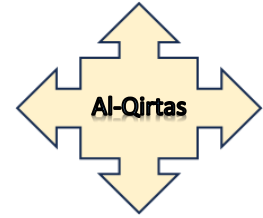


Gender Based Oppression in Ayesha Baqir's *Beyond the Fields*: A Feminist Perspective



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Abstract

The world has been in the clutches of gender inequality and oppression of women since antiquity. Innumerable voices have been raised to address this disparity; but they remained less fruitful, contrary to the expectations, due to rigid patriarchal mindset of the societies. Ayesha Baqir's *Beyond the Fields* is a contribution of a Pakistani writer to become the voice of the voiceless, to empower the constantly underprivileged and undermined gender to get back their inalienable rights. This article is an explorative journey to show how women of Pakistan, especially hailing from rural areas, suffer at the hands of cultural norms. The oppression female characters of the novel are inflicted with will be looked at using the lens of Iris Young's 'five faces of oppression'. The five faces i.e., Exploitation, Marginalization, Powerlessness, Cultural Imperialism and Violence against women, will be inspected in the novel to showcase the age-old issue of women oppression in Pakistan.

Keywords Gender, Oppression, Exploitation, Marginalization, Powerlessness, Cultural Imperialism, Violence

Introduction

Gender inequality is a well-known term in today's world. It seems hard to reach the exact origin of this behavior of gender-based prejudice the women of this world are facing till date. Moreover, history tells that more and more atrocities women were inflicted with, by the men and society in general, the more inner anguish in women transformed itself into a movement, which through many years of efforts has now stepped into the year 2022. Published last year, Ayesha Baqir's *Beyond the Fields* (2019) is yet another attempt of a writer to empower the women of Pakistan and to give a thought-provoking push to the patriarchal mindset of Pakistani people. Written in a simple narrative style, the novel showcases the caged mindsets of the people of rural area of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. The story is a chronological representation of the lives of twin sisters, Zara and Tara, narrated by Zara. The novel opens when Zara is traveling to Lahore with her brother to get some job over there, masking her real purpose to find her twin sister, Tara. Although they

belonged to a poor family, they lived a satisfied and happy life. Zara and Tara used to help their mother in household chores, as they were supposed to do like all other women and girls of the village. There was no proper schooling in their village. Omer and some other boys started their education in the newly opened school at village. On the other hand, when the matter of education comes to the girls of the village, no parent permitted it. Consequently, despite her wish, Zara couldn't go to school. She and Omer then decided that Omer will teach her whatever he would learn at school. The personalities of Zara and Tara were poles apart. Tara was an extremely obedient child, while Zara was rebellious. She was never happy with the customs and traditions of her village. She believed that only education could bring change in her life. The only dream she saw and wanted to fulfill at any cost was getting an education and becoming something so that she could have her own identity. Baqir, through raising the issue of female education, has tried to say that our culture doesn't want a woman to have her own identity by taking the right to education from her. But women need to fight for their right, as Zara did, if they want to bring any change in their overshadowed lives.

Literature Review

Beyond the Fields is the writer's first novel. Her novel got her much fame and praise and a considerable number of researchers are working on *Beyond the Fields* to explore its various perspectives. Dalal (2020) believes that *Beyond the Fields* is a quest for women's liberation. She thinks about a question lately asked from women on a social forum that what will they prefer to do if it is announced that there won't be any men around them for one day. Husain (2019) states that the life Tara lived is quintessential example of the shackled life a village woman lives. Her subjugation, trials and muteness are not unfamiliar in a rural setting. It looks as if the only reason of her life is to suffer silently. Husain (2019) also highlights the similarity index between women living in rural and urban areas as shown in the novel. Despite the place they lived in, women of both the worlds were suffering equally. The only symbol of strength in this novel is Zara. While facing fields, she thinks whether she could ever cross these unending fields. She then traverses them to reach out her sister with the help of her unyielding personality. Husain (2019) contemplates that each girl, once in life, must have thought whether she could ever cross these patriarchal fields present before her (p. 1).

Theoretical Design

The present study is designed in Iris Young's model of 'Five Faces of Oppression' (1988) which demonstrates how women are portrayed as an oppressed group of society and have been exploited at the hands of cultural norms. Oppression brings injustice in a society. It is not always about cruel tyrants having bad intentions to oppress people. In various situations, a good-intentional society that is totally liberal puts system-wide restraints on some groups and snatches their freedom. Oppression can prevail by choices of a few people or policies they make which create symbols, habits and norms which get deeply embedded in the system and remain unquestioned by majority of the people (p. 1). The faces of Young's model are: "Exploitation, Marginalization, Powerlessness, Cultural Imperialism and Violence" (Young,1988). She adduces that oppression of

proletariat class at the hands of bourgeois is not the only important oppression in the world. Racism, sexism, ageism, and homophobia also does exist in our societies, and are as despicable as oppression of the poor is. She sums up that a social group is believed to be under oppression if it undergoes all or few of these five faces of oppression. Heldke and O'Conner (2004) while discussing Young's model of oppression say that traditionally speaking, oppression means when ruling group exercises tyranny over any other group(s). Oppression brings injustice to a society. The oppression of women is not a problem of any one country, culture or race. It has been there since antiquity and is present till date. Although much has been done to check this oppression, there is a lot to be done still. *Beyond the Fields* is a rendition of the horrors of such oppression in Pakistani culture, where abducting, raping, killing, and sabotaging women is a day-to-day matter. They are exploited, marginalized, their rights and bodies are violated and are left powerless under cultural imperialism.

Discussion and Analysis

Exploitation

Exploitation is an act in which a person or a group take advantage of another person or a group to get profit. It could be in any way, like rich exploiting poor for economic gains, colonizers coming to somewhat weak nations with ulterior motives, men exploiting their women to get benefited from their labor and support. *Beyond the Fields* is brimming with examples of exploitation of women. As the story is that of a typical village of Pakistan, almost all the women are shown working inside their homes. Whether they are daughters or wives or unmarried sisters, all of them are putting in their efforts and time in the household chores. The quintessential example of exploitation in the novel is that of Zara's mother. She is like a robot which is programmed to do work, work and only work. Without any identity and voice, she is happy in her home. From all the major and minor decisions of their family are taken by her husband. It seems as if the whole family is breathing according to the orders of the father. The very first example of exploitation is when Zara's Nani brings some seeds to be sown in the backyard of the home so that her daughter could raise her finances and help out her family financially. Zara's father got enraged listening to her idea. Zara's father, like majority of the Pakistani men, has this superiority complex which doesn't allow him to get financial assistance of his wife. In Pakistan, especially in conservative areas, men are believed to be the sole bread earners of the house. Women are hardly allowed to step out of their homes to earn.

But the same women work like slaves in their homes without getting any remuneration in return. Amma, Zara and Tara are shown working incessantly at home. They are also expected to lend their hand in the fields. When Amma orders Zara to stop studying and start working in the fields, she is extremely annoyed. She says, "My breath squeezed as if a python coiled around my windpipe. Why did I have to work on the land? It wasn't mine. My dreams were mine. No one was going to snatch them away. Not even Amma" (Baqir, p. 44). It shows how parents exploit their daughters' labor to earn profit for the whole family but don't give them their due credit. Zara thinks about one of the injustices they are silently accepting which is no inheritance of the land

to the female child. She declares, “Unmarried girls didn’t own land or property in our village. Sons inherited all of it. They carried the family name. Abba’s land would go to Omer. Our dowry was for our in-laws. There was nothing for us. I knew that, I had been told that” (Baqir, p. 39). Mutiullah (2020) says that when parents send their beloved daughter to her new house with loads of dowry, they might have meant well, but they have totally blown her self-worth in her own eyes. Throughout the novel, there are many incidences where a girl’s dowry and complexion are shown as an important matter for the people of Zara’s village. When a family visits to see Zara, they hand over a list of dowry material they are expecting to receive from bride’s side as a dowry of their daughter. Grievously, they are not even ashamed of it. They say, “We’ve made a list. It should make it easier for you.” Interrupted Halima Masi’s husband, speaking for the first time. “A list?” murmured Amma. Paper rustled. “It’s all written down. For your ease, of course,” said Halima Masi. “Now if u think you can manage, we can finalize the details. Right, Sakina?” (p. 130).

Marginalization

Marginalization means one person or social group is sidelined as ‘Other’. Women in Zara’s village have no say in any social, political and religious matters. They are reduced to perform only ‘behind the scene’ activities. Also in the city, Sehr Madam is bound to her pretty house. She has no role to play outside her home. Even the inside decisions of their home are taken by her husband. From employment of the maids to their management, her husband is the boss of everything. Zara notices the marginalized status of Sehr Madam as follows, “Primped and preened in their suits, Jameel Saab and his friends strolled towards the line of gleaming cars. He was leaving Sehr Madam home again. Was she any better off than Amma?” (p. 204). Baqir’s *Beyond the Fields* portrays marginalization in many forms. Women are not allowed to vote and have no say in the social happenings of the village. It is the male friends and acquaintances of Tara’s father who along with her father decide her future after rape incident. All the women of the village are assigned peripheral job of taking care of the home, kids and husband. Zara says, “As soon as we learnt to walk, Amma set us on chores” (Baqir, 2019, p. 33). Even they are not allowed to look themselves in the mirror because their mother considers it evil. Only their father is allowed to use the mirror. It symbolizes the facelessness and identity less existence of village women. When Zara and Tara’s mother tries to help her husband financially, he stops her aggressively. Zara’s father is shown reluctant to send Zara out of the city. Vijayavani (2018) says that we keep on saying that women and men are essential constituents of a society; but a woman is always marginalized by her husband, family relations and by the society at large (p. 108).

Marginalization is shown again when Kulsoom chachi says to her husband not to take the girls to the mela, for the fear of what people will say about them and their daughter. She thinks that a dead daughter is better than a divorced daughter. In their village, a divorcee is looked down upon and is kept aside; so is a rape victim and the one who takes the decision of her marriage by herself. The tragic lives of Tara, SaimaAppi and Chiragh are proof of the fact that whether a girl is being wronged or does a wrong by herself, in every case, women are going to be accused. Tara is disposed of soon after the rape happened. Sehr Madam, a character from the bourgeoisie class, is

also living a subsidiary life. She has no importance or substantial role to play in her husband's life. She is like a pretty decoration piece lying in one corner of the house. Even the servants to work in the house are chosen by her husband. At one point in the novel, Zara explicates the insignificant and marginalized life Sehr Madam's is bound to live as follows, "Primped and preened in their suits, Jameel Saab and his friends strolled towards the line of gleaming cars. He was leaving Sehr Madam home again. Was she any better off than Amma?" (p. 204). The condition of her mental and emotional health can clearly be seen by her addiction to sleeping pills.

After the rape incident, it was the men of the family who decided the fate of Tara. No one asked Tara or her mother about their thoughts. Zara's mother repetitively says the words like your father will get angry; your father hasn't allowed it; what if your father gets to know; I have to ask your father first. It seems as if she has no identity of herself. She is just a slave who has to obey the commands of her master. When Zara repetitively asks Tara to consider Salman and tell their parents about him, Tara replies that she will never open her mouth in front of her parents. She believes that whatever decision their parents will take will be best for them, as they have seen and experienced life and they can understand people more. On the other hand, we know nothing about the world. She says that we are fortunate to have such caring parents who want us to be happy and get settled (p. 88).

Powerlessness

Women, throughout this novel, have felt powerless before the deeply rooted patriarchal system prevalent in their society. The moment a girl is born, she is powerless before the discriminatory and misogynistic behavior of the world around her. Zara is powerless when people judge her skin color. She is powerless when Amma stops her from studying. She is powerless when she is not allowed to roam outside. Rape victims and their families are shown powerless before Hadood Ordinance. Rape victims were powerless before the misogynists who put all the blame of rape on a woman. Almost all the women of the novel are powerless before the male members of their family. Zara and Tara are powerless before their father. From studying to marriage, all the major and minor decisions of their lives are taken by him. SaimaAppi is powerless in front of cultural norms, myths and false beliefs of their society. Zara and Tara's rape incidents are symbolic of women's powerlessness in a male dominating society.

Jatoi (2018) says that the reason why women are reluctant to step out with the allegations of rape or sexual harassment in Pakistan because in this country many people still put the blame on women themselves for being abused or raped (para. 4). When Tara got raped, she and her family were unable to get justice because of the fear of power of the culprits and also because if they remain unable to prove their accusation, Tara will be punished for Zina then. Their whole family was powerless before constitutional law. Omer once said to Zara that he wants to study to become somebody so that he could earn her sister justice. That rape incident of Tara and their powerlessness before Landlord's thugs got stuck in his head.

Girls and women are portrayed powerless many times in the novel. From their choices to their freedom, from their identity to their rights, they felt powerless every time before the

patriarchal system. Zara's quest to find Tara can be taken as a symbolic journey of a powerless to become powerful and change her condition. While travelling to Lahore, Zara bucks herself up thinking that this is her journey. She hunted for the truth. She studied warriors. Now, it was time to become one (p. 8). Zara and Tara's rape incidents are symbolic of women's powerlessness in a male dominating society. It can also be taken as price a girl has to pay to become powerful in a male dominating society. Gangoli (2007) says that many scholars agree to this fact that it is quite difficult to weigh the 'status of women' in a country, especially when a country is big and diverse.

Saima Appi is powerless before her in-laws and their superstitious believes. She suffered a lot but could do nothing. She shares her bleak experiences with Zara saying that she was powerless before them. Could she walk out? She wanted to walk out, but where could she possibly go? She didn't want to go back home. Then the crops got destroyed by the rains and her mother-in-law said to her to not to come out of her room. No one came and spoke to her. They used to put food inside her room. She thought she would go mad. Finally, at the loss of her sister-in-law's baby, she was whipped and locked in the storeroom. She was kept there for many days (p. 157). Saima Appi told Zara that she used to plead and beg her husband to believe that she is not unlucky. But, her husband, a patriarchal man who would listen and believe only customary voices, didn't believe her (p. 156).

Zara's mother is powerless before her husband's decisions. When she decides to cultivate a garden of vegetables, she faces resistance of her husband. "When Abba returned home, Amma had led him to the plot, held out the packet of seeds and voiced her idea. Abba's brows had fused like a giant centipede. He had snapped that the women in his family didn't work" (p. 63). Zara has always raised her voice whenever she felt weak before customary voices. She wants to accomplish something, and it was only possible if she spends the teen years of her life getting education instead of getting married and rearing children. Looking at her buffalo, Zara once thought that even she is more grounded than her. She can do whatever she wants, whenever she wants (p. 52). When she gets the news that some distant relatives are coming to see her, she deliberately burned the sweet rice which were being made for the guests. At first, she tried to convince her mother; but, when she saw no change in her Amma's decision, she had to do something to show her that she has a choice.

Amma said I didn't have a choice. I had to show her that I did have a choice. Tara, on the other hand, didn't have the guts to tell her mother about Salman. When Zara persuades her to open up before Amma, instead of taking pressure of cultural norms as restrictive chains, she says that they are lucky to have parents who cautiously take decisions of our lives. She is unable to understand that this is her right to have a say in her marriage decision. Zara gives voice to her powerlessness in their male dominating village. She abhors the fact that how men of their village make sure to cover up the women of their own family with burkas but rape and abuse other women of the village. According to Kishor and Gupta (2004), most of the studies suggest certain variables through which status of women can be measured in a country. Those variables are: access to education, paid employment, contribution in decision making, marriage age, level of

acceptance of violence at social and personal level and women's mobility (as cited in Gangoli, 2007, p. 2). When Amma declared her decision that she wants to bring Tara back to their home, her husband got extremely angry. He in anger says that has she lost her mind and then moved forward with clenched fists towards his wife. Omer and Khalid Chacha stopped him. Amma says that she hasn't lost her mind; she thinks she has finally found it. Bari Masi says to Amma that it is solely a woman's responsibility to make her marriage work. If every daughter keeps on coming back like this, how would marriages work. Amma then replies that they should come back when they are unhappy. There is nothing wrong in it.

Cultural Imperialism

Cultural imperialism means when one dominating group of a society makes the rules and it becomes cultural norms of that community or society. Young (1988) says, "Cultural imperialism consists in the universalization of one group's experience and culture, and its establishment as a norm... As a result, the dominant cultural products of the society, that is, most widely disseminated, express the experience, values, goals and achievements of the groups that produce them" (p. 285). The culture of Zara's village seems to be made by men. All the rules are in favor of men. Women are sidelined and are reduced to an inferior status. Men decide the fate of their women. Simone de Beauvoir rightly says, "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth" (Simone de Beauvoir, as cited in Firestone, 1970, p. 156) From Chiragh's wretchedness to Tara's emergency marriage, from domestic violence to education of the girls at village, everything follows the patriarchal mindset of the village. When a woman does a mistake, people are ready to punish her severely. But when a man commits the same mistake, people let go of it. Chiragh's case is the prime example of that.

When Chiragh dies, no one was ready to prepare her body for the funeral under the orders of Bari Masi. Such women are so confined in their cultural and traditional ways of thinking that they are unable to realize the wickedness of those cultural norms. Only women who turned up were Amma, Surriya Masi and Zubaida Masi. When Moulvi Sahab started to read her funeral prayer, an angry mob gathered in the mosque and threatened to set it on fire. Chiragh's dead body was moved forcefully to shrine (p. 169). Gauntlett (2002) gave 'cognitive-developmental theory' which states that gender roles are learned by an individual. The Feminine and Masculine traits are actually learned through society. When Zara and Tara are born, their nani and Amma literally lamented at the births of two girls. There was a picture of a pretty boy on the wall of their room. Zara has caught Amma looking at that picture with yearning. He was a boy; and, in their village, it made all difference (p. 34). When Zara and Tara were born, the dai begged Amma to go to their Pir and ask for forgiveness (p. 33). The words of the dai imply as if giving birth to girls is a sin.

As they grow up, they are not allowed to roam outside their house. Their mother says that if someone finds out who they were, it will ruin their family name. Daughters are to keep inside like some precious thing (p. 29). An old woman of their village, Bari Masi, once told all the girls that it is a woman's job to cover herself and protect herself from tempting somebody by her looks.

Otherwise, she will burn in hell. All girls got so much terrified (p. 32). Shafiq (2019) adduces that the cause behind the decline in female literacy is because Pakistanis think with their cultural mind. This mind deems it futile for girls to receive education. He states that in the province of Baluchistan, a high number of girls ranging between fifteen to eighteen years are pressurized to get married and raise children instead of acquiring education. It brings a gigantic decline in female literacy (p. 1).

Growing up, there were multiple restrictions on them only because they were girls. Their mother had forbidden them to look at themselves in the mirror. She informed them that it was haram. She said that devils lurk behind these glasses. They catch those young girls who looked in them (p. 34). Once their mother said that they need to stop pranks and laughs, as they won't take them in their in-laws' house. She declared that they are not small kids anymore. If they are good, they will surely marry well. Once they are married, they have to keep their husbands as well as in-laws happy. They shouldn't give them any reason to complain. They must do what their husband and in-laws say, and that too with a broad smile and with no questions. This is every girl's duty and responsibility. The sooner they understand this, the better it would be for them. Zara said that it was her mother's favorite topic. She loved to remind her daughters about marriage, their duties and responsibilities after marriage. Zara wondered why her mother has never initiated any such talk with Omer. Why every time girls are given such lessons (p. 77). It was the societal norms in Amma's voice which were teaching girls to be always submissive, silent and people pleasers. Gauntlett (2002) gave 'cognitive-developmental theory' which states that gender roles are learned by an individual. The Feminine and Masculine traits are actually learned through society.

When Zara and Tara were in their thirteenth or fourteenth year, their mother asked their father to bring sewing baskets believing it was accurate time that Zara and Tara start sewing their bridal linen. Tara right away started sketching patterns on her pillowcase, while Zara had no hurry to catch up with Tara. It depicts the mentality of two girls. One who conforms to the norms of society. Other who knows what she wants to do (p. 35). Abdulali (2017) says that when she was raped, it was she who was wounded, not her honor. When she fought to survive that night, she hardly knew the reason she was fighting for. Of course, rape is extremely terrible. Zara's mother clearly declared that it is not a matter of fair or unfair. If education was in her destiny, she would have been born a boy. When Majjo phuppi listens to Amma's thoughts, she intervenes. Majjo phuppi was of the opposite view. She said that if Zara is good in her studies and is no less than any boy, then she should be given a chance to study. But Amma refuses her suggestion saying that it is useless to ask her father about his daughter's education; because she already knows the answer would be a big 'No'. There was this rishta hunting culture in their village where old women devoured news about every single girl of the village. They were like vultures who pluck flesh from bones. They held records of which girl is single, castes of girls and which girl can bring the right dowry (p. 56). Zara hated that culture. She felt as if girls were some display materials. Everyone can come and rate, judge and reject them. She wasn't ready to be sold as a commodity. A girl's

skin color is being judged by everyone around her, especially by women. Kulsoom Chachi once seeing Zara's skin tone sadly remarks that it seems she still spends too much time under the sun.

Zara's mother replies that it is better not to pay heed to this trivial matter. Kulsoom Chachi, voicing the cultural norms, says that she should be concerned about her daughter's skin color, as good rishtas are very rare to find these days (p. 154). The culture of suppressing daughters-in-law and domestic violence has also been shown in the novel at multiple points. SaimaAppi was taken as a sign of bad luck by her in-laws. Everything wrong that happens to them was blamed on Saima Appi's bad luck. They starved her, beaten her and enslaved her in a small store. When Surriya, a maid at Jameel Saab's place, was caught having a relationship with one of the cooks, Gloria treated her inhumanly. It seems as if the only fault is that of Surriya's. One of the maids said that Surriya is the only bread earner of her family and if her mother finds it out, she will kill her. She says, "It's our fate, to be lumped or dumped" (p. 183). SaimaAppi says that she was her mother's angel before she got married. My mother used to believe that everything I do is always perfect. But now after my divorce, my mother believes that I am unable to do anything right. "Like I was only worth something while I was married" (p. 245).

Violence

From physical and mental abuse Saima Appi faces by her in-laws to Tara's rape and violation of her rights and body by her so-called husband, from Sehr Madam's emotional vulnerability to infidelity of Chiragh's lover, from Zara's rape to Surriya's situation, women are subjected to physical and emotional violence throughout the novel. In most of the Asian countries, divorce is viewed as something despicable. Women are expected to stay mute in front of their abusive husbands so that their marriage could work. Bari Masi said in front of Zara's mother that what would happen if all the daughters keep on coming back to their parents' houses. It is the utmost duty of a woman to put efforts to make her marriage work. Zara's mother negates Bari Masi and says that if a daughter is not happy with her husband, she can and should come back to her parents' home. SaimaAppi suffered extreme form of violence at her in-laws' place; but, her mother still wanted SaimaAppi to patch up with her husband. She believed that a dead daughter is acceptable to her than a divorced daughter. Her words clearly showcase the mentality of Asian women who pay more heed to what society says than their daughters' happiness. They are ready to sacrifice their daughter(s)'s life in front of cultural pressure. In all aspects women are equal to men, women must not be regarded inferior. Both of the genders should be granted equal chances and women must be venerated by men. If women are regarded equal and are given their due share in their rights, this is the only possibility that the nation can thrive. In society, physical violence against women by men is seen rampantly. Men consider themselves superior to women and find it easy to blame women, as they are considered weak. Tarar and Pulla (2014) rightly say that in patriarchal society of Pakistan, half of the population is that of women but they are deprived of their opportunities to participate in national development.

Ayesha Baqir herself suffered through dominant power regime hence she is informed of women's terrible plight in Muslim society. The requirement of the hour is to speak out, breaking

such long silence. Zara and Tara as synecdoche represented women oppression, standing for the whole. Their life and adversities mirror the life of every woman who leads such terrible life and is not able to speak out for herself. A woman is regarded as weakling in a male dominant society who lives according to the desires of her husband. Societal conditioning does the remaining task. Nasreen Masi tells Amma that her father-in-law has beaten her when she tried to save her daughters from his beating. She had red welts on her back (p. 138). When Tara says to Zara that it would better that our parents' select our spouses for us, Tara then gives example of one of their neighbors who is always beaten up by her husband but doesn't utter a single word in front of anyone. She pretends to be totally fine. Oransky and Marecek (2002) in their research analyzed that the mostly young boys were giving more importance to a person's capability of dissociating oneself from emotions and feelings so they could look like a man

Violence is carried out in different forms; sexual killing and physical violence. In the selected text *Beyond the Fields*, we observe violence against the fairer sex by men. Saima Api who married her husband, at the very beginning the relation between husband and wife were peaceful. After a short time, when a buffalo died in Saima husband's home, the situation took another direction. The relation between husband and wife started to weaken. As the death of another buffalo occurred, this changed the world around Saima entirely. She became not only the target of her husband but also of her mother-in-law too. Her freedom was restricted and her shadow was considered as a curse upon the home. She faced both physical and psychological oppression. She faced it because she is a woman who can be blamed easily by men as well as those who surround her.

All the women of the novel suffering from any sort of violence were suffering silently. No one was allowed to raise voice. From physical to psychological, abuse and violence were rampant. When Nasreen Masi showed Amma welts on her back, caused by her father-in-law's beatings, she stopped speaking when she saw that Zara was witnessing all. There was this culture of brushing the problems under carpets and hiding women's harsh realities from young girls. There might be this idea behind all this secrecy that the women don't want girls to think about the sufferings they are subjected to, lest they raise their voice. They want their girls to get married as soon as possible, without thinking anything about what is meant by mental compatibility between spouses and what are the traits of a good husband. The daughters are expected to say 'yes' to any man their parents have chosen for them. As Saima Appi acceded to her parents' choice; but, later, suffered tremendously because of their bad decision. Her mother only saw the good financial status of Saima's in-laws. Only Saima's father was worried about the educational background of the boy, which made him an unsuitable match for her daughter. Moreover, the violence Tara faced at her husband's place is too dark to narrate. She was silently enduring all the pain. She was forced to stop complaining by constant doses of drugs.

Conclusion

Keeping in view the above-mentioned discussion, one can safely say that women of Pakistan, especially from rural areas, are suffering tremendously. They are exploited, marginalized, their

rights and bodies are violated and are left powerless under cultural imperialism. The demand of the hour is to raise our voice against this inequity; unless, it gets too late to amend. The main thing that needs to be altered is the mentality of the people. It is the people who make cultural norms. When mindsets will change, cultural evils themselves would vanish. Zara realized her sufferings and raised her voice against the injustices done to her and to the women around her. She from the very beginning was conscious of these injustices. When she herself got raped by the end of the novel, she didn't take it as a self-pitying phenomenon. She believes that it was that man's shame who raped her. She has done no wrong, then why she is expected to look down on herself according to the social norms. The most significant message of the novel is that people should declutter their minds from all the cultural garbage they hold in their heads.

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