

Gender Role and Subalternity in Mouni Mohsin's The End of Innocence: A Feminist Literary Analysis



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Abstract: *The study is based on the feminist movement, which has vividly challenged the basic social structures of society, through which for many years' women are being used as a tool of depression. The study explores the stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity that are present in such societies and it also sheds light on how women are socialized in patriarchal societies. The study also examines how women are portrayed in Pakistani literature and media and emphasize what type of prejudice and mistreatment they experience. Furthermore, the research looks at the works of postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, whose critical perspectives are centred on oppressive systems. Spivak criticizes the limitations and divisions faced by subalterns through her deconstruction of Western academic knowledge. Finally, the paper delves into Mouni Mohsin's novel The End of Innocence, which tells the love story of Rani and Laila in West Pakistan while highlighting the oppression and mistreatment of women in the country.*

Key Words: Subalternity, Mouni Mohsin, The End of Innocence, Feminist, Literary Analysis

Introduction

Women have historically been subjected to systematic discrimination and oppression in patriarchal societies. The feminist movement emerged in response to this oppression, challenging ingrained social structures and expectations that have historically ostracized women. This literary analysis aims to shed light on how women are socialized in patriarchal societies and the persistently dominant stereotypical ideas of femininity and masculinity, as well as highlights the feminist movement's influence on Pakistani literature and media. The feminist movement has made a commitment to examining the sociopolitical rights, economic concerns, educational opportunities, and freedom of thought of women (Cooke, 2001). The idea of a woman's body has been a hotly debated subject throughout the three waves of feminism (Cooke, 2001). The goal of feminists is to achieve equality for women in all spheres of life and to challenge traditional gender roles. The ability for

women to share their own stories, the right to vote, and the right to own property are all examples of this (Cooke, 2001). Farooq et al, (2021) in their article *Grappling with Environmental Crisis: An Eco-critical Study of Momaday's House Made of Dawn* assert that women just like the environment are being marginalized by the man in society.

The feminist movement has generally focused on opposing societal structures and norms that have historically oppressed women. Even though there has been progress, true gender equality needs to be attained. Despite advancements, women are still subjected to oppression on a global scale and are treated as "others" despite their accomplishments (Said, 1978). Patriarchal systems that historically discriminated against women are the root cause of this oppression (Cixous, 1976; Mukherjee, 1988). The colonial-patriarchal social order gave rise to black feminism in the 20th century as women from oppressed communities fought back against

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oppression based on racial, ethnic, class, and hegemonic factors (Cooke, 2001). The patriarchal social structure has essentialized women, defining them as emotional, sensitive, nurturing, conscious of their appearance, and good listeners (Murnen et al., 2016). This essentialization, which shapes how society views women, starts during early socialization. The famous quote from French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 14), indicates that femininity is socially constructed rather than inherent. Ishfaq, F. et al, (2022). In her article, *The Nuptiality of Arranged Marriage Traditions Leading to Generational Gap and Modernity in How it Happened* by Shazaf Fatima Haider tells that the generational gap is one of the basic problems that every woman is facing in the subcontinent.

Women are socialized in traditional patriarchal societies and are portrayed in books and societies dominated by men which are often fabricated. Because their bodies are not as closely correlated with language as men's, women find it difficult to speak out against the patriarchal system. Men enjoy having authority over not only their own lives but also the lives of other women, such as their mothers, wives, and sisters. Although women make up 56% of the population in Pakistan, they do not enjoy equal rights and frequently endure discrimination and mistreatment at the hands of men. Unfortunately, the word "feminism" in Pakistan has acquired a bad reputation, which has only served to strengthen patriarchal standards and values. Feminism is not widely accepted by both genders, and it is frequently mistakenly seen as being anti-Islamic. Women in Pakistan have a difficult time advocating for their rights and being treated equally due to this misunderstanding. However, in recent years, more women have felt empowered to speak out and fight for their rights. Many people have been inspired to share their experiences and work for change by the #MeToo movement and the Aurat March. This study will concentrate on how feminist themes have been used by Pakistani authors to highlight the oppression and denial of rights that women in that nation experience. Writers can influence societal norms and advance constructive change through their work.

The work of renowned feminist researcher and postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak has had a significant influence on critical theory. She explores the connection between power, representation, and agency in colonial and postcolonial

contexts in her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" According to Spivak (2015), the subaltern, which is a term for disadvantaged and oppressed social groups, is marginalized and left out of the discourse of power. She criticizes the idea that Western intellectuals can speak for and represent the underprivileged because it upholds the very systems of oppression and power that cause them to be marginalized. Spivak (2015) contends that the dominant discourse cannot merely give the subaltern a voice. They must instead be given the ability to speak for themselves and exercise agency within their own communities. She emphasizes the significance of opposing the patriarchal and colonial structures of power and dominance that marginalize and silences the underprivileged.

In her book, *The End of Innocence*, Mouni Mohsin describes the romance between Rani and Laila, which takes place in West Pakistan in the winter of 1971. Rani confides in a young girl named Laila, but as their friendship sours, Rani turned to Laila for comfort and support, unintentionally ruining the queen. With a focus on the complexities of class and gender, the book examines how volatile love affects society as a whole. The scene takes place in a rural area of West Punjab, vividly evoking the scents of sugarcane and the cool colours of Laila's endearing house. An old-fashioned maid, a happy ex-pat, and a perplexed nun are all characters in the story that strike a balance between interesting polyphony. Mohsin's writing style seamlessly transitions from Western allusions to regional folklore and proverbs, using words as a palette to paint a gentle picture of the nation where she was raised. Laila's innocence and Pakistan's division, which occurred as Bangladesh sought independence and India intervened, are carefully contrasted in the book.

Mouni Mohsin's book *The End of Innocence* vividly describes the changing seasons and hues of Western Punjab against a distinctive backdrop. The author's writing is accurate and evocative, portraying a bilingual society where the protagonist easily switches between references to the West and local folklore and proverbs. The town of Sabzbagh, which translates to 'green garden' plays an important role in the narrative as it serves as an Urdu-language representation of the world of ghosts. The novel's pacing is slow but engrossing, with the dramatic dynamic emerging later in the narrative.

Literature Review

According to Harkrisnowo (2000), the patriarchal system deprives women of their rights and opportunities and perpetuates gender inequality. Because of this system, men hold positions of power and women are forced into subservient roles. Sexual violence is a frequent occurrence, and women frequently experience discrimination and violence because of their gender. In patriarchal societies, where women are viewed as inferior and are not treated with the respect and dignity they deserve, this social evil is deeply ingrained. Women are unable to assert their rights due to societal norms and traditions, and their subjugation is further reinforced by their fear of retaliation. Therefore, it is crucial to oppose the patriarchal mentality and work towards establishing a society that is more just and equitable. Women's equality in politics, the economy, society, the arts, and other fields are promoted by feminist criticism. Female characters and their problems must resonate with feminist readers on an emotional level. In his analysis of feminism, Showalter separates feminist complaints into two groups.

The *End of Innocence* by Moni Mohsin by Hussain (2006) offers a critique of Moni Mohsin's book, which chronicles the friendship between a young girl named Laila and a teenage girl from a lower social class named Rani. In the winter of 1971, against the backdrop of the impending war between Pakistan and India, the story is set in Western Pakistan. Laila is sucked into a dangerous situation that she is unable to understand or assist with as Rani becomes pregnant. Sardar Begum, Laila's grandmother, is the only one in the book who truly comes to life and is portrayed as a typical Punjabi grandmother. The review acknowledges the potential of the novel's premise, which examines the friendship between two girls from different social classes and the influence of societal norms and expectations on their lives—despite these flaws.

Ahsan and Nawaz (2021) assert that the love story between Rani and Laila in the book *The End of Innocence* takes place in West Pakistan during the winter of 1971. When Rani confides in Laila about her illicit love, Laila, a nine-year-old girl who is eager to learn about the world, consoles Rani. Rani, however, seeks Laila's comfort and support when unexpected test results are revealed, which unintentionally leads to Rani's demise because Laila is unable to recognize the potential risk. Furthermore, they highlight that although the book's pacing can be slow and

meandering at times, it eventually builds to powerful dynamics that serve as the backdrop for the last third of the book. Although Laila's viewpoint predominates, other characters, such as her liberal father, protective mother, and widowed grandmother but all contribute their views as well which leads to the inherent lack of privacy that results from such an approach.

Theoretical Framework

The oppression of women in Pakistan is frequently depicted in literature and the media of Pakistan. Authors like Saadat Hassan Manto have brought Pakistani culture's darker side to light by highlighting the physical and psychological abuse that women experience. Pakistan also has a culture of oppression where those in positions of power can stifle the speech of those who disagree with them. For women and writers, this makes it difficult for them to speak out against patriarchy and oppression.

Famous postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak criticizes Western centres and their oppressive systems. In her writings, Spivak raises the issue of gender and sexual difference as well as the political ambiguities and contradictions of postmodernism. Because of various societal divisions like gender, class, caste, geography, and religion, Spivak claims that subalterns, or people from third-world countries, are unable to speak up for themselves (Spivak, 2015). When examining the accuracy of constructions, Spivak uses deconstruction. She uses the practice of Sati, in which a woman is burned alive on her dead husband's pyre, as an example. Despite the practice being outlawed by the British, Indian women's voices were not heard during the process. The British used this to support their rule in India and to uphold the stereotype of the native people as barbarians. Human consciousness, according to Spivak, is created at random, and people do not create their own identities (Spivak, 1996).

Women of the subcontinent cannot speak because they do not have their indigenous identity Nawaz, A. et al. (2021). Spivak emphasizes how Western academic knowledge is exported to third-world nations to serve Western economic interests in her critique of Foucault and Deleuze. This fosters the idea that Western knowledge is superior and serves as the foundation for the identity of people in the third world. According to Spivak (Spivak, 2015), knowledge is never neutral and always represents the interests of its creator.

Although some critics have expressed disapproval of her emphasis on the impossibility of subaltern agency and the essentializing tendencies of her use of the term "subaltern," her work has made a significant contribution to our understanding of power, representation, and agency in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's work has greatly influenced the critical theory and continues to influence discussions of the politics of representation in the present. Her focus on empowering marginalized groups to speak up for themselves and opposing the systems of power that keep them silent continues to be an essential contribution to our understanding of social power structures.

Analysis and Discussion

The End of Innocence by Moni Mohsin is a book about a nine-year-old girl named Laila who becomes a confidante of a teenage girl named Rani who is having an extramarital relationship. The story is set in Western Pakistan in the winter of 1971. Although both of them are emotionally connected to each other when Rani asks Laila for help after finding out she's pregnant, she fails to recognize the risk and unintentionally pushes Rani into a dangerous situation. The book examines the friendship between two young girls from different social classes and also touches on the more general issue of the nation's development during the war of 1971. The story has a lot of potentials and sheds light on Pakistan's feudal system's complexities.

Coercion was defined as the unjust holding of something by N. E. Cudd in [2005](#). Iris Marion Young (1990) added that coercion can also refer to the use of tyranny and violence by a group in power to impose or control others or to implement certain rules of their own will. Exploitation, violence, cultural imperialism, marginalization, and disempowerment are five different types of oppression. Violence refers to acts of physical or verbal aggression against another person or group, whereas exploitation occurs when a person or group uses their power to further their own interests. When the ruling class imposes its cultural norms and values on others, it is engaging in cultural imperialism. Empowerment is the use of power by one group to subjugate and control another, and marginalization happens when someone or some group is prevented from rising to higher status or realizing their full potential.

The friendship between Rani and Laila is depicted in the text *The End of Innocence* without any romantic or sensual overtones. However, there are often hints of desire in the language used to describe their relationship. In the opening sentence of the story, "Perched on the edge of a car seat, Rani and Laila hurtled towards a love story," the tone of their close relationship is established. Contrasted with the complex dynamics she encounters with her own sister, Sara Laila's love for Rani is pure and innocent, akin to the admiration of a young child for an older girl. Laila believes that Rani is unmatched in her capacity to add wonder to daily life and make anything into something delightful. Laila sees Rani as intellectually superior, someone whose cleverness she secretly envies. This admiration and idolization build a deep emotional connection between them. As the story unfolds, it is Laila who first becomes aware of Rani's burgeoning sexuality. She notices Rani striking a provocative pose, mimicking the posture of Heer from the film "Heer Ranjha" they had watched together. Laila's recognition of Rani's sensuality may be interpreted through various psychoanalytical theories that explore the childhood experiences of women. The language employed in describing their relationship often conveys a sense of longing and yearning, even though their bond remains purely platonic. It explores the complex emotional landscape between two individuals, transcending conventional notions of friendship. Overall, *The End of Innocence* delves into the intricacies of an intense and transformative friendship, where desire may be present in the language used but does not manifest as a romantic or sexual relationship.

Ahsan and Nawaz ([2020](#)) in their article tell the story that In Western Pakistan in 1971, a young girl named Laila learns about a teenage queen named Rani and starts a covert love affair. Rani confides in Laila, but when the affair has unintended consequences, Laila is powerless to intervene, which causes tragedy. This story brings to light patriarchal norms that frequently define women in terms of men and bind them to the men in their lives. By giving Draupadi, a strong and independent female character, Divakaruni ([2017](#)) challenges this idea. In opposition to the patriarchal society she lives in, Draupadi is portrayed as a woman who fights for her freedom and asserts her uniqueness and self-confidence. The character chooses to be called Panchali rather than the name her father gave her, which reflects her desire to forge her own identity. The struggle of women to break free from the

restrictions placed on them by patriarchal norms and forge their own identities is portrayed in Divakaruni's novel.

Nawaz, A. et al, (2021) assert that women have a close relationship with nature and in order to survive she finds nature to get happiness. Patriarchy and gender inequality are examined through the perspective of marginalized women in third-world nations in the writings of Mohanty and Spivak. The tragic tale of Rani, a young girl who was mistreated by her stepfather before being murdered by her lover, serves as an illustration of what oppressed women are performing in these societies.

According to Mohanty, patriarchal cultures frequently exist in third-world nations, which contribute to women's continued subjugation. For Spivak, the term "subalterns" refers to people who are marginalized and have few rights. Spivak further talks about the custom of Sati in which women are buried alive but in *The End of Innocence* Mohsin talks not only about the oppression of women rather he also highlights that the unborn child is also killed as a result of male oppression. In the novel *The End of Innocence*. Mashooq assumes the responsibility of ending the lives of Rani and her illegitimate unborn child. Mohsin's portrayal of Mashooq is intriguing as he depicts him as a man burdened by the stigma of being illegitimate throughout his life. Mashooq believes that there is no greater transgression than fathering an illicit child. He expresses a deep sense of conviction and purpose in his actions. He firmly believes that his actions have brought liberation and redemption to both Rani and her unborn child. Mashooq sees himself as a saviour, taking it upon himself to remove the dishonour that Rani carried due to her unmarried pregnancy. He feels a responsibility to rescue the child from what he perceives as a life filled with hardship and suffering. According to Mashooq, his actions were not arbitrary but rather part of a greater plan orchestrated by a higher power. He attributes his role in this plan to the will of Allah, believing that it was predetermined for him to take on this task as a means of seeking personal redemption. In essence, Mashooq views himself as an instrument of change and believes that he has successfully alleviated the dishonour associated with Rani's situation while also rescuing the unborn child from a potentially difficult life. He sees his actions as a way to reconcile his own past, which was marred by being labelled a bastard, and to find salvation in fulfilling what he perceives as Allah's plan for him. I have liberated them both. I removed the dishonour from

Rani. As for the baby, I rescued it from a living hell. It was all planned up above. Allah wanted me to redeem myself." (Mohsin, 2006 P. 325)

The formidable obstruction standing in the way of 'gyn/affection' lies within the institution of matrimony. Sardar Begum imparts to Laila that a woman's paramount devotion post-marriage resides with her husband and his kin, while friendships swiftly fade into oblivion. Marriage, the pinnacle of hetero-relationality, assumes the role of an all-encompassing entity in a woman's existence. Her life is neatly categorized into a prenuptial stage of relative liberty paired with innocent chastity, followed by a postnuptial phase of submissive sensuality. Indian feminists astutely observe that a family's honour is intricately intertwined with the conduct of its women. Vrinda Nabar (1995) cogently argues that "Izzat," a prized possession, appears to be exclusively linked to the female realm, with its preservation falling solely upon the shoulders of women. In order to safeguard Anju's marital union, Sudha reluctantly abandons her plan to elope with Ashok due to Anju's father-in-law's stern words: It is preferable to have a destitute, unattractive girl, I whispered to my wife, than one whose lineage is marred by immorality (p. 139). When Rani finds herself with a child prior to wedlock, her grandmother Kaneez mournfully reflects, The only thing I had left was my dignity. And the hope that it would be different for you. But today you have robbed me of both. I have nothing left (p.233). However, in reality, it is only Rani who endures the wrath of retribution, meted out by her stepfather Mashooq, who extinguishes her life due to her carrying an illegitimate child. Further compounding matters, women involved in illicit relations are unjustly denied the option of abortion, as it would entail concealing an immoral act. Moreover, the unborn child resulting from such transgressions is left without a guardian, deemed a consequence of wanton passion. These laws unabashedly aim to exert control over a woman's corporeal vessel and her innate sexuality, thereby seemingly justifying Mashooq's ruthless act of slaying Rani. In his eyes, by eliminating both Rani and her tainted offspring, he believes he has purged the earth of dishonourable progeny, thus seeking redemption for the perceived transgressions.

The study is based on the feminist movement, which has vividly challenged the basic social structures of society, through which for many years' women are being used as a tool of depression. The study explores the stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity

that are present in such societies and it also sheds light on how women are socialized in patriarchal societies. The study also examines how women are portrayed in Pakistani literature and media and emphasize what type of prejudice and mistreatment they experience. Furthermore, the research looks at the works of postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, whose critical perspectives are centred on oppressive systems. Spivak criticizes the limitations and divisions faced by subalterns through her deconstruction of Western academic knowledge. Finally, the paper delves into Mouni Mohsin's novel *The End of Innocence*, which tells the love story of Rani and Laila in West Pakistan while highlighting the oppression and mistreatment of women in the country.

Conclusion

The research is based upon the feministic analysis of Mouni Mohsin's novel *The End of Innocence*. The novel represents the political condition of 1971 during which East Pakistan was struggling to get independence from

West Pakistan. The novel is based upon a story of two protagonist females who face difficult times during their life as they are most oppressed by the male patriarchal society. The study focuses on the stereotypical representation of women in Pakistani and Indian society. Gayatri Spivak a well know feministic writer from India has given a voice to the common women of the subcontinent. Through her essay "Can Subaltern Speak" she makes it clear to the reader that subalterns can not speak. Her theory of subalternity is applied to the novel *The End of Innocence*. Through a detailed analysis, it is made clear that even though centuries have gone when Gayatri Spivak had written her famous work but still in the subcontinent women are unable to speak due to the patriarchal society. She says it is the oppression of a male dominant society that women of the subcontinent are unable to speak for themselves. Furthermore, the research paper also highlights that all the forms of oppression that are being done to the women of the subcontinent must come to an end in order to raise the voice of subalterns.

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