



MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD AND MARGINALIZATION: MISOGYNISTIC NARRATIVES EXPLORED THROUGH DECONSTRUCTING KHIRAD IN HUMSAFAR BY FARHAT ISHTIAQ

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Abstract

The research paper critically examines the portrayal of marriage, motherhood and marginalization through the character of Khirad in the widely acclaimed South Asian drama Humsafar. This paper uses feminist theoretical frameworks, including radical feminism, Sarah Mills feminist perspectives and other models to deconstruct Khirad's journey within a patriarchal frame work. The study explores how Khirad's character navigates societal expectations and familial power dynamics that marginalize women within marriage and motherhood. The research aims to analyze how Khirad's marginalization highlights the systematic inequalities women face in patriarchal societies and the intersection of gender, class and cultural norms in shaping her identity . It investigates how Khirad's character challenges or reinforces misogynistic narratives in family dynamics and societal stuctures. The analysis reveals the duality of motherhood in Kjirad's journey serving as both a source of empowerment and tool of societal control. The significance of this research paper lies in its examination of Humsafar as cultural artifact reflecting patriarchal ideologies. By critiquing Khirad's silenced voice, abandonment and eventual resistance , this paper sheds light on the oppressive structure endure and their resilience within these frameworks. Ultimately, this study contributes to feminist discourse by deconstructing patriarchal narratives in media and advocating for more empowering potrayals of women . This study aims to introduce the concept of strength to females just like khirad's unwavering strength and resilience which tranfrom her from a victim to a symbol of defiance, challenging the traditional foundation of patriarchal norms.

Keywords: *Intersectionality, Marriage, Marginalization, Misogyny, Motherhood, Patriarchal Structures, Subordinate and Subservient*

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1. Introduction

Humsafar is a well-renowned drama based on Farhat Ishtiaq's novel of the same name. It revolves around Khirad and her arranged marriage to Asher, a wealthy and educated man, this becomes the centre of familial conflicts, betrayal, and emotional turmoil which is eventually leading to the struggle of a woman who remains unheard in this patriarchal society. Khirad's character is central to the narrative, representing a woman navigating through societal values that perpetuate **Patriarchal control and class disparity**. Khirad and Asher's marriage serves as a microcosm of societal dynamics where class, gender roles and familial power structures intersect. This intersection is represented by the double oppression faced by Khirad. Khirad's arranged marriage reflects how women's consent is often sidelined in the favour of fulfilling familial obligations. The bond of trust in her relationship is broken by Farida's manipulation, exposing society's tendency to devalue a woman's voice while prioritizing male perspectives. The false accusation and her abandonment reveals the ease with which women are marginalized under the guise of protective family honour. This research paper explores that how motherhood emerges as a pivotal aspect of Khirad's journey, offering her both empowerment and additional societal challenges. This research paper analyzes Khirad's journey through a feminist lens reveals and unveils the layers of oppression she endures and resists. Khirad's marginalization by Farida and abandonment by Asher underscores the systematic inequalities women face in familial and societal settings. Despite the injustices, abandonment, and character assassination, Khirad remains determined to protect her daughter's rights and reclaim her dignity challenges patriarchal norms. The research objectives of this research paper are to analyze how societal values influence Khirad's identity through marriage and motherhood. This paper examines the portrayal of gender marginalization in Khirad and Asher's marriage. It explores motherhood as both a source of empowerment and a tool of societal control in society. This paper assesses 'Humsafar' as a cultural artifact reflecting patriarchal norms and gender dynamics. This paper will shed light on how South Asian dramas portray women's struggle, resilience, and agency within patriarchal frameworks. This research paper will ultimately serve as a tool to deconstruct patriarchal ideologies in media and advocate for more empowering portrayals of women.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper will adopt a feminist theoretical framework to critically analyze Khirad's character in Humsafar, focuses on her experiences of **marriage, motherhood, and marginalization**. This framework will integrate four feminist models. These three models are Radical Feminism, Sarah Mill's Feminist model, Can the subaltern speak? and intersectionality. Radical Feminism critiques the deep-rooted structures of patriarchy and

male dominance, emphasizing the need to dismantle these systems. This model will evaluate how Humsafar portrays patriarchal control within marriage and familial power dynamics, as whole marriage incident revolves around that whether Asher will agree or not for marriage. Khirad's consent was entirely disregarded, with the marriage solely on Asher's acceptance or refusal. Sarah Mills emphasizes the role of structural oppression in shaping women's life. In Humsafar, the institution of marriage contributes to systematic marginalization of Khirad's character as her passive role within the marriage are rooted in Cultural norms that prioritize male authority. Sarah Mills stresses the importance of agency in feminist theory –women's ability to challenge and resist patriarchal structures, this ability is seen in Khirad while her reclamation of her daughter's rights. Can the

Subaltern Speak? { Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak } investigates whether marginalized individuals, especially women, can voice their experiences, sentiments and rights within hegemonic systems. This model is used in this research paper to explore how Khirad's voice is silenced through accusations of infidelity and societal control. Khirad remains unheard during marriage decision and during false accusation of infidelity. Third model Intersectionality [Kimberle Crenshaw], examines how overlapping identities (gender, class, and social status) creates unique forms of oppression. Khirad's identity as a woman from a modest background intersects with patriarchal and class-based prejudices in her marriage and motherhood. This paper uses the model of intersectionality to analyze how these intersections amplify her marginalization, especially through Farida's manipulation and Asher's abandonment. This framework will position Khirad's character as a feminist figure who navigates and challenges systematic marginalization while shedding light on broader social dynamics.

3. Literature Review

This Literature review examines the scholarly perspectives on patriarchal dynamics, motherhood, intersectionality, and media representation, situating these within the frameworks of feminist theories to analyze the journey of Khirad's character in Humsafar. Marriage in patriarchal society often depicted as a beginning of a 'fairy tale' journey for a girl but in reality marriage in this society functions as a mechanism of control, with women's agency marginalized. Radical Feminism critiques the inherent power imbalance in such institutions, arguing that marriage perpetuates male dominance by dictating women as subservient partner. This phenomenon is well evident in the story as it completely revolves around Asher's approval for marriage.

Feminist scholars have long critiqued the institution of marriage as the site of patriarchal control (Beavious, 1949; Firestone, 1970). According to Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, marriage is a social construct designed to reinforce women's subordinate role within the society.

Motherhood hold a dual position in feminist Discourse, serving as both a source of empowerment and a means of reinforcing patriarchal norms. Cultural feminism celebrates the transformative power of motherhood, viewing it as a space where women can assert agency. Khirad's character exemplify this dichotomy. Motherhood is portrayed as a source of agency in numerous literary works such as in 'The Joy Luck Club' by Amy Tan, in which the mothers in this novel empower their daughters. Here motherhood is depicted as a source of strength and a bridge between generations. 'Room' by Emma Donoghue, a novel in which the protagonist, Ma, uses her role as a mother to protect and nurture her son. Her motherhood becomes a source of courage for her. Motherhood is often viewed as a restriction such as this concept is elaborated in the short story 'The Awakening' by Kate Chopin and 'Madame Bovary' by Gustave Flaubert, where the role of motherhood is seen as limitation to personal desire. The character of Khirad elaborates motherhood as an agency as well as a restriction also. Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality provides a lens through which the formation of khirad's character is analyzed, as her identity as a lower class woman exacerbates her marginalization in a wealthy patriarchal family. 'Women at the Crossroads', a research paper on intersectionality in South Asian Women's Literature, this analyzes factors responsible for the oppression of women such as religion and caste. 'Brick Lane' by Monica Ali, the novel narrates the story of Nazneen and examines how her identity is influenced by her gender, cultural background and socioeconomic status. The portrayal of women in South Asian media, particularly in dramas like Humsafar, has often been critiqued for reinforcing misogynistic norms. Shashi Tharoor in *The Elephant, the Tiger, and the Cell Phone* (2007) argues that South Asian media despite its liberation, often perpetuates gendered stereotypes portraying women as passive and subservient. While there is a considerable scholarship on the Feminist analysis of marriage, motherhood and patriarchal structure but there are several gaps that remain in the literature, particularly in relation to drama Humsafar. These gaps are lack of intersection analysis and limited focus on female agency. A focused feminist analysis of Humsafar reveals significant gaps in our understanding of how misogynistic concepts are constructed and deconstructed in media. Moreover, a more intersectional approach would allow for a deeper exploration of how race, class, culture intersect with gender to shape women's experience in South Asian Societies.

3.1. Analysis

In Humsafar, Khirad's marginalization within the role of marriage and motherhood is portrayed as consequence of deeply entrenched patriarchal values and gender expectations. Throughout the series Khirad is subjected to emotional and psychological abuse largely stemming from the societal pressures placed her on as a wife and mother. Khirad's marginalization within her marriage is starkly illustrated by her treatment as an outsider in her martial home. Farida perpetuates the alienation of khirad by planting seeds

of mistrust, suggesting that Khirad is unworthy of Ashar's love. **'Girls like you only care about money and status. You were never in love with Asher'**, these degrading remarks were uttered by Farida, here we can analyze it through intersectionality. Khirad faced these insulting remarks because of 2 reasons, firstly due to her second important gender and secondly due to her socioeconomic background. This highlights how Khirad is dehumanized and accused of ulterior motives, reducing her role as transactional figure. The carefully constructed trap where Farida's preplanned timing makes Asher walk at the worst possible moment was the most critical moment which is the perfect example of loss of women's agency in marriage. The scene reflects Khirad's vulnerability and her inability to fight back against the well-orchestrated plot, showcasing her marginalization within marriage. In that scene she cried and pleaded in front of Asher, **'Believe me Asher,**

Believe me Asher, I am only yours.' Khirad occupies a subaltern position as she is silenced by Ashar's lack of trust and Farida's manipulation of societal and familial structures to frame her as unfaithful. Her plea reflects her desperate attempt to assert her voice and truth but it is drowned out by the patriarchal and hierarchical dynamics at play. Khirad's role as mother is similarly undermined when she is falsely accused of infidelity and expelled from household, leaving her to raise her daughter Hareem, in poverty. Here the women's marginalization is well evident as a daughter, wife and at last as a mother as well. She was marginalized as a daughter when she didn't want to enter Ashar's house as a wife but she had to agree for the marriage. Secondly as a wife when she was happy and satisfied in her marriage but was forced to leave his house due to that manipulative plot. Thirdly as a mother when she sacrificed her on oath of never entering his house but again she was forced but this time she again compromised for the sake of her daughter's life. Khirad's character serves as a powerful lens to explore and critique misogynistic views of women's role in family dynamics. Through her resilience, dignity and refusal to conform to patriarchal expectations, Khirad both reinforces and challenges traditional norms. Initially, Khirad appears to reinforce traditional gender roles. Her silence and endurance in the face of injustice align with societal expectations for women to 'bear everything'. However, Khirad's silent suffering is not a sign of submission rather it becomes a critique of the societal structures. Khirad challenges misogynistic views by asserting her dignity, integrity and independence. **'I am with you only because my daughter needs you not me'**. This highlights her independence as a woman. Moreover, when after the leap Asher wanted to restart his relationship with Khirad she refuses him. This refusal is the example of her dignity that she portrayed as a woman. Khirad's character in Hamsafar navigates societal expectations from the woman as a wife and a mother. As after being a daughter's mother she used to address her self as **'umm-e-hareem' (Hareem's mother)** rather than Khirad. This illustrates how her character conforms to the societal expectations of motherhood. Motherhood serves as both restriction as well as agency for Khirad.

Motherhood restricts Khirad in several ways as her entire life centres around Hareem. She had to leave her studies in order to find suitable job and most importantly she faced and asked Asher's help for the sake of her daughter. Sacrificed her self respect for the sake of her motherhood. On the other hand her motherhood also becomes the source of empowerment and agency. Her unconditional love for Hareem gives her strength to confront Asher and Farida, reclaiming her dignity and asserting her rights. Khirad uses her role as a mother to negotiate power in a society that otherwise marginalizes her. The character of Khirad challenges this misogynistic view that a mother becomes weak for the sake of her children as her role as a mother allows her to wield power and authority in her dealings with Ashar. Khirad refuses to accept the position of passive submission instead she demands respect and justice not for herself alone but for her daughter as well. This transforms her relationship with Ashar from one of vulnerability to one of negotiations and mutual recognitions. In Sarah's feminist theory, agency is viewed not just as a resistance to patriarchal structures but as the active and intentional use of language and power to redefine one's role within society. Khirad's ability to resist Ashar's mistreatment and Farida's manipulation can be seen as an example of agency through discourse. Through her assertive use of language and her protective love for her daughter, Khirad redefines the discourse of motherhood, transforming it from a source of oppression to a source of empowerment. The marginalization and oppression faced by the character of Khirad can be analyzed through an intersection approach. This approach examines how various factors such as gender, class, education and familial dynamics intersect to shape the experiences of marginalization especially for women. Her struggles are emblematic of the structural inequalities many women face, compounded by her gender and class identity. Nobody asked her permission in her marriage rather the whole episode before nikkah revolves around Ashar's agreement. This marginalization is faced by Khirad because of her second important gender and low socio-economic class. An intersectional approach critiques the multifaceted oppression faced by Khirad while exposing broader societal misogyny. Khirad's humiliation at the hands of Farida is not only about being a woman but also her class. Her gender, lack of wealth and societal standing is used to invalidate her voice. By exposing these intersections, drama can be used as a case study to challenge patriarchal values and advocate for more equitable portrayal of women's experiences.

4. Methodology

The methodology for this research in cooperates Sarah Mill's Discourse analysis model, Intersectionality, radical feminism and Simone de Beauvoir's Second Sex framework to critically analyze Khirad's character in Humsafar. This is qualitative feminist discourse analysis that investigates how patriarchal and misogynistic narratives are constructed and perpetuated through the representation of Khirad. Sarah mill's model

examines how language, power and ideology interact in texts such as how Khirad's identity is constructed through dialogues and interactions. How characters (Asher, Farida, Khirad) are positioned within the narrative's power structure and also it includes identifying moments where Khirad's voice is suppressed and dismissed. Khirad's experiences are analyzed how her gender and class intersect to marginalize her. Second Sex model critiques how women are often treated as 'Other' in patriarchal societies, define solely relation to men. This study critiques how Khirad's individuality is overshadowed by her domestic roles and marginalization. For Data Collection primary source is the drama

Humsafar. The focus is placed on key scenes, dialogues and character's interaction involving

Khirad. Secondary sources are feminist theory, intersectionality and media representation in

South Asian contexts. The key elements for analysis are Dialogues, Character Dynamics and Cultural and Social contexts. In method of analysis discourse analysis is applied and textual analysis of key dialogues is carried out. Dialogues highlighting Khirad's marginalization are identified and analyzed. Through the lens of narrative positioning it is analyzed that how

Khirad's voice is positioned relative to other characters. This study situates the drama in its socio-cultural contexts analyzing the patriarchal values embedded in South Asian marriage and motherhood. This study also analyzes class dynamics and their influence on gender based discrimination and oppression reinforcing societal hierarchies. The following questions are suggested by Sarah Mills which makes it possible to track down the ways that texts or dialogues encode gender. It will aid us to investigate ways in which gender is dealt by our society. These questions will be answered with respect to drama Humsafar.

1. What sort of text it is? What genre does it belong to?

It belongs to the drama genre.

2. Is there a tendency for women or men to be associated with this type of text?

This drama primarily appeals to female audience due to emotional conflicts and a strong female protagonist.

3. Does it portray woman as representational object?

Women are central as representational objects in Humsafar as it portrays women as nurturers, victims and moral anchors.

Gender and Writing;

4. Are the sentences short or long?

The dialogues consist of short and emotionally charged sentences. Subordinate clauses are commonly used to express causality and justification. Coordinate clauses are also used in dialogues to convey contrast and conflict.

5.Are the verbs concerned with actions or emotions?

The verbs predominantly reflect emotions rather than actions such as Love, Understanding, betrayal and Trust

6. Is the narration first person or third person?

The television drama uses a visual third person omniscient perspective , allowing the audience to witness the emotions and conflicts of multiple characters.

7. What makes you assume that the voice of author is male or female?

The voice of author Farhat Ishtiaq is assumed to be female because of focus on traditional feminine themes such as emotional resilience, motherhood and familial relationships.

8.Does the text address you as male or female?

This drama assumes a heteronormative and patriarchal lens primarily addresses female audience through its focus on Khirad's struggle , emotions and relationships.

9.Does the drama uses pronouns You ,I, and We ?

It primarily uses dialogues involving 'I' and 'you'. These pronouns personalize the narrative , creating emotional intimacy with the audience.

10.Does the text or drama assume that you have certain elements of background knowledge?

Yes, the text assumes that the viewers have knowledge of South Asian Family structures and regarding arranged marriages as well. It assumes that the viewers have understanding of class hierarchies and how they influence relationships.

11. Is this background knowledge drawing on stereotypical assumptions about men and women?

Yes, the text draws on stereotypical gender roles as men being business owner and women as caregivers.

Gender and clause/sentence level;

12. Are metaphors or figurative language used that draw upon gendered assumptions?

Yes, the drama uses figurative language rooted in gendered assumptions as women often compared to fragile or pure elements like flowers or moon. Khirad is referred as 'masoominnocent' by Asher, implying purity and vulnerability.

13. Analyze the transitivity choices. Are they different for males and females represented in drama?

Khiraad's character revolves around relational processes as her actions are often associated to emotional connections. Asher's character associated with material action intention, reflecting his role as decision maker.

Gender and Discourse Level;

14. Are there certain words that are gender specific?

Yes, words like **massom-innocent** and love are frequently associated with Khiraad while

Asher is described with terms responsible and angry.

15. Whose point of view does the drama emanate from?

The narrative primarily focuses on Khiraad's perspective but occasionally shifts to Asher providing insight to his internal conflict.

5. CONCLUSION

This research paper investigates the journey of Khiraad through marriage and motherhood and analyze these terms as the tools used for her marginalization. It further explores that how she transforms her motherhood from the tool of marginalization to the key to empowerment. Marriage in Humsafar serves as both a platform for Khiraad's oppression and a crucible for her transformation. The marital dynamic mirrors the patriarchal expectations that women endure regardless of emotional and psychological cost. Yet, within this space of betrayal and alienation Khiraad's silent strength emerges, subverting the conventional depiction of a victim by showcasing her moral fortitude and unwavering love for her daughter. Motherhood, as depicted in Humsafar as dual-edged construct. The return of Khiraad for the sake of Hareem's health can viewed as the restriction imposed by motherhood. On the other hand, this drama conveys the idea that how motherhood can serve a redemptive force within restrictive patriarchal frameworks. As Khiraad could never enter Asher's office but Umm-e harem was granted the permission to enter and claim her rights. The misogynistic narratives in Humsafar are deconstructed through the lens of intersectionality in this paper. In conclusion, Humsafar offers a compelling exploration of Khiraad's marginalization by shedding light on the complex interplay between agency and oppression. This also suggests that how a women can become the savior of her own dignity rather than depending on any male supporter just like Khiraad who decides to value her self respect regardless of societal pressures and expectations. Khiraad's journey demonstrates the strength and resilience of women in the face of systemic injustice, while raising important questions about limitation of empowerment within patriarchal frameworks. This analysis invites further exploration into hoe popular narratives can both challenge and reinforce societal norms.

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