (2013), acid attacks are often perpetrated intentionally to disfigure victims by throwing or pouring acid across their faces and bodies. The motivation for these attacks is to cause substantial physical and emotional harm to the victim who has rejected their romantic or sexual propositions.

Since the felons recognize they will avoid repercussions after committing this grievous sin which further gives rise to these crimes and incites them to repeat their heinous actions. Similarly, Raza who has bereft Ayesha of her facial identity still doesn't pacify his misogynistic hatred. Ayesha flees to London to escape the cruel world of Raza but to her misfortune, he even chases her there and locates her. He confronts and mocks her that "[b]urning you with acid wasn't enough. My revenge was still incomplete" (Khan, 2023, p. 231). Calcini (2022) points out that the most frequent causes of vitriolage are revenge and jealousy. Raza has the audacity to pass such remarks even after shattering her entire life because he feels invincible due to his unpunished past actions. This unchecked hostility reflects a larger tendency of male chauvinism going unchecked that glorifies violence against women and promotes domination and control.

4.6 The Impact of Raza's Abuse on Ayesha's Identity

"Raza Masood had not only ruined her appearance, he'd wounded her soul too" (Khan, 2023, p. 123)

Ayesha's world is turned upside down after Raza abuses and throws acid on her face. It is not just the physical features that she has been deprived of but also her identity and inner self-confidence. As Calcini (2022) notes the intention of disfiguring a woman's appearance is to erase her identity. Therefore, Ayesha feels a severe identity crisis because from being a beautiful woman she has turned into an eerie creature in the eyes of people who stare at her just like an animal behind bars at a zoo. When she is in public, people are "watching her like she is an animal in the zoo" (Khan, 2023, p. 164). Ayesha can feel people's infiltrating gazes digging into her skin and that is why she loses her confidence and always escapes public gatherings and interaction with people. She complains, "I want to be treated like a normal human being [and want people] to treat me like a human and not an animal spotted in the zoo" (Khan, 2023, p. 173). In a recent study, it has been revealed that survivors of vitriolage endure perpetual societal discrimination due to which they feel ashamed and worry that others may stare at or ridicule them, and make them reluctant to leave their homes, hence subjected to perpetual isolation and loneliness (Mittal et al., 2024).

Due to constant alienation and victim blaming, her heart has grown weary of the world and her surroundings. She no longer feels the zest of life that she used to feel and nothing excites her as she abandons both her public and private life. In the process, she has grown suicidal as her mind is cluttered with suicidal thoughts because she cannot further endure the anguish and affliction that Raza has caused her. She starts thinking "how it would feel to slit her wrists and let the blood mix with water" (Khan, 2023, p. 240). This is how she wants to end her suffering by putting an end to her life once and for all. In this way, she feels she can escape the vicious cycle of abuse, pain, shame and guilt that have constantly been hunting her. A study conducted by Sharma (2022), explains that survivors of vitriolage who had a sense of isolation, feeling of guilt, shame and embarrassment post-attack had a greater tendency towards suicidal ideation and mental distress (Sharma et al., 2022).

However, the impacts of Raza's abuse are not only restricted to emotional and physical consequences but also have psychological repercussions. Ayesha is hallucinating about Raza and her inner demons don't leave her at rest even after leaving away her past in Pakistan and settling in London. The trauma of abuse and acid attack is ingrained in her mind and doesn't let her settle with Kamil in whom she finds another love and a true gentleman after being

abandoned by Saqib and ravished by Raza. In an instance when she was with Kamil she winced and "looked like she'd seen a ghost" (Khan, 2023, p. 212). It appears to be Raza – a ghost of him that is still haunting her, affecting both her present and future.

Acid attacks significantly impact the survivors and they face many psychological consequences, such as social isolation, suicidal ideation, and persistent trauma (Azam, 2014). It also shows her growing fear and apprehension that Raza, as a blemish of her past, is soon going to invade and destroy her life once again. The motivation behind an acid attack is not to cause death, but to inflict irreversible harm to the victim's face and body, resulting in both physical and mental distress. Since the psychological repercussions of acid attacks can be severe and enduring, certain victims may endure their psychological symptoms throughout their lives as they are constantly reminded of their tragedy by their scars and disability (Bollineni, 2011).

4.7 Societal Stereotypes: Gender, Honor, and Victimization

"A whisper is all it takes to condemn a woman for life"
(Khan, 2023, p. 17)

In a traditional society like Pakistan, the patriarchal culture is portrayed through gender stereotypes and victimization of women. The conception of man and woman – one being superior to the other – is constructed by these defined gender stereotypes and conventional roles assigned to women. Chodorow (1989) indicates, "Woman's oppression is located in her otherness" (p. 5). Gender stereotypes embody the societal standards to ensure appropriate conduct for men and women within a specific society. A woman who fails to conform to traditional gender roles within a culture is deemed an outcast or a fallen woman. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a fallen woman refers to "a woman who has lost her good reputation by having sex with someone before she is married." It's a label placed upon those women who violate societal and moral standards. It may be perceived as sexual transgression, or defiance of expected roles and stigmatize or exclude women who do not conform to the ideal of 'good girl.'

In the patriarchal culture of Pakistan, a man's and as well as a family's so-called honour is placed between the legs of a woman. The virginity of women is seen as a reflection of the family's honour, hence allowing men to assert dominance over women's bodies and lives. Likewise, Ayesha's mother is flabbergasted when Ayesha reveals to her, "I am not a virgin anymore" (Khan, 2023, p. 31). Her mother is shocked and bemoans that she has tarnished the reputation of the family and blemished the honour of her

father. Although Ayesha's transgression is unjustifiable here she voices an important notion that reveals the hypocrisy of the typical society. She raises an interrogative, "why does nobody question boys when they do the same thing?" (Khan, 2023, p. 31). Sexual behaviour is policed differently for men and women due to deep-rooted societal stereotypes that prioritize male superiority and control over women's sexuality. Subsequently, the same moral and social expectations are not imposed on men's sexual behaviour. Societal stereotypes known as 'sexual double standards' allow one gender more sexual freedom than the other or place more societal opprobrium on women than on men (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002).

Ayesha's portrait as 'a fallen woman' is incessantly portrayed by the author throughout the novel. Raza calls her a *gushiti* (wanton) woman and "the dirty little rakhail" (concubine or mistress) throughout the novel, pointing a finger at her character and sexuality (Khan, 2023, p. 257). In this way, he exercises his male chauvinistic power over her, to debase and humiliate her. In Pakistan, the notion of *Izzat* (honour) is frequently linked to women's conduct, particularly concerning sexuality and obedience. As Awais Khan (2023) aptly asserts "[h]ere, reputations are as flimsy as kites in the wind" (Khan, 2023, p. 52). Therefore, a woman's behaviour is often perceived as a reflection of her family's moral status, and her independence is constrained to prevent her from causing 'shame' to her family. Women who defy these conventions through their social interactions, or romantic preferences are frequently deemed dishonourable, inviting severe criticism, alienation, and violence. However, in the novel when a woman is brutally assaulted by her husband, one of the policemen mocks her by saying, "[s]he must have done something...[m]en don't just cut their wives' faces like this for no reason" (Khan, 2023, p. 12). In this way, the severity of the brutality is alleviated and hence shows victim-blaming. It is another harmful aspect of traditional stereotypes in Pakistan that the victim is blamed rather than seeking justice for them. According to an article, "[v]ictim blaming is any response that explicitly states or implies that the victim is to blame for the abuse they have experienced" (White, 2023).

Due to societal stereotypes marriage is depicted as the paramount objective for women. In the traditional Pakistani culture, an unmarried woman beyond her early 20s is often categorized as over-aged and regarded with a degree of pity or even skepticism. Ayesha is unmarried and gets the same treatment as she is often taunted by her aunt and mother that "[n]obody wants a girl over thirty here" (Khan, 2023, p. 23). The stigma associated with age frequently results in increased familial pressure, as parents have a societal obligation to guarantee their daughters'

marriage on time. This societal pressure to marry at a certain age marginalizes Ayesha, and she agrees to marry a misogynistic person like Raza. According to a study, *The Stigma of Singlehood*, Anne Byrne asserts that most of the respondents, who received other people's social opinions to get married, were largely women in their 20s and 30s age (Byrne, & Carr, 2005). Women are forever bound in the shackles of patriarchy as the novel quotes that "[o]nce you go to your husband's home, only your funeral should emerge from those gates" (Khan, 2023, p. 135). Due to this traditional and stereotypical mindset, men exercise their indubitable power and control over women which gives rise to instances of gender-based violence.

V. CONCLUSION

"A woman must be strong, but above all, she must also be patient. If she isn't, life will teach her the hard way"
(Khan, 2023, p. 271)

The ingrained patriarchal ideals and male-dominated mindset of society are the root causes of male chauvinism. Patriarchal society favours men and deems them superior to women which eventually results in the development of male chauvinistic beliefs. Psychoanalytic feminism is based on the same notions which assert that men have an inherent need to subjugate women. However, biasedness and hatred directed towards women foster gender-based violence. In the novel, *Someone Like Her*, Ayesha faces insurmountable anguish and afflictions in the form of domestic violence, harassment and sexual violation. She faces the brunt of defying the male-dominated structure of patriarchal society. After all the undulating and painful experiences in her life, she finally takes a stand for herself by mustering up the courage to raise a voice against Raza at the end of the novel. She presents a vignette of a phoenix rising from the ash and dawn breaking through the night. She shows sheer resilience and grit to confront Raza and finally file a police complaint against him with the help of police officer, Amna. However, the novel ends optimistically by providing justice to a battered woman in a male-dominated society like Pakistan. Raza despite having a high profile and connections gets arrested and penalized with severe charges. The novel ends on a dramatic note, with Ayesha receiving *Sitara-i-Imtiaz* (an honorary award) for her bravery. Unfortunately, in reality, the situation is contrary to that of Ayesha's eventual fate. In a society like Pakistan, it's unimaginable to even think of seeking or getting justice for a woman of rape and abuse victim. The system can only change if the deep roots of patriarchy are eradicated from society and the ingrained male-chauvinistic mindset is altered.

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