

ISRG JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND CULTURAL STUDIES (ISRGJHCS)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Humanit Cult Stud

ISSN: 3048-5436 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/gjhcs/>

Volume – I Issue - I (March – April) 2024

Frequency: Bimonthly



Mothers are the most anti-feminists: From patriarchy to Neo-patriarchy in *Beyond the Fields*

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| Received: 01.01.2024 | Accepted: 04.02.2024 | Published: 03.03.2024

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Abstract

Ayesha Baqir's Beyond the Fields analyzes the sufferings and miseries of girls at the hands of mothers in culturally rich and male dominated region of southern Punjab, Pakistan. Where mothers adopt the role of fathers to implement the patriarchal decisions of fathers on daughters. It highlights the role of mothers as agents of patriarchy as they repress young girls in every aspect of life. When mothers become the fatherly figures for girls, it rise to a new form of patriarchy that is called neo-patriarchy, which works through women and supervised by men. It highlights the suppression, oppression, objectification and subjugation of daughters at the hands of mothers. The way girls are not allowed by the mothers to step out of their house for studying and playing. Mothers smash the very wish of daughters to marry by their choice and declare them third class girls. This paper is an attempt to analyze the roles of mothers being anti-feminist through internalizing patriarchy. This study investigates that how internalizing patriarchy smashes and affects the lives of daughters and make them suffer physically and psychologically. It concludes that the dual suppression makes daughter's lives miserable. Their lives are sandwiched between mother's and father's life.

Keywords: *Feminism, Subjugation, Suppression, Neo-Patriarchy, Oppression.*

Introduction

Beyond the Fields (2019) is Ayesha's first novel. The book depicts the interior view of the Pakistani Punjabi culture. A male dominated society, where women are crushed between the religion and the culture. Where Men hold supreme authority. This novel is about the young girls, who are treated like objects; by their father as well as by their mother. But the role mothers perform in the absence of father hardly justifies any affectionous feeling to their own

gender. The characters in Baqir's novel define the lives of those women who are powerless, deprived of their right, have suffered a lot and are shut up within the four walls of houses as prisoners. But in return these powerless women become the source of miseries and affliction to their powerless daughters. The situation here gets similarity with the novel *Bluest Eye*. Where white men torture powerless black men. Powerless black men suppress their black

wives. Powerless wives suppress and torture their daughters. However, working under the supervision of patriarchy, makes mothers anti-feminist and they give rise to a new form of patriarchy that is Neo-patriarchy. Hisham Sharabi used this word in his book *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in the Arab World* in 1988. The term Neo-patriarchy means new form of governance. In his book he explained the relationship between modernity and patriarchy in the context of Arab world by using this term. According to Hisham Sharabi, patriarchy is shifted to Neo-patriarchy due to structural and the historical changes in society. It is twisted form of traditional patriarchy, which works through women. However, Neo-patriarchy works through women but supervised by men. It is new form of power and control where women have leading role but their decisions and actions are controlled by men in the family.

Beyond the Fields (2019) is a story about twin sisters, Zara and Tara, born to a poor family. The story begins in early 1980s, when the ruler of the country is a dictator, general Zia ul Haq, who has introduced a new law of "hudoob ordinance". According to the law if a female is raped, she has to prove this by providing four witnesses otherwise she has to be punished severely.

Tara and Zara live with their parents in a small house made up of mud and clay, along with their brother Omer. They are happy but mentally suppressed by their mother who taunts them on every trivial matter. Zara wants to go to school. She wants to be a scientist but her amma declares that getting education is haram for girls. Similarly, their aunt Kulsoom is just like their mother. She deals her daughters with an iron hand and she is very eager to marry her daughters off without their will.

One day when Tara and Zara were playing hide and seek in the fields, someone raped Tara and left her there in the fields. When they find Tara with torn clothes and blood over her shalwar. She is taken into room by her father wrapped in *chadar* and no one is allowed to see Tara. They try to find scoundrels who rape Tara but they are helpless. In fact, they do not register an FIR in Police Station in order to prevent the spread of news to save the honor of family and other sister Zara.

Tara's parents take her to Karachi and they marry her off to an unknown person. Finally, they know through a newspaper that the person whom they married Tara, runs a brothel. At first, they do not believe this news and start saying that they have married Tara to him and that is her destiny now. They plunge Tara into the mouth of a monster to save their family honor.

Somehow Zara gets permission to work in the city as a maid to support her family. There she meets Gloria who helps her in finding Tara. She takes Zara to that brothel, where Tara is imprisoned and where Zara must pretend to be a prostitute. She finally reaches the room where Tara lies unconscious but at that moment, she is called to attend the man for whom she has to come here as a prostitute. After that she lifts Tara on her back and moves towards gate where she puts her in rickshaw and they disappear. In her effort to save Tara, Zara succeeds but loses her virginity.

Literature Review

Ayesha Baqir's *Beyond the Fields* (2019) has been discussed and reviewed by the various researchers. It has been discussed from the prospective of Marxist-feminism, gender issues, subjugation, patriarchy and the oppression done to the women.

Altaf (2019) highlights the story of a young girl from the countryside who refuses to be bound by the traditional ideas about honor and dignity. The book highlights the lack of freedom for women in Pakistani society, where they are controlled by men and are oppressed by a male-dominated system. Girls are often only allowed to do household chores and are not permitted to go to school, causing high rates of illiteracy among rural girls. The author wants to bring attention to the fact that women in this society are being deprived of their basic human rights, including freedom. Similarly, she wants to highlight the women's resilience in Pakistan by weaving the story around Zara's sphere, where women's rights are suppressed by the draconian Hudoob Ordinance.

Bukhari (2019) says that *Beyond the Fields* deals with important problems like killing girls for honor, raping young girls, and using women for sex. The story shows life in a Pakistani village where girls are controlled by their parents and live under patriarchal values. Where parents care more about their honor, that is associated with daughters, than their daughters themselves. Even young girls face strict rules. In this society, women and girls are often treated badly without mercy. Despite this, they still face discrimination based on their gender. When Zara and Tara become 12 years old, restrictions are put on them by their parents. They are unable to go outside their home without their mother.

Husain (2019) demonstrates that the tale of Zara and Tara serves as a mirror for the societal demands from the girls and the women. The theme of the novel is survival and it is best portrayed through the character of Zara. She sets off on a journey to save Tara and to seek justice for her. It also portrays the struggle of women in the patriarchal society, where government and the family system work against women folk. Tara is weak and submissive character and all her sufferings, kidnapping and raping are brushed under the carpet by marrying her to an unknown person. Similarly, the new law of Hudoob Ordinance increases the sufferings of women.

Kundi (2022) explains that commodification of women is a very catastrophic issue in the society. She tries to explore the problems faced by young girls in the patriarchal society. Through the lives of Tara and Zara. She highlights the issues faced by young girls in a patriarchal society. She explores how Tara and Zara are commodified in the novel and what is the impact of commodification on their lives. The novel is the depiction of hard realities of life and Marxist feminist ideology is portrayed in a very beautiful way. She says that everywhere women are facing lots of problems in this patriarchal society. This situation creates social dependency of women and that becomes the basic power for males over women in all relationships.

Naqvi (2019) sheds light on the harsh treatment of women and girls in a patriarchal society. Women often experience violence and cruelty due to lack of justice. The story takes place in a rural area of Pakistan and is based on the author's own experiences. The author thinks that these women need economic support to fight for their rights and social justice. The most common forms of violence, against women in Pakistan, are marital rape and spousal abuse. Girls in rural areas face restrictions, such as limited access to education, due to patriarchal norms. These gender-based prejudices have become internalized in the minds of Pakistani people.

Discussion

Patriarchy molds women's thinking according to its rules and regulations and women act accordingly. Dworkin (1989) says that

patriarchy colonizes women's mind and body. Living under the chains of patriarchy makes women internalize the patriarchy. Women start believing that ideas propagated by men are true. They start believing that men are superior and women are inferior. They think that they have nothing to do with rationality, education, politics, and fighting. So, women believe in the sexist ideas perpetuated by men. This internalizing patriarchy makes them anti-feminist. A situation in which women work against their own race. Especially mothers in the family work as anti-feminists by internalizing patriarchy. Mothers work as agents of men and start to perpetuate patriarchal ideas to their daughters. They suppress their daughters and put different restrictions on them. In this mother becomes the fatherly figure for the daughter, by suppressing her daughter through internalizing patriarchy, in the absence of father. They play the role similar to panopticon or surveillance for the daughters and keep the close eyes on daughters in implementing the patriarchy. Where denial of patriarchal values for the girls turns into same situation like in 1984 novel 'Big Brother is watching you' to the 'mother is watching you'. Hook (1984) says that internalizing patriarchy is a big problem that stops women from being equal to men. She says that internalized patriarchy happens when women start to believe in sexist ideas and stereotype about their own gender, such as the belief that men are better or that violence against women is acceptable. She thinks it is important to challenge these ideas and to work towards creating a world where men and women are equal. She says that this can only possible if women stop believing in these harmful ideas and start standing up for their rights.

Zara and Tara's mother, despite helping her daughters against the social system where men hold power, works as an agent of men. She is the one who suppresses her daughters rather than supporting them. Although she is a woman and a mother and she has faced men's authority throughout her life, however, she does not stand against men's supremacy, rather she internalizes patriarchy and propagates it to her daughters. She is a mother but for her daughters she turns to an anti-feminist character. She suppresses and subjugates her daughters and she treats them like an object.

At the very start of Zara and Tara's puberty, their mother puts restrictions on them by caging them in their home and covering them with a *chador* first then with a *burka* in the heat of summer. Although they lose their freedom at the start of their life by introducing to them the *chador* and *burka*, yet their mother says that this is freedom for them not slavery. "Amma said that *burka* gave me freedom" (p.6).

Their mother smashes their wish to see the world with un-covered eyes by caging them in *burka*, like birds are caged in a cage and they are unable to flap their wings. But when Zara hesitates to wear the *Burka* in the heat of summer, her mother threatens her that she will not allow her to study secretly with her brother Omer. "Take it off and you won't get another minute to study" (p.66)

Zara and Tara's Amma is against the schooling of girls. She is house wife and wants to see her daughters in the shape of house-wives. She believes that girls have nothing to do with getting education. According to her, the function of girls is to serve men. She strictly follows the patriarchal binaries like man is for field and a woman is for hearth. That is why she does not allow her daughter Zara to get education. Although, she is educated, she has studied from a government teacher but still she thinks that girls do not need schooling.

As in patriarchal society, man is the controlling authority and he thinks that girls do not need basic education, only boys have that right. As Kate Millet (1970) says in her book *Sexual Politics* "If knowledge is power, power is also knowledge, and large factor in their subordinate position is the fairly systematic ignorance patriarchy imposes upon women" (p.42).

Similarly, Zara and Tara's mother is strictly following the patriarchal ideas. She says that Zara is not a boy that is why she cannot get education. "If studying was in her destiny, she should have been a boy" (p.144). When Zara announces that she wants to study, "I announced that I wanted to go to school and flung open the books to show Amma that girls did go to school" (p.47), her mother says to her that girls in their village do not go to school. She says to Zara that has she gone mad that she wants to study. If Zara says that again, she will be married off. But when Omer refuses to study further if his mother does not allow Zara to study, only then she agrees and submits to the demand of Omer because she wants to see her son Omer as an educated person. She allows not because of her motherly affection to Zara but because of love that she bears for Omer. "But then Omer howled a googly and vowed he was going to start tutoring me at home. If Amma didn't allow it he would stop going to school as well" (p.47).

Similarly, Zara is very intelligent and does well in her studies as anyone else. Even she can compete with her brother Omer in studies. But her mother does not pay any heed to her studies because she is girl and a girl needs to learn how to make her husband happy. If Omer gets first position, their mother cooks Omer's favorite dish but when Zara passes the exam with highest marks, her Amma does not cook something special for her. Instead, her mother says that she needs to know how to make *chapatis*. "Last year when Omer had passed his exams, Amma had spent hours preparing his favorite dessert, the milky *kheer*. This year, when I had cleared with higher marks, Amma had muttered I needed to learn to make softer *chapattis*" (p.45). For her Amma it is very important that her son Omer should top the school, "I knew it was important for Amma that Omer topped" (p.64). As Malala Yousafzai (2013) in her address to the *United Nation* says "One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world". Same is the case with Zara. She wants to change the world by becoming a scientist, "I wanted to be a scientist, an astronaut; to discover, and explore. How would my village look from space" (p.102). But in her Amma's view Zara getting education is meaningless because it is not going to help her in the future.

Similarly, her Amma does not disturb Omer in his studies. She cares for his uniform, "I saw Amma straighten Omer's school uniform and comb his hair while he ate his breakfast" (p.51). However, when Zara does not work according to the desires of her mother, her mother beats her, but she does not say a word to Omer. "Amma beat me with her *chappli* and made me sit on the wooden crate" (p.133). So, in order to have dominance over her daughter Zara, her mother threatens and beats her. As Bell Hook (2000) says in her book *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, "Women remain the primary caretakers of children, the fact confirms the reality that given a hierarchal system in a culture of dominance which empowers females (like the parent-child relationship) all too often they use coercive force to maintain dominance" (p.64). But this dominance, threatening, control and surveillance of mothers over daughters fulfil the function of patriarchy through mothers in an alternative way. This supervising role of Zara's Amma is the creation of patriarchy that suits its need. As Kate Millet (1970) in her book *Sexual Politics* says that

“The image of women as we know it is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs” (p.46).

Zara’s Amma wants to make her daughters suitable house wives rather than educated ones. She assigns them different chores. She makes them wash clothes but she does not allow Zara read different books. “We cooked breakfast, dusted the rooms, swept the floor, sorted grains, fed and washed the livestock” (p.33). There is no motherly affection in the heart of their mother. She always deals her daughters with iron hands. “Amma said the dough had to be just right: moist but not wet, soft but not fluffy, gooey but not sticky. Sometimes Amma’s instructions were tougher than these in Chemistry books” (p.76).

Moreover, the role of mothers in the marriages of daughters is anti-feminist. Mothers treat their daughters like aliens in the family. They consider daughters burden upon them because they do not carry the family name. So, they are not given the free will to marry someone. Girls are objectified and used as a relational object to cement the family ties. Thus, mothers internalize these concepts due to living with men and working according to men, who use them in *vatta-satta*, just like a trading object as well as in *vanni*; to compensate the loss of family. Thus, they help working patriarchy within family. As Gerda Lerner (1986) says in her book *Creation of Patriarchy*, “The system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of women” (p.217). Similarly, mothers adopt patriarchal attitude in the marriages of girls in an alternative way. For mothers’, daughters’ marriages have become the source of barter system. Exchange one thing for the other thing. Daughters have become just like trading objects which are traded between the two parties. Where loss is compensated through the gain of other thing. A similar situation occurs at the funeral of Shaukat chacha, when a woman is looking for a bride for her son. She rejects Zara due to her dark complexion. Zubaida Masi suggests a solution to that woman that she should do *watta-satta*; exchange of brides for their sons. She mentions that although Zara may not be suitable for her son, but her brother Omer, who does not have a dark complexion, could be an ideal companion for the woman’s daughter. Zubaida Masi assures the woman that her daughter will be happy with Zara’s brother and she will not be in loss in this settlement. “Watta-satta, explained Zubaida Masi. You knew an exchange, one sibling for another. Her brother is doing well at school. He’s a good boy with a bright future” (p.60).

Zubaida Masi believes that when girls enter into teen age they should be married. The start of puberty is best for mothers to send their daughter to their husbands’ house. “Just between us, the other day I was advising Nasreen to fix her elder daughter’s marriage. She’s fourteen after all, and if not now than when?” (p.58). Similarly, Samina Masi advises Zara’s mother to marry her daughters because they look old and it is good for them to be married at this age. “You have started thinking, haven’t you? And what better occasion to talk about marriage than at once. They looked old enough. Good height and slim. And thick log braids” (p.96).

Zara’s mother thinks that only men have the freedom of choice that is why she categorizes those girls who marry without the will of their parents, into third category. According to her a good girl is the one who is submissive and who marry according to the will of her parents. So, she does not believe in the free will of girls. But if a girl chooses to marry without the permission of her parents, then, according to Zara’s mother that girl is third class girl. “In Amma’s world, there were three types of girls. First class married whom

their parents chose, second class never married and third-class girls married against their parents’ wishes” (p.08).

Sama Appi’s mother believes in the idea of honor. She believes that family honor depends on the daughters’ actions. She thinks that it is the honor for a girl to move to her husband’s house and settle there as soon as possible. That is why an un-married daughter is a source of tension for Saima Appi’s mother. She always faces the hanging sword of honor over her head. The only relief for her is the marriage proposal of her daughter and that’s a wonderful news for her. When the news of Saima Appi’s wedding is shared among the family member, Kulsoom Chachi says, “It’s a wonderful news, and you’ve shared it on such a special occasion” (p.70). But when Saima Appi’s in-laws send her back to her father’s house, her mother becomes furious and blames Saima Appi for not doing best in her house. “Amma was furious said I must have done something to upset them” (p.157). Kulsoom Chachi becomes very eager to send her daughter Saima Appi back to her husband’s house but her husband Khalid Chacha refuses to send her daughter to those cruel people who tortured Saima Appi. But Kulsoom Chachi says to her husband that for her the dead daughter has more value than the divorced one. “Kulsoom Chachi shook her fist. You forgot that I’m her mother. Better for my daughter to be dead than divorced” (p.158).

Like men Zara’s mother thinks that honor resides in girls and once it is lost then the family name is ruined. When Zara and Tara go outside the house, Zara’s mother says to her that she wants to ruin our family name. “You went out? Amma’s voice tightened with anger. Haven’t I told you and Tara a thousand times not to? What is someone sees you? Do you want to ruin our family name?” (p.29).

Moreover, when Chiragh runs off with the Anwar and her family disowns her but then Anwar marries to someone else and Zara’s mother and all other women blame Chiragh for dis-honoring her family name but they do not say a word to Anwar. They say that Chiragh is a third-class girl. “Amma and her friends blame Chiragh, saying there was no place in our village for third class girls and Bari Masi had declared that Chiragh should drown herself if she had any shame” (p.79). But when someone rapes Chiragh and leaves her in the fields to die, after her death, Bari Masi stops Zara’s mother from attending funeral prayers of Chiragh. “Raped and strangled. Amjad Chacha discovered her body in the fields. Bari Masi just came to stop Amma from going to the funeral prayers” (p.168). When Molvi Saab urges women of the village, they refuse to attend Chiragh funeral prayers. “Later I learnt that Molvi Saab had requested the village women to prepare the body for funeral since Chiragh had no family in the village but they had refused under Bari Masi’s orders” (p.169).

Zara and Tara’s Amma do not allow them to laugh and make different pranks. She says that these activities will not take them to their in-laws’ house. And their duty in their husbands’ house is to serve their in-laws without complaining. “Pranks and laughs won’t take you far in your in-laws’ house, said Amma. You’re not children anymore. If you married you have to keep your husband and in-laws happy and give them no reason to complain” (p.77). Even their mother does not speak to them politely. She cares and loves animals as well as Omer but she does not love her daughters. The daughters are burden upon her. Zara says that, “I suddenly wished that Amma would talk to us in the voice she used for the kitten. She crooned and murmured to them held to them gently, and even let them upon the charpai when Abba was out” (p.37).

Zara's Amma declares different activities haram for them, which are normal for the boys, but for them these activities are haram. Woolf (1985) says that there are many cases where supervising mothers or grandmothers even supervise the body and the soul of young women. Same is the case with Zara's mother. Zara's mother says that running out is haram. "Now Amma said that running out was haram. Playing in the street was haram. Everything was haram after the bleeding started" (p.28). "Amma had forbidden me from stopping out" (p.148). Similarly, she says that looking in the mirror is haram but for their Abba and Omer it is not haram. "Amma had forbidden us to look in the mirror. She said it was haram. The devil lurked behind the glass waiting to catch young girls who peered inside" (p.34). Moreover, she says to them that listening to music is haram. This will make jinns to appear. "Tara hummed softly as she flipped the chapattis. Amma had forbidden her from singing aloud, saying it would entice the jinns" (p.36). "Amma declared that all music was haram" (p.93). Their Amma says that for girls, love is sickness that will destroy their family name. Due to this she does not allow her daughters to love someone. "Love is the sickness, Amma says" (p.100).

Conclusion

The overall discussion and the concepts unveil the anti-feministic attitude of mothers towards the daughters. Though the supreme authorities are men yet women are marionette in the hands of men and the internalized patriarchy works as the threads for marionette. Women play their role assigned to them by men. They suppress and subjugate their own gender and weave the patriarchal web around their daughters. They put patriarchal shackles around their daughters and restrict their freedom. Ayesha Baqir (2019) guides us through *Beyond the Fields* that in Pakistan Women's sufferings can be minimized if they break the shackles of patriarchy. So, mothers should not weave the chains of patriarchy around their daughters rather they should support their daughters in breaking the chains of patriarchy. They should not adopt repressive status in the families as fathers adopt because dual suppression crushes the very existence of girls in the families. They should love their daughters as they love their son and their love will make them believe that they are not aliens living among cannibals. Mothers' roles in girls' marriages should be a supportive one. They should not force them to marry to an unknown as patriarchy demands from a girl. Mothers' support regarding girls' consent in marriages will be helpful in saving their lives from scam marriages.

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