
Female Marginality in Contemporary Pakistan: A Feminist Critique of Feryal Ali Gauhar's *An Abundance of Wild Roses***Muniha Saleem¹, Bilal Asmat Cheema², Muhammad Kashif Nazar³**

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Abstract

Through a close reading of Feryal Ali Gauhar's novel, *An Abundance of Wild Roses* (2024), the paper explores the intricate themes of female marginalization, environmental degradation, misogyny, gender-based violence, and cultural stereotypes. This research paper focuses on the complex issues experienced by contemporary Pakistan's women. This study will analyze the novel through the lens of feminism. The study will further elaborate on how the female characters encounter tragic fate followed by oppression and physical torture in a patriarchal society. The study reveals the harsh realities of contemporary Pakistan in which Gauhar articulates the struggles of her characters against the backdrop of social turmoil. The study aims to explore marginalized women in Northern Pakistan. The study will contribute to paving the way to unfold the representation of women and their traditional role in Pakistani Anglophone fiction produced by other male and female writers signifying the difference between their engagement with the issue of female marginality, patriarchal structure, and oppression.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence, Marginalization, Misogyny, Patriarchy, Tragic Fate.

Introduction

Feryal Ali Gauhar's most recent novel, *An Abundance of Wild Roses* showcases life in a remote village area where the fates of its inhabitants are intertwined with the complexities of their patriarchal system. Moosa Madad, an arrogant and proud man with three wives and one daughter is the leading character of this novel. The character of Kalsoom is also very important as she has four daughters and is married to a man addicted to cough syrup, who blames his wife all the time for not having a son. The novel hints at the characters' struggle in matters of life and death. At the core of the narrative is the fate of young girls and women and the terrible incidents that occur when they try to get exposure to education and modernity. This analysis utilizes a Feminist lens drawing upon Social Learning Theory and Learned Helplessness Theory and will also focus on the different types of violence i.e. Domestic Violence, Gender-Based Violence and Physical Violence occurring in contemporary Pakistan. The primary research problem addressed in this study is the pervasive marginalization of women in rural Pakistan, as represented in Feryal Ali Gauhar's *An Abundance of Wild Roses*. The novel reflects systematic issues rooted in patriarchal structure, restrictive traditions, and selective societal interpretations that perpetuate gender inequality. This study explores how Gauhar's portrayal of female characters underscores the limitations placed on women's autonomy, educational pursuits, and social mobility, as well as the psychological toll these restrictions impose. The purpose of this study is to examine Gauhar's portrayal of female marginality and resistance within a patriarchal rural setting and to analyze how her work challenges traditional gender roles and cultural norms in Pakistan. By employing a feminist lens, this research aims to explore how literary representations can shed light on

gendered oppression, the struggle for education, and the potential for modernity to reshape the roles and expectations imposed on women in Pakistani society. The main hypothesis of this research is The depiction of female characters in *An Abundance of Wild Roses* reinforces the argument that rural Pakistani society's adherence to patriarchal norms and selective traditional interpretations significantly limits women's autonomy and social mobility. There were a lot of voices and characters in this book that sometimes became hard to follow or distinguish. The novel exposes the bitter realities of very young girls and women in such a submissive form, that they are leading their lives. Elders and men dictate their whole future, they are being treated as inferior and useless for not blessing their husbands with a baby boy. Gauhar's main agenda is to show how girls still live in many rural parts of the world whose male community refuses to enter them into the 21st century. They also use the words according to their religious beliefs to claim how women are treated in their culture. Due to the absurdity and brutality of their societal norms, many young girls commit suicide because, for them, death by any means is less torturous than the life they will have to face. Many girls get married at the age of 15 and even sometimes younger ones are deemed fit to marry and bear a man and sons. This study will critically analyze how *An Abundance of Wild Roses* illustrates the entrenched marginalization of women in rural Pakistan and the complex interplay between tradition, modernity, and the quest for autonomy. By situating Gauhar's work within a feminist framework, this research seeks to illuminate the pathways her narrative suggests for societal change, highlighting the resilience and agency of her female characters amid oppressive structures. Social learning theory and learned helplessness theory will further elaborate on the psychological and domestic violence issues. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of gendered experiences in Pakistani literature, underscoring the potential of contemporary fiction to challenge cultural norms and advocate for gender equity. The study focuses on the ways Gauhar critiques patriarchal structures and their impact on women's autonomy and education.

Literature review

Gender-based violence is considered to be one of the most persistent issues affecting women around the world, and many literary masterpieces were oriented on the massive spread of this problem. Previous experiences of gender research were not successfully analyzed, and the flaw of progression was minimal. This global problem has been studied for many years by evaluating the experiences of the past generations. Gender-based violence is any form of physical, sexual, mental, social, or economic abuse directed at a person because of their gender. Individuals are categorized according to their gender identity or perceived conformance to socially defined masculine and feminine ideals. Stanley and Devaney co-edited a special issue of *Psychology of Violence* According to Stanley and Devaney (2017), threats, coercion, arbitrary restriction of liberty, and economic deprivation are other examples of physical, sexual, and emotional or psychological abuse. Sexual abuse of minors, sex trafficking and forced labor, abuse, domestic violence, and harmful cultural practices such as forced marriage are examples of gender-based violence. Gauhar has elaborated on all these types of violence to some extent in her novel *An Abundance of Wild Roses*. Many research works have been on different types of gender-based violence but the purpose of this study is to bridge the gap between existing knowledge of female marginalization. Gauhar has described the gender-based violence of the modern age. This study reveals the true nature of the Pakistani patriarchal system. Different types of violence have been portrayed through the close reading of this study. Physical violence is the easiest to recognize due to physical manifestations. The physical violence inflicted upon Kulsoom is reflected in the lines, "So, when the dirty, drunken man they called Naushad beat his wife, a man whose name, we are told, means Joy, but who brings only sadness to his family, we waited, for we knew that we need not harm that woman for she was already marked for suffering. ... So, we just watched as these men and women struggled to heal the wound, they had inflicted on themselves" (Gauhar, 2024, pp.83-84). The text of the novel also puts another example of physical violence, "She reached for the small mirror suspended from a nail in the wall. There was a mauve bruise on her cheekbone where Naushad had punched her with his fist, and a bleeding gash across the ridge of her brow. The eye below her brow had swollen shut. Most of the time the beatings would take place when the children were at school" (Gauhar, 2024, p.74). Most instances of physical violence are typically caused by poverty, where parents or guardians

cannot provide for the family, infidelity, denial of conjugal rights, and mistreatment by stepparents or guardians among children. Physical violence frequently results in psychological anguish, death, deformity, and significant injuries to the victims. It is the most recognized form of violence because of its impact on victims. Gender-based violence is psychological, sometimes known as emotional or mental abuse. It is a significant health, development, and human rights issue in many developing countries. Perrault (2020) claims that “psychological violence is a purposeful infliction of pain on another person. This violence is viewed as trauma to the victim caused by threats, coercive techniques when there has also been prior physical or sexual assault or prior threat of physical or sexual violence”. Gauhar has also elaborated on the effects of psychological violence on female characters. One such example is that Moosa Madad always insulted Fatima for not giving him any son after the death of two sons. “Moosa mocked Fatima; he told her that she was not to give him any more sons, and had given him this daughter, this wayward girl who would bring nothing but shame upon them. Moosa growled at mother and daughter chastising both of them for daring to question his rules” (Gauhar, 2024, pp. 31-32). It usually manifests through humiliation, restricting what the individual can and cannot do, preserving information, and purposefully making the victim feel inferior or degraded. In addition, verbal abuse is a type of psychological abuse characterized by language and is essentially a threatening action. This is any verbal interaction that causes emotional harm to a person, frequently causing them to doubt their identity (Perreault, 2020). This method of establishing and maintaining power over another person has been used by Moosa Madad. Criticism, name-calling, blaming, rudeness, and ridicule are examples of aggressive or violent behavior and these issues are still present in contemporary Pakistan. Less forceful assertions can sometimes be used to falsely accuse or incorrectly blame victims, humiliate or coerce them into submitting unwelcome behaviors (Perreault, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study aims to analyze the novel, *An Abundance of Wild Roses* through the lens of feminism. By the close reading of domestic violence and the gender-based violence in contemporary Pakistan, this study analyses how the female characters are being portrayed by Faryal Ali Gauhar. Furthermore, the theoretical framework will also be focused on Social Learning Theory and Learned Helplessness Theory. Pakistan has a good normative legal framework for gender-based violence. This is mainly due to sociocultural barriers, economic dependency, and lack of information. The female characters of the novel suffer through gender-based violence and domestic violence due to the patriarchal system of contemporary Pakistan. Gauhar examines gender-based violence which refers to the harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power, and harmful norms. The suffering of one of the female characters beaten by her husband can be imagined by this line: “He was a harsh man, thrashing his wife almost every day, blaming her for not bearing him a son” (Gauhar, 2024, p.89). Throughout the novel, Gauhar shows how serious gender-based violence is for violating human rights and a life-threatening health and protection issue. The character of Moosa Madad is the symbol of patriarchal and power dynamic in society, as Gauhar describes his personality “He was the Numberdar of Saudukh Das, the Number One man, a title given by the British during the Days of Empire, signifying the most important man in the community, the leader, the man with power vested in him to make decisions in the absence of the local administrator appointed by government” (Gauhar, 2024, p.17). The term ‘patriarchy’ has become a buzzword in contemporary conversations about gender inequality and feminism. Through the study of feminism, the patriarchal system of Pakistan will be analyzed as a social system that has historically bestowed primary power and privilege upon men in various aspects of society. The dominant authority and harsh treatment of Moosa Madad towards his daughter is indicated as “Already the girl, Sabiha, Moosa Madad’s daughter with Fatima, had been punished by her father, locked up in the storeroom until she revealed the name of the person who had sent her a love note, a letter in the form of a poem. Surely the young girl would see that rebellion would only lead to remorse Moosa had slapped Sabiha hard, marking the smooth rise of her cheeks with the shape of his thick fingers” (Gauhar, 2024, p.31). The analysis demonstrates that knowledge cannot be considered neutral or objective. Traditionally, researchers have engendered knowledge based on the dominant perspective and behavior in society, which was androcentrism. Taking into account this idea the theoretical framework of this project is based on Social Learning Theory and Learned Helplessness Theory.

Social Learning Theory is one of the most popular explanatory perspectives in the marital violence literature proposed by Albert Bandura. Often considered as the “cycle of violence” or “intergenerational transmission theory”. In terms of Albert Bandura’s perception people model their behavior as children in their childhood and “violence is learned through role models provided by the family... Violence is learned through role models provided by the family, either directly or indirectly (i.e. Witnessing violence), is reinforced in childhood, and continues in adulthood as a coping response to stress or as a method of conflict resolution” (Bandura,1973). Additionally, the social learning theory suggests that violence is a learned behavior and can be triggered by stress, alcohol abuse, and money. We learn behavior starting at an early age in life from our parents. In fact, our parents and guardians have the greatest impact on our behavior, attitude, and relationships. The learned behavior carries with us into our adulthood. This theory can be applied to the character of Naushad who is a drunken man and continuously blames and abuses his wife for not having a son after four daughters under the supervision of his mother. Gauhar describes this character in such a way that he is under the control of her mother and only learns those things which she teaches him. Gauhar explains through these lines how Naushad clings to her mother and follows the things that she had suffered in her lifetime. “Naushad’s mother had clung to her son the way a newborn calf seeks the teats of the cow... as if she sought the attention of her son to make up for the fact that her husband barely even remembered her name, and hadn’t cared to talk to her for a full seventeen years at the time that Naushad, her pride, her jewel, married Kulsoom, a woman who was plain” (Gauhar, 2024, p.85). Another advanced theory that can be applied to the female characters of the novel is the Learned Helplessness Theory. Lenore Walker, a psychologist in the United States, studied the behavior of women who stay in violent relationships. Walker hypothesized that women stay in abusive relationships because constant abuse strips them of the will to leave. Other key figures in this theory are Rebecca and Russell Dobash who are renowned for their research on domestic violence and also used the framework of learned helplessness to analyse the dynamics of abusive relationships of husbands with their wives. In their seminal book *Violence Against Wives* they elaborate on the learned helplessness theory by saying that “A Case Against the Patriarchy, states that systemic patriarchal structures repress women’s importance and delve them to a sense of helplessness in abusive relationships” (Dobash and Dobash 1979). It implies that women are usually persistent and often tenacious in their attempts to seek help but pursue such help through channels that prove to be most useful and reject those that have been found to be helpful or condemning. He also states that victim women do not live their lives in a state of learned helplessness. On the contrary, they often engage in a process of “staying, leaving and returning. According to learned helplessness theory women make active and conscious decisions based on their changing circumstances: they leave for short periods to escape the violence and to emphasize their disaffection in the hope that this will stop the violence. In the beginning, they are generally not attempting to end the relationship, but are negotiating to reestablish the relationship on a non-violent basis. This theory is applied to the female character of the novel Kulsoom who suffers through the beating and bullying by her husband in an abusive relationship but also remains loyal to him and ultimately dies. Through the female characters of the novel one comes to know how they feel helpless before their fate which was controlled by the men. The depiction of the helplessness of Kulsoom can be justified by Gauhar as “I, Kulsoom, wife of Naushad the village drunk, mother to four unnecessary daughters, I have tasted the bitter skin of onion, I have eaten the soft flesh of purple brinjal, I have burnt my tongue on the fire of the red chilli. ... I have walked towards my death, boding this thing that grows within me, my life, my beginning, my end. 1, Kulsoom, I have heard them calling to me” (Gauhar, 2024, p.73). After the unbearable violence in pregnancy, she ultimately died after a lot of attempts that things might be changed someday. This theory also signifies the continuous helplessness of the daughter of Moosa Madad and his middle wife Fatima when she feels herself completely useless in the hands of his husband, and she is unable to stop the violence on her daughter. The silence of Sabiha indicates that she already knows the harsh consequences but somehow, she hopes that her father will forgive her. She also meets her tragic fate at the end of the novel and commits suicide. The conversation between Sabiha and her mother is mentioned here to depict their inability to change Moosa’s mind. “Sabiha, you know how stubborn your father is. ... Do you want to live out your life locked up in this suffocating room? Do you? Sabiha looked up and locked her gaze with her mother’s (Gauhar, 2024, p. 210). Gauhar’s idea of choosing so many female characters in *An Abundance of*

Wild Roses is evidence of the fact that the women of contemporary Pakistan are like the variety of wild roses who bloom even in harsh circumstances. Their fate is closely associated with the patriarchal society, they suffer a lot and ultimately surrender themselves before their fate.

Discussion and analysis

Several types of violence explain violence against women such as gender-based violence, physical violence, domestic violence, and psychological violence. The first theory that developed in the United States was that men who battered women were mentally ill, However, gender-based violence happened against every woman and this theory is proved to be wrong. The next theory describing gender-based violence against women is a loss of control theory. This “loss of control” theory is contradicted by batterers’ behavior. Batterers’ violence is carefully targeted at specific people at specific times and places. The female marginality in Faryal Ali Gauhar’s *An Abundance of Wild Roses* can be explained by various theories namely Social Learning Theory and Learned Helplessness Theory. The marginalized also explains various types of violence including gender-based violence and domestic violence. This paper study also focuses on the different types of violence faced by female characters like physical violence, abusive violence and social violence. Sociologists state that men batter because they learned violence in their families as children and that women seek out abusive men because they see their mothers being abused. Children who live in homes with repeat violence will act out by hitting, biting, and pushing friends, siblings, and classmates. Social learning theory implies that a child learns not only how to commit violence but also learns positive attitudes about violence when he (or she) sees it rewarded. This suggests that children who have witnessed violence or have been abused, learn destructive conflict resolution and communication patterns. Bandura’s social learning theory would predict that both observers and victims can be affected, (same as in the case of Naushad and Kulsoom) with children from more violent environments being more likely to acquire aggressive modes of behavior. Gauhar explains Naushad as the character who does nothing except following his mother’s instructions. His mother had suffered a lot in her lifetime and now she is totally dependent upon his son and encourages his son for beating and cursing his wife for not having a son. It elaborates on the social conditioning of Naushad in the hands of his mother. “Kulsoom, married to a wastrel who did nothing but sit around drinking bottles of cough syrup and cursing his wife and four daughters” (Gauhar, 2024, p.30). In addition, the learned helplessness theory explained by Lenore Walker was based on perceived characteristics ostensibly shared by battered women, such as low self-esteem, a tendency to withdraw, or perceptions of loss of control. Walker applied the learned helplessness theory in her groundbreaking work on the Cycle of Abuse in the 1970s. In her book. She used the theory to explain why women in abusive relationships often feel unable to leave. She argued that repeated cycles of abuse, coupled with societal pressures and lack of support, can lead women to internalize feelings of powerlessness, even when opportunities to escape arise. Those who espoused the theory, however, rarely took into account the fact that these “characteristics” might be, in fact, the physical and psychological effects of the abuse. Finally, the static model of “learned helplessness” is contradicted by the fact that the violence, and the woman’s reaction to the violence, often changes over time. The first episode of violence is generally minor, victims may be surprised, and may not anticipate that it will occur again. Rather, as Dobash and Dobash explain, “they believe, as anyone might, in the potential for reform and are still committed to the relationship” (Dobash and Dobash,1979). It can be understood through the representation of all the female characters of the novel by Feryal Ali Gauhar. Violence against women has become a grave sociopolitical and legal problem in Pakistan. Many women are killed, stone to death, married to an older guy, or even murdered due to defaming the family name, like, honor. Faryal describes Moosa Madad’s youngest wife married to an older guy for the sake of saving her reputation as a young widow. “Her mother was long gone, dying six months after Mariam’s birth, tired and worn from thirteen pregnancies, of which only six children survived. Her father was old, senile, barely able to swallow his own spittle” (Gauhar, 2024, p.41). Gender is the central social identity in patriarchal social structures to establish discrimination and stratification. Baden and Reeves (2000) define discrimination as a treatment towards individuals in a systematic and favorable treatment. It is the social construction in which women are discriminated against and demand their rights. Unequal treatment toward females is the common social norm in Gender Based stratified societies. Here gender determines their roles and rank in society. Therefore, in this type of system when a female raises her voice or challenges her

existence she faces different forms of violence. Domestic violence is also common in Pakistan as portrayed by Gauhar in *An Abundance of Wild Roses*. In this type of violence, men consider it their basic right to threaten and be physically violent to their ladies to correct her behavior when she is seen as being disobedient. Gender-based violence can also contribute to social stigma, adversely affecting a victim. Stigma and prejudice may result in psychological trauma, weakness, and inadequacy to engage in productive activities and fully participate in development activities. As a result of their fear of entering into public settings, women who have experienced gender-based violence frequently restrict their access to education, reducing their ability to increase the value and efficiency of their knowledge and skills and limiting their income-generating options. It is particularly heartbreaking to read that some girls have been forced to leave school due to defilement, rape, and frequent sexual harassment, even from teachers. This social stigma is represented by Gauhar who due to the fear of Honor killing restricted his daughter Sabiha from going to school. He has a threat in his mind that the love letter he found in her daughter's hand will cause him humiliation in the village. Due to this fear, he locked his daughter in a storeroom and didn't even care if she'll survive or not. Gauhar says that "Moosa thundered, he threatened not to let Sabiha out until she revealed the identity of the man who dared send a note covered in hand-drawn hearts, the red of their centers vulgar, scornful of the Numberdar's honour" (Gauhar, 2024, p.33). Here the reputation of Moosa Madad is more important than anything else. He cannot accept his humiliation in society. For him, it doesn't matter that his only child is innocent and unaware of the facts of the harsh world. This social stigma is deep rooted in any patriarchal system. Gauhar mentions that "How dare he humiliate Moosa Madad? He would gouge out the man's eyes for daring to look at his daughter with desire and evil intent; he would smash his legs to pieces and watch him crawl for forgiveness; he would hurt him as much as the family's honor had been wounded. How dare he, how dare he bow dare he?" (Gauhar, 2024, p.33). Moosa Madad's character is the symbol of the patriarchal system explained by Faryal Ali Gauhar as: "Moosa Madad, tall, imposing, the headman of their small village, Moosa Madad fifty-seven years old illiterate father of two sons both dead killed in the war several beautiful daughters all but one married the youngest the most beautiful" (Gauhar. 2024 p.16). In feminist literature, the term patriarchy has been defined in many ways. In the book *The Creation of Patriarchy* published in 1986 Lerner describes patriarchy as "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in the society" (Lerner,1986). Many social attitudes and norms regarding women still present among the people in contemporary Pakistan. Despite easy access to education and information has often failed to vanish deep-rooted concepts about women. One such idea is that a baby girl is just treated as a visitor in her own house by keeping in view the fact that eventually, she will have to go to her real home and married home. Due to this she has no rights and is considered the most useless or unimportant part of the household. Suffering does not end here for a girl because there is no place outside the house of her father, husband, or guardian. Many superstitious thoughts of men prevent their daughters from entering into the field of education. They consider education as a future threat for them. As mentioned by Gauhar Moosa Madad kills Nasser because he is an educated person and requests Moosa to let his daughter study further in college and university, but Moosa Madad abused and cursed him as his talks are like an educated person which is the moment of disgrace for Moosa Madad. Moosa cursed Nasser by these lines "You men from the cities, you come here and think that you have done us village folk a favour, bringing new ways of doing things. You think that with your education and your Western clothes, you are better than us. You think that we will not know what a poem is, or what the words you write to our daughters mean. You think that girls whose brothers are no longer there to protect them, that these girls are easy prey" (Gauhar, 2024, p. 286). The views of Moosa Madad, even in the modern age don't allow him to follow the modern traditions and accept reality instead he thinks that modern education is the cause of Fitnah and trouble for his family. He is totally against modern education and learning. "I spit on your university and on your learning. I spit on the parents who could not teach you the ways of our ancestors. One rotten sheep like you will spoil the whole flock your parents have bred, you understand. Don't you dare tell me what to do with my daughter, you hear me?" (Gauhar, 2024, p.288). Through all these perspectives of female marginalization, this study analyses that the lack of modern education is the main cause of violence in contemporary Pakistan. The patriarchal system only allows men to enter into several fields but they treat their daughters and wives as their personal property.

Conclusion

An Abundance of Wild Roses is Feryal Ali Gauhar's third novel in Pakistani English Literature. This novel delves deep into the themes of female marginality in contemporary Pakistan. Gender-based violence, misogyny, physical violence, and emotional torture of female characters have been depicted through this study. The main cause of female misogyny throughout this novel is the Patriarchal system of SauDukh Das in which Moosa Madad (the Numberdar of the village) holds all the control and power of the village. He considers women as the Fitna of his house. Gauhar's portrayal of female characters in this novel is to highlight the boundaries and restrictions they face all the time in their society. The character of Moosa is complex enough to understand as he remains loyal to the strangers as the head of the village but remains rude and harsh to his young daughter and wives except Maryam. This behavior leads to the tragic death of his daughter. Kulsoom also suffers through multiple physical and emotional violence and is ultimately found dead near the mountains. These two incidents lead this novel to address the issues regarding gender-based violence.

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