

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Rational

It has been said that the ways we live and interact with each other in everyday life are shaped by the idea of gender which is a central organizing factor in societies as it assigns public activities, roles and behaviors for men and women. Modern-day life is a result of corporative actions between men and women. No country in the modern world can be progressive, improved and advanced without the help of women. Women in our society are often seen in working positions, with administrative power and authority. Women have been selected to work in a high position as men such as prime ministers, administrators and company executives.

On the contrary, all of these perspectives and perceptions of women unfortunately do not change in some patriarchal societies, where women subordination remains. Nowadays, gender inequality still seems to be a problem in some societies. In many places in the world, women are still considered as inferior to men. Patriarchy affects women's struggles to move forward in society. Not only in public contexts, patriarchy or male domination is also presented in the private sphere. The topics of patriarchy and gender inequality have been studied worldwide by feminists, activists and academics in the last few decades because of the awareness of women's rights.

Women are treated differently in different religions, societies and cultures. For examples, in a Buddhist society, women are not allowed to enter some religious places. Also, in Japanese culture, women are forbidden to climb up to the top of Omine Mountain known as the sacred mountain in Nara. In an Islamic society, people from the outside oftentimes observe that Muslim women are oppressed by their religion. It is because Muslim women have often been portrayed in the media as an inferior group who are under men's control. In fact, Islam is a religion which teaches Muslims to hold women in high regard. The Qur'an (4:19), states that "O you who believe, you are forbidden to inherit women against their will, and you should not treat them with

harshness” (Rahmar, par. 4). This indicates that women should be treated with respect, perhaps given a right to have education and to own property. In contrast to this part of the Qur’an, Islamic societies seem to limit the roles and status of Muslim women. For example, women are murdered by honor killings, they undergo genital mutilation, they get married at a young age to a man selected by their parents or they are not allowed to access education. Besides, most of them become victims of sexual assault. Instead of getting fair justice, many Muslim women get punished for rape crime because they are women (Shaykh, par.2).

Islam is considered as the second largest world religion of which there has been a number of researches related to gender issues and Muslim patriarchal societies, together with any kind of media which represents and reveals the subordinated status of Muslim women in the Middle Eastern countries. According to Blakeman’s “The Muslim Veil in America: A Symbol of Oppression or Empowerment,” women in Muslim countries are dominated by men (1). Blakeman reveals in her study that Muslim women have to cover their hair and head by the veil. The purpose of wearing the veil is to cover up a person’s beauty to protect her from crime that could be committed by men. However, it causes men to feel curious about what lies under the veil and that finally puts women in danger (34). In addition, Tiffany D. Reed discusses about the veil in her work “Modern Middle Eastern Women and their Rising Impact on Society” that the idea of the veil has been changed. The veil is no longer just a religious tool, it is seen as a new source of power and beauty in the Middle East (32).

According to most Western conceptions, Muslim women especially in Middle Eastern countries are viewed as a group of women who is not allowed to have their own will and property. Michel Foucault, the French postmodernist, shapes the understanding of power by pointing out in, *Sexuality: an Introduction* published in 1990, that where there is power, there will be resistance (95). He also stated in his book’s *Discipline and punish: The Birth of the Prison* published in 1995 that power is not only described in negative terms of definitions, it can be a positive force in the society (194). Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate how the roles and images of Muslim women are portrayed through female characters in the novel *The Blood of Flowers* by Anita Amirrezvani who spent more than nine years writing this book. The study aims to analyze how Muslim women live and cope with their lives within the so-called Muslim

patriarchal society as reflected in *The Blood of Flowers*.

In this study, the research question is “ How are gender roles and images of Muslim women portrayed through female characters in *The Blood of Flowers*?” Apart from studying Muslim women’s fate in patriarchal society, the study also explores how the female protagonist liberates herself and resists male power within the Muslim patriarchal society.

1.2 Purposes of the Study

1) To study how gender roles and images of Muslim women are portrayed through female characters in *The Blood of Flowers*.

2) To investigate how the female protagonist liberates herself and resists patriarchal power in Muslim patriarchal society.

1.3 Educational Advantages

The general public would be aware of gender differences that give men unfair privilege to control women.

1.4 Research designs, scope and methods

This research aims to study the portrayal of Muslim women in Muslim patriarchal society as reflected in the novel *the Blood of Flowers* by Amirrezvani, by analyzing the events that happen to the female characters. I will discuss how female characters are treated in the novel and find out if and how the female protagonist can liberate herself. Marxist and Radical Feminist theory, the concept of patriarchal society and genders in Islam are employed as frameworks for the analysis.

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