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MANIPULATIVE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE GIRLS OF RIYADH BY RAJA AL SANEA

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Abstract

Religion is an integral part of every culture but, unfortunately, it has been used as a manipulative force to control and suppress women. This research discusses the manipulative use of religion, Islam, as a patriarchal tool to make women submissive in a phallocentric society. In Islam, there is no gender discrimination and all Islamic orders are for both men and women but in the implementation of the orders, the Muslim communities discriminate and try to impose the orders on women only. Even the girls are brought up with the internalization of such discrimination ideology and girls have the ideology that the prevailing order in the culture and society is to be followed as social norms. The researcher analyzes The Girls of Riyadh by Raja Al Sanea with the application of Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist approach to figure out how delimited fiction explores the influences that help patriarchy use religion to set phallocentric norms. The researcher applies the theoretical stances of Asma Barlas and Amna Wadud for the analysis of this book. The researcher explores why Muslim society in Saudi Arabia is not following true Islam and the causes of why they are following the patriarchal setups of their culture.

Keywords: *Gender Discrimination, Manipulative Role Of Religion, Patriarchy, Parental, Islamic Feminism, Muslim Female Writers*

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1. Introduction

Muslims' views on women's status are a contentious and divisive subject. Some feminist academics of Islam claim that the scriptures and traditions of the religion support repressive behaviors that create a gendered hierarchy, while others claim that the masculine interpretation of Islam, not the religion itself, is what defines women as inferior to men (Ahmed, 2011). According to Ahmed (2011), male Muslim scholars increasingly address the topic of gender equality and women's rights in addition to becoming a topic of debate for female Muslim feminists. As devout Muslims, this generation of Islamic academics feels that gender must always be included when discussing equality and justice in Islam. According to Ahmed (2011), even though previous ethnocentric generations failed to interpret the Qur'ān as entailing gender justice, Islamic justice must, in the eyes of this new generation of devoted American Muslims, self-evidently and rationally include gender justice if it is to be counted as, indeed, justice. Engineer (2003, 2008) and Barlas (2002) depict that a substantial body of research on women and gender in Islam explains that misreading the faith is to blame for women's subjugation in the Muslim world. Engineer (2003, 2008) depicts that because of the patriarchal structure of cultures worldwide, men whose initial viewpoints already supported a society controlled by males have interpreted the Qur'ān and because of this, the application of several translated scriptures has mirrored this belief in masculine dominance. Roald (1999) and Wadud (1999) argue that the male perspective shapes conventional readings of the Qur'ān, which are penned by males. According to Saeed (2008), the misinterpretation of ethical passages as legal ones by jurists exacerbates the problem of these incorrect readings of the Qur'ān. Many verses meant to be understood as moral precepts have been interpreted as solely legal, and people looking for an authoritative foundation for creating a legal system have lost sight of the language and spirit of the Qur'ān. Saeed (2008) goes on to say that although several verses in the Qur'an seem to contradict one another about women, the main message of the Qur'an is equality and that the Qur'an needs to be read in light of this ideology.

1.1. Problem Statement

The research explores The Girls of Riyadh with the application of theories of Asma Barlas (2002) and Amna Wadud (1999) for the exploration of gendering the religion and Derrida’s deconstruction for the analysis of the selected fiction. This research discovers the use of religion as a patriarchal tool to make women submissive in a phallocentric society. It figures out the causes of why Islam, though parental, has been used as a

patriarchal religion in Muslim societies. It figures out the geographical aspects that are affecting the concepts and lifestyles of Muslim communities.

1.2. Research Objectives

The researcher will explore the following objectives

1. To explore the religion's use as a patriarchal tool to make women submissive in a phallocentric society of Saudi Arabia.
2. To figure out the causes of why Islam, though parental, has been used as a patriarchal religion in Saudi Arabia.

1.3. Research Questions

The researcher will explore the following questions:

1. How do Raja al Sanea deconstruct the institutionalization of Islamic values as phallocentric norms in The Girls of Riyadh?
2. How do Raja al Sanea's The Girls of Riyadh argue the phallogocentric Islamic values?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This research explores how The Girls of Riyadh points out the impacts that are assisting patriarchy to use religion to set phallocentric norms. Islam as a parental religion never discriminates between men and women and all the commands are for both the genders. The researcher figures out that women are provided with all the rights by Islam as Islam is parental but the male members have made it patriarchal resulting in making women deprived of their true rights. Such a study needs to be done in the area as many gender studies and feminist studies have been made but specific research has not been attempted. This study will help to understand the gendering of religion as well as the trans-geographical literature depicting the gendering of religion.

2. Literature Review

Throughout the history of Islam, a large number of Muslims have advocated for greater rights for women. Islamic women's movements were becoming more popular throughout the Muslim world by the 20th century. Azim (2011) & Engineer (2003, 2008) claim that Muslim women gained more privileges after the birth of Islam as a result of the revelations and sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. Esack (2002) explains how against the backdrop of seventh-century Arabia, the Qur'ān promoted sympathy for all oppressed people, especially women, and a sense of gender justice. At the time the Qur'ān was

revealed, Arabia in the seventh century was going through a significant socio-anthropological transition. According to Ahmed (1996), Esack (2002), and Abbott (1941), before the advent of Islam, women in Arabian culture experienced a decline in status due to the progressive replacement of patriarchal traits by several distinctive matrilineal ones. Honarvar (1988) depict that not only were women viewed as inferior in Arabian culture around the time of the first revelation of the Qur'ān, but other authors assert that their circumstances were not much different from those of slaves and animals. Ahmed (1992) and Esposito (2001) claim that female infanticide was a common practice and this was mostly brought on by the financial strain of raising several daughters, but it was also partly caused by the stigma attached to having a female kid. Gove & Watt (2004) points out that in a culture where women's rights had been steadily eroding for some time, the privileges granted to them with the advent of Islam were perceived as elevating women's position. He further pinpoints that some academics contend that although Islam did not invent patriarchy per se, its revelations regarding women, such as the prohibition against having more than four wives, may have reinforced patriarchal customs in Islamic culture. Even if the revelations from the Prophet Muhammad were very important to women at the time, the assumption that they came from a heavenly source might prevent someone from reinterpreting or reanalyzing anything. This means that while the Prophet Muhammad's revelations helped secure some rights for women at the time in a society where things were gradually getting better for women, their divine nature also meant that the progressiveness observed at the time of their revelation remained static and fixed within ideas of seventh-century morality. Because of this, their divine position is a double-edged sword, while their divinity originally pushed women's rights, it has also acted as a barrier to disputing Qur'anic passages that conventional interpretations see as supporting male supremacy. Esposito (2001) claims that the Middle East's social roots changed with the arrival of Islam, moving from blood family to the fellowship of the community of believers. Esposito (2001), Esack (2002), and Wadud (1999) point out that due to this change, women were now acknowledged as essential members of the ummah and granted rights like property ownership, the ability to give a woman's family a dower (mahr), limitations on the husband's ability to practice polygyny, the ability to inherit, the ability to include conditions in a marriage contract, the (conditional) right to divorce, and more.

Samuel, N. (2022) in his article, New Adult Fiction in Arabia: Exploring Lipstick Feminism and the Harem Complex in Raja Al Sanea’s Girls of Riyadh, presents that the native community that was previously unaware of how she chronicles the experiences of young Saudi women. The process of emulating a Western lifestyle within an Arab society that was formerly closed off to the public by the Saudi patriarchy is portrayed in her tale as a sign of liberal modernity. This account of one's sensory feelings is also considered to

be a sophisticated example of traditional and cultural manipulation. Samuel, N. (2022) aims to investigate New Adult fiction as a literary work that promotes the sensitive concerns of young Arab people. Pioneer themes in this genre include fantasy, love and sensuality, isolation, lipstick feminism, retaliation, and retribution. In addition to examining a post-colonial feminist reading of the book, Samuel, N. (2022) seeks to reframe historical patriarchal and imperialist ideology that serves as a unifying force rather than creating a gender barrier. This essay emphasizes the Harem complex as a way for women to show their sensitivity and sensibility, as seen by the use of lipstick feminism in the Girls of Riyadh characters. The article Islamic Feminism at the Crossroads between Apologetics and Defending Women: Rajaa Alsanea's Girls of Riyadh in Context by Bendouma, N. and Kerboua, S. (2023) discusses the idea of Islamic feminism and offers a dialectic connection that implies that the two radically opposed and seemingly incompatible paths of Islam and feminism are coming together to advance social justice and gender equality. It raises concerns about Islam, inequality, and the mistreatment of Muslim women. This article explores the hierarchy of Islamic feminism when it comes to standing up for women's rights vs protecting Islam. Through feminist methodology and textual analysis, it explores whether the Islamic feminist movement is limited to advocating for women's rights and whether defending Islam is inherent. The story explores topics of love, relationships, marriage, and divorce through the lives of our young Saudi women. It questions conventional wisdom in Saudi Arabian society. The novel's author has come under fire for portraying Saudi life and culture in a daring and non-conservative manner. The goal of Girls of Riyadh is to reveal a purposefully obscured aspect of Saudi Arabian society. Situmeang, S. (2018) in his work, Analysis of Social Feminism against Novel Banat Riyadh by Raja Al Sanae**,** presents an overview of four Saudi Arabian girls who seek to bring feminism and women's reformation to the forefront through literary works that attract international attention. The facts reveal that the social reality of women differs from what the international community currently understands. Situmeang, S. (2018) identifies many social feminist components that the author has included in the narrative, as exemplified by the four characters in his writing. Several factors contributed to the four Saudi Arabian girls' social feminism (1) their diverse educational and familial backgrounds, which lead to different ways of thinking; (2) the restrictions placed on them by both family and education, which make it difficult for them to express their interests and desires; (3) the need to change Saudi Arabian women's dress codes; (4) the relationship between work structures and the realities of social life, which is extremely relevant to the life of feminism; and (5) the existence of symbolic forms of violence expressed through the novel's text.

Using a fresh historicist comparative methodology, Albader, W. A. (2021) in the research article, Contextualizing Gender's Role in Kate Chopin's The Awakening and Rajaa Alsanea's Girls of Riyadh: A Comparative Historical Study, investigates the dynamics of Women in friendships and marriages for Rajaa Alsanea's Girls of Riyadh and Kate Chopin's The Awakening. When published in newspapers and book reviews, Chopin's 1899 novel and Alsanea's 2005 novel, which both emphasize the roles that genders play in both societies, are met with scathing criticism and rejection. Albader (2021) contributes to the scholarly understanding of how newspapers and critics' reflections on a particular literary text, as a human constant, describe the gender segregation of the context's time by elucidating the reciprocal relationships between the texts and the reviews. Albader (2021) shows how the opinions of critics serve as the context for the novel's creative historical output, in which both writers skillfully sparked important social discussions for change. Textual analyses are employed, including close readings of the interactions between the female characters and their partners as well as the struggles and experiences of each woman in terms of marriage. The author points out that not only does Sadeem's marriage to Gamrah fail due to a lack of love, but tradition, folktales, cultural expectations, and demands from both genders that are hidden under an artificial religious mask all play their part. Michelle's narrative, who was born to an American mother and a Saudi father, reveals this. They spend years together when she meets her partner Faisal in a mall. But when she proposes, he vanishes because his parents won't let him marry her. After all, her mother is American. She doesn't have pure blood, according to his parents. While Islam is anti-racial and anti-tribal, Alsanea demonstrates how Saudi society at the time valued pure blood and tribe equality in marriage. People in Saudi Arabia at the time saw the book as scandalous because the characters are portrayed not as rebels but as representative members of their culture, due to its graphic picture of cultural constriction in marriage and gender interactions. In a world where everything is controlled by forces greater than a person's desires and choices, Alsanea struggles against the idea of marriage and gender roles. She demonstrates how, at that time, tradition and cultural norms devalued love, making it the victim of both male and female abuse. As a result, both sexes experienced dysfunctional marriages and ended romantic relationships due to societal views and parental interference. The characters in both books vividly capture the times in which they are written, and the authors themselves offer a critique of society that is shaped by their cynical views.

Algahtani, N. S. H. (2017) focuses on the reception of the book Girls of Riyadh in The Dynamics of Interpretive Communities and the Contemporary Saudi Novel: A Study in the Reception of Abdo Khal, Raja Alem, Rajaa Alsanea and Yousef al-Mohaimeed. In this book, the author discusses how her traditional community has put limits on both men

and women, prohibiting any kind of communication or connection between the sexes other than marriage. This complicates the experience of love for the novel's four female protagonists: Gamrah, Michelle, Sadeem, and Lamees. Even though they belong to the so-called upper class, they have to overcome the same challenges as other young Saudis. Modern technology, including the internet and cell phones, allows them to talk with the other sex more freely and without fear of being noticed. As an illustration of the importance of this kind of communication, the narrator of the book utilizes email to share her narrative with the globe. As a result, the book represents the narrator's fight for freedom of speech in addition to describing the difficulties faced by the female characters as they attempt to find their place in the world. Khuddro, A. (2023), in Girls of Riyadh Revisited: Investigating the Quality of the English Collaborative Translation of Rajaa Alsanea's Arabian Novel, analyzes the extent to which Rajaa Alsanea's Arabian book Girls of Riyadh has been faithfully translated into English, paying particular attention to linguistic and cultural elements of the Target Text that are occasionally absent from the Source Text. The paper notes that the mixed literal/functional approach to collaborative translation appears to be inconsistent, which is caused by the target culture's prominence that occasionally recurs in the Source Text as well as the apparent tension between the self-translator and her co-translator Marilyn Booth. The study attempts to answer two questions: First, how much has collaborative translation impacted the accuracy of expressing lexical terms, songs, celebrity names, religious and literary allusions, and customary celebrations, all examples of linguistic, social, and cultural references found in the Source Text? How successful was the functional and literal approach in this joint translation? The results of this study demonstrate that it is occasionally inappropriate to use certain translation techniques, such as omission, addition, and change. Khuddro, A. (2023) highlights the possible conflict between the co-translator and the self-translator over the inclusion or deletion of specific textual elements and how this conflict may impact the final product's quality. This study suggests a new critical translation of the ST that addresses some of the gaps left by the present simple translation, such as by considering the author's message and aims and recommending that the two translators employ alternative techniques. The article suggests that collaborative translators should only use one of the two approaches, the functional approach or the literal method, rather than using the two incoherently. The current study suggests potential adjustments to improve the quality of the English translation of this novel.

Shihada, I. M. (2013), in Breaking Silence in Rajja Al Sanea's Girls of Riyadh, examines the position of women in Saudi Arabia and how patriarchy, double moral standards, tribal mentality, and societal hypocrisy undermine their fundamental human rights. In light of the Arab Spring that is sweeping the Arab world, the researcher further

discusses that Al Sanea's Girls of Riyadh is considered a visionary initiative with a broad reach that calls for the advancement and improvement of women's rights in Saudi Arabia. This article employs feminist, analytical, and textual techniques. Shihada, I. M. (2013) concludes that, in a nation as conservative as Saudi Arabia, women in Girls of Riyadh continue to be victims of male supremacy, rigid traditions, tribal rituals, and the misapplication of religion. We also learn about strong women who, despite the difficult situations they face, do not give up and surrender. These women, like Gamrah, Sadeem, Michelle, and Lamees, are full of optimism, dreams, and perseverance despite all the hardships, setbacks, and agony they endure. In actuality, they define their own identities and shape their futures. Stated differently, some women accept modernity while holding on to the virtues ingrained in their culture and faith. Girls of Riyadh is a pressing plea for betterment, reform, and reassessment of Saudi Arabia's women's situation. Saudi women have every right to demand their legal rights and equal standing as fully humane in light of the current Arab revolution sweeping the Middle East.

Khan, D. T. et al (2019) in Islam and Woman in the Contemporary Arab World: An Interpretation of Rajaa al-Sanea's Girls of Riyadh from an Islamic Feminist Perspective, investigates the Islamic feminist interpretation of Rajaa al-Sanea's 2005 novel Girls of Riyadh. Khan, D. T. et al (2019) draws attention to the differences between the Islamic understanding of feminism and the paradigm of Western feminism exemplified in the story under consideration. Islamic feminism guarantees women's equality and its application in the Islamic state and society, while feminism supported by the West focuses on the idea of women's liberalism. Because it believes in elevating women to the status of equals and placing them above males in sociocultural positions, it ultimately results in an anarchic and chaotic society. In the current context, the novel criticizes Saudi Arabia's phallocentric culture and seeks to replace it with a sensate-secular feminism that upholds women's excessive autonomy. Khan, D. T. et al (2019) uses the reader's response approach as a methodology and Islamic feminism as a theoretical model to analyze the existence of overpowering patrilineal mores. According to the research's findings, Islamic feminism is a more appropriate and advantageous replacement for the patriarchal autonomy in the mentioned culture than Western feminism. The state of chaotic secular feminism in the modern world has brought attention to the necessity and significance of Islamic feminism. The study also looks at how Islamic feminism, which guarantees equal rights to everyone without distinction, contrasts with the restrictive and skewed Western conception of feminism. An institution's functions and responsibilities play a major influence in raising a generation. In Islam, women have a crucial role since they form the basis of a family. On the other hand, Islamic civilization traditionally protects women's dignity and grandeur, but Western feminism has given women undue independence and access to institutional

privileges at that expense. They are used by Western feminists as pawns and throwaway commodities, manipulating them against Islamic feminism. Western feminists are antagonistic towards Islamic feminism and encourage women to speak out against the oppressive limitations imposed by this movement. Islam rejects the feminism promoted by the West and upholds women's birthrights by adhering to the Muhammadi Moral Model (MMM), which is based on the teachings of the Qur'an. It upholds equity for each member of the Islamic state and society, irrespective of language variances, gender prejudice, racial discrimination, or ethnic distinctions. The novel received widespread praise from interested readers and Western feminist critics for embracing the Western style of feminism and disproving Islamic feminism. Western feminism's proponents and claimants mostly disparage women's access to education, freedom of choice in marriage, and headscarf use. Khan, D. T. et al (2019) demonstrate that Islam, as a comprehensive code of conduct, deliberately considers all facets of human existence, including the duties and obligations of women as well as their legal rights in society.

Winarni (2010), in his thesis, An Analysis of Gender Discrimination on the Four Major Characters in Novel Banat Al-Riyadh, examines the book written by Rajaa Al Sanea, named The Girls of Riyadh. Winarni (2010) investigates how Saudi Arabian society and culture treat women, specifically with gender inequality as it is portrayed in The Girls of Riyadh. The study focuses on two issues: first, the four major protagonists' experiences with gender discrimination, and second concerns the perspectives of the four central characters on gender inequality. To address the research topic, the novel is meticulously and properly evaluated using the theories of gender and gender discrimination, as well as feminism to demonstrate how women fight prejudice. According to Winarni (2010), women in Saudi Arabia experience some form of gender discrimination. Religious, social, cultural, and political issues are among the causes of discrimination against women in Saudi Arabia. These are all the things that restrict the movement of women and their rights are not equal to those of men. Whether in the context of the household or the public sphere, gender inequality renders males always superior and women always inferior. Torky, E. A. (2018) in the article, Unveiling the Veiled in Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis and Persepolis 2 and Rajaa Alsanea’s Girls of Riyadh: A Revolutionary Perspective, delves into the different types of power imposed on Muslim women in two totalitarian regimes, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These sources of power and control are intricate, necessitating Muslim women in these countries to utilize a variety of strategies to negotiate them. These strategies are evident in governmental institutions, state policies, patriarchal hierarchical relationships, and deeply rooted cultural norms. Torky, E. A. (2018) focuses on clarifying the concept of power in the context of Foucault, as well as how it is interconnected and unified with resistance. This article's central tenet is

Foucault's assertion that Where there is power, there is resistance. The study then securitizes and elaborates on two feminist novels by two modern Middle Eastern women authors: Saudi author Rajaa Alsanea's Banat Al-Riyadh/Girls of Riyadh (2007) and Iranian-French graphic novelist Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood (2003) and Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return (2004). Satrapi and Alsanea both offer fresh portrayals of assertive, revolutionary Muslim women characters in these two texts who oppose both the Western media's portrayal of them and the country's institutionalized cultural norms. In doing so, they subvert the gaze, which imprisons women in rigid, stereotyped roles of passivity and submissiveness, and give voice to the oppressed and voiceless so the process of power and resistance never ends. Gwynne, J. (2013), in "The lighter that fuels a blaze of change: Agency and (cyber)spatial (dis)embodiment in Girls of Riyadh, examines that in Girls of Riyadh, Rajaa Alsanea offers valuable perspectives on the obstacles that Saudi women encounter as they navigate both public and private spheres. Gwynne, J. (2013) delves into the cultural significance of the women's movement, with a particular emphasis on empowerment through online disembodiment and international embodiment. Gwynne, J. (2013) explores the gender-liberating potential of virtual spaces and starts with the argument that young women's perceptions of the relative freedoms granted by globalization and the rules of local cultural tradition are fundamental to their experiences of agency in transnational spaces.

3. Research Methodology

This research uses the theorization of Asma Barlas and Amna Wadud and for the research methods, the methods of Derrida has been applied for analysis. The position of women in Muslim society is examined from a fresh perspective in Barlas's 2019 book, Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an. The majority of Qur'anic readers today, she argues, dictate Muslim women's social roles and the majority of Qur'anic interpretations are patriarchal. Asma Barlas (2019) believes that the Qur'an unequivocally declares men and women to be equal. The egalitarian voices within the Qur'anic text, according to Barlas (2002), are obscured or lost as a result of the patriarchal exegesis of the text and the gendered nature of human language. Amina Wadud (1999) offers the first interpretive reading of the Qur'an by a woman in her book, Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective. This reading affirms and elevates the voice of women in the Qur'an. Progressive Muslims have long maintained that women have been oppressed not by Islam but rather by patriarchal interpretations and applications of the Qur'an. Reexamining and reinterpreting religious texts are, for many, the path to reform. Quran and Woman gives Qur'anic exegesis, one of the core fields of Islamic thought, a gender-inclusive interpretation. To show how certain texts and phrases

defy such interpretations, Wadud (1999) dissects texts and keywords that have been used to restrict women's roles in public and private life and even to defend violence against Muslim women. Her analysis makes clear that the fundamental language of the Qur'an does not contain any gender bias, precedent, or prejudice.

According to Derrida, an origin can only exist through its functioning within a classification and therefore within a system of differences rather than existing independently of its institution. This phenomenon is what Derrida refers to as différance, and deconstruction is built around this concept. Différance is the idea that meaning is dynamic and ever-changing, rather than fixed or static. It results from the ongoing process of compromising between opposing ideas. Examining these conflicting interpretations that come together to produce meaning is what deconstruction necessitates rather than seeking the reality of a natural origin. Writing, or the act of the institution, itself, encapsulates this ongoing struggle between the various meanings that can be interpreted within the institution. Therefore, différance is ingrained in the meaning structure as a result of the translation of thought into language. It simultaneously embodies the limitations imposed on that meaning by the process of text interpretation as well as the intended meaning as written by the author. Meaning is determined in this sense by both what is and is not part of the institution. One idea is always more prevalent than the other and can therefore be excluded at any given time. Although the concept of exclusion implies that which is excluded is not present at all, the reality is that the institution depends on the things that have been excluded to exist. The two are in a hierarchical relationship where one will always be in charge of the other. The concept that holds the upper hand is the one that can establish legitimacy by portraying itself as a reflection of the natural order. This allows it to suppress alternative interpretations, which are left behind as the excluded trace within the dominant meaning.

4.Analysis

Religion and marriage are the institutions in Muslim society that make the patterns of attitudes and behaviors concerning relationships in a given social order. These institutional discourses exist to meet society’s fundamental needs, such as providing structure, guidance, and order. These institutions create discourses and are the cause of gender discrimination in a hegemonic way. Smith (1979) asserts Islam accords women a status of dignity and respect, along with spelled-out rights and duties. The rights of women in Saudi Arabia are determined by several different variables. Religion is the primary element. Islam has an impact on every facet of Saudi Arabian life. Nearly 90% of people in the nation of Sunni Muslims practice Wahhabism. The Ulama are adamantly opposed to gender equality and society is the second component. Women are regarded and viewed

as second-class citizens only due to patriarchal societal norms and regulations. In the household, men also have a very dominant role and have complete authority over their wives or daughters. It is expected of females to submit to their male guardians. The government is the third component. Unrelated men and women are kept apart in all public areas of the Kingdom under the severe gender segregation regulations enforced by the Mutaween. Culture comes last. Saudi Arabia's cultural milieu encourages adherence to the rigid Purdah system.

For marriage, paternal first cousins or related relatives have historically been married. It is traditional for prospective spouses not to meet before the wedding, and fathers, mothers, and other relatives are responsible for arranging weddings. Although these customs are gradually and unevenly evolving, there is a trend toward fewer weddings between close relatives and more communication between the couple before the wedding. While they still plan weddings, parents are more likely to do it covertly and in the background. The first character to get married in the novel is Gamrah. Gamrah's family plans her marriage, just like it happens with other girls. According to the author Rajaa Al Sanea, marriage is the end of independence, individuality, and companionship for Saudi ladies. The family environment in Saudi Arabia imposes constraints on women in many ways, including marriage. The females don't participate in choosing the terms of their weddings. Officially, the husband-to-be and the bride's father sign the marriage contract. Her mother informs Gamrah that a family wants to marry her to their son. Her family is also organizing her wedding. Like Gamrah, the majority of Saudi Arabian women are forced to marry against their will. For many, marriage is a source of regret, grief, and despair, “Every last one of Gamrah’s girlfriends was secretly hoping that the keepsake from her wedding would be the next one to be added.” (p. 13) Al Sanea attempts to construe Islamic teachings in a way that is supportive of women by allowing women to freely select their behaviors and morals, particularly when it comes to making life partner plans and sharing personal experiences. She criticizes Saudi society for denying women equal rights concerning social and civil standing. She chronicles the experiences of these young Saudi women who, in defiance of social conventions, are seeking partnerships that nurture love, trust, and conviction both inside and outside of marriage.

Divorce is a detestable act to God; though it is permitted it is never encouraged, the Prophet of Islam declared to his followers (Jaafar-Mohammad, I., & Lehmann, C. 2011). Jaafar-Mohammad further depicts the sayings of Muhammad SAW that he who treats his wife with the greatest decency and politeness is the most perfect believer. It is the break of a marriage and bond that was created for the creation of a family. Even for divorce, Islam has provided complete guidance, and women are also given rights in this regard. But in male-centered Muslim societies, all the rights are only for men and women

are devoid of their rights. In Girls of Riyadh, Gamrah and Sadeem are divorced resulting in the insults and worst treatment from society. The fact is that only divorced women are treated so poorly by society and end up as prisoners in their own homes. Rashid treats Gamrah in an extremely harsh and impolite manner. He insults and smacks her whenever he pleases. Because a wife is not allowed to do so to her husband if she does not want to be divorced or executed, Gamrah, as a woman, only takes it without interrupting or becoming furious. Sadeem and other characters likewise put up with this behavior. The Saudi government forbids relationships between individuals of opposite sexes who have not yet tied the knot. "One day, as Sadeem and Ali sat together in a café on Al-Thalatheen Street, a band of men from Al-Hai'ah swooped down on them and led the pair off swiftly to two separate GMC jeeps and headed immediately for the organization's nearest bureau." (p. 131)

Men only have the right to divorce, unless there are extremely rare circumstances, according to Mernissi (2003). Women often have fewer options when it comes to filing for divorce than males do in countries where Islam is the predominant religion. Divorced women in Saudi society are seen negatively, as Gamrah's family is forced to keep her within her father's home after she gets divorced. Women are subject to family laws, which are regarded as the domestic realm's private domain. Gamrah is compelled to respect her family's choice of future husband as she has no right to decide about her marriage and even after her married life is not going well and she gets divorced from her husband, she is considered the culprit. She is suffering both physically and mentally and she now has to live the life of a divorced woman, a stigma that does not let women live their own lives. She bravely refuses her family's request to marry her again to Abu Musa'ed, an army commander and a close friend of her uncle, after learning from the mistakes of her first marriage.

"Why? Why do I need a man to shield and protect me? Does your brother think I'm a disgrace, or I cannot protect myself? You people do not realize that I am a grown woman now and I have a son! My words should count and I should be listened to! You think the opposite of how any reasonable family would think. That's even worse than what you did to me in my engagement to Rashid!" (p. 182)

When starting or filing for divorce, women frequently have to deal with financial, legal, and parenting responsibilities in addition to losing their children (Hamada, 2010; Stark, 2004). Muslim women have the option to file for divorce or use the khula system to be married. When a woman uses khula to dissolve her marriage, even if the husband is not at fault, she is the one who violates the terms of the marriage contract and needs to refund her dowry. To be sure, they are not pregnant, women must also wait three menstrual cycles. Divorce has negative attributes and stigma for women as Gamrah's actions are severely

restricted by her family due to her divorce. Since divorced women are only seen negatively in Saudi Arabian society their family is forced to stay at home. She needs to go outside with her mahram if she wants to. People in the community will circulate the obscenest stories about divorced ladies if they continue to go out alone after their divorce. “Gamrah would begin working every night after she performed the evening Ramadan prayer at the huge Mosque downtown.” (p. 220)

Before their wedding celebration and a few months after they are legally married, Waleed abandons Sadeem, causing her first personal catastrophe. Even if the wedding hasn't happened yet, she offers herself to him one night because he is already her legal spouse. After dark, he abruptly vanishes and doesn't return. And at last, she receives a divorce document. She is unaware of what transpired with him. “Sadeem was afloat in a state of bewilderment, waiting for a call or visit from Waleed, dreaming that he would come to her on his knee begging for forgiveness. But he didn’t visit and didn’t call…. An answer did come from Waleed three weeks later, though: Divorced paper!” (p. 34) Men in Saudi Arabia can divorce their wives with ease and without offering a reason, as was the case with Sadeem. Because she believes that Waleed is her legal spouse, she is constantly asking herself why he left her. If women desire a divorce, things are different. To support her divorce claim, they need to appear in court. The majority of Saudi women receive no better treatment than property.

5.Conclusion

The religion Islam is used as a patriarchal instrument to subjugate women in a phallocentric society. The fundamental character of Islam, which is parental, has been overshadowed by the geographical culture of Saudi Arabia, while the cultural influence has rendered Islam patriarchal. Muslim society is not following true Islam and it is following the Patriarchal setups of its culture. Gender differences have become the ultimate foundation for how people are treated in societies where women live subservient lives to men. Islam offers human beings ethical guiding principles to live according to the Quran and Hadith. Islamic instructions are for both men and women but due to the patriarchal culture and society, its implementation is executed only on women. The patriarchal society uses them to subjugate and control women in the community by shaping the commands of Islam according to their wishes and ultimately turning them into societal norms. Unfortunately, women are not given their basic rights. It is the male members of the family who decide their lives all the decisions such as marriage and divorce etc. Social structures such as marriage, inheritance, and divorce provide the norms for relationships that govern social interactions. The basic requirements of society, such as those for structure, direction, and order, are met by these institutions and discourses. These

institutions shape discourses and contribute to gender inequality. This is happening because religion is only used as a tool to reinforce patriarchy. It has long been a tool used by patriarchal societal structures and customs against women.

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