Tracing out Elements of Radical Feminism in A Woman Like Her by Sanam Mehar

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ABSTRACT

The present study highlights the features of Radical Feminism in A Woman Like Her (2018) by Sanam Mehar using the lens of Ti Grace Atkinson's Radical Feminism and theoretical framework of Radical Feminism. In the view of researcher the protagonist of the book made several bold decisions that questioned the patriarchal culture. She was killed in the name of honour because of these radical actions. The study also highlights the difficulties faced by Pakistani women. There are other issues that women face, including the fact that they are forced into marriage, that their activities are restricted to the home, that they are harassed at work, and that they are unable to engage in the practical life of their choosing. According to the study, only women, not men, are slain in the sake of honour, demonstrating the patriarchal nature of the culture.

Keywords

Violence, Honour Killing, Radical Feminism, Sexual Harassment, Male Dominance

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Introduction:

The present study is based on Sanam Mehar's) book A Woman Like Her (2018, which examines issues that the women are facing in patriarchal societies and reexamines the circumstances
surrounding the honour killing of Pakistani social media personality Qandeel Baloch. The research looks into certain extreme actions taken by Qandeel that led to her death under the guise of an honour killing. This study seeks to identify some of Qandeel's radical actions as well as the issues facing women in patriarchal societies. It draws attention to the society's dualistic and conservative conduct. The research exposes misogyny of media and calls the media into question. It demonstrates that women are exclusively seen as a symbol of honour, and that everything they do that goes against social norms brings shame and guilt upon their families and the entire community. In this aspect, the attitude toward males is very different.

The narrative of the book centers on Qandeel Baloch, a young Pakistani lady who became famous on social media before being killed by her brother at the age of 26. Throughout her life, Baloch (real name Fouzia Azeem) attracted attention and caused controversy, angering not just her brother but also several threatening online and offline trolls. Her brother Waseem was also made fun of for what his sister did. He wanted it to be over, so he took matters into his own hands. Waseem told police this information during interrogation, "She just wouldn't listen." “I didn't know how else to deal with this” (Mehar, 2018, p.25). He killed his sister in July 2016 after putting a sedative in her milk. In his confession, Waseem said that he had done it to protect the "honour" of his family. Waseem was given a life term in jail in September.

Honor murders, as they are known, happen all across the world, but around half of them happen in India and Pakistan. According to Pakistani activists, over 1,000 honour murders take place yearly. They can occur when a relative, usually a woman is accused of bringing dishonour to the family, and honour is restored by killing her. Maher refers to honour killings as "the perfect crime" since so many of them go unpunished. On the other side, Qandeel Baloch was distinctive. The worldwide press referred to her as Pakistan's Kim Kardashian after her murder, which was televised throughout the globe. Her parents were furious, upset, and supported her instead of pardoning the perpetrator, as is usually the case. Baloch’s father made a commitment to never pardon his son. Her mother decorated her daughter’s hands and feet with henna to signify that she had exited the world gracefully. The way Maher examined Baloch’s life and passing is astounding. It is a study of how a whole nation and culture interact with the contemporary demands of the Internet, reality television, and women who are yearning to be liberated from pre-existing restrictions. Journalist Maher, who is based in Karachi, is a patient and honest storyteller, pointing out when accounts diverge, which interviewees are unreliable, and which inquiries should be left unanswered. Her writing is straightforward and even lyrical, which is fitting given the subject matter. Maher also weaves in Baloch's own words, perhaps taken from media interviews.

Baloch is 8 or 9 years old when A Woman Like Her (2018) starts in her little town. In time with the motions of a woman on television, she is writhing and dancing. Maher, who spoke with hundreds of individuals for the book, including Baloch’s parents, said that when her elder brother sees her, he is furious and knocks the breath right out of her. Waseem's actions foreshadow her story's terrible ending. At the age of 17, Baloch marries an abusive guy by agreement, and they have a kid. Baloch says that she despises this way of life, runs out, leaves her child behind, and seeks a job so she may support herself. Maher calls the following events "a very public middle finger" to the majority of conservative Pakistan. Baloch records a Valentine's Day greeting for notable politician and former Prime Minister Imran Khan after
the president says the holiday is a Western idea that shouldn't be observed. She offers a striptease if the national cricket team triumphs in a competition against India. She takes seductive photos of a Muslim cleric. Every prank is scarier than the one before it. “Whatever you try to stop me from doing, I’ll do much more” (Mehar, 2018, p.61), Baloch is quoted as saying by Maher. Baloch acquires tens of thousands of Facebook fans, but there is an immediate and harsh pushback. She is denigrated and accused of bringing Islam and Pakistan into disrepute.

Statement of the Purpose:

Women are under the power of the patriarchal system in a number of systems, including social status and sexual supremacy. Patriarchy is a tradition in South Asia and the Indian Subcontinent. In a patriarchal society, girls give to fatherly families, women are subject to males, and women only react passively to men. To end male domination in patriarchal culture, social norms about male sexual superiority must be altered. This study emphasises the hardships faced by women in patriarchal societies. There have been several studies on the subject in the past, but none have been conducted on the issue of honour killing recently. In this sense, there existed a research gap that the current study aims to fill.

Research Questions:

In this study the researcher answers the following questions:

- Which basic elements of Radical Feminism can be located in Sanam Maher’s work, A Woman like Her?
- Which elements show Qandeel Baloch a radical feminist?

Significance of the Study:

The work of Pakistani journalist Sanam Mehar is the subject of the present study. Readers and common people can use the research to better understand the suffering and issues faced by women in patriarchal societies. It aids the reader in understanding the many forms of abuse women experience in their social and marital lives. It demonstrates the drastic actions taken by Qandeel Baloch, who caused her murder in the sake of honour. The research emphasises the requirement for media outlets to act responsibly while covering delicate subjects.

Literature Review:

In his study "Analysis of South Asian English Fiction," Khan (2006) concludes that Pakistan has a variety of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic conditions. Women must recklessly deal with all of these societal issues, particularly the agriculturally oriented families and outdated systems. The majority of Pakistani population resides in rural and slum regions. They are struggling with a lack of their basic requirements and a terrible kind of illiteracy. Women who live in cities benefit from higher educational possibilities and work chances. Additionally, they are not subject to the same limitations that village women are. The communal and the personal patriarchal based norms are two separate types of maternal systems that apply to males in Pakistan. Due to the character of women, who are viewed as inferior and subordinate to males in many spheres of life, this is a widespread practise of utilising strength and force to defeat them.
In some regions of Pakistan there are forced marriages. Obviously, Islam does not have any laws that force people into marriage. Islam forbids forcing women into forced marriages. Islam prohibits forcing women to wed strangers without their consent; hence this is against Islamic law. Fatima (2007) expressed the opinion that "ghag" is a bad practice in Muslim communities that is undermining the foundational principles of Islam. Hadith explicitly said that the Nikah is a requirement for women as a contract and that the girl's parents and other family members cannot compel her to marry an unknowing man. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the practice of ghag is still prevalent, and the Elimination of Custom of Ghag Act 2013 was created to combat the unjust and evil custom. It is now clear that a Ghag is a form of law, ritual, or exercise where a man successfully asks the hand of a lady without getting her consent or that of her parents. It can be done by open discourse, words spoken or written, a significant presentation, or another method. There are a few situations where another person is unwilling to propose to her or be married to her. In a same manner, masculine violence is evolving daily, and the people are guiding this obscene sort of tradition and giving women an abusive platform through the practice of Ghag.

Women's value varies depending on their occupation and marital status, and under certain circumstances, they are recklessly assaulted. There are many different types of women in the community, including those who are attractive and sensitive. Dangerous attacks can undermine their steadfastness and their everlasting spirit. Therefore, it is difficult to eliminate this type of dread, and in order to safeguard women, a segment of patriarchal society must be eliminated. In these kinds of situations, the victim carries the issues from the management and the judiciary, therefore they occasionally stay away. However, acid attacks are considered to be sexual assault and are prohibited by both national and municipal regulations. Despite this, it continues with little change because to the well-established male-dominated organizations, the deteriorating state of the legal system, the publics’ cheap cost access to acid-containing products, and other factors (Zia, 2013).

Girls and women are killed in the sake of honour. The system has undergone refinements for many years. In 2011, the HRCP estimated that 675 girls and women had been killed between January and September. The executioner has provided a variety of justifications. In 2010, the committee reported 791 honour murders. The integrity of women is undoubtedly compromised in this strict sort of culture. The uncomfortable truth is that society protects women's integrity by excluding them from participating in every aspect of life. By simultaneously murdering, sexually assaulting, acid-attacking, burning, and abusing the women, society degrades them. Therefore, there are a variety of local reasons for honour murders, which may be viewed as a ceremonial practise throughout the regions of Pakistan. the tribal regions of north Bhanbhro, siyahkari in Balochistan, karol-kari in Sindh, and tor-tora in Punjab (2013).

The demand for dowry items from the bride is the most hazardous custom in the Indo-Pak subcontinent. As far as we are aware, dowry articles refer to any furniture or other objects other than inherited property that the bride takes from her parents' home. The in-laws of a bride who does not have dowry items treat her differently, torment her, victimise her, and in some cases, violently murder her (Parveen, 1981). The practise of dowry has been ingrained in our society, much like other feminist and social issues. Pakistan enacted a legislation outlawing the unfair dowry tradition in 1976. This regulation stipulated that the dowry must not exceed
5,000 rupees and that the list had to be made public and recorded in the marriage registry (Iftekhar, 2019). Dowry is not a religious obligation and is outright forbidden in Islam. However, some illiterate individuals view it as a religious obligation to justify their unreasonable claims against their brides (Noor, 2004). Islam does not recognize dowry as a concept or practise. It is an unfair and un-Islamic tradition in our culture. According to Islamic law, the bride's parents are not required to provide any kind of dowry in exchange for their daughter's marriage. It is not an Islamic ritual; it is a cultural one. Despite these legal and Islamic repercussions, the practise of dowry did not decline.

My Feudal Lord by Tehmina Durani, published in 1991, is a biography that provides a detailed explanation of Pakistani customs relating to marriage and family life. She also denounces repressive elements like nationalism, the feudal system, and ceremonial laws. She understands that she lacks the confidence to do so whenever she wants to refuse to live with her spouse or want to expel from his life because she believes that by doing so, she has disrespected and slandered him. She put a lot of effort into gaining more self-assurance, independence, and fulfillment. According to descriptions of how society views women, when they create art, society views it as a passion. The pursuit of friendship is viewed as sexual harmony by society. Society equates success with the ability to attract people of the opposite sex when they make an effort to envision it. However, society forbade them from accessing the potential power of sex. The presence of women at every corner of the triangular SDS, according to Eagleton, is what defines women's true success (socially, domestically, and sexually). English chronicle in Pakistan is only getting started with this facet of women's empowerment. Numerous authors focus their concentration instead on fiction. While it is true that Tehmena's work has attracted public attention, Shaista Ikramullah, Benazeer Bhutto, and Sarah Suleri were pioneers in this field before Tehmena. Her life narrative was what drew in so many readers on a national and worldwide scale. In order to expose the repressive nature of feudalism and the figures of authority that the people of Pakistan obeyed, she devoted her work to them. And for writers, she provides a model for how to improve their pen and their interests for the burdened, the destitute, and for those who wish to express their own struggles. Would it be possible for my daughter to learn about the persecution and my son to refrain from targeting the weak?

Theoretical Framework:

For the examination of the chosen text, the researcher employed Ti Grace Atkinson's (1969) Radical Feminism Theory as a conceptual framework. It implies that while males are around, women suffer. Women must reduce or completely remove the role of males in their lives if they are to advance in life and move freely across it. For women, having guys around is quite problematic. They do not demand equality but rather total exclusion of males from their life. Women in patriarchal societies have very little opportunity to advance. Society demands women to take some risky and unconventional actions to make their mark. According to radical feminism, the most pervasive kind of tyranny is the oppression of women, which is a basic component of virtually all societies, whether ancient and modern. Political, cultural, economic, religious, and social oppression are just a few ways this patriarchal tyranny shows out in society. It is based on a social construct called gender, which assigns women a place that has nothing to do with actual social divisions and everything to do with how much males exploit women collectively. Exploitation must be fought on all fronts political, economic, cultural,
artistic, philosophical, and scientific because it permeates every area of culture. Within this wide partnership, there are several competing opinions as well. One of the most extreme claims is that everything including philosophy, science, and even language itself is the product of a certain social structure that is wholly governed by males. It is necessary to reject all that this male hegemony involves in order to combat it, even if this means creating a new language that women may use to speak with other women. According to a less radical but nonetheless problematic perspective, women are fundamentally different from males. They are more sensitive to maternal qualities of compassion, care, and intuition as well as more in tune with life, environment, and the ecological character of the planet itself. On the other hand, feminist opponents contend that this is a retreat to the comfort of a romanticized view of a woman's character that men find appealing. Naturally, this raises the fundamental and unanswered question of whether there are appreciable differences between men and women. Men's responses to feminism raise some intriguing issues. Because the two sexes will be able to negotiate a different and healthier relationship, some feminisms believe that releasing women also releases men. Some people think males are useless since women don't need them (thus the famous phrase, "a woman requires a man as a fish requires a bicycle"). This easily leads to more extreme types of feminism; for instance, in Pornography: Men Possessing Women, Andrea Dworkin (1974) almost sums up "maleness" as fundamentally violent, destructive, and negative. Male sexual redundancy may be reaching the stage where males are no longer required for reproduction thanks to recent scientific advancements. According to some feminists, this has given rise to a type of "political lesbianism" in which women interact with one another on all levels, not just sexually, and in ways that they choose without taking into account the views of males.

**Textual Analysis:**

Qandeel Baloch is a member of the Maara tribe in Pakistan's Balochistan. Her family relocated from Balochistan to Shah Sadar Din, a tiny hamlet close to DG Khan, a city in Pakistan's Punjab region. The ladies in her traditional household are not permitted to participate in any form of social life. According to Atkinson's (1969) idea of Radical Feminism, society's male supremacy is mostly to blame for the suffering of women. The Baloch family, to which Qandeel belongs, is an example of this. Women's receiving a solid education while still working outside is unheard of. Male family members are the family's leaders, and women are expected to follow their directions. Even as young children, girls are not permitted to play with boys beyond the boundaries of the family. When Qandeel was seven years old and playing outside with guys, she received punishment. "She longs to go outside. But she has been punished and must stay indoors. 'What is wrong with you?' her mother had asked her as she plucked her from the scrum of boys she had tried to play with" (Mehar, 2018, p.12).

Qandeel was forced into her marriage against her choice to her mother's cousin. She resides with her spouse in Kot Addu, where he works as a landlord. Her husband's actions are quite aggressive. He frequently beats her and cigarettes sears her flesh. She admits to her mother that she has cigarette burns on her skin. She frequently visits her house to confront her parents about her spouse. The justification she gives for the miserable marriage to her parents is what supports feminism. She claims, "He hates me because I am beautiful and he is not. I am young and he is not" (Mehar, 2018, p.28). Her husband's hatred of her despite her beauty and youth
is obviously a result of male dominance. The radical notion that males are not as attractive and youthful as women is further demonstrated by Qandeel's aforementioned words. Although it is against the family custom that women never leave the home of their husbands, her parents do not pay attention to her complaints, thus she is obliged to stay at her husband's house. The husband has the authority to divorce his wife. Every time she visits her folks, her mother whisks her away. Her mother frequently chastises her for leaving her husband's house. According to her mother, “We are Baloch and Baloch do not believe in running away like this” (Mehar, 2018, p.29).

The Pakistani society that Qandeel Baloch is seeking to make her mark on is also shown in A Woman Like Her (2018). Additionally, society uses a double standard when evaluating anyone's error. The existence of males in society, according to radical feminists, particularly Atkinson, poses problems for women. It makes their presence in society extremely challenging and pointless. The same is true of Pakistani society, where Qandeel Baloch resides. The name of Qandeel and the other model girls that work with her are the first thing that indicates that society is somewhat male dominating and that women are not accepted. The names that their parents have given them are not used by the girls in show business. This demonstrates their rebellion against societal norms. When Qandeel enters the shoe industry, she changes her name from Fouzia Azeem. Her parents' previous name, in her opinion, is inappropriate for her new persona. She thus gives herself a new name, Qandeel. As we can see from the text, “Now that Mec was on her side, the only thing holding her back was ‘Fouzia’ if she wanted to be a star, she needed a star's name. A new name for a new life” (Mehar, 2018, p.35). Khushi, a Kashmiri woman who works as an event organizer in the entertainment industry, is another woman addressed in the book. She has a lengthy history of struggle to earn her place in society. Mehar reveals that Khushi is not her true name, which her parents gave her. Even the girls who were performing in the event that Khushi was arranging all had new names that were not the same as the names their parents had given them. In the book, we read: “Her real name is not Khushi- ‘Happiness' in Urdu. Like Qandeel, none of the girls here use the names their parents gave them” (Mehar, 2018, p.39).

Qandeel Baloch is a driven young woman with unconventional views. She was born into and was raised in a fairly traditional family. She makes several unconventional choices, about which Mehar writes in her book. She first divorces her spouse, which is against the rules of her culture and family. When she divorces her spouse, she defies the expectations of her family. The wife has no right to leave her spouse; this is against her family's custom and culture. She makes the decision to work for herself and gain financial independence. But when she split from her husband, she brought their child with her. She returns her child to her spouse. Her action is unusual since, typically, mothers in society like to keep their kids close to them. However, she views the youngster as a type of roadblock to her advancement. According to Atkinson's Radical Feminist Theory (1969), women are free to bear children or not. They are bound to do what they see fit regarding having a kid. As we read in the book, “I need to make my own life,” she says. “Whatever I want to do, I cannot do it with a child hanging onto me. I'll become helpless.” The child could live with his grandparents. May be his father will want him (Mehar, 2018, p.31).

Baloch was known as the "Pakistani Kim Kardashian," and she had developed a social media following of hundreds of millions of people. Along with her defenders, she also had detractors
who said she was too scandalous and risqué for the clannish culture in which women had little chance of achieving independence. Her provocative photos and extremist videos have angered Pakistan’s social media users. Farhan Virk, a different social media user, therefore starts a campaign to block her Facebook account. In a video that he publishes, Virk accuses Qandeel of defaming both Islam and the nation. He goes on to say that she would continue to act in this way if we do nothing and Pakistan will be cursed as a result. In a statement on Twitter, Virk claims: “We can’t bear a retard like her shaming our nation. Keep sharing this message and reporting her page” (Mehar, 2018, p.85). Her audacious and unconventional decision is the subject of a contentious media discussion. Both in the mainstream media and on social media, she is receiving criticism from everyone. She gets invited to appear on TV chat shows where her fellow panellists abuse her harshly. A social media effort has been started to shut down her Facebook account. She did this since, as a woman, such audacious actions are not typical of her. People believe that she has damaged the reputation of both the country and the church. Her Baloch family threatens her, telling her not to refer to herself as Baloch since she has brought disgrace and blame upon the clan. “My family refuses to acknowledge me. It’s because of all these things that are going on. They say you are dead to us” (Mehar, 2018, p.87).

In A Woman Like Her, an outstanding piece of investigative journalism, Sanam Maher delves into the tale of a woman who was misunderstood both in life and in death. Maher performed a large number of interviews with Baloch’s family, the media, clerics, feminist activists, and cybercrime specialists in order to accuse the society that encouraged and enabled Baloch’s murder. Maher claims that although Waseem Azeem and his accomplices killed Qandeel Baloch, they weren’t acting alone. Maher gives Baloch, a character who built her public identity out of truth, desire, and exaggeration, and who was insistent about living her life on her own terms, the ability to remain mysterious despite the fact that she is unable to speak for herself. The book attempts to convey a more comprehensive story of the divisions brought about in Pakistan by social media, which permits and even encourages a degree of self-expression that is directly at odds with a traditional culture.

Conclusion:

The research shows how Qandeel defies social conventions in her life by doing various unconventional actions. These actions attest to the existence of Radical Feminism in the Society. In order to start her own life, Qandeel breaks up with her spouse and departs. She also delivers her child to her parents since she believes she would be unable to move forward while her spouse and child are around. This action by Qandeel supports the radical feminist idea that women should have the freedom to live their own lives, choose who they want to marry, and end their marriages. When Qandeel posted her audacious video of a naked dance, it was yet another daring act. This film is another example of radical feminism’s belief that women should be free to pursue their passions. In reaction to the accusations made against her, she states, “Whatever you stop me from doing, I’ll do that even more. I’ve been like that since childhood” (Mehar, 2018, p.81). Mansoor, a friend of Qandeel’s, teaches martial arts to her in Islamabad. She refuses to fight the girl when asked to. She claims that all she wants to do is battle the lads. Because there are Radical Feminist components in the novel, she seems to have some type of wrath against men.
The following are the primary challenges that women face, as described by Mehar in the book, after a thorough study of the data that was gathered in the preceding chapter. No right to take part in social life

- Harassment at work place
- No right to marry to the person of their own choice
- Only woman is considered as the symbol honor not man
- Misogyny of media

According to the survey, women in society are only permitted to perform household tasks. They have no other options for entertainment. As we can see, Qandeel is a member of a Baloch household, and according to Baloch tradition, women are not expected to participate in social activities. They conceal their bodies with a garment and their faces with a veil if they must go outside. Their range of endeavours is strictly domestic. In a Baloch household, women's education is not prioritised. Most females stop attending school when they are ten years old, and Qandeel was unable to attend school. We see that male coworkers or female employers harass women at the workplace. They are unable to work in complete safety. According to Khushi's story, the harassment caused her career at the property office to cease. Her boss's kid invites her to the parties with him so they may drink and dance. Because of this, she quit her work. When her politician employer makes unwanted advances toward her, Nighat, another woman described in the novel, also experiences a similar issue. When Khushi works as a sales lady for a firm, she frequently receives annoyance-inducing inquiries from merchants. The report also revealed that any media event sponsors want that the top models spend the night with them. As Khushi reveals, “Come get your cash,” he said. “But that little friend of yours, what’s her name? Sunny? You leave her here” (Mehar, 2018, p.50).

After analysing the text in the previous chapter, we discovered that the book discusses several fundamental problems facing women in a traditional culture. It also emphasises certain daring actions taken by Qandeel. Qandeel does several audacious deeds to become a Radical Feminist. She divorces her spouse to pursue independence. She returns her child to her spouse so she may travel about without restriction. She posts a few provocative images on social media. She also offers to perform a striptease on Facebook. She suggests the former cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan. All of her militant actions support the radical feminist components in the book. The public are outraged by this, and her family feels guilty and ashamed about it. Because of this, her brother murders her in the sake of honour. This study provides evidence that Sanam Mehar’s A Woman Like Her has aspects of radical feminism. The study reveals that the book also emphasizes certain fundamental problems that women in Pakistani society face.

References:


