



Interrogating Patriarchy in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction: A Feminist Analysis of Sabyn Javeri's *Nobody Killed Her*

Dr. Saima Yousaf Khan¹, Rubina Masum² & Asifa Ansari³

¹Lecturer, Department of English Literature, University of Balochistan, Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.

²Associate professor, Karachi School of Business and Leadership, Karachi, Pakistan,

Email: rubina.israr@ksbl.edu.pk

³Instructor in English, The educators School (A project of Beaconhouse), Vehari, Punjab, Pakistan.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: January 16, 2025
Revised: February 10, 2025
Accepted: February 13, 2025
Available Online: February 15, 2025

Keywords:

Patriarchy, Contemporary Pakistani Fiction, Feminist Analysis, *Nobody Killed Her*

Corresponding Author:

Rubina Masum

Email:

rubina.israr@ksbl.edu.pk



ABSTRACT

This research explores Nobody Killed Her by Sabyn Javeri from Feminist perspective and examines the notion of patriarchy in recent fiction from Pakistan. By doing so, it aims to investigate how representation of patriarchy gain ground and traversed through socio-cultural matrix. A political thriller, in the novel power, gender oppression, women's systemic marginalization in a patriarchal society are intricately interwoven. Using feminist literary theory as an interpretive paradigm, this work examines how Javeri weaves female agency and resistance into a patriarchal sociopolitical context. The research employs feminist literary theory, especially Radical Feminism, Postmodern Feminism and Postcolonial Feminism as its theory to study Nobody Killed Her. The study explores how power relationships, female ambition and an interconnection of gender and politics influence women's experiences. It also interrogates how the novel questions or reinforces traditional gender norms, looking at the protagonist's struggles against cultural and institutional structures. The findings point to the novel's subversive approach to narrative dynamics, the complexity of female solidarity and the restrictive roles for women who seek autonomy and leadership. This study highlights the importance of fiction as a medium of resistance against the entangled gender hierarchies of Pakistan.

Introduction

Scholars increasingly recognize this symbolic representation of patriarchy in modern Pakistani literature because literature plays a crucial role in the criticism of gender inequality and systematic oppression. Pakistani novelists have increasingly written about feminist themes challenging traditional gender roles and exploring diverse manifestations of patriarchy in socio-political spheres. From such novels, a compelling critique of gendered power dynamics in Pakistan's political landscape emerges, as with *Nobody Killed Her* by Sabyn Javeri. This study interrogates the intersections of gender, power, and resistance as depicted by Javeri, viewed through a feminist lens that unravels the socio-spatial codes that women must navigate in order to survive within a patriarchal society.

Patriarchy, defined as a concept that perpetuates male dominance and subordination of women via cultural, political, and economic structures (Walby, 1990), has historically governed the lives of women in South Asian communities. The legal system, socio-cultural factors as well as institutional barriers that serve to restrict women's access to leadership and decision-making positions contributes to the issues of gender inequality in Pakistan (Khurshid, 2016). Fiction, which is through literary works, is a powerful tool to draw attention to any injustice and to be able to challenge, reject and recreate the way women are positioned within our world (Shamsie, 2017). By exploring the power dynamics of a female political leader, Javeri's *Nobody Killed Her* also invites us to reflect on the challenges facing women in politics today.

Pakistani literature by female authors, including Kamila Shamsie, Moni Mohsin, and Faiqa Mansab, has played a critical role in problematizing women's experiences within patriarchal structures (Siddiqui, 2020). Javeri's novel deepens that tradition by layering a narrative that not only critiques gendered oppression but also probes female ambition, betrayal and resilience. It suggests the expectations placed on women who dare to assume leadership roles until what any woman can achieve is constricted, a pattern that echoes the retelling of the lives of women in Pakistani politics, Benazir Bhutto, for example (Jalal, 2008). Power and gender politics in the novel partakes too of the feminist literary tradition where narratives serve both to define and contest dominant ideologies (Butler, 1999).

By embedding *Nobody Killed Her* into feminist literary discourse, this research contributes to the burgeoning scholarship on gender in Pakistani fiction. It wishes to investigate how Javeri's work critiques patriarchal codes and re-imagines female subjectivity within a male-driven world. The novel would be a good subject of cultural analysis using a feminist lens, breaking down how contemporary literature from Pakistan serves as a site of resistance, agency, and the reimagining of gender roles.

Statement of the Problem

Even after decades of political academic and social challenges, the patriarchal system is still bound in the government of Pakistan, which has both gender roles, women's freedoms and women's leadership opportunities. Literature, more specifically fiction by women writers, acts as an avenue for revealing and deconstructing these masculine frameworks. Sabyn Javeri's *Nobody Killed Her* offers a nuanced interrogation into gendered power dynamics, female ambition, and how women are confined by socio-political forces that constrain them in male-dominated spaces. Yet, in spite of its critical engagement with these themes, there has been relatively little scholarship on the novel as a feminist, both generic and political enterprise, or on the novel's implications for understanding gender politics in the landscape of contemporary Pakistani

literature. This focuses on analyzing how Javeri cultivates female agency, resilience, and submission from within patriarchal structures and examines its ramifications for the production of violence and intersubjectivity across narratives in Pakistani fiction. Through the lens of feminist literary theory, this study aims to examine how *Nobody Killed Her* subverts or supports mainstream gender conventions, and how its representation of women hunger for power and political conflict mirrors prevailing structures of society.

Research Questions

1. How does *Nobody Killed Her* depict patriarchal structures and their impact on women's political and personal lives?
2. In what ways does Sabyn Javeri's novel challenge or reinforce traditional gender norms and stereotypes in Pakistani society?
3. How does the novel construct female agency and resistance within a male-dominated socio-political landscape?

Literature Review

Literary Critique 'Patriarchy and Gender Representation in Pakistani Literature'

Sister this situation echo's in the world of the literatures of Pakistan as well, where much of the early days Native literature is patriarchal in nature with enumerable amount of writings coming from bench arab, however, literature now engages with the thematic of patriarchy, gender oppression and female resistance. The term patriarchy refers to a system in which men hold primary power and privileges in the political, social, and economic realms (Walby, 1990), and its manifestations tell a pervasive story of how South Asian societies and, consequently, women experience their lives. Scholars claim that crossing immigrant body is only way to negate the matter of one's identity while simultaneously reinforces an identity for them. As Siddiqui (2020) notes, several female writers — Kamila Shamsie, Bina Shah and Faiqa Mansab among them — have been central to documenting the struggle of women against systemic oppression.

Nobody Killed Her (2017) by Sabyn Javeri also adds to this conversation, whereby it explores female ambition, political power, and patriarchal resistance. Drawing on real-world political events in Pakistan, the novel provides a fictionalized narrative of gendered power tussles in a male-biased political regime (Javeri, 2017). Moving beyond standard feminist narratives that center on victimhood, Javeri's novel features complex female characters that engage both complicity and resistance within patriarchal structures. This resonates with Spivak's (1988) poignant argument on female subaltern agency, wherein even when women are fragmented subjects in oppressive matrixes, they quietly negotiate modes of survival and thus become strategically embedded in existing power systems.

Feminist Literary Criticism and the Examination of Patriarchy in Literature

Feminist Literary Theory: A theoretical framework that shows us how literature produces, reproduces, reinforces, or challenges gender hierarchies. Butler (1999) has argued that gender is performative, such that patriarchal norms are sustained through repetitive cultural and linguistic practices. Through cultural products such as fiction, the reinforcement or subversion of the accepted femininity gender norms occurs, making feminist literary analysis an imperative practice in that it acts as a means of deconstructing these gendered narratives (Moi, 2002).

Previous feminist readings of South Asian fiction have noted the tension between female characters acting against societal constraint while also exercising agency in other ways (Khurshid, 2016). In *Nobody Killed Her*, Javeri uses a dual narrative structure, alternating between two female protagonists, which facilitates a complex exploration of, and commentary on, power dynamics and gendered oppression (Javeri, 2017). This coheres with Belsey's (2002) assertion that feminist literature frequently interrupts linear narration to subvert hegemonic narratives.

Women in Politics: Analyzing the Fictional and the Real

Series identifying how women are depicted in politics and what they have to go through in patriarchal societies have been invaluable. Studies on women's political participation suggest that women in Pakistan encounter systemic obstacles, including socio-cultural stigmas, lack of representation in politics, and male-dominated party structures, despite constitutional guarantees of equality (Jalal, 2008). The protagonist of the novel, an inspiring female leader, mirrors the struggles of other real-life figures such as Benazir Bhutto, whose political career was both empowering and constrained by patriarchy (Weiss, 2014).

In Siddiqui's novel, second-wave feminism takes aim at the social dichotomies placed upon female leaders and how ambition in women is encumbered and seen as either dangerous or unnatural (Siddiqui, 2020). This highlights what Ahmed (2017) believes, that women in political leadership face a unique tension as they negotiate their gendered identity in addition to their leadership, and are often judged in ways their male counterparts are not. By using these themes as the basis of the novel, Javeri exposes historical injustices, while also injecting her own views into current conversations in South Asian politics about gender and power.

Autonomy or the Subversion of Models of Gender in Pakistani Fiction

Narratives like those of contemporary Pakistani women writers have been intrinsically defiant of the bourgeois notions of femininity: Gender roles are subverted here. In earlier literary novels, women were victims, passive victims; women are more complex in modern fiction (in Shamsie 2017) Women were the literal victims in earlier novels: deep in the novel, passive victims. Modern fiction subjects a woman; women were more than victims. In *Nobody Killed Her*, Javeri subverts the victim-villain binary by presenting women who exhibit agency and autonomy, navigating restrictive gender dynamics towards rebellion and strategic ambivalence (Javeri, 2017).

This inversion reflects postmodern feminist positions, which ditch the binary interpretation of women as either oppressed or liberated, promoting the fluidity of power and identity instead (Butler, 1999). Javeri's work fits squarely in this landscape of women writing back to patriarchal power: Women interrogate, appropriate and even subvert power dynamics in it.

Much recent Pakistani feminist fiction has focused on how these new contemporary women writers are dismantling hardcover patriarchal ideologies. *Nobody Killed Her* is an important text in this tradition, as it offers an inverted consideration to gender, power, and political ambition. This article brings feminist literary analysis to bear on Javeri's work, in order to understand how she departs from and interrogates patriarchal systems while rewriting female agency in her narrative.

Research Methodology

This study uses qualitative researches design, adopting textual analysis for analyzing gender representation of patriarchy in *Nobody Killed Her* by Sabyn Javeri. Given its theoretical foundations and the analysis of the reviewed article, qualitative research is suitable as it offers an

intensive understanding of motivations, character development, and narrative structures that shape and challenge gendered power dynamics (Creswell, 2018).

The main data of this research is Sabyn Javeri's novel *Nobody Killed Her*. The secondary data used consists of academic papers, books and critical essays dealing with feminist literary theory, gender studies and Pakistani fiction. To provide the theoretical basis for analysis, relevant theoretical texts on feminist criticism and patriarchal structures are also going to be reviewed.

This study uses feminist literary analysis to explore the novel's depiction of female agency, patriarchal oppression, and resistance. The analysis will be carried out using Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis approach based on recurring patterns and themes in relation to gender and power.

Theoretical Framework

The research employs feminist literary theory, especially Radical Feminism, Postmodern Feminism and Postcolonial Feminism as its theory to study *Nobody Killed Her*. This discussion of theory establishes a comprehensive framework from which to interrogate the novel's critique of patriarchy.

Radical Feminism

Centuries of male-dominated structures have allowed men to become empowered towards women and today that has resulted in widespread violence against women. Radical feminism views patriarchy as the main source of women's oppression and aims at ending those patriarchal structures completely as a means to achieve gender equality (Firestone, 1970). Javeri's novel fits this framework by illuminating structural barriers that women must navigate in their political and social spheres. As if the implications of this shift were not damning enough, the novel adds the caveat that even powerful women are likely to be weaponized in and by patriarchal institutions, ensuring gender oppression remains baked into the institutions that govern us.

Postmodern Feminism

Utilitarian postmodern feminism critiques essentialist understandings of gender and theorizes the multiplicity of identity (Butler, 1999). *Nobody Killed Her* uses irony and genre to create complex female characters and subvert traditional tropes of gender binaries and victimhood, along with the notion that to be empowered you must become an antithesis to the original victim. Postmodern feminist literary techniques that question dominant discourse are embodied in the novel's fragmented narrative style and changing perspectives.

Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonial feminism addresses the interconnections between gender, race and colonial history, emphasizing the ways in which Western patriarchal systems often assume a global perspective on the struggles faced by women in postcolonial contexts (Spivak, 1988). In a postcolonial South Asian context, Javeri's novel deals with how gender oppression intersects with class, politics and colonial legacies. The novel's concern with female ambition and the barriers it faces within a South Asian patriarchal setting resonates with the interests of postcolonial feminist scholars.

This study will critically engage with how *Nobody Killed Her* challenges patriarchal norms and represents female agency through the application of these feminist theoretical frameworks. This

one brings a multi-faceted analysis of the critique of the novel with the perspectives of radical, postmodern and postcolonial feminism.

Data Analysis: A Feminist Reading of *Nobody Killed Her*

In this section, a deconstructing feminist reading of Sabyn Javeri's *Nobody Killed Her* through salient textual references is mapped to de-familiarise systematic sexism, a reclamation of feminine vagrants, and the mutability of power relations in a patriarchal milieu. The analysis is thematic in orientation and draws on radical, postmodern, and postcolonial feminist perspectives.

Patriarchy and the Political Sphere

Textual Example:

"Women like us are tolerated as long as we don't threaten the system. The moment we try to claim our rightful place, we become dangerous." (Javeri, 2017, p. 112)

This is a reflection of the structural limitations placed on women in political spaces. Its protagonist, Rani Shah, is a powerful female political leader, but the patriarchal order is so deeply entrenched that her position is always under threat. From a radical feminist perspective, this echoes Firestone (1970), who claimed that the systemic oppression of women is grounded in male dominance over the institutions of power. Despite Rani's securing of the socio-political elite, she is ultimately expendable in a patriarchy-designed system which aims to propagate male supremacy. The book is a critique of how women in the highest positions of power are increasingly held to diagnostic standards, delegitimated, then deposed when they challenge the patriarchy.

The Femme Fatale Trope and Gendered Perceptions of Morality

Textual Example:

"A woman who knows how to play the game is far more dangerous than a man who was born to win." (Javeri, 2017, p. 89)

This lyric is further commentary on the double standards that society holds for women who hold positions of power. Sadia, the in the film *Nazneen Khan* is depicted as a committed friend yet also as a traitor so the character embodies the postmodern feminist idea of unstable identities (Butler, 1999). She is seen as a femme fatale — a woman whose intelligence and ambition make her a threat rather than an asset. This corresponds to postmodern feminist critiques of gender essentialism, since it emphasizes the fact that patriarchal narratives take powerful women and reduce them to duplicitous backstabbers, rather than acknowledging that they also have agency.

Moreover, postcolonial feminist scholars argue that the motif bolsters transnational visual cultures founded upon Western and Eastern sets of gendered expectations. Over the decades, from the 1970s onwards, Western feminism has challenged the femme fatale trope but the South Asian narratives have still primarily propagated moral ambiguity (Spivak, 1988) and persistent phobia of ambitious women as opposed to empowering and endorsing such women as rightful contenders for power.

Marriage as a Patriarchal Institution

Textual Example:

"Marriage was not a union; it was a cage. One that trapped women into silence and servitude." (Javeri, 2017, p. 156)

Here is also a critique of the institution of marriage as a tool of control which reinforces radical feminist arguments that marriage institutionalises women's subordination (Millet, 1970). "If I ever had a guess, it is that the novel itself represented to them a marriage that shamed and doomed a woman because it chained her to the hearth, denying any agency toward the public sphere."

Rani's relationship with her husband depicts how even the world's most powerful must adhere to a gendered family structure. The book challenges marriage-as-partnership by exposing the ways it becomes a mechanism for enforcing patriarchal power.

The Silencing of Women and the Role of Patriarchal Violence

Textual Example:

"The louder she spoke, the harder they worked to drown her voice." (Javeri, 2017, p. 201)

This phrase is an intriguing image that fits postcolonial feminist discourses about the usurpation of women's voices, finding reaching some of the problems of a world in which women's input is erased from (male) histories and (masculinist) politics (Spivak, 1988). Women who speak against oppression throughout the novel are punished, often through character assassination and literal silencing, or imprisonment.

Through these allegations, the novel reveals the ways in which patriarchal violence is enacted not only physically, but enact institutional violence through antidepressants, media control, legal injustices, and social stigma. Women who claim their own agency are vilified or have their moods classified as hysterical — a method for preserving male dominance.

Female Solidarity and Resistance

Textual Example:

"Sisters in struggle, but strangers in survival." (Javeri, 2017, p. 244)

This suggested tensions in feminist movements, as well as the intricacies of female solidarity. The novel celebrates sisterhood between female characters but also critiques the systemic ways in which patriarchal systems force women to compete against each other, rather than empower each other collectively. This speaks to postmodern feminist criticisms of feminism's inability to address intersectional issues, since not all women face oppression in the same (Crenshaw, 1989) way.

Though Rani and Nazneen are sexual outsiders struggling to survive in a patriarchal society, their class backgrounds, ambitions and vulnerabilities inform their experiences. The book sees a complex view of feminism in a way that recognizes the intersectional potential for liberation within it, even as it exposes flaws and fractures that hinder its strength.

Discussion

This section details the analysis of the findings with the feminist theoretical framing, relevant political discourse in contemporary Pakistan, and finally the gist of patriarchal oppression as portrayed in *Nobody Killed Her*. Through its exploration of both offending and avenging, the novel critiques deeply held gender hierarchies and shows the ways in which female power and agency exist in a male-dominated society — but only as paradoxes.

In its dramatisation of women in leadership, the novel does an excellent job of revealing the contradictory expectations and demands that accompany such characters. Rani Shah, a woman who achieves political status, is both lionized and pilloried. Her success has been acceptable only to the extent it doesn't upset the male-dominated political order. This supports radical feminist claims (Millet, 1970) that institutions such as politics are designed to reproduce men's centrism, and that women who breach these bastions are attacked in a similar manner.

In addition, Rani's character parallels real-life instances of female politicians in South Asia, like the late Benazir Bhutto, who negotiated a political setting rife with gender stereotypes. How many women in power are more frequently judged not by their policies or the decisions they make but by how well they can fit into traditional feminine expectations? According to Butler (1999), gender is performative, and women in public are described as needing to straddle the line between masculine strength and feminine proclivity, lest they undermine their political futures.

Using the nouns 'enabler' and 'betrayer' to describe the protagonist, Nazneen Khan, the novel critiques the concept of morality. The alteration of her image—from faithful friend to presumed conspirator—demonstrates how society fabricates morality through a patriarchal framework. Women working in the power structures are often cast as *fa femme fatale*, aligning with postmodern feminist critiques of gender essentialism (Butler, 1999).

These binary portrayals of women echo Spivak's (1988) contention that, in post-colonial societies, women are typically located at either end of the spectrum of binary representations; or, they are constitutively presented as victims, requiring rescuing, or else as subversive forces. The novel works against these binaries by illustrating that female ambition is multifaceted instead of a vice by its very nature. But the absence of structural support for ambitious women points toward the novel's central critique: that patriarchal systems won't grant women power to exert on their own terms.

One of the novel's most powerful critiques of patriarchy is its depiction of marriage as an institution based not on companionship but on control. Societal expectations of marriage shape Rani's personal life, showing how even the most powerful women are forced into traditional gender roles. This result aligns with radical feminist perspectives (e.g., Firestone, 1970), which suggest marriage acts as an apparatus of enforcing male authority.

The novel also puts itself in the trajectory of postcolonial feminist critiques that examine how colonial legacies have constructed and consolidated patriarchal spaces in the context of South Asia. Although marriage has been historically critiqued as a patriarchal institution by Western feminists, in postcolonial societies such as Pakistan, it is a significant site of gendered oppression through which women's autonomy is negotiated and often thwarted (Mohanty, 1988).

The novel's ability to do this goes beyond highlighting physical forms of patriarchal violence to encompass and reveal social, legal, psychological forms of silencing as well. This notion that speaking up equates to being ignored, discredited or punished resonates with Spivak's (1988)

argument that the subaltern woman is deprived voice within structures of hegemony. That repeated ambition to silence women characters in the novel makes it a timely foil for how systems of patriarchy work across multiple levels, from family to law to politics.

Javeri's portrayal of this systemic silencing resonates with real-life instances in Pakistan, where women who dare to fight the status quo — be it in politics, journalism or activism — put their lives on the line and face character assassination, incarceration or worse. As such the novel operates as a feminist critique as well as a political commentary, revealing the ways in which gendered oppression is written into the fabric of national discourse.

The novel offers an ambiguous portrayal of female solidarity. Although it considers moments of sisterhood, it also critiques the rifts between women that stem from class and ambition, and from patriarchal structures from outside. This complexity echoes intersectional feminist arguments (Crenshaw, 1989) which highlight the differences in women's experiences of oppression based on socio-economic status, education, and political affiliation.

The contentious relationship with Rani and the relationship with Nazneen tells readers that feminist alliances are necessary in order to fight patriarchy, but systemic forces make this difficult, forcing women to fight against each other. Such an assertion correlates with Mohanty's (1988) critique of Western feminism's generalisation of the "female experience" in depicting postcolonial women's oppression as a universal phenomenon, emphasising that one needs to have a detailed understanding of the forms of power and control exercised on women within the latter context.

Conclusion

Both of these elements have been scrutinized through the lens of feminist theoretical frameworks to investigate questions of power, morality, gender roles, and systemic oppression in Sabyn Javeri's *Nobody Killed Her*. The book paints a chilling picture of gender hierarchies in Pakistan, and offers a keen analysis of the systemic sexism at play in the country's political and social spheres, as well as the paradoxes that survive and persist for women who are committed to making their way through these spaces dominated by the male gaze. Using Rani Shah and Nazneen Khan as guiding lenses of this exploration, Javeri deftly illustrates how women are encouraged yet thwarted by the will of society, and how that relationship exists in a funny, frustrating loosening of the still-tight control patriarchy has over women's bodies, desires and aspirations.

The study's findings are consistent with prominent feminist interpretations, from radical feminism, which denounces patriarchal formations like marriage and politics; to postmodern feminism, which questions the social construction of gender roles; to postcolonial feminism, which situates the particular struggles of women in postcolonial contexts, as in Pakistan. The novel's exploration of institutionalised silencing, gendered violence, and the moral policing of women serve to highlight how systemic barriers that deprive women agency, empowering men in the process, are by no means a thing of the past.

Indeed, this work focuses on the novel's engagement with feminist discourse by eschewing binary us/them perspectives of victim versus villain. *Nobody Killed Her*, by representing female characters as complex beings who simultaneously rebel against yet also uphold patriarchy, offers a layered analysis of gendered power dynamics in modern-day Pakistan. The novel evenly balances more gain than loss, but it ends up posing critical questions around the limits of female solidarity, as it appeals to the intersectionality of gender, class and political power.

This study does not only hold literary importance but also sheds lights on struggle of women in Pakistan. The novel mirrors real-life gender politics, especially the treatment of women in positions of leadership and in public life, finding common ground with past and present players alike. As such, it operates both as a form of literary and socio-political commentary, which invites readers to revisit the realities of gender equity and equity more generally in contemporary South Asia.

Yes, *Nobody Killed Her* is an important feminist text that questions the structures of patriarchy, even as it represents a saga of resistance and resilience. It also adds to the increasing scholarly work of feminist literary criticism on Pakistani fiction and highlights the importance of gender studies in literature today. Analyses could resonate with similar aspects of world literature by other modern-day female Pakistani writers producing in the global space enhancing the theoretical knowledge of gender, force and agency in South Asian writing.

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