

POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE SHORT STORY
COLLECTION *IN OTHER ROOMS, OTHER WONDERS* BY DANIYAL
MUEENUDDIN

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ABSTRACT

*This research analyzes the short story collection *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Daniyal Mueenuddin from Postcolonial Feminist perspective. This study illustrates the impact of patriarchy and oppression on the lives of women in the selected short stories. The main characters in these short stories highlight the struggles and injustice faced by the women of Pakistan. The qualitative textual analysis is carried out through the concept of "Sisterhood" by Chandra Mohanty. The analysis of these short stories shows that the women living in postcolonial societies are not only fighting for their equal rights but also for their identity as a postcolonial subject. The study examines the psychological impact of oppression on the women and how each of them react in their own way, some of them resist to it and others willingly accept it as a part of their life. The study focuses on looking how Daniyal Mueenuddin uses these characters to explore different situations and reactions of women.*

Keywords: Postcolonial Feminism, Legacies of Colonialism, Socioeconomic Structures, and Women's Organization.

Introduction

Pakistan, a nation created by South Asia's decolonization in 1947, bears the indelible scars of British colonial control throughout its cultural, social, and political fabric. Pakistan, as a postcolonial country, is grappling with colonial legacies that continue to affect its identity, power structures, and socioeconomic hierarchies. The junction of gender and class, which is intimately woven into the fabric of society, is one of the basic aspects of this postcolonial experience.

Pakistani literature emerges as a potent tool for examining the complexity of postcolonial life in this environment. *In Other Rooms and Other Wonders* a collection of short stories published in 2009 by Daniyal Mueenuddin, provides a captivating literary prism through which to investigate the lived realities of Pakistanis from all social strata. Mueenuddin's stories go through feudal landowner's realms, working-class worker's domains, and middle-class professional domains, revealing the complexities of a society contending with tradition, modernity, and the lingering legacies of colonialism.

Feminist literary analysis, reinforced by postcolonial theory insights, provides a crucial framework for deciphering this complexity. It enables a detailed examination of how the female characters in *In Other Rooms and Other Wonders* navigate their identities and agency in a postcolonial and patriarchal culture. It also allows us to investigate the intersections of gender, class, and colonial history, shedding light on the obstacles and opportunities that women from various backgrounds face.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To investigate female agency in stories, explore their abilities to resist against the existing conventions, assert their identities, and make choices within the restrictions of their circumstance
- To analyze the impact of colonial legacies on the lives of women in the tales, how it continues to shape gender norms and power structures in postcolonial Pakistan

1.2 Research Questions

- 1.How does Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms and Other Wonders* show women's roles and agency in a postcolonial Pakistani society, and how do these portrayals relate to postcolonial feminist theory?
- 2.How do the stories in *In Other Rooms and Other Wonders* demonstrate the persistent impact of colonial legacies on gender dynamics in postcolonial Pakistan, and how do these legacies intersect with class structures?

1.3 Significance of the Study

As it is a general assumption that the research work works as a chain and it leaps forward.

It continues from one angle to another. This research is one Angle to the post-feminist perspective on the book *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* by Danial Mueenuddin. This dissertation is useful to those who want to continue their research work on this aspect. This research work is a mere drop in the sea of further work. Hence, it is recommended that the research should be carried on this book to explore and extract more ideas and themes about this book. In addition to it, it is equally imperative to delve into to probe numerous other perspectives on this work.

This research is significant because it presents a new angle which has not been sought after prior to this. This study investigates from the feminist perspective on the issue which is a universal issue and the problems which women face even today like patriarchy, gender-based violence and gender inequality to name a few. It is well illustrated in the story *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* where Husna is mistreated and her identity is exploited. Furthermore, this research opens the gates to critically analyze the patriarchal structures which are rampant and prevalent in today's society and discusses the topic from Asian lens which was before largely researched from the Western lens. Last but not the least, this study will be a guidance to comprehend the book *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* in a more critical way.

Literature Review

In Other Rooms, Other Wonders by Daniyal Mueenuddin is a magnificent work of contemporary Pakistani literature that provides readers with a sophisticated and multidimensional analysis of postcolonial culture via a female lens. This collection of

interconnected short stories, published in 2009, delves into the lives of varied characters navigating the intricacies of a quickly changing Pakistan. Mueenuddin, a highly recognized writer of Pakistani and American heritage, crafts a tapestry of novels in a postcolonial context that reflect the complicated interplay of power, class, and gender.

She is simply something to be ravished and enjoyed until the goodness wears off and satiation is attained. Her most important component of identification, her role as a mother and homemaker, does not provide her with any identity. She is simply a domestic helper and the mother of thirteen children. In this context, her only accomplishment is giving Nawabdin a “wanted son” (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 18). Her submissive status as Nawabdin’s wife is clearly defined by the method in which they eat dinner: “Nawab ate first, then the girls, and finally his wife” (Mueenuddin, 2009, p. 18). She is virtually always found bending over the stove, attempting to light the fire wood in order to prepare dinner for her spouse, or sitting at his feet on the bed. The habit of colonial rulers imposing compliance on natives is at work here, but under the guise of cultural standards. The situation is different, but the normative essence of the interaction is the same: the ruler demands everlasting loyalty, blind allegiance, and obedience, and the passive, voiceless wife is the subaltern deprived of agency and the opportunity to express opposition.

The status of the other women in the family, namely Nawabdin’s eleven daughters, is considerably worse than that of Nawabdin’s wife. While his wife is a companion, his daughters are an annoyance that he can’t wait to get rid of. Furthermore, Nawabdin uses them to justify his bribery. Because he must pay for their dowry in order to marry them off, he, like many others in society, believes he can engage in corrupt acts. Nawabdin appears as a desperate parent attempting to do the right thing for himself, while his daughters remain shadowy characters in the shadows of poverty and the reasons for his desperate acts.

Nawabdin’s wife and daughters do not have voices. The wife has no control over what her husband does. His decision to engage in corruption is not contested, nor is the manner in which it occurs. She can’t have an opinion or be competent about something as simple as starting a fire, which falls completely within her area. The denial of voice is one part of the female voice’s absence, but there is another, perhaps more essential, aspect as well: her ignorance of the knowledge that she has been suppressed.

Theoretical Framework

Data Analysis

The female characters in Mueenuddin’s collection navigate a complex spectrum of resistance and acceptance in the face of oppression. It is important to recognize that their responses are not monolithic but are shaped by their individual circumstances, backgrounds, and desires. The characters’ agency is mediated by their socioeconomic status, familial ties, and the constraints imposed by a patriarchal society. It is essential to recognize that the characters’ responses to the oppression are not solely a result of gender dynamics but are also influenced by intersecting factors such as class, caste, and personal histories. The intersectionality of their identities complicates any simplistic categorization of resistance or acceptance.

These stories offer the readers a door to the contemporary Pakistan where Pakistani masculinity is built on the divergent grounds of tribal values, religious beliefs, physical factors and deep-rooted class divisions. Therefore, Pakistani masculinity is multifaceted and complex because a Pakistani man seems to juggle his conflicting roles: loving yet dominant; pious yet virile; married yet unfettered; modern yet traditional. In a country where class is established and maintained primarily through social or material dominance, masculinity is predatory. Since money and social position are interdependent, the easiest alternative victim of exercising authority is a woman. (Sadaf, n.d, p.02).

Within the pages of Daniyal Mueenuddin’s *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, we are

granted access to the intricate layers of contemporary Pakistan, a landscape where the concept of masculinity is constructed upon a mosaic of diverse influences. These stories serve as a portal into a society where Pakistani masculinity emerges from a complex interplay of tribal customs, religious convictions, physical attributes, and deeply entrenched class divisions. In a country where social class is largely defined and maintained through either social standing or material affluence, masculinity takes on a predatory quality. Money and social position are tightly intertwined, and in such a landscape, the exercise of authority often finds its easiest target in women. Thus, the oppression of women within this patriarchal framework becomes emblematic of the wider power dynamics at play, where women often bear the brunt of societal hierarchies and the patriarchal constructs that underpin them.

Mueenuddin's narratives provide a lens through which we can witness how these patriarchal norms are played out in the lives of female characters. They offer a profound insight into the multifaceted nature of male dominance and the consequent challenges faced by women who must navigate these oppressive waters. In examining these stories, we gain a deeper understanding of how women in contemporary Pakistan grapple with their position in a society where the complexity of masculinity often translates into the subjugation of the female. Through these narratives, we explore not only the challenges women face but also the strategies they employ, whether through resistance or accommodation, to negotiate their existence within this intricate web of gender-based oppression.

In essence, Mueenuddin's collection serves as a mirror reflecting the intricate interplay of gender, class, and power within the context of contemporary Pakistan. Through our exploration of these narratives, we aim to unravel the layers of male dominance and female oppression, shedding light on the profound complexities that define patriarchal Asian societies and the ways in which women both confront and navigate these challenges in their quest for agency and empowerment.

As it is claimed by Kandiyoti that, as the belief in male superiority becomes increasingly persuasive, it grows more challenging for men to consistently embody and live up to this ideal. Masculinity is not an inherent status, but rather an attained one that is never permanently secured due to the ever-present threat of being stripped of it. Consequently, the constant need to affirm one's masculinity results in a preoccupation with its possible loss. In Asian societies like Turkey, where female sexuality is strictly regulated while men are expected to display their masculine prowess, men may become exceedingly concerned about the potential erosion of their sexual identity. This state of affairs might partially explain the enduring connection between danger and the female sex, with the possibility of subjugation through violence arising especially when female behavior is perceived as a challenge to masculinity or a male's "honor." (Sadaf, n.d, p.03).

Mueenuddin's interwoven stories, by employing the vocabulary that hints at the male insecurity, allow a cross-sectional view of Pakistani class system.

In Other Rooms, Other Wonders present a variety of female characters with their varied feminine as well as masculine personality traits. In *Nawabdin Electrician*, Nawab works as an electrician as well as a mechanic. With twelve daughters and a son, the amount he gets barely suffices him and so he works day and night multiple duties. the salary he received from K.K. Harouni for tending the tube wells would not even begin to suffice. He set up a little one-room flour mill, run off a condemned electric motor – condemned by him. He tried his hand at fishfarming in a little pond at the edge of one his master's fields. He bought broken radios, fixed them and resold them. He didn't demur even when asked to fix watches, though that enterprise

did spectacularly badly, and in fact earned him more kicks than kudos, for no watch he took apart ever kept time again. (p.09).

Nawab is a tireless worker who does multiple jobs to feed his thirteen children. His wife is represented as a minor character but her presence can be felt from the above lines and one can identify her role in the story, that is, merely a tool of reproducing children, a true image of illiterate and patriarchal society. Women like Nawabdin's wife are victimized who have no voice or choice other than what their husbands, or the male heads of the family desires.

Nawab's wife, with a 'strong body' and 'long mannish face' seems to do all the house chores and works as a caretaker for the children. "He would raise his nose and sniff the air, to see if he could find out what his wife had cooked for dinner; and then he went in to her, finding her always in the same posture, making him tea, fanning the fire in the little hearth". (p.11). The role of Nawab's wife is that of a typical woman in a Pakistani society; a woman who is believed to be solely a housewife; to serve his husband and raise the kids. Nevertheless, to mention that she is deliberate in accepting her role as most of the Pakistani women do. Although Nawabdin's portrayal is that of a loving husband, and not of someone who would intentionally oppress or indicate violence on the women, the contemporary Pakistani society seems to be structured in a way that has put forward the 'good woman' stance in a way that marginalizes the women of society by confining them into a particular patriarchal box.

Come on, make us some parathas. For all of us? Pretty Please? I put out the fire.

So, light it. Or rather, you just sit here, I'll light it.

You can never light it. I'll end up doing it anyway, she said, getting up. (p.13).

The initial request for parathas is a common example of how women are often expected to fulfill traditional caregiving roles in a patriarchal society. The assumption is that women should cook and serve food to the men in the household without question. Nawabdin could see that his wife was already in the kitchen and when she's out to sit and relax, she's been given another duty to fulfill. No just this, but she is also expected to complete it without any question.

Furthermore, the statement "You can never light it. I'll end up doing it anyway" emphasizes the difficulty men face in performing even simple domestic tasks such as lighting a hearth, as they have seldom been placed in situations requiring them to complete any household chores. It signifies the 'man child' nature of our society where men are brought up without any instructions or learning for the basic needs of household. On the other hand, women are expected to learn all the household duties since their childhood. The woman's final statement, "I'll end up doing it anyway," reflects the resignation that many women in patriarchal societies might feel. Even when they resist initially, they often succumb to societal expectations and end up performing tasks they did not want to do, reinforcing the gender roles expected of them. The entire exchange highlights the normalized nature of these gender roles. It is taken for granted that the woman should cook, and the man should assert his authority, with no room for questioning or challenging these roles.

Nawabdin's wife is relegated to a traditional, subservient role, which is evident in her portrayal as someone who simply obeys her husband's orders. She lacks economic agency. Her inability to earn a living and dependence on her husband leaves her vulnerable and powerless. This reflects the economic oppression faced by many women in traditional societies where their roles are often limited to homemaking. She remains confined to her home, not venturing out or

participating in the larger community. This isolation is often a result of cultural norms that restrict women's mobility.

Another such instance is vividly depicted in the short story which strongly contributes to the portrayal of subservient status that women in a typical Asian society often face; "Nawab ate first, then the girls, and finally his wife." (p.12). The sequence of eating in this phrase establishes a clear hierarchy within the household, with Nawab at the top, followed by the girls and finally his wife. This hierarchy implies that Nawab's needs and desires are prioritized over those of his wife and daughters, reflecting a deeply ingrained patriarchal structure. The fact that Nawab, as the male head of the household, eats first underscores the privilege accorded to men in such societies. By depicting the wife's place at the end of the dining order, the phrase highlights the submissiveness expected of women in such societies. Women are conditioned to accept their secondary status; similar to how Nawabdin's wife accepts her secondary status, and to prioritize the comfort and desires of male family members.

Though the girls aren't deaf, they are not given voice throughout the story just like their mother. Moreover, they are presented as a financial burden in terms of dowry, "If he had been the governor of Punjab, their dowries would have beggared him [. . .] for each daughter, beds, a dresser, trunks, electric fans, dishes, six suits of cloth for the groom, six for the bride, perhaps a television, and on and on and on." (p.08). However, sometimes the possession as well as the absence of dowry can still lead to the vulnerability of women and cannot maintain a secure future for them as depicted in our next story titled *About a Burning Girl*.

The other story *About a Burning Girl* invites scrutiny of an employer's perspective to explore the self-interested callousness that the servants are subjected to within systemic forms of power. It explores the servants' vulnerability to the law as they contend with both the vagaries of criminal justice and the amorality of the employers. In depicting the warped perspective of such an employer, Mueenuddin turns the self-absorption of a middle-class male narrator into the butt of comic satire making clearer that how a corrupt perspective can invite critical distance rather than sympathy or identification. (Hai, 2014).

A male servant Khadim is arrested for burning his brother's wife to death. The facts are yet to be disclosed but uncaring of the truth, the wife of the judge demands her servant back; "Good servants are impossible to find." (104). By highlighting the judge's disregard for justice as well as for a woman who dies a brutal death, and altogether his willingness to manipulate the medical and legal systems, Mueenuddin asks us to judge both the judge and the system, and in turn, to examine the amorality of a bourgeoisie that finds it indispensable that routine comforts it demands of servants whose lives and ethics it regards as having no connection to its own. (Hai,2014).

The lady has been murdered by the proper planning of her own family's men. This highlights that how women in a patriarchal society are considered the property of men, the tools for their advantage and comfort. Khadim's brother's wife, the victim, is depicted as a lower-class woman, and her marginalization is exacerbated by her gender. She is subjected to economic exploitation, domestic violence, and limited agency due to her lower social status. This intersectionality illustrates how the legacy of colonialism perpetuates inequalities, as the colonial system reinforced existing class hierarchies and imposed patriarchal norms on indigenous cultures.

These stories take the readers from the outwardly glorious and sophisticated rooms of

Lahore to the mud villages and beyond showing the interconnected lives of masters and servants. (Akbar, 2009).

Mueenuddin uncovers the complex power structures of master-servant, parent-child, husband-wife, and lover-beloved relationships. The victims are not only the economically

disenfranchised women but also the women who belong to the elite class, struggling to gain control over their lives. Women occupy a prominent position in all of the Mueenuddin's stories yet remain insignificant members of their society. (Akhtar & Almas, 2019). Their names too, remain hidden throughout the stories and whenever mentioned, are mentioned in relation to their husbands', masters', or brothers' names.

Another story of Daniyal Mueenuddin *Our Lady of Paris*, which was the first short story that got published in a foreign journal is a kind of story that could be relatable to many urban Pakistanis who went abroad to study. The middle-class Helen, the American girlfriend of Sohail Harouni, (the rich Pakistani kid and the Yale Law School student of '*Our Lady of Paris*) likes to keep close to Sohail. She enjoys all the benefits that she gets loving with Sohail and is willing to sacrifice her will to live a life of wealth. She seduces him whenever she feels like he is being distant with her. She seems to use her body and beauty in order to keep Sohail close and thus, attracting the wealth.

Just like the preceding story, this story also highlights the fact that the only sharp weapon in a patriarchal society that the women possess are their bodies. However, the difference between the two stories lies in the fact that the woman in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* belonged to a poor class, whereas in *Our Lady of Paris*, the woman belongs to a rich class. This helps us to conclude that women from all social backgrounds think that the only way to be considered successful as well as a part of society, they need to use their beauty and have to perform sexual favors. *Our Lady of Paris* is represented as an ambiguous woman of an urban society.

Rafia, the mother of Sohail, attributes her son's gentleness as his weakness which is one of the major notions of a patriarchal society. In a patriarchal society, men are demanded to be cruel, ruthless, emotionless, and violent. These are the qualities of toxic masculinity in a patriarchal society which the men are often proud of. Rafia asserts;

"Sohail is gentle – not weak, soft. That's one of the reasons we both love him and it's also his greatest flaw." (p.121).

The distinction between "gentle" and "weak, soft" implies that Sohail carries traits typically associated with femininity, yet manages to maintain respect and admiration from those around him. This blurring of gendered expectations subverts the dominant patriarchal norms and showcases the potential for acknowledging alternative expressions of masculinity within a postcolonial context. The statement also highlights the fact that So-hail's gentleness is seen as his weakness, suggesting the vulnerability that comes with defying gender norms in a sociocultural setting. Overall, this dialogue contributes to postcolonial feminism by celebrating non-normative

expressions of gender, while simultaneously underscoring the fragility and potential pitfalls of such defiance within a patriarchal society.

Mueenuddin skillfully utilizes the concept of spatial confinement experienced by women as a means to articulate the oppressive circumstances faced by South Asian females. These women attribute their regional identity as the underlying cause for their disadvantaged and restricted existence, confined by societal norms and expectations. The author's presentation of this theme effectively highlights the ramifications of geographic and cultural influences on the lives of women in South Asia. (Haque & Afzal, 2021). As Rafia from *Our Lady of Paris* expresses, "The one thing I've missed, I sometimes feel, is the sensation of being absolutely free, to do exactly what I like, to go where I like, to act as I like. I suspect that only an American ever feels that.

You're not weighed down by your families, and you aren't weighed down by history." (p.125).

However, the response of Helen opens another vista under the extent of mental and spatial enclosure, universally, as she claims; "Americans aren't freer than anyone else. Just because an American runs away, to Kansas or Wyoming, doesn't mean he succeeds in escaping whatever it is he left behind. Like, all of us, he carries it within him." (p.125).

Not just it, in fact, the epigraph of Daniyal Mueenuddin's short stories collection *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* perfectly exemplifies the very notion of men's mindset regarding women in a male dominated society.

Three things for which we kill – Land, women and gold.

– Punjabi Proverb

This epigraph encapsulates a profound and haunting exploration of the patriarchal society that forms the backdrop of Daniyal Mueenuddin's short stories. The epigraph's stark declaration

–
"Three things for which we kill – land, women and gold" – immediately draws attention to the themes of violence and ownership that run throughout the collection. These three elements are not presented as mere objects of desire, but as objects for which individuals are willing to resort to the most extreme measures, including murder. This establishes a dark and chilling tone from the outset, highlighting the ruthlessness with which these societal norms are upheld.

Firstly, the notion of "land" as one of the coveted possessions to kill for underscores the deeply ingrained concept of territorialism and the importance of landownership in this society. In many traditional patriarchal societies, land is not just a means of sustenance but also a symbol of power and prestige. The ownership of land grants authority, and it is often seen as a marker of a man's success and virility. This emphasis on landownership not only perpetuates a hierarchical structure but also limits opportunities for women, who are typically excluded from property rights, as is depicted in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* through Husna's character as she quotes that "My dad can give me nothing; he is feeble and has lost his associations" (p.109). They are treated as mere extensions of their male relatives, unable to possess or inherit land in their own right. Consequently, women's lack of agency in land matters reflects the broader patriarchal system's dis-empowerment of women.

The inclusion of "gold" in the list of things people kill for draws attention to the economic aspects of this man-centric society. Gold is often associated with wealth and opulence,

and in this context, it symbolizes the materialistic pursuits that drive individuals to commit heinous acts.

The relentless pursuit of wealth becomes a driving force behind the characters' actions, often at the expense of others, particularly women. This dictatorial society portrayed in Mueenuddin's stories value economic success above all else, perpetuating a cycle where women are marginalized and commodified to serve men's economic interests. Women, in this context, are often seen as assets to be exchanged or exploited for financial gain, reinforcing their subordinate position within this society.

However, it is the inclusion of "women" in the epigraph that serves as the most potent representation of the patriarchal society's oppressive nature. The very fact that women are listed alongside land and gold as objects worth killing for underscores their dehumanization and objectification. In this society, women are treated as property, to be acquired, controlled, and disposed of at will. The epigraph suggests that women's lives are deemed expendable, and their agency is systematically stripped away. It echoes the idea that women are reduced to commodities, their worth measured by their ability to fulfill traditional gender roles and serve the interests of men.

Furthermore, the choice of the word "kill" in the epigraph is significant. It implies not only physical violence but also the systematic erasure of women's identities and autonomy. Women in this society are subjected to emotional, psychological, and physical violence, all of which contribute to their dehumanization and subjugation. Their voices are silenced, their desires are disregarded, and their lives are often dictated by the men who consider them their property. One of the key elements that emerge from Mueenuddin's storytelling is the way women's bodies are used as currency within these men dictatorial society. They are exchanged in marriages, used to forge alliances, and exploited for sexual gratification. The commodification of women's bodies underscores their complete lack of agency and the extent to which they are regarded as objects to be controlled and manipulated by men. The epigraph's mention of "women" as something worth killing for becomes chillingly tangible in these narratives, where women's lives are sacrificed for the preservation of patriarchal power structures.

The epigraph's portrayal of women as objects to be owned and controlled also finds resonance in the theme of marriage within the stories. In many instances, marriage is depicted as a transaction in which women are married off to suit the interests of their male relatives or to consolidate wealth and power. Love and personal choice are often disregarded in favor of societal expectations and economic considerations. This further reinforces the idea that women's lives are determined by the desires and needs of men, reducing them to pawns in a patriarchal game.

Daniyal Mueenuddin's choice of epigraph, "Three things for which we kill – land, women, and gold," serves as a powerful and evocative encapsulation of the man-controlled society depicted in his short story collection, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. This epigraph underscores the themes of power, ownership, and exploitation of women that permeate the stories. Through its stark declaration, it highlights the brutal consequences of a society that treats women as property, systematically stripping them of agency and humanity. Mueenuddin's narratives provide a harrowing glimpse into the lives of women trapped within this oppressive system, where their bodies, dreams, and desires are sacrificed on the altar of patriarchal

dominance. Ultimately, the epigraph serves as a haunting reminder of the urgent need for societal change and gender equality in such oppressive systems.

The second story of Mueenuddin's to appear in *The New Yorker* is *A Spoiled Man*. In this story, some poor parents sell their little naive girl as a commodity to an old watchman, for whom she's nothing more than a housekeeper.

The girl, a tiny thing of nineteen or twenty, had an impediment, and spoke not in sentences, but rather strings of sounds, cooing or repeating words [. . .] but when she settled in, he found that she could more or less cook." (p.177).

It is important to note that the girl is described as being "sold" by her parents, as if she were a mere commodity or object. This dehumanization of the girl accentuates her marginal position in society, where poor families treat their daughters as disposable possessions rather than human beings with desires and aspirations of their own. Furthermore, the age of the girl highlights the vulnerability and helplessness that comes with being young and inexperienced. By using words like "tiny" and "little," the girl's perceived insignificance within this society is underscored.

Moreover, her physical impediment worsens her vulnerability – instead of being treated as an individual with special needs, she gets traded off as if her disability does not matter, perpetuating her status as 'lesser than' in a male-dominated world. The girl being referred to as "the thing" reflects how women in a patriarchal society are treated as merely things and not as human beings.

The fact that "more kept arriving" at the funeral, with women "clicking through the front vestibule in high heels," underscores the idea that women are not just passive participants; they are actively taking part in the event. This continuous arrival of women challenges the notion that they can or cannot be marginalized or controlled by men. The crowds of women highlight the lack of male heirs. This surrounds Harouni's death with a sense of feminine triumph. (Sadaf, n.d).

The women seem to eventually win when no man is there to dominate them. It challenges traditional gender roles and expectations, revealing that women can exert influence and assert themselves even in contexts where men are considered to hold authority. This underscores the complexities of power dynamics and the resilience of women in postcolonial societies.

Findings and Conclusion

In a world where the patriarchy remains deeply rooted in societal structures, the struggles of women continue to garner immense attention and academic investigation. Daniyal Mueenuddin's short stories in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* serve as a powerful instrument for analyzing the diverse ways women experience oppression in a patriarchal society. This thesis employs a postcolonial feminist approach to scrutinize Mueenuddin's compilation, aiming to determine if the women characters in the stories resist or accept their subjugation. By closely examining these tales, it becomes apparent that the women's experiences of oppression are intricate, influenced by both individual agency and structural patriarchal limitations.

Throughout Mueenuddin's collection, we encounter a wide range of female characters, each managing their unique social and economic conditions. These women's lives transpire within Pakistan's rural landscapes, where they face varying degrees of subjugation and marginalization. It is crucial to acknowledge that this oppression cannot be simply labeled as internal or external; rather, it involves a multifaceted interaction between individual decisions and societal standards. In this conclusion, we will explore the subtle ways these female

characters either defy or embrace their subjugation and how their reactions mirror broader tendencies within a postcolonial feminist perspective.

A central theme emerging from Mueenuddin's anthology is the array of resistance and acceptance that embodies women's reactions to oppression in patriarchal societies. Many female characters in these stories display exceptional resilience when confronting adversity. They maneuver around oppressive systems and devise innovative methods of asserting their autonomy while adhering to restricted roles. For example, Helen from *Our Lady of Paris* abandons her love that would limit her freedom, choosing instead to embark on an independent journey that exhibits strategic resistance. Conversely, there are instances where women submit to their subjugation due to limited options or fear of societal backlash. For example, Husna in *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* resigns herself to a life of few choices and ultimately succumbs to the patriarchal establishment. Her devastating outcome underscores the harsh truth many women confront when their resistance is hindered, leaving them seemingly trapped in an ongoing cycle of subjugation.

A key element in comprehending the reactions of female characters to oppression in Mueenuddin's stories is acknowledging intersectionality's significance. These women face oppression not only due to their gender but also because of their class, ethnicity, and economic standing. Intersectionality introduces additional intricacy to their experiences, as their identities intertwine and influence both the opportunities and restrictions they encounter. Those with greater economic or societal resources generally have an easier time resisting oppression, while those in more marginalized situations may have fewer alternatives. For example, in *About a Burning Girl*, Khadim's brother's unnamed wife is a woman unable to resist her oppression as other powerful factors were working against her – she did not receive justice even after her murder. Similarly, in *Nawabdin Electrician*, Nawabdin's wife is trapped in a cycle of economic oppression and forced to accept her circumstances as they struggle to make ends meet. On the other hand, women like Harouni's daughters, old wife, and his elite girlfriends represent lives of freedom obtained by acquiescing to the unjust and malecentric societal norms.

Intersectionality emphasizes that the capacity to either resist or accept oppression is not equal among all women but rather affected by their multiple identities and situations. This analysis reveals that women's agency and choices greatly impact whether they resist or accept oppression. Mueenuddin's female characters often find themselves at crucial junctures where they must make critical decisions affecting their lives.

Socioeconomic aspects play a vital role in molding women's responses to oppression in Mueenuddin's stories as well. Economic autonomy typically strengthens women's ability to fend off oppression more efficiently. Those with financial means can challenge patriarchal standards by making choices like leaving abusive relationships or pursuing education and professions.

Nonetheless, economic disparities can also force some women into accepting oppression out of necessity. Characters such as Nawabdin's wife, Harouni's old wife, and other typical wives confront financial challenges without support from their male counterparts, ultimately limiting their options and coercing them into remaining within toxic or oppressive marriages. This highlights the relationship between financial security and women's capacity to resist or

accept oppression, serving as a potent reminder that economic empowerment is a fundamental factor of women's agency in patriarchal societies.

Mueenuddin's compilation effectively emphasizes the intricate methods women employ to defy subjugation while simultaneously adhering to conventional standards and cultural expectations. Women often utilize discreet approaches to resist, such as subterfuge, negotiation, or cunning tactics to challenge the established patriarchal order without explicit defiance. Instances like Nawabdin's wife's dialogue "You can never light it; I'll light up anyway";

Husna's assertive tone while demanding her rights and questioning Harouni's daughter's bias; the relentless pursuit of justice by Khadim's brother's wife's family; and Helen's disapproval and refusal to succumb to pressure are all notable examples of women exhibiting nuanced acts of rebellion or resistance in difficult situations.

The overarching patriarchal frameworks within Mueenuddin's narratives cast a significant shadow over the female characters' lives. Dismantling these structures is not an easy task, and women's reactions to oppression often take place within these systems' boundaries. Some women achieve success in their resistance and express their autonomy, while others find themselves ultimately engulfed by the tenacious nature of patriarchal norms.

In summary, Daniyal Mueenuddin's *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* depicts a vivid portrayal of women navigating a male-dominated society. The female protagonists in these stories traverse the elaborate maze of suppression in various ways, showcasing the diverse aspects of their individual agency and the structural limitations enforced by patriarchal systems. Some choose rebellion as their mode of resisting oppression, while others pragmatically adapt to their circumstances. Factors such as the intersectionality of their identities, personal agency, social class, and the lasting impact of patriarchal structures all contribute significance to shaping their responses.

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