JOD'S RESISTANCE TO PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY IN NADIA AL-KAWKABANI'S NOVEL AQEELAT

Zeyad Hussein Al-Mudhaffar
Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Thamar University, Yemen

Abstract

This paper is aimed at analyzing the novel entitled 'Aqeelat' written by Nadia Al-Kawkabani. This study is concerned with the main character's resistance to patriarchal ideology in her society. To analyze the resistance of the main character the researcher has used feminism approach. After analyzing the main character of the selected novel, the researcher found that the main character is aware of being discriminated by male domination. She is aware of the suffering of Yemeni women due to patriarchy. Her awareness of being marginalized brings her to some efforts to resist patriarchy in her society. This resistance can be seen in her actions and attitudes to reject the patriarchy ideology. First, she rejects the social rules of her patriarchal society which disregard women potentiality, and second she proves the potentiality of women as equal to men.

1. Introduction

A. Background of the Study

Carole Pateman writes, "The patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection" (207). Now it is used more generally to refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways, (Bhasin 3). In patriarchal society, the most important roles are occupied by men due to their strength, capability and productivity, whereas women are considered weak, incapable and unproductive. Thus, the most important positions, such as, economy, education, law, politics and religion are held by men, whereas women are marginalized into domestic roles. They are still dominated by men even in domestic roles, (Tim 28).

Mitchell, a feminist psychologist, uses the word patriarchy to refer to kinship systems in which men exchange women, (Mitchell 24). Walby defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women, (20). Patriarchy means the manifestation of male domination over women and children in the family in particular and male domination over women and children in society in general. According to Lerner, patriarchy implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. However, it does not imply that women are either totally
powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources, (239).

Patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain that men always have the dominant, or masculine roles, and women always have the subordinate or feminine ones. This ideology is so powerful that men are usually able to secure the apparent consent of the very women they oppress. They do this through institutions such as the academy, the church, and the family, as each of which justifies and reinforces women's subordination to men, (Millett 35). Abeda Sultana argues that "The patriarchal system is characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy, and competition. So patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (3).

Gender relations in Yemen are shaped by cultural, social, and political traditions across the regions, between rural and urban areas, and between different tribes and generation, (Care 1; Gressmann 3). Historically, women are regarded as inferior to men and they have had less capability in society than men. They have been only confined to the household level, (CARE, 2; Gressmann 3, 13; Heinze 2).

Yemeni women and girls experienced systematic discrimination and marginalization (Al Naimi and Moodly 5). They cannot get married without the permission of their male guardian; they don't have rights to demand divorce, inheritance or child custody; they are not protected and are exposed to domestic and sexual violence (Gressmann 45).

Yemeni women's roles in their society are reduced to the level of a child-producing machine. They are less likely to attend schools. They are suffering sexual harassment, forced marriage, early marriage, exchange marriage and denial of inheritance. They are inhumanly deprived of their rights and are regarded as inferior and irrational creatures. Women are considered more marginal of the lot in a male dominated society.

From the statements above we can say that patriarchy put women in a difficult situation. Women have been struggling to fight patriarchy and gender discrimination since a long time ago. Therefore, women created a movement which is called feminism. The role of this movement can be revealed by Bashin and Khan: feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women's labor, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation, (2).

This movement came into existence as a reaction against patriarchy. It is created to make women aware of their rights and to encourage women to revolt against patriarchy in their society.

Based on Feminism, there are many Yemeni feminist authors who wrote novels about women's resistance to patriarchy. They try to include the suffering of Yemeni women in their literary works. They also try to depict how Yemeni women are marginalized and discriminated due to male domination. Through their literary works, they try to get Yemeni women's voice heard by us in order to change their conceited attitudes towards women.

The first novel by a Yemeni woman writer was published in 1970s, Dhahiyat al-Jashe'e (The Victim of Greed) by Ramziyya Al-Iryani. This novel deals with the common social problem of forcing a young girl to get married to a rich old man for the sake of money. Ahlam Nabilah (Dreams of Nabilah) was published in 1997, by Aziza Abdullah. This novel reveals the social and political situations of the country through the historical life of female protagonist, Halima, who underdoes a series of difficulties and terrible experiences in a corrupted society. Arkenha Al-Faqeeh (She was promised by the Faqeeh) was published in 1998 by Aziza Abdullah. This novel reveals the social and political situations of the country through the historical life of female protagonist, Halima, who underdoes a series of difficulties and terrible experiences in a corrupted society. Arkenha Al-Faqeeh (She was promised by the Faqeeh) was published in 1998 by Aziza Abdullah. This novel deals with a real story taken from social life. A young girl is seduced by the faqeeh (a religious man), who has promised to marry her but then deserts her and leaves her face her pregnancy and the punishment of her society.

Nadia Al-Kawkabani is a celebrated novelist of the contemporary world of literature. In her novel, she is diametrically concerned with the issues of women in Yemen. She not only reveals the suffering of women through her novel, but also projects the rebellion and resistance of women the rules of the patriarchal society. This
A novel is considered as a feminist narrative. It depicts the embattled women in Yemen. In this novel, the author vociferously denounces the familial dictatorship that victimizes women in Yemen.

In addition, the novel highlights how patriarchy tries to suppress the creative energies and resistance of women. It is the promising novel of Al-Kawkabani through which she can reveal the pain of women in her society. This feminist work ossified the position of Al-Kawkabani in the literary circles as a novelist who advocates the resistance of Yemeni women to patriarchy. Through this novel, the author attempts to redress the very serious issues like patriarchal hegemony in her society.

**Patriarchy in the Novel**

*Aqeelat* is a novel that tells a story about women who struggle to liberate themselves and to achieve their dreams in their patriarchal society. This novel narrates the sufferings of Yemeni women under men dominance. It is about suffering women who live in a patriarchal society. But in this study I had chosen the main character, Jod, to analyze her resistance to the patriarchal society because Jod is a good example of this resistance.

Jod is a woman lives in a society where women are regarded as inferior to men. She lives in a society where women are completely dominated by males. Jod graduates from Engineering College at Sana'a University and gets high marks in her college. She dreams of getting a job at her college, but unfortunately as a woman she is regarded as inferior in her society. She is prevented by her family from getting a job in her college. Furthermore, she is enforced to accept an arranged marriage to a person she doesn't know anything about. Jod bravely refuses this marriage breaking the rules of her patriarchal society. She also decides to live away from her brother and mother. She asks her inheritance after her father's death to run her own business away from her oppressive family.

The author depicts the main character as a unique character. She is depicted as a conscious woman who realizes the condition of women in her society. In feminism, being conscious is important to struggle against discrimination. Hook states that before women struggle against patriarchy, they should raise their consciousness. They should realize that they are really being victimized and being discriminated (6-7). Jod is really aware of women's sufferings in a society in which they are being discriminated. Thus, her awareness encourages her to resist the rules of patriarchal society. The author, through the main character, encourages women not to obey the rules imposed on them by patriarchal society. In this study, I attempt to reveal some efforts of the main character in struggling against her patriarchal society using the feminist approach.

Yemeni women are constantly forced to get married to someone chosen by their families. They are deprived of their rights in choosing their men. Their families never respect their opinion about this arranged marriage. Women have no rights to choose their men. They are not considered as human beings having the same rights and needs as men have. Women in Yemen are merely thought of as the objects of sexual satiety and as a child-producing machine. Marriage in Yemen has been changed into a prison for women instead of being a time of joy and pleasure. This marriage brings a woman into her husband's house as a slave. This marriage limits the freedom of woman in enjoying their rights as human beings. The novelist expresses the subordinate and under-fortunate positions of women in marriage in the hopeless words of Jod:

Men who propose my hand for marriage want me to be imprisoned at home. They want me to be detained in a place where there is no air, beautiful landscape that can cheer me up; where there is no blue sky that can embrace my desires (113).

The above lines reveal the bitter suffering of Yemeni women under their oppressive husbands. The novelist skillfully uses the metaphor "imprisoned" to make a comparison between a prison and the life of a woman under her husband. Both have the same suffering regarding lack of freedom and special treatment. For the reasons that mentioned above, Jod refuses to get married and decides to complete her life without marriage. She also refuses to get married from the man who is chosen by her family. She decides to resist patriarchy in her society by
refusing that marriage which is not based on real relationships between male and female parties. By her refusal, she breaks the rules of her patriarchal society. The novelist tries to decenter all those patriarchal institutions through her archetypal feminist novel, Aqeelat. She attempts through her character, Jod, to expose abuse and crime to which women in Yemen are subjected and to liberate them from the patriarchal slavery.

In such a patriarchal society like Yemen, it is so hard for a single woman to live away from her family. She has to spend her time with her family until she gets married. But Jod is an exception. Due to bad treatment she faces under her brother dominance, she decides to flee from her family's home to reach any place that would safeguard her from the cruel clutches of patriarchy. Jod doesn't accept to live with her mother and brother because they are responsible for her destroyed life. So, she breaks the rules of her society and frees herself from patriarchy. The novelist tries to encourage women of Yemen to revolt against patriarchy in their society. She wants them not to be subjected by male domination.

Another image of the protagonist's resistance to patriarchy can be revealed in Jod's demand. In such a patriarchal society like Yemen, it is not easy for a woman to demand her inheritance after her father's death, but Jod bravely demands that without caring for the rules of her society. She wants to be totally independent from her oppressive brother and to start a new life that is full of dreams and achievements. She finally gets her inheritance and starts to run her own business by founding a famous school for kids in Sana'a city. In Yemen it is difficult for a woman to run her own business, but Jod breaks these rules and runs her own business. People of her society consider a woman as inferior and they think that the house is the suitable place for her. Jod doesn't care about the rules of her society. She only thinks about her new life away from patriarchy. Feminism rejects the norms of patriarchal society that degrades women. Feminism assumes that men and women have the equal logic and capability. Okin states "his rejection about assumption which states that women are naturally inferior, less rational, and lack of capability" (as cited in Karimah 29).

The novelist through her main character, Jod, wants to prove that a Yemeni woman is able to achieve her dreams and goals if she is given a chance to do that by her family or her society. Jod's decision to be independent from patriarchy can be manifested in Rauda's words: Jod refused to live with her brother and her mother. Not only this, but she doesn't care about them. She asks her inheritance after her father's death and founded a nursing school for kids which is considered one of the best schools in Sana'a city.

Through the lines quoted above, the novelist also tries to send a message to patriarchal society that women have the ability to work side by side with men. at the same time, she tries to encourage Yemeni women to liberate themselves from male domination and to count upon themselves.

Jod is an optimistic person. She habitually expects good things to happen. Her optimism can be revealed in her incitation to her friend, Rauda, to write about victimized women in Yemen. Jod expects that Rauda's writing would help women in Yemen to be free from patriarchy by revealing and depicting their tragic life under male domination. She persuades her friend to rewrite again about those women who are subjected in their patriarchal society. In such a patriarchal society like Yemen, women cannot write and publish their writings because of the restricted customs rooted in this society. But Jod incites Rauda to break the rules of her society and rewrite again in order to reveal the suffering of Yemeni women under male domination. This resistance can be revealed in her incitation to Rauda:

Without your writing, marginalized women never see light. Be sure that yesterday imprisoned women will be free ones today. We want to get our rights. We want to be respected and we want our desire to be respected too by men as we do with them, (48).

Through the above lines, the novelist, through Jod, wants the marginalized women's voice to get heard by men. She wants men to change their opinions towards women and respect their desires and decisions.
In this novel, Jod is also depicted as an advisor woman to those of her sex. She is a conscious woman who realizes the suffering of women under patriarchy and tries to liberate them from that nightmare. She constantly advises mothers not to enforce their daughters to get married early. She wants their daughters to complete their education. In such a patriarchal society like Yemen, girls stop their education because they are enforced to get married early. They are also forced to get married even to old men. Jod never keeps her silence, but she resists that bad phenomenon by encouraging mothers to revolt against the rules of their society and refuse such an arranged marriage. In Jod's society, women usually marry at a young age and it is such an obligation. Thus, they cannot get education due to the fact that society regarded women inferior who should serve their households. Feminism realizes that education is very important for women to expand their potentiality. Jod proves that when she advises mothers not to accept such marriages:

Rauda, believe it or not, one of the school girls got married directly after her graduation from high school. I advise her mother to let her daughter complete her study at a university to be able to shoulder her responsibility as a wife, but her mother replied, 'a husband is a guard,' (22-23).

In the above lines, the novelist through her major character, criticizes the role of mothers and their duty towards their daughters. Instead of supporting their daughters to revolt against the rules of patriarchal society, mothers unconsciously participate in destroying their daughters' future. In a unique way, the novelist depicts the sufferings Yemeni women constantly encounter in their society. They are not only victimized by male domination, but also by irresponsible mothers.

Jod is such a clever woman. She gets high marks in her college and she could run her business successfully. In such a patriarchal society like Yemen, a woman is depicted as inferior to man. Her ability and nature are only confined to household chores. She has no ability to get good education or to achieve her goals without man's support. Feminism states that, "women and men have some capacity intellectuality, they reject all of the statements that degrade women's intellectual and capacity," (Karimah 31). Jod breaks the rules of her society by proving that a Yemeni woman has an ability to achieve her dreams without relying on a man, namely, in the field of education and business. She could achieve her goals better than a man. Jod founds her school, and it is considered one of the best schools in Sana'a city. Her brother knows that she is clever, but he never supports her to achieve her dreams. Instead, he primarily participates in destroying her personal life by enforcing her not to get a job at her college and not to get married to the man she really loves. Jod could prove her ability as a woman in changing impossible dreams into possible ones by resisting her patriarchal society.

The novelist could, through her character, Jod, skillfully express the sufferings of Yemeni women under patriarchy by revealing some images of discrimination and marginalization towards women in Yemen. She could also show the protagonist's resistance against the rules of her patriarchal society. Through this novel, the author could explicitly reveal the sufferings of marginalized women in Yemen and get their voice heard by men in their society. She wants males to be aware of women's rights and respect them.

Conclusion

Aqeelat is a novel that tells the story of the marginalized women in Yemen. In this novel, the author utilizes some of feminism ideas to criticize the patriarchal society through Jod as the main character. After analyzing the novel, I found that the discrimination towards women is not due to their biological determinism, but due to social structures and practices. The Yemeni women are marginalized and discriminated because of men's unawareness of women's potentiality.

It can be conclude that the author through her character, Jod, has expressed explicit empathy with the plight of women in her society. Furthermore, through the character's resistance to patriarchy, the author has revealed that women are able enough to resist the patriarchy ideology that has been illegally experienced by men in Yemen. Jod, on one hand, symbolizes the victim
of male dictatorship and male domination. On the other hand, Jod reflects a successful model of an enlightened and deviant woman who resists the social rules of patriarchal society. The female character in this novel struggles to liberate herself from patriarchy in a society that is governed by discriminating and oppressive attitudes towards women. The female protagonist seeks for a utopian society in which a woman can be respected by men and can live freely. The author through her female character, attempts to extend her supporting hand to all those suffering women who have been marginalized and discriminated by the so-called patriarchal ideology.

Works Cited
… Arkenha Al-Faqeeh [Rely on a Priest]. Cairo: al-‘Alamiyya, 1998. Print
Al Naami, A., & Moodley, S. We won’t wait: As war ravages Yemen, its women Strive to build peace. Oxfam International. 2017.web.6.10.2019
Engels, F. The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State. London : Lawrence and Wishart, 1940. Print