

Representation of Afghan Women in Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone*: A (Standpoint) Feminist Critique

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ABSTRACT

After the 9/11, Afghan women gained much visibility across the globe. The popular images in fiction represent them as passive victims of war, patriarchy and oppression. The purpose of this paper was to analyze Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* for the representation of Afghan women and to find out what representational strategies have been employed and what politics is involved in them. Feminist standpoint theory was applied to the analysis of the text which pointed out that Rahimi has employed imagining, political efficacy, and privileged location as strategies for his representation of Afghan women which are not devoid of their representational politics and the resulting stereotypical images have been used for political purposes (e.g. a justification for the US invasion). He has taken advantage of his privileged location and has reinforced the popular images of Afghan women. Moreover, he has under-represented Afghan women by ignoring the less problematic strategies of representation (e.g. confessional tales) and as such has contributed to the oriental discourse.

KEY WORDS: representation, stereotyping, feminism, standpoint theory, Afghan women

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes the representation of Afghan women in Atiq Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* and how feminism challenges the taken for granted representations. In order to know the possible representation of Afghan women in *The Patience Stone*, I draw on the arguments of Macleod [19], Spivak [31, 32], Kaplan, [17], Mohanty [21, 22, 23] and Harding [11, 12]. Feminist Standpoint Theory as a theoretical framework is used for the analysis of the text. The paper also examines the representational strategies used by the Rahimi which are not free from their problematic aspects and they lead to the stereotyping of 'others'.

Feminism, as a critical theory, has successfully theorized about representation which is as old a phenomenon as human history itself. It pays particular attention to the representations of women in works of literature and has strong investments in recovering the lost female voices and unveiling the truth about their representations. It does so because the purpose of any critical analysis of representational practices is not merely the elaboration of texts for the readers but also to show how texts are constructed and what are the methods and conditions of their construction and so to show their ideological push. Here I draw on Kenneth Burke [2] who has made a distinction between pious representations that disclose their method of construction, and impious representations that conceal it. A text carries along with itself certain unsaid contradictions the text cannot be aware of. Ideology in the text is present precisely in such silences. Thus, the job of impious criticism is "to install itself in the very incompleteness of the work in order to theorize it – to explain the ideological necessity of those not-saids which constitute the very principle of its identity" [7]. Feminism, in this regard, has proven itself as an 'impious' criticism that makes use of different analytical tools and seek help from other critical theories (standpoint theory for example) to analyze and question female representations and representational strategies in literary works.

Theoretical Framework

The influential and much debated Standpoint Theory emerged from the second wave feminism in the 1970s. Feminist theorists have inducted the Marxist standpoint theory into feminism and developed it into feminist standpoint theory. Feminist standpoint theory has three main claims:

- 1) Knowledge is situated socially.
- 2) The location of the marginalized groups makes them more aware which is not possible for other non-marginalized groups.
- 3) Such marginalized groups shall be the starting point in feminist research.

It would be misleading to think of feminist standpoint theory as one single epistemological or methodological approach. To think of them in terms of "Standpoint Theories" would be more appropriate. These theories offer epistemological and methodological approaches to a variety of disciplines. I have used feminist standpoint theory as theoretical framework to draw on power relationships and analyze the strategies of representation in *The Patience Stone*.

A stand point is a collective identity that is achieved consciously through the political struggle of a group in a marginalized location, like Rahimi's female protagonist. But Rahimi tries to give her an automatic standpoint for being a woman which is not correct. She cannot acquire an automatic standpoint. Because, according to Harding [12], a stand point must not be confused with a perspective that anyone can have by simply being a marginalized women because this is earned through the experience of a conscious struggle that is collective and political. The dominated and the dominant, both, hold perspectives but it is the dominated that can successfully achieve a stand point.

Epistemic privilege, another notion of standpoint theory, is pertinent to foreground the analysis of the inherent struggle in the slave/master relationship, as analyzed by Hegel. The notion provided a basis for the insight that oppression is better judged from the point of view of a slave rather than the master. Later on, this idea was used by Marx and Angles for their framework of class struggle which has given a rise to the concept of a standpoint of the working class as an epistemic position that is privileged and superior. This tradition provides a genesis to the claim of the standpoint theory for the 'double vision' gained by those who have experienced social relations from a marginalized position. In a patriarchal society like Afghanistan, I found Hegel's concept very applicable to the analysis of husband/wife relationship in *The Patience Stone* where women are the victims of male oppression, injustice and brutality. A standpoint can bring to surface more just stories as argued by Harding [12]: "Starting off research from women's lives will generate less partial and less distorted accounts not only of women's lives but also of men's lives and of the whole social order". Thus, a standpoint can recover and bring to surface more just stories of both sexes, as in case of the orphaned youth in *The Patience Stone* who is also the victim of male oppression and brutality.

Moreover, Feminist standpoint theories recognize the socio-historical location and its role in shaping the experiences of the epistemic agents and the knowledge it produces. So, location is considered potentially a valued contribution to knowledge because any attempt to know is socially situated. In Rahimi's case, his expatriate status makes him special. What he says about his country and its people will be valued and considered reliable by the readers. But the race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and capabilities of an agent are important factors in laying the limits of what we are allowed, able or restricted to know. In light of this, I question the location, sex and ethnicity of Rahimi which puts a question mark on the credibility of the writer as transparent representor of Afghan women.

Furthermore, feminist theory has large investments in recovering the voices of the oppressed people and groups in order to challenge dominant social structures. Yet, it is often these investments that lead feminist theorists to seek out 'authentic voices' to represent oppressed groups. In this regard, Rahimi's selection of his female protagonist is an apt example. He has chosen his heroine as an authentic voice for representing millions like her. But, in the process of selection, he has ignored the far stronger voice of the heroine's aunt.

The Patience Stone

A number of expatriate Afghan Diasporic writers have written about the pre and post-9/11 situation of Afghanistan. I have selected AtiqRahimi's *The Patience* for discussion which is a devastating exploration of one woman's tormented inner life. In the Persian folklore, *Sang-e-Saboor* is the name of a magical black stone which absorbs the plight of those who confess in it. But here, *Sang-e-Saboor* is not a stone, rather a man lying on his bed brain-dead with a bullet in his neck. The wife of this soldier, the unnamed protagonist of the novel, cares for him, and attends to his needs, all the while unburdening herself of the truth about her feelings. Thus, the wounded soldier becomes her "*Sang-e Saboor*", The Patience Stone [26].

Rational

Liberating Afghan women from the tyranny of Taliban rule has become a late justification of war for the US in Afghanistan. Rahimi imagines the outcome of such liberations, for both sexes. Now after more than a decade of the United States and NATO's occupation of Afghanistan, critical examination and interrogation of the popularized narratives is needed that continue to produce knowledge about Afghanistan. Isn't it strange that some narratives on/about Afghanistan are so popular while many others are confined to ambiguous academic journals? And that some infamous popular images are consistently repeated throughout fiction and media alike, for example the public stoning of an adulterous couple in Kabul, while narratives of strong Afghan women are ignored and marginalized who organized underground schools for both girls and boys even though girls' education was banned by Taliban. Why are voices of strength and resistance silenced, while silenced peripheral voices are prominently fictionalized? To find an answer to these questions the novel has been examined for the representation of Afghan women.

Statement of the Problem:

Afghan women have been stereotypically represented in the western fiction where they are shown as either burqa-clad or passive victims of war, oppression and patriarchy; unable to decide on their own or change their circumstances. Rahimi has also contributed to these (mis) representations by writing about Afghan women. Such attempts of representation are directly linked with the production of knowledge and power and are thus political in nature. Feminist standpoint theory claims that representation of women in fiction is carried out by employing different strategies, such as political efficacy, speaker's location or privilege location, epistemic privilege, lived experience, and imagining etc., which are not devoid of their politics, and as such they lead to the stereotyping of 'Others'. Rahimi has used some of these representational strategies in *The Patience Stone* and has stereotyped Afghan women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Said's *Orientalism*, a pioneering work, has effectively challenged representations and stereotypes of the oriental discourse [29]. Said's tools and methods of analysis have been taken up and employed by many other critical theories, notably feminism, with amazing results. The focus of feminist critical theory is on the representation of women across the globe and to question the utilization of such representations for power politics.

In the colonial and neocolonial discourses, women have been used frequently as pawns. The British colonizers also pointed out *Purdah*, *Sati* and child marriages as uncivilized treatment of Indian women. In order to introduce them to the 'civilized' norms they had to bear the yoke of slavery and the White Man's Burden. On the same token, the present War on Terror, like British Colonialism, claimed to rescue the third world women or brown women from brown men [32].

In her essay "Under the Western Eyes", Mohanty has outlined a set of signifiers associated with a third world woman, as conceived by western-feminism. For example, in *The Kite Runner* this imagined woman is represented as "sexually constrained... ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.," as opposed to the western women who are represented as educated, modern, having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions" [21]. She further says that the existing First/Third World connections are maintained by images of the veiled woman, obedient wife or powerful mother etc., which exist in the universe a historically and these images also define 'code' [22].

The logical question which arises is that why are the representations of an imagined third world woman accepted as the ultimate, static and bland truth? It is because they are being looked at and read as part of the landscape and because those representations are reflected consistently in fiction and mass media. Afghanistan must be represented this way for the international community so that they might be able to justify why they are at war in Afghanistan. In light of this, we must not look at Hosseini's text for accurate/inaccurate representation, but view *The Kite Runner* as a historically situated cultural phenomenon that is packaged, marketed and sold to the international community which is desirous to know what is happening out there [25]. Here comes the role of creative writings in shaping and molding people's world view.

Creative Writing is one of the ways through which ideas about development can be represented and be taken seriously (by masses) for, in [4] development is one of the organizing concepts of this age and ideas of development can be represented in various ways. As compared to academic writings and policy research documents, the work of fiction is better as it can reach a large number of audiences and are influential in shaping their knowledge. When an administration wants to build public support, which is in fact crucial for policies of development, especially in a specific environment (a war stricken country for example), it seeks the help of fiction. The example of the extraordinary popularity of Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003) is a direct result of the ongoing US-war on terror in Afghanistan. The novel has reached over 20 million people around the globe, educating them about Afghanistan and its problems, during and after the Taliban rule, than any other media campaign, report or research has ever done. But fiction cannot be reliable all the time and writers may sometimes mis-represent or indulge in stereotypes. Following is a categorical analysis of some popular creative writings for the possible stereotypes and (mis)representation of Afghanistan and its people:

The first category is of travelogues by writers who have a shallow understanding of the indigenous culture because of their short stay in the country and have stereotyped Afghanistan. James Mischener's *Caravans* published in 1986 [20] is part of that long tradition of adventures and travelogues which has perpetuated the discourse of Orientalism; 'romantic adventure into the wild land (Afghanistan)'. This novel features a young diplomat, Mark Miller, who is posted to the US Embassy in Kabul during the late 1940s. Michener is looking to Afghanistan (the Orient) as career. Through the eyes of this young diplomat, Michener is portraying the post-WWII Afghanistan. His work is full of stereotypes and coincidences. But the post-9/11 scenario has added a new perspective to this novel.

Such creative attempts are often based on generalizations and a shallow understanding of the people and cultures concerned. If the inaccuracies of narratives like these are questioned, it will create headlines as in the case of *The Bookseller of Kabul*.

The Bookseller of Kabul (2003), a non-fictional book, by a Norwegian journalist Asne Seierstad about Shah Muhammad Rais, a bookseller, (whose name was changed to Sultan Khan). She entered Afghanistan after the September 11 and lived with Rias and his family in Kabul. This novelistic book depicts the conditions of Afghan women who still live in a patriarchy—where polygamy and arranged marriage are still allowed [30].

This book became controversial when it began to create headlines after its publication as Rais contested many of the book's descriptions, who took the author to court in Norway because for him it was a matter of honor and truth, one she could never have understood during her short stay and due to her shallow knowledge of Afghanistan and its traditions. He claimed that this account is defamation and an assault on his character, family and country. As Rais was a well-known figure in Kabul, the author's effort to anonymize the identity of this family has been unsuccessful. Seierstad was found guilty of defamation and “negligent journalistic practices and ordered to pay damages to Suraia Rais, wife of Shah Muhammad Rais” [9].

In 2005, Rais appealed to seek political asylum in Norway or Sweden. Because he felt that the book had made their lives unsafe in Afghanistan. In 2007, he published his own version of the story with the title *Once Upon a Time there was a Bookseller in Kabul* (though it appears to be ghost-written) in order to tell his part of the story and expose Seierstad's lies, along with the attempt to enlighten his readers about Afghanistan, its people, history and culture [27].

The controversy about this book speaks for itself and there is no need to go into the details of whether it was invoking the Western prejudices about Afghanistan and blending these prejudices with sensationalism or it was giving way to US occupation of Afghanistan as the ‘white man's burden’ which the West ought not shed, or both. On the one hand she is backing George W. Bush's agenda to have pity on Afghan women, a justification for his attack, and on the other hand she criticizes Ahmed Shah Masood, whose era proved to be best for women's rights, because he happened to be a communist.

Second category is of the expatriate writers who claim to have a deeper understanding of their own culture and people even then have under-represented Afghanistan. Contrary to the example of Seierstad, we have those creative writers who can claim to have a deeper understanding of the indigenous culture because they are expatriates, like Hosseini. But their works are being popularized, packaged and marketed for the international community. These writers often rely on the media images fed to them, because they have been residing in the west. In *The Kite Runner* (2003), Hosseini's representations of the inhabitants, the land and the history of Afghanistan are conformed to popularized imaginings of Afghanistan as the orient. Amir's adventurous return home in 2001 was solely for the purpose to depict Afghan women, who were described as either “burqa-clad... [living] alongside gutters” [14], victims of the Taliban's punishments, or silenced in their *hijab*. This puts a question mark on Hosseini's credibility as an authentic representor of Afghanistan and its people.

Beside the above mentioned two types of writers, here is another category: writers who neither belong to the country they are writing about nor have they visited the place or observed its people and culture but even then have written about it. Such works are based on popular imaginings of the culture in question. *Swallows of Kabul* is a very apt example in this regard, written by Yasmina Khadra (pseudonym of a former Algerian army officer Mohamed Moulessehoul). He was still in post when he wrote this novel so he published it under an assumed feminine name to circumvent the military censors. *The Swallows of Kabul* is written about the complexities of the Muslim world. But the writer has never been to Afghanistan. It is wondrousome that how has he depicted the culture and people, especially women, of Afghanistan and the atmosphere of oppression [18]. He has used ‘imagining’ as a strategy of representation and has supposed the situation in Afghanistan on the condition of his own civil war stricken country. Using imagining as a strategy of representation without real and authentic knowledge about the culture and people of Afghanistan seems an attempt of simplifying a highly complicated phenomenon.

Yet there are a few exceptions; writers who have tried to go beyond representation. Debarah Rodriguez is one such example. She ran a beauty school in Afghanistan where she helped in training Afghan women as hairdressers and beauticians. She came to Afghanistan with a medical team in 2002. She has written about her experiences in a novel *A Little Coffee Shop of Kabul* telling the story of five women, two Afghan and three foreigners. Through the coffee shop, the writer has brought together these characters to have a lighthearted comment on the prevailing social issues with the hope that it may change something [28]. Surprisingly, she has avoided stereotypes in a genre which is so rich in this regard. The writer has shed the stereotypes which are prevalent and dominant in creative writings and have gone beyond representation. Indeed, it is a welcoming gesture.

THE PATIENCE STONE: GIVING FACE AND VOICE TO A PROXY AFGHAN WOMAN

Seeking Authentic Voices: A Standpoint or A Perspective

Hosseini writes in his introduction to Rahimi's *The Patience Stone* that Afghan women have been faceless and voiceless for a long time and now Rahimi has given "face and voice to one unforgettable woman—and, one could argue, offers her as a proxy for the grievances of millions" [26]. He has admired Rahimi for giving voice to a nameless heroine and presents her as a "conduit, a living vessel for the grievances of millions of women like her, women who have been objectified, marginalized, scorned, beaten, ridiculed, silenced. In *The Patience Stone*, they have their say at last" [26]. Rahimi is presenting her heroine as a proxy for other Afghan women but, according to standpoint theory, her experience cannot be generalized. She cannot be offered as a proxy for the grievances of millions because she cannot gain an automatic standpoint for being a woman. Her struggle is an individual one, not the result of a collective consciousness and political struggle, which are essential factors for a standpoint to emerge. A standpoint must, therefore, be distinguished from a perspective because "a feminist standpoint is not something that anyone can have simply by claiming it. It is an achievement. A standpoint differs in this respect from a perspective, which anyone can have simply by opening one's eyes". [11]

Rahimi's attempt of giving his female protagonist an automatic standpoint, eventually ignores and deprives other powerful characters in the novel of this achievement. For example the aunt of the protagonist is really a powerful character. Her story is a tragedy, far worse than the heroine's. Her personality has a lot of influence over the protagonist. She was married once but, unable to produce a child, was sent by her husband to his family house. There she was raped everyday by her father-in-law. She fled from there, at last, with a note saying that she has put an end to her life. But actually, she ended up in a brothel. Now she runs a brothel herself.

She is agentic because she has raised herself above the social and cultural restraints and does not care for men or their rules. In the novel, it is not the female protagonist who achieves a standpoint rather her aunt acquires a true standpoint. She has escaped the systems of oppression and is now helping and giving place to other women like her in the brothel. Her movement is the result of a collective consciousness that will eventually liberate them. In support of this, Harding argues: "only through such struggles can we begin to see beneath the appearances created by an unjust social order to the reality of how this social order is in fact constructed and maintained" [11]. And that is a true standpoint. But Rahimi has not given her even a voice of her own. Such strong catalyst characters are either ignored or pushed to the margins.

An apt example in support of this view can be given from the dedication of this book. Rahimi has written this novel in memory of some N. A. who, upon research, turned out to be Nadia Anjuman, an Afghan poet, who died after receiving terrible beating from her husband on 7th November 2005. She was 25 years old and was an undergraduate student of literature at the University of Herat. She had published a collection of her poems titled *Gul-e-Dudi* (Dark Flower or Flower of Smoke). Her husband, Farid Ahmad Majid Mai, and his family considered her poetry a disgrace to their family name but she continued on writing. Her second book *Yek sâbad dêlhoreh* (An Abundance of Worry), contained poems expressing her isolation and sadness regarding her marital life, was set to publish in 2006. Mai was arrested and he confessed to have beaten her but was of the opinion that she had taken poison after their fight. But there is no evidence to that as Mai and his family barred the doctors from doing the autopsy. Her death was declared a suicide by the court and Mai was released within a month. [1]

Is Rahimi presenting his female protagonist as a proxy for Nadia Anjuman too? But his heroin cannot serve as a proxy for Nadia Anjuman who, during her tenth class when her school was closed down by Taliban, studied in an underground school named The Golden Needle Sewing School. And in doing so and being a famous poet, she has earned her own standpoint. Her story needs to be told because it is a story worth telling; instead Rahimi chose a character (the woman) that has not been given a name even. The question is that who will write the story of Nadia Anjuman because, according to Spivak, feminist theory is caught up in the discussion of legitimizing who can and who cannot use representational strategies for depicting women [31]. Thus, Rahimi's selection of his female protagonist is an attempt of seeking 'authentic voices' to represent an oppressed group, which is problematic. Moreover, in such narratives the location, sex and ethnicity of the author are also important factors.

Popular Imagining or Confessional Tales

It appears from the narrative style of the novel that Rahimi has used confessional tale as a strategy of representation but the fact is that no human being has confessed this story to the writer rather it has been, altogether, the work of popular imaginings. The novel is about Afghanistan. The whole action takes place in a small room of a city in Afghanistan where the terrors of war can be heard in the background. But even then, there is a statement in the beginning of the novel which says that this story has taken place "somewhere in Afghanistan or elsewhere", [26] meaning that the writer has adopted imagining as a strategy of representation. He had fled from Afghanistan in 1985

and returned to Kabul after seventeen years in 2002, after the fall of Taliban. He has not seen the seventeen years of war and turbulence in his homeland. Now, that he is writing a novel about it, he is left with little choice but to imagine it. And he did.

According to Rahimi the novel is inspired from a real life event; that is the brutal murder of Nadia Anjuman, the rest is just imagination. As such, the authenticity of these imaginings is subject to question. In [5] there are various processes of imagining: “experience, made by the senses and mediated through the faculties of the intellect and the imagination, produces knowledge as well as imaginings...here lies rooted the possibility and indeterminacy of (or else the ‘freedom’ to) social change”. In order to move beyond the problematic aspects of popular imaginings, feminists need to re-imagine such stories because to re-imagine their encounter with others might enable them to counter some of the problematic representations within feminist epistemology. So, writing about others should not be based on popular imaginings for it is an integral part of ethical strategies of representation to have critical intimacy with others, unlike Rahimi, who had just heard the news of Anjuman’s death and wrote a novel totally based on popular imagining.

Thus, critical intimacy with others is necessary because “creative imagination is crucially involved in the construction of the situated subject, the individual and, even more obviously so, the collective subject” [5]. The re-writings (re-imaginings) might be useful within feminist epistemology for the further exploration of how ethical representational strategies might be created and sustained without their problematic aspects. Speaking so, confessional tales is a representational strategy which is less problematic as compared to other strategies. This strategy is used to give voice to the autobiographical narratives of women through testimonials, one of the hybrid authorial strategies of representation, for bringing to light the accounts of social oppression, war and violence. It has been referred to as such by Kaplan [17] because the stories are recounted to the author. This strategy is impartial, unbiased and free from the politics of representation.

The woman in *The Patience Stone* confesses the secrets of her heart, kept hidden for a long time, to her half dead husband — her *sang-e-sabour*. Like an onion, layer after layer is peeled and the true self of the woman comes out which is not so simple because it is the portrait of a complex human being. Her confessions are in the form of monologues: lengthy, self-corrected, self-responded and psycho-analytically revealing. She is caught up in her own existence. The confessions of the female protagonist become bold and vivid with the passage of time until they reach to a fevered pitch and the woman, according to Hosseini (in his introduction to the novel): “suddenly finds herself free from all restraints ... What pours out of her is not only a brave and shocking confession, but a savage indictment of war, the brutality of men, and the religious, marital, and cultural norms that continually assault Afghan women” [26]. But these confessions are not confessed to the writer rather to her husband within the novel. The story appears a confessional tale but actually it is not. It has been imagined by the writer, altogether. Although, in the scenario, confessional tale was a suitable strategy of representation because of its less problematic aspects but Rahimi chose to avert it and used popular imagining.

Male and Female Bodies and Sexualities

Imperial, colonial and neocolonial discourses have been viewed by many as “allegories of gender contest” [34]. In this sense, the novel has redefined the meanings of (not just female but) both male and female bodies. In his introduction to *The Patience Stone*, Hosseini praises Rahimi for the treatment of his heroine and how he has described her body that presented the notion of woman as a sexual being—a great Afghan taboo. He was successful in “not turning his heroine into the archetype of the saintly, asexual, maternal figure” [26]. Life for women in Afghanistan is hard, but it is not a heaven for men either. The protagonist says to her *sang-e-sabour*: “Sometimes I think it must be hard to be a man. No?” [26] On another occasion, when narrating the deteriorating situation of the war stricken country to her husband, she says: “When it’s hard to be a woman, it becomes hard to be a man, too!” [26] This is very true about the youth who visits the protagonist. He is the victim of sexual abuse in the hands of the commander who has kidnapped him since he was an orphan. The woman is fierce to see the cigarette burns on his body and tells her husband:

He keeps that poor little boy for his own pleasure! He kidnapped him when he was still a small child. An orphan, left to cope on his own on the streets. Kidnapped him and put a Kalashnikov in his hands, and bells on his feet in the evenings. He makes him dance. Son of a bitch! ... The boy’s body is black and blue! He has burn scars all over—on his thighs, his buttocks ... It’s an outrage! That guy burns him with the barrel of his gun! [26]

It is a custom in some parts of Afghanistan to keep under age children for dancing, as shown in *The Kite Runner* too, [14] who are often kidnapped and trafficked from other provinces. This novel claims to give voice to women and emancipating them from the system of oppression, so this ‘dancing boy’ has suffered as much as the female protagonist of Rahimi, but he failed to give a voice to him. Both of them are the victims and they escape at the end from the system of oppression that has imprisoned them and their bodies, as suggested vaguely in the novel and clearly in the movie.

In Afghanistan both genders suffered and it is unjust to ignore one and represent the other. In the eyes of the west, oriental male and female do not correspond to the western gender standards. The west considers, Macleod maintains, western women as passive, chaste and loyal while men are supposed to be active, brave and strong and such characteristics are hardly present in Orientals. Macleod also notes that Orientalism, East as whole is “feminized, deemed passive, submissive, exotic, luxurious, sexually mysterious and tempting; while the West becomes masculine – that is active, dominant, heroic, rational, self-controlled and ascetic” [19]. Such ideas bring complexity into the notion of sexuality and gender. According to Zillah Eisenstein: “There is female and male masculinity; and male and female femininity” [8]. She further says that sexual humiliation and torture to those brown men captured by the forces on suspicion of terrorism, by white women in order to make them vulnerable and also to restate the fictional fantasy that women in the West are free enough to participate in the humiliation of ‘othered’ men, implicitly indicate that tortures are unmanly for the Muslims and also show how the West treasure their sexual freedoms [8]. Instead of shedding this stereotype about oriental male and female, Rahimi reaffirms it. The youth has been feminized who is depicted as a person with low self-esteem who even cannot express himself clearly as he stammers a lot.

In the novel, *The Patience Stone*, the aunt of the heroin runs a brothel and that is the only source of her income. The theme of prostitution has been repeatedly mentioned throughout the book. Even when some men, from one of the fighting fractions, took refuge in the heroine’s house and asked about her living alone, she told she was a widow and earned bread for herself and her two daughters by selling her body for the pleasure of men. It was this lie that brought the orphan youth to the house of the woman for the second time. He was offering money to her in exchange of her body. The writer wants to show that many Afghan women have been pushed to such limits where they could not earn a respectable living—except through prostitution.

The question arises that what is the role of sexualization, and what is the manner in which female bodies are circulated and represented in the recent workings of the imperial forces in the third world countries, where sex has become a lucrative industry. Mohanty calls for a response from feminist theorists, regarding this issue of militarization, imperialism and globalization which all traffic on female bodies [23]. In the novel, the aunt of the heroine runs a brothel and it shelters women whose only source of income is prostitution. Has US invasion liberated these women too? The answer is ‘no’ because those well-armed tourists have sexual needs and they are being fulfilled in such places. Same happened during the war on terror in which particular formations of gender, race, nation and sexuality are brought into play, in order to invent and solidify practices of sexualization and racialization of the people, through disciplining and mobilizing third world women’s bodies as a way of consolidating patriarchal and colonizing processes. These are the factors which has given a boost to the ‘maid trade’ in the international market, the sex tourism industry, and global militarized prostitution. [23]

The idea of supremacy and dominance of man over woman has also been reversed in the novel. The woman has full command of the situation as she controls the body of her paralyzed husband. She confesses everything that comes into her mind, as if using the stream of consciousness technique, to her injured husband – things that she could not have told in ordinary situation. She even tells him the difference between raping a virgin and having sex with a prostitute. She says that men do not think it proper for their honor to have sex with a prostitute because there is an exchange of commodities: payment in exchange of body which makes them equal. Furthermore, it is often the prostitute who is dominant during the activity.

The protagonist kisses her husband, makes love to him and even touches and strokes his penis. She has the capacity to torture him. She confesses: “Now I can do anything I want with you” [26]. It’s time for her to take revenge for every bad thing that has happened to her because of this man. God has provided an opportunity for her to settle the score. She says: “He’s keeping you alive so you can see what I’m capable of doing with you, to you. He is making me a demon... a demon for you, against you! Yes, I am your demon! In flesh and blood!” [26] Once she attempted to murder him by removing the drip from his mouth and leaving him alone in that condition for a whole night [26]. She tells him that it would have been fine if “A stray bullet just finished you off, once and for all! [26]

In the process of revealing her secrets, she becomes so bold and vivid that she openly abuses her husband and his family. “You men are all cowards!” and “One should not rely on men who have known the pleasure of weapons!” [26], because “As soon as you have guns, you forget your woman” [26]. She criticizes men for shedding blood, that seems to be so much important to them, whether on wedding night or in the battle field. She fails to

understand the reason: “I have never understood why, for you men, pride is so much linked to blood” [26]. But even then she cares for him, changes his drip and puts drops in his eyes, why? She must have been doing it for the role and duty assigned to her by the society, at first, but later on she does it for her own sake. She needs male protection. She confessed to her husband that you have no right to leave us alone, without any man. And this is the rhetorical vision offered by Rahimi that Afghan women need male protection [33]. Even at the end of the novel when she kills her husband and escapes with the orphan youth, it too, shows her dependence on male. Here, Rahimi may be calling for the Western military protection as well.

Women’s everyday experience and the knowledge that comes along with it make them special and this experience can be used as a tool of analysis for the understanding of larger social contexts. A unique set of expertise is gained from engaging in the daily household activities and socially dictated roles. Alison Jaggar has identified it as emotional acumen—a unique, intuitive ability to read and interpret pain and hidden emotions and understand the genesis of those emotions—as a unique set of expertise [15]. The heroine cares for her husband, puts drops in his eyes and changes his clothes. Beside these, she is raising two daughters. She is a household lady.

It was this characteristic which enabled the heroine of *The Patience Stone* to see the pain and sufferings of the young boy and was ready to take them away. She helped him gain his self-esteem and to decide for his own betterment, on his own accord. However, this acumen must not be restricted to the household and family only. If applied outside the house to the social world, it can have vital and useful functions, especially in sociology and philosophy, where it can help in stimulating new insights. But its best application can, however, be in the field of political analysis and accountability, because this ability of women enables them to tune in quickly to the situations of cruelty and injustice, and thus, can expose political and social injustices. If women could provide “first indication that something is wrong with the way alleged facts have been constructed, with the accepted understanding of how things are” [15], it can empower women, and can, thus, make “subversive observations that challenge dominant conceptions of the status quo” [15]. Rahimi fails to allow her heroine to apply this acumen outside the house. The novel ends by showing the heroine eloping with the youth; suggesting that she needs male protection and will be caught up in the household activities for ever.

Political Efficacy or Justification for the War on Terror

It is claimed that this work of fiction gives ‘face and voice’ to women [26] and empowers them. This idea is called political efficacy — a strategy of ethical representation, which is used as a justification for such representations. As the project of feminism, to transform power relations and to improve the material conditions of the people, is complicated by the problematic and contradictory representation of the subjectivities and identities of ‘others’ [13], in this context, Rahimi’s attempt of giving face and voice to Afghan women is questionable.

The depiction of the old Woman living next door to the protagonist’s house is a suitable example here. The sound of her cough is heard when she opens the door for the water bearer, she coughs and murmurs an inaudible name. Her whole family is dead in the bombing that took place one night. Now she is mad and is wandering about the streets of the city. She reminds me of the old woman in *The Kite Runner*, who speaks but is barely audible. The question is that why such peripheral voices are prominently fictionalized and strong voices of resistance are silenced [25]. It is because the work of fiction can reach a far larger audience and can educate or misguide millions of people across the globe. It seems, then, as an organized attempt to create a universal space for public alliance; an attempt to justify US-led forces to invade Afghanistan and rescue such weak women from the bounds and chains that have imprisoned them.

Instead of giving political efficacy and empowerment to women, the novel seems to be a typical attempt of justifying the US-led forces to invade Afghanistan and rescue Rahimi’s heroin and women like her from the tyrannical regime of Taliban. Taliban became the common enemy who, as Laura Bush has put it her November 17, 2001 radio address to the nation, “would like to impose their ways on us . . . our culture is at risk . . .” [3] And if we compare the statements of Bush and Hitler delivered at different occasions in time, we would come to know that they are telling the same thing. Hitler, when announcing the Gestapo to his nation and George W. Bush, when declaring war on Taliban stated the same sentence: “An evil exists that threaten every man, woman and child of this great nation. We must take steps to ensure our domestic security and ensure our homeland” [16]. A shocking consensus of those who own the means to organized violence; it seems that history has repeated itself. It was a moment of defining the ‘other’. The central aspect of this stereotyping was to create a global alliance of public space against terrorism. The battle of terrorism is “between ‘us’ and ‘them’ that it is a battle of cultures and values, that what is under attack is ‘our very way of life’”. Sometimes, it seems that the primary justification presented for this war is that of culture [6, 10, & 24]. Thus, contrary to its claims of emancipation, the novel turns out to be a typical attempt of justifying US invasion of Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION

The western pop fiction has shown Afghan women as passive victims of war, violence and patriarchy. The portrayal of Afghan women depicted by Rahimi in *The Patience Stone* corresponds exactly to the dominant and stereotypical images of Afghan women in the west. Rahimi treats his heroine with much more complexity than many writers which is phrase worthy yet he has not shed the stereotypical images of Afghan women. Because of his privileged location which he has gained for being an expatriate and being an Afghan diasporic writer, the western readers, who do not have a firsthand experience of Afghan culture, will consider his representations authentic because these are coming from a person who is well aware of the culture and history of the region. For such readers who have no direct contact with the people of Afghanistan, whose only source of information is the media images fed to them, will see this novel educating them about the condition of women in the country because narratives have an influence on people's thinking. Moreover, the educating aspect of fictional works can be seen from its wider readership across the globe. But findings of the analysis reveal that Rahimi has under-represented Afghan women and his representations reinforce the dominant and stereotypical images of Afghan women in the popular fiction which has shown them as passive victims of war, violence, and political repression, to be liberated only and only by the western military intervention. Moreover, feminist standpoint theory questions the gender of the author in this regard. Being male, how can he be so sure of female needs, body and sexuality? Furthermore, Rahimi is presenting his heroines as a proxy for other millions of Afghan women, which according to standpoint theory is objectionable. Because this story is just a perspective of an individual woman and, thus, is different from a standpoint which cannot be acquired automatically for being a woman, rather it is the result of a conscious and collective political struggle.

Political Efficacy, as a strategy of representation, also fails to legitimize the representation of Afghan women in *The Patience Stone* because Rahimi does not have any authentic way of knowing what values are emancipatory for women and what are not or what constitutes emancipation itself. Thus, the claim of giving voice to women and empowering them by such fictional representations turns out to be a typical attempt of justifying the ongoing US War on Terror. Rahimi has also used his Lived Experience for writing the novel. But this fact is worth mentioning that he fled from Afghanistan right after the Russian invasion and came back after the fall of Taliban. Thus, he has missed to observe a large portion of political and social changes that took place in his absence, which undermines his status as a representor of Afghan culture and women. Moreover, to fill this gap, he used imagining as a strategy of representation, while confessional tales of women seems a suitable strategy of representation in this scenario, which is impartial and less problematic. Feminist might call for the re-imagining of such narratives for bringing more true stories to light. Rahimi's attempt to give an automatic standpoint to his heroine is an excellent example of what such imaginings might entail. On the other hand, there is the heroine's Aunt whose character is agentic. Her story deserves better to be told but she is not even given a voice of her own.

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