

A Retrospective Analysis of Cultural Patriarchy in Majid Rafizadeh's *A God Who Hates Women: A Woman's Journey Through Oppression*

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Abstract

Cultural patriarchy is the male dominance practiced in the name of culture in a society. Majid Rafizadeh, an Iranian American author, businessman, political scientist, and academician, is known for his distinguished writings on gender equality in Middle Eastern regions. His famous novels are *A God Who Hates Women: A woman's journey through oppression* and *My Story of Child Marriage*. The present study has chosen Majid Rafizadeh's autobiographical novel, *A God Who Hates Women: A woman's journey through oppression*, to determine a retrospective analysis of cultural patriarchy. The methodology of the present study uses textual analysis from qualitative research to analyze the selected novel. The current research emphasizes that the oppression of women is due to male dominance. Hence, the culture of that particular society instills this dominance in the minds of men. It is evident in the selected novel. Society's culture determines the roles and performances of men and women in both private and public areas. Thus, culture influences people's collective consciousness. Religion, on the other hand, instructs the people to follow a code of conduct to protect their cultural heritage. Furthermore, the current study analyzes the chosen novel using Judith Butler's gender performativity theory and Raymond William's dominant, residual, and emergent cultural concepts. The current research is an attempt to analyze cultural patriarchy to propose a solution for achieving gender equality in society.

Keywords: Cultural patriarchy, Emergent culture, Gender performativity, Polygyny

1. Introduction

Cultural patriarchy refers to the patriarchal dominance that is upheld by society through culture in every aspect of human life. In the chosen novel, a society internalizes and perpetuates its institutions based on cultural patriarchy. The widespread belief that culture should preserve rather than modify, even if it destroys mankind, makes it difficult to oppose cultural patriarchy. Douglas (1966) posits that cultural values are regarded as history, the instrument of perpetual writing, and the body as the surface that allows history to write on its surface. Walby (1989) divides patriarchy into two categories: private patriarchy and public patriarchy. In private patriarchy, family members oppress women, whereas in public patriarchy, the state oppresses women collectively. The chosen novel witnesses both public and private patriarchy.

The novel centers on a female protagonist named Amira, who lives in Iran and Syria. Because of prevalent patriarchal conditions, women's lives are either inaccurately or completely underrepresented in the chosen novel. To interpret this, the current study uses textual analysis in qualitative research to focus on the retrospective analysis of cultural patriarchy in Majid Rafizadeh's *A God Who Hates Women: A Woman's journey through oppression*.

2. Literature Review

Ghada Al-Samman, a Syrian novelist, short story writer, poet, and journalist, writes for individual liberty. Her novels speak for women's liberation. In an interview, she opines, "The liberated woman is not that modern doll who wears make-up and tasteless clothes... The liberated woman is a person who believes that she is as human as a man. The liberated woman does not insist on her freedom to abuse it" (Cooke, 1998).

People refer to Nawal El Saadawi, an Egyptian feminist, writer, and doctor, as the Arab world's Simone de Beauvoir. She opposes religious fundamentalism, which is the root cause of all social evils.

Assia Djebar is an Algerian novelist, translator, and filmmaker. She challenges patriarchy in her fiction. She writes for women's emancipation and advancement in Arab societies.

In her works, Miriam Cooke, a professor of Arab cultures at Duke University, explores war and gender conflict in Arabian literature. She speaks about the richness of Arabian literature. In her fiction, she also examines the cultural complexities of Arab societies.

Researching Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*, Saddik Gohar rebukes, "His representation of women conforms to domestic patriarchal visions of femininity, while on the surface it masks itself as a progressive image of womanhood. In this sense, the narrative is reflective of what Sharabi refers to as "neo-patriarchy", the prevailing Arab culture" (Gohar, 2015).

Elhum Haghghat, after examining the research of Boserup, Caldwell, and Youssef, concludes that socio-cultural phenomena significantly influence the employment of Muslim women. Furthermore, he asserts, "In neo patriarchal societies, however, patriarchy is not weakened but rather modernized" (Haghghat, 2005).

Evaluating the socio-cultural phenomena that constraint the employment of Muslim women, Collver and Langlois (1962) suggest that the socio-cultural constraints emerge from the kinship and family in society.

Neopatriarchy is a new form of governance over women in the family that functions through different types of violence to suppress the woman's identity and create dependency in the family (Rehman, 2009).

Hence, the goals of patriarchy and neo-patriarchy are similar that is to repress and subjugate women in the family (R. Zakar, M. Z. Zakar, & Kr äner, 2012).

Habiba, Ali, and Ashfaq (2016), investigating women's oppression in Pakistan, presented their findings as follows: families should play a vital role in changing the traditional patriarchal structure and practices that oppress women. The family is the first perpetrator of male dominance and female subjugation. Treating both male and female members of the family equally can change this situation. Women should be encouraged to take initiatives to lessen their worries instead of encouraging them to compromise. In this regard, all stakeholders should work together. NGO's can play an important role in providing awareness about women's rights. Religious leaders can also play their role by providing proper guidance to the people. Finally, women should be given the opportunity to pursue higher education in order to increase self-awareness about their agency and role in society.

Examining the fictions of Amina Abdallah's "*Fury*" and Layla Baalbaki's "*From Mare to Mouse*" (as cited in Alshammari, 2020), it is interpreted that both fictions bring out the madness of the female protagonist to rebel against the patriarchy.

According to Schick (2010), western scholars criticize the harem mentioned in the Quran as a reason behind the oppression of women. The function of harem is similar to that of Gynaecia in ancient Greek tradition. "The word harem denotes both the female members of a household and the dedicated spatial enclosure in which they live" (Schick, 2010).

Moreover, the harem syndrome is part of a continuing clash of perceptions between protagonists of the European West, looking through a (neo-)Orientalist prism, and those from the Arab East who are antagonistic toward the West, looking through an Occidentalistic optic" (Elie, 2004).

Gayas (2016) concludes from her research on Elif Shafak's novel *Honour* that men, no matter where they live, possess a masculine ego and are obsessed with honor. In Elif Shafak's *Honour*, Adem abandons his wife and children due to his illegal relationship. After her husband's abandonment, Pembe, the wife of Adem, has a chaste affair with her Greek boyfriend, Elias. Instead of taking revenge against his father for abandoning his family, Iskender kills his mother, Pembe, to safeguard his family's honor by putting an end to his mother's chaste affair.

Alyabis analyzes Leila Aboulela's novels and postulates that "Aboulela depicts Muslim women as active agents who practice their faith from personal conviction as a deliberate strategy to counter dominant Western misconceptions of their supposed oppression under a patriarchal religion" (Alyabis, 2023). Accordingly, Leila Aboulela advocates Islamic feminism in her novels.

Mojab (2001) describes western feminism as a successful movement that has achieved legal equality for women. Whereas Islamic Feminism is not even ambitious enough to demand universal legal equality. According to Mojab (2001), Islamic feminism is not challenging the extremely oppressive laws that label non-Muslim women and men as 'ahl-e-zemmeh', or 'non-Muslims who paid tribute to the Moslems. Muslim and non-Muslim women face unequal treatment in penal laws, with the latter facing more brutal punishment due to their religious beliefs.

According to Badran (2011), Muslim holistic feminism evolves out of the combination of religion-based equality, justice, and secular democratic human rights. She believes that Muslim holistic feminism is transnational feminism. She also calls it communal feminism. Islamic feminism tries to break the notion that Islam encourages patriarchal dominance. Indeed, it is taking the initiative to clear up the inequalities in Muslim family laws.

3. The Research Gap

The research gap is that the previous studies only focused on the victimized, not the victimizer. The oppression of women and their voices against patriarchy are represented in the previous studies. But it is understandable that the process of victimization involves both victims and the victimizer. Unless and until the victimizer's attitude and behavior change, the process of oppression of women will never end. In the previous studies, there were no steps taken to change the attitude and behavior of the victimizer to eliminate the process of oppression. The novel for the present study, Majid Rafizadeh's *A God Who Hates Women: A woman's journey through oppression* is a ground-breaking novel in gender studies. The present study fills the research gap by initiating the process to change the Victimizer's

behavior to create a society with gender equality through retrospective analysis of cultural patriarchy.

4. Materials, Methods and Methodology

The present study uses Majid Rafizadeh's autobiographical novel, *A God Who Hates Women: A woman's journey through oppression*. The present study adopts Judith Butler's performativity theory, Robin Fox's concept of kinship and marriage, and the cultural concepts of Raymond Williams, such as dominant, residual, and emergent cultures to analyze the chosen novel. In addition, the present study employs a qualitative textual analysis approach.

5. Discussion

In this study, Majid Rafizadeh challenges patriarchy in dominant and residual cultures. Through his repeated acts of gender equality, he deconstructs patriarchy in dominant and residual culture. Furthermore, he reconstructs the societal structure by opposing dominant and residual patriarchal cultures to introduce an alternative i.e., an emergent culture to ensure gender equality.

6. Findings

6.1 Family

It is not, therefore, sufficient to study what 'family' is 'in itself': it is always part of a wider social context and has a cultural meaning. In order to understand the function and the place of the family, we have a grasp of the larger social pattern of which it is a part (Moxnes, 1997).

Hence, the formation of families varies according to the cultures of different societies. The current research finds that heterosexuality forms the foundation of the families in the chosen novel. Both the joint and nuclear family systems coexist in the chosen novel.

6.2 Kinship and Marriage

The present study uses the concepts of kinship and marriage to understand how the male characters in the chosen novel oppress women. Kinship is deemed as the relationship among society members based on lineage and by marriage (Neelakshi and Amr, 2021). Referring to heterosexual marriage, Fox (1983) asserts that copulation builds the relationship between mates. The birth of a child establishes parenthood. Fox (1983) considers the mother-child bond to be the most fundamental and basic of all social bonds. Furthermore, Fox asserts that the death creates a gap in society. Childbirth fills the gap in society by balancing its population. And there is a question among the spouses: who will decide their family's heir? As a result, the spouses adhere to the kinship pattern of their society's culture.

The study of kinship is the study of what man does with these basic facts of life-mating, gestation, parenthood, socialization, siblingship, etc. (Fox, 1983). The relationship of the child with its relatives is decided by the kinship of the society's culture to which it belongs. Hence, kinship determines the lineage of a child.

Over the years, men manipulate the relationships created by the kinship patterns of their society's culture. Hence, men establish dominance and hierarchy, territoriality, group cooperation, consort and mating behaviour, bond behaviour, ritualization, etc. (Fox, 1983).

6.2.1 Patrilineal Kinship

Majid explores patrilineal kinship in Iran and Syria to elicit gender discrimination on the basis of patrilineality. In the chosen novel, people call the females by their husbands' or the eldest sons' names. Divah is Majid's maternal grandmother. When the female members of Bashar's family come to Divah's home, they call her Um-Zein; "Um" (Rafizadeh, 2015) means mother in Arabic, and "Zein" (Rafizadeh, 2015) is Divah's first son. Therefore, in the chosen novel, her relatives refer to Divah as Zein's mother instead of using her own name. Divah calls her husband Abu-Zein (Rafizadeh, 2015). Abu means father in Arabic, and Zein is their first son. Zahra, the niece of Bashar, calls Amira "mart-ammi," meaning uncle's wife (Rafizadeh, 2015).

When a parent has two children, with the first being a girl and the second being a boy, people only refer to the parents by the name of the second-born boy, not the first-born girl. When a parent doesn't have a son, people address them by the name of their unborn child. As a result, the characters in the chosen novel refer to each other by their male lineage. When Bashar divorces Amira, he takes custody of their son and refuses to give her alimony after the divorce. In the chosen novel, men dominate women in all aspects of life, from relationships to inheritance.

6.2.2 Patrilocality

The present study finds that the characters in the selected novel follow patrilocality. Post-marital residence states vary widely, but in ethnographically attested societies worldwide, the most common residence pattern is patrilocality (Murdock, 1967).

Divah, Majid Rafizadeh's grandmother, stays in the place where her husband works. Amira, daughter of Divah, is a Syrian by birth. She settles in Iran after her second marriage to an Iranian, Rafizadeh. After Rafizadeh's imprisonment, his son, Majid Rafizadeh, becomes the breadwinner of the family. He struggles financially to support his family. Without any choice, Majid Rafizadeh sends his mother, sisters, and brother to Syria. Upon his release from jail, Rafizadeh chastises his son for his reckless decision to send his mother and siblings to Syria. Rafizadeh seems unconcerned with the pain of his second wife, Amira, and their children. The only thing distressing him is that his second wife, Amira, and their children went to Syria without his permission. He refers to Amira and her daughters as prostitutes because they fled to Syria during his imprisonment. Communities may favor the more economically beneficial sex to form the kinship patterns (M. Ember and C. R. Ember, 1971; Lippert & Murdock, 1931; Murdock, 1949). In the chosen novel, Amira's migration is contingent upon her

husband and son as a result of financial dependency, which is comparable to the preceding argument.

6.2.3 Child Marriage

The present study observes child marriage in the lives of Amira and Rafizadeh. Her mother forced Amira, a sixteen-year-old girl, to marry a thirty-nine-year-old relative, Bashar. She pleaded with her mother to put off her marriage for a while. Divah warns Amira that if she refuses to accept the marriage proposal, the curse of her mother will forbid her to enter heaven.

Similarly, Rafizadeh is forced by his parents to marry his cousin Sekineh. Initially, Rafizadeh refuses to marry Sekineh, as she is a child. His father slaps Rafizadeh when he refuses to marry Sekineh. Eventually, his father forces his son's marriage by giving the example of Prophet Muhammad and Ayesha. When Prophet Muhammad marries Ayesha, his age is fifty-four, and Ayesha is nine years old. His father suggests that if the Prophet marries a child, then marrying a child is permissible for the followers of Islam. Thus, Rafizadeh's parents force him to marry Sekineh. When Rafizadeh is twenty-five years old and Sekineh is nine, they tie a knot.

6.2.4 The Practice of Mahr

Mahr is the bride's gift or money that the bridegroom gives to his bride on the occasion of their marriage. Mahr is a major contributing factor to the prevalence of child marriage in the chosen novel.

In the selected novel, Rafizadeh's parents face an extreme financial crisis and decide to arrange their daughter's marriage, though she is only seven years old. Hence, the present study observes that when a family faces severe financial hardships, the parents decide to offer their minor daughter to a groom who offers the highest Mahr in the chosen novel.

6.2.5 Forced Marriage

Majid Rafizadeh disapproves of his family's forced marriages. The research observes that in the chosen novel, the parent's wishes must ultimately arrange their marriage. A verbal agreement in our culture is so important and so binding that entire families and communities will strive to keep their word, even if it costs them their lives (Rafizadeh, 2015).

Majid Rafizadeh comes to know of Anahita's family's pilgrimage to Syria. Hence, he approaches Anahita's family to deliver a letter to his mother. Anahita comes from a wealthy family, and her father is a successful businessman. She appears to be the same age as Majid Rafizadeh. Anahita likes Majid Rafizadeh. Occasionally, they go out together. Thus, Anahita longs for Majid Rafizadeh's hand in marriage. But Majid Rafizadeh wants to spend more time getting to know each other.

Anahita, in the meantime, speaks to her mother about Majid Rafizadeh. Anahita's mother communicates her daughter's love for Majid Rafizadeh to her husband and sons. Anahita's brothers threaten to kill her if she sees Majid Rafizadeh again. Consequently, Anahita's family keeps her under house arrest. Anahita conveys to Majid over the phone that her parents reject him because he is poor. She says to Majid Rafizadeh, "I know what a problem is with them. They said you don't have money. They want a rich man, that's all they want" (Rafizadeh, 2015). These events in the chosen novel confirm that parents primarily decide and arrange their sons' and daughters' marriages. The current study also observes that honor and money primarily influence the forced marriages in the chosen novel.

6.2.6 The Problem of Consummation

The chosen novel discusses the problem of consummation on a wedding night. The present study finds that the groom has to show his bride's blood as a sign of her virginity to the elders in the family. When Bashar marries Amira, he forces her to have sex on the first day of their marriage in order to confirm her virginity by showing her virgin blood to his elders. Meanwhile, Amira does not feel comfortable consummating on her wedding night. But he convinces Amira by telling her the story of the Prophet Muhammad and Ayesha. The Prophet marries Ayesha when she is a child. On their wedding night, the Prophet and Ayesha consummate their marriage. On the other hand, Rafizadeh's parents and in-laws force him to consummate on the very first day of his marriage, despite the fact that Rafizadeh's wife, Sekineh, is nine years old. Therefore, the present study finds that the tradition of consummation on wedding nights causes hardships among the partners.

6.2.7 Religion

Friedrich Nietzsche calls an organized religion as society and culture which controls man (Strong, 1999).

According to Sigmund Freud (as cited in Nicholi, 2003), all the western faiths are based on the monotheistic God known as the 'Father God'. Nicholi (2003) states that in every religion, the yearning for the father is central. Consequently, a patriarchal religion is constructed by the culture to establish male domination over others.

Culture transmits male dominance from generation to generation. The conversations between the women and Amira confirm the performative role that women play in their families. This is evident in the words of the female members of Bashar's family, who converse with Amira during the bridal search. A woman instructs Amira that a woman should sacrifice herself, as a man is the source of livelihood on which the whole family depends. She further says, "If not their wives, then who do they have to pour out their wrath on?" (Rafizadeh, 2015). Another woman comments on the attitude of modern women and asks, "If women were to behave like men, then why would men ever want to marry them? Then why did God create them different?" (Rafizadeh, 2015).

The present study observes that before marriage, the bride receives instruction from her fellow women in the community, and after marriage, her husband assumes this role. The husband instructs his wife on how she should behave in public and domestic arenas.

Amira, who is very religious, follows the words of her husband, Bashar. She believes that her husband's words mirror the wishes of God and the Prophet. If she disobeys her husband, she will ultimately disobey God and the Prophet. However, the present study finds that to avoid blasphemy, she obeys her husband's words and endures the pain. Though Amira is submissive to his first husband, Bashar, he divorces her without any reason.

Rafizadeh often quotes the Quran and hadiths to defend his supremacy when he marries Amira. He warns Amira that if she does not obey his advice, Allah will shun her. He cites the hadith of Prophet Muhammad, which claims that women make up the majority of individuals in hell. Furthermore, he mentions that the Prophet views three things as evil: a woman, a horse, and a house. He goes on to tell Amira that a woman is incapable of testifying. It is advisable to accept testimonies from men rather than women. If two women come to testify, accepting their testimony does not provide justice, and it is required to hear from a male other than the two women since, according to the Prophet, women have mental limitations. Thus, men like Rafizadeh use the Quran and hadiths to subjugate women in the selected novel.

6.2.8 Intimate Partner Violence

The present study examines intimate partner violence in the chosen novel. Lawson (2012) intimates that violence against intimate partners is a manifestation of men's domination over women. In the chosen novel, Bashar uses violence to dominate Amira. On one such occasion, Bashar tells Amira, "You should be subservient. You should listen to whatever I say. This is what your Quran and your God says: Men are in charge of women... That's Quran 4:34" (Rafizadeh, 2015). He manipulates religion, God, and the Prophet to justify male chauvinism. This is what your Allah and Muhammad said I should do: So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance—advise them; forsake them in bed; and beat them. That's Quran 3: 34. This is what you Allah said. Did you listen? (Rafizadeh, 2015).

To extend his power and dominance, Bashar, in a quarrel with his wife, Amira, thrashes his six-months-old son, named Basel, against the wall. Thus, Bashar enforces his brutality even on his baby. Hence, in the chosen novel, intimate partner violence affects both women and children physically and psychologically.

When Rafizadeh recites the Quran and Hadith to the female members with reference to women, he says, "According to him, you are the dirtiest and most impure thing. You are born to listen to me, and if you dare disobey us, you should be beaten. You hear?" (Rafizadeh, 2015). In this context, "You" (Rafizadeh, 2015) denotes the women in Rafizadeh's family. Thus, Rafizadeh uses his religion as a control mechanism to dominate women.

The present study confirms that even when a woman is pregnant, she undergoes extreme physical violence. In Iranian tradition, women must cover their heads completely with a headscarf, even at home. The headscarf conceals every strand of a woman's hair. In the novel, when strangers see Amira in a sleeveless dress without a headscarf, they become alarmed, as if she had been naked. Sekineh reported the incident to her husband. Rafizadeh cruelly thrashes Amira for having brought him shame and dishonor. Even Amira's pregnancy does not stop him from thrashing her.

6.2.9 Consanguine Marriage

According to Majid Rafizadeh, marriage between cousins, or consanguine marriage, is quite common in his family. Majid Rafizadeh ironically comments that cousin marriage is a divine union, according to his family. However, he opposes consanguine marriage. By rejecting his cousin Reem's marriage proposal, he shatters the long-standing tradition of marrying a cousin. When his aunt Roula pleads with him to marry her daughter Reem, he replies, "But I think she's too young to get married right away. She needs to study and think more. Ask for me, every time I see her, it's like I am looking at my sister. And I think marriages between cousins should be actively discouraged" (Rafizadeh, 2015).

6.2.10 Polygyny

Majid Rafizadeh explores the problems of polygyny in this novel. Grossbard (1980) states that polygamy can take the form of polyandry (several men share a woman) or polygyny (a man marries several women).

As Thom Brooks remarks,

Polygamy is hotly contested practice and open to widespread misunderstandings. This practice is defined as a relationship between either one husband and multiple wives or one wife and multiple husbands. Today, "polygamy" almost exclusively takes the form of one husband with multiple wives. Polygamy is neither exclusively western nor non-western; it has been practiced by some Hindus, Mormons, Muslims, and other cultural and religious group (Brooks, 2009).

As Philips and Jones quote Soorah an-Nisaa (4):3 for the definition of polygyny in Islam, For Allah has already confirmed the right to do so as clearly stated in the Quraan: "Marry of the women that please you; two, three, or four, but if fear that you will not be able to deal justify, then only one." (Philips & Jones, 2005).

Rafizadeh marries Amira without the knowledge of his first wife, Sekineh. Sekineh thought that if she reproaches her husband, he will leave her and their children alone to reside with his second wife, Amira. If she reconciles with her husband, she will become his senior wife. Rafizadeh is the primary source of income for Sekineh and her children. If she divorces her husband, she and her children will be financially impoverished. To avoid such economic deprivation, Sekineh accepts her husband's second marriage and insists Rafizadeh bring his second wife to their home.

Amira feels disgraced for having married Rafizadeh without his first wife's knowledge. Amira feels for Sekineh and tells Rafizadeh, "Allah! How can I face her again? I am ashamed! I'm disgraced! Have you told her? Does she know? I can't believe this. God, what should I do? Do you... you didn't tell your wife you got married a second time? How can I look at her face again? I want to die. God, take my life. She deserves to kill me" (Rafizadeh, 2015). To escape from the guilt of betrayal, Rafizadeh beats Amira when she cries of being married to Rafizadeh, without the knowledge of Sekineh. Hence, the present study finds that polygyny may cause problems between partners and children in the chosen novel.

6.2.11 First Wife Syndrome

Al-Sherbiny (as cited in Shaiful Bahari, Norhayati, Nik Hazlina, Mohammad Shahirul Aiman, & Nik Muhammad Arif, 2021) states that first wife syndrome occurs in polygamy marriages. First wife syndrome occurs when a husband's first wife suffers from psychological issues related to her husband's multiple marriages. As a result, the first wife develops an enmity towards her husband's new wife.

The present research suggests that Sekineh's husband's second marriage has caused her psychological distress. Her aversion to her husband's second marriage affects the whole family. One day, Sekineh's kid, Hassan, opens the fridge and eats something without her consent. When Sekineh notices this, she becomes enraged and pricks her son Hassan with a needle from her cloth. Hassan screams nonstop, and Sekineh summons Amira to assist him. Hassan's attire is stained with blood. To Amira's shock, there is little evidence of a wound. Finally, Hassan gestures to his mother, indicating the needle in her hand. Amira condemns Sekineh for her wrongdoing. Amira then persuades Hassan to calm down. However, Sekineh continues to do the same. Majid Rafizadeh, the infant, crawls into Sekineh's room a while after his mother, Amira, falls asleep and his father departs. Sekineh pinches baby Majid Rafizadeh with a needle from her fabric. The baby screams, jolting Amira out of her slumber. She feels shocked when she discovers her baby, Majid Rafizadeh, inside Sekineh's room. Amira is shocked to know that Sekineh used a fabric needle to pinch the baby. Thus, Sekineh is psychologically distressed by her husband's second marriage.

6.3 Gender Performativity

The word gender is used to denote the attributes of the sexes created by society. Sex refers to the biological distinctions in the human body, i.e., female, male, and sex variations. Butler (2006) suggests the term "body" as a common term for the sexes. According to Foucault (1977) and Butler (2006), culture inscribes the body's surface. In his work on genealogy, Foucault (1977) asserts that history imprints culture on the body's surface. Foucault (1977) and Butler (2006) affirm that civilization creates transitions in history. Foucault (1977) proposes a clear understanding of history through Freud's perceptions, asserting that civilization is the destruction of the body. Thus, in history, the body has undergone construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction.

History establishes gender meanings and values in language through the practice of corporeal signification, which controls the sexed body. Stylized repetitive acts stabilize corporeal significations. Stylization can take the form of gestures, movements, discourse, and various styles. Butler (2006) considers the act both intentional and performative, whereas the performative has a dramatic and contingent meaning. Furthermore, stability, or coherence, establishes the boundary between the subject and the other. Butler (2006) defines the "subject" as the individual who adheres to societal norms, or the structure, and the "other" as those who do not. Further, she says that society treats "subject" as an inclusion and "other" as an exclusion. Society punishes people who fail to perform their expected gender role. Repeated performances and the fear of punitive consequences lead people to believe that illusory gender identities are real. Through repetitive stylized acts, society tries to naturalize or humanize gender performances in contemporary culture. Thus, the societal structure internalizes gender identity.

When Majid Rafizadeh's maternal great-grandmother, Salma, delivers her first daughter, she is shocked and utters, "I am disgraced! What I am going to do with it" (Rafizadeh, 2015). The philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler famously coined the term gender performativity (Butler, 2006). The theory of gender, or the body as one that acts and performs according to the conventions of gender, conventions that are influenced from the start, before one is even born" (Butler, 2006). Diva's conversations in the chosen novel suggest that women in her household were considered mere commodities for cooking, cleaning, and producing as many children as possible. Divah has eight children. She often says that she has "three boys and five burdens" (Rafizadeh, 2015), where the five burdens refer to her five daughters. In the selected novel, Diva considers her daughters to be a burden on the family because of their economic dependence. Indeed, she believes that her daughters' marriage is an ideal solution to alleviate her family's financial distress.

The analysis of the chosen novel presupposes the elimination of gender inequality through stylized gender equality discourse. Contemporary culture shapes meanings, values, and relationships. Language is "arbitrary" (de Saussure, 2011). If the language is arbitrary, the meaning is also arbitrary. Only through repeated acts can the performativity of the gender be stabilized. And this stabilization tends to naturalize gender identity. As a result, people begin to perceive their gender identity as real. By realizing the societal norms on which gender is acted are groundless, i.e., the illusion, gender equality can be attained.

The concept of polluting powers (Doughlas, 1966) can play a significant role in facilitating changes within the patriarchy. The patriarchy perceives gender equality as a polluting power, which poses a threat to the prevailing patriarchal structure. A polluting power poses a threat to patriarchal hegemony and has the potential to destroy the patriarchal system. Therefore, the polluting power will disrupt the dominant patriarchal structure in order to rebuild a society that values gender equality. In the selected novel, Majid Rafizadeh embodies the power of pollution.

Gender performativity represents the character's actions, whereas dominant, residual, and emergent cultural concepts represent the transitions and evolutions over time. Therefore, this study conducts a retrospective analysis of the cultural patriarchy in dominant, residual and emergent cultures in the selected novel by examining the gender performativity of both men and women with the aim of promoting gender equality.

The culture of society has certain norms. Haralambos and Heald (2004) refer to these norms as guidelines. These guidelines define the acceptable and appropriate behavior of human beings in a particular society. The patriarchal societies of Iran and Syria have instructed women to follow certain guidelines. When a woman behaves according to patriarchal guidelines, society sanctions her positive honor. On the other hand, when a woman denies cultural norms and guidelines, society despises her. Hence, women bestowed with an honor from society enjoy pride in their identity among their female counterparts.

6.3.1 The Gendered Spaces

The present study finds that women in the chosen novel experience limited access to public space. Women and men are forbidden from going together unless they are spouses or siblings. This kind of moral policing is supervised by the police force, revolutionary guards, and volunteer paramilitary forces in the chosen novel. It is evident when Majid Rafizadeh studies at an Iranian university. One day, he meets his cousin, Hajar. They walk together on the sidewalks. The moral police forces intercept them. Majid Rafizadeh tells them that they are cousins. However, they order him to remain silent. Then, they inquire about Hajar and ask for her parents' phone number. Hajar tells them that she is married and is the mother of a child. They contacted her husband over the phone to confirm that Hajar and Majid Rafizadeh are relatives. Furthermore, the moral policing forces threaten them, requiring them to sign a paper vowing to never walk together again. Finally, after issuing a verbal warning, they let them go. As a result, female public access is spatially limited in the selected novel.

6.4 The Education

Education also plays a vital role in shaping one's life. During the time of Majid's parents, education was not given much importance. When Amira pursues the fifth grade, her mother orders her not to attend school thereafter. Amira begs her mother to continue her studies; however, her mother turns a deaf ear to her Amira's request. Divah says to Amira, "Why should you keep studying if you are eventually only going to stay at home? You are only meant to wash the asses of your children, to clean, to cook, and to take care of your family. Girls are born to stay at home and please their men" (Rafizadeh, 2015).

On the other hand, Rafizadeh studies at school without the knowledge of his parents, owing to their aversion towards western education, which is considered evil. When Rafizadeh studies in the third grade, the principal of the school, Mr. Rashidi, gives him promotion to attend the fifth grade directly as recognition of his intellectual skills. On the same day, the principal visits Rafizadeh's house and talks to his parents about his studies and career. When the principal goes out of the house, Rafizadeh is beaten by his father for not revealing the secret of attending school. As a consequence, Rafizadeh's father denied him permission to attend school thereafter. He discontinues his schooling and starts working.

In the chosen novel, during Majid Rafizadeh's time, the government allowed girls to attend school but mandated that boys and girls pursue their education in separate classrooms. The girls are the first to leave the school in the evening, with the boys following suit. Every afternoon, the Iranian school in Syria conducts religious classes in which they instruct the male students about personal and sexual cleanliness, as well as how men and women should behave with reference to the Quran and hadiths. In these religious classes, male clerics instill a sense of male domination in the minds of their male students.

6.5 Raymond Williams' Cultural Concepts

Furthermore, the present study includes Raymond Williams' cultural concepts such as dominant, residual, and emergent to analyze the selected novel.

6.5.1 Dominant Culture

Dominant culture represents the past's cultural hegemony. It is considered archaic. Characters in the selected novel, such as Amira's great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother, act as agents of patriarchy. The aforementioned characters perpetuate idealized patriarchal gender identities through their discourses. To legitimize patriarchal dominance, the characters in the present study use religion to safeguard male dominance.

6.5.2 Residual Culture

Williams (1977) asserts that although the residual has effectively formed in the past, it remains active in the cultural process, often not as a past element but as an effective present element. Majid Rafizadeh's parents' period marks the beginning of residual culture. Rafizadeh allows his son, Majid Rafizadeh, to pursue education. Rafizadeh does not force his children into child marriage. But still, he exercises violence over his wife and repeatedly conveys that women are inferior to men. Despite efforts to promote changes in child marriage and education, Rafizadeh continues to dominate his wives and children. Thus, patriarchal remnants existed in the societal structure during the time of Majid Rafizadeh's parents.

6.5.3 Emergent Culture

Williams (1977) asserts that the emergent culture arises from the opposition and alternation of the dominant culture. It creates new meanings and values and builds new relationships in society. Butler (2006) says that the polluting power creates trouble for the existing

structure. And this polluting power can be considered an emergent culture, as it opposes the dominant culture and creates new meanings and values. Unlike his forefathers, Majid realizes that God created everyone equally. He treats women equally. He understands that culture and religion are man-made. He opposes patriarchal hegemony to create gender equality in society. Hence, in the present study, the period of Majid can be considered an emergent culture.

7. Suggestions

The research findings indicate that patriarchal dominance influences the culture of the selected novel. It also suggests that patriarchal culture must undergo transmission in order to evolve into an emergent culture of gender equality. Furthermore, analyzing the selected novel enhances the understanding of how cultural patriarchy constructs, deconstructs, and reconstructs the gender performativity of the characters. Thus, the present study provides insights for scholars researching gender studies.

8. Limitation

The Middle East region is the geographical focus of the current study. It aims to shed light on cultural patriarchy by analyzing the gender performativity of men and women. However, this research excludes other genders from the chosen novel.

9. Conclusion

In the dominant patriarchal culture, women play a submissive role in all aspects of life. The present study holds hope that the emergent culture of gender equality will bring positive changes to society. The changes in individual behavior will have an impact on the relationships that bind them. In the chosen novel, Amira's life is miserable. She is aware of the unfair treatment she receives from patriarchal society. However, she raises her children, who treat everyone equally. Hence, the present study considers Amira's son, Majid Rafizadeh, to be a prominent figure in implementing gender equality in society in the chosen novel. Unlike his forefathers, Majid Rafizadeh treats women and men equally. Indeed, the current study, through its investigation of the chosen novel, concludes that resisting the belief system of dominant and residual cultures is crucial for the development of an emergent culture that promotes gender equality. The emergent culture should incorporate in people's minds that each and every creation of God has the right to live independently, irrespective of gender, caste, creed, religion, and culture.

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Authors' contributions

1. P. Meena, the first author, drafted the manuscript.
2. S. Rema Devi, the corresponding and second author, guided the first author to draft the manuscript.
3. P. Pandia Rajammal, the third author, was responsible for arranging the reference list for the manuscript.

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