

**Glorification of a Single Woman: A Critique of Neoliberal Feminism  
in Selected Anglophone Fiction**

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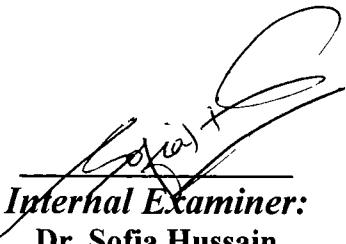
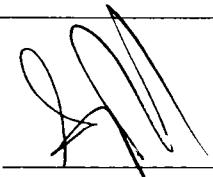
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## **Glorification of a Single Woman: A Critique of Neoliberal Feminism in Selected Anglophone Fiction**

## Abstract

In recent years, feminism has been dramatically influenced by Neo-Liberalism, and as a result, it has entered a new phase termed Neo-Liberal Feminism. The current famous feminist manifestos like Slaughter's '*Can We All Have It All*' and Sandberg's '*Lean In*' have contributed a lot in bringing the neo-liberal ideals into feminism, advocating that women should struggle to get equality and then lean into their careers and face the consequences of their choices. In this way, they tend to ignore men who play an important role in women's lives, both negative and positive. This research explores how neo-liberalists are using feminism as their tool first to make women economically independent, and then when a large number of women start working, they are paid less to create cheap labor. Through this, they manipulate the minds of women and make them their subjects. Another tool neo-liberals have started to use is promoting the concept of single women and the pleasure of leading life as a single. This ideology is being promoted through major Western feminist non-fictional works, which include Brooke Hauser's '*Enter Helen: Helen Gurley Brown and The Rise of Modern Single Women*', Kate Bolick's '*Spinster: Making a Life of One's Own*' and '*All the Single Ladies*' by Rebecca Traister. The influence of neo-liberal feminist ideals is not limited to the Western world; instead, it has also reached the Third World Countries, especially Pakistan. It can be witnessed that recent Pakistani feminist fictional works are greatly influenced by these Neo-liberal feminist ideals and could be seen glorifying the concept of singlehood. These works include Soniah Kamal's *Unmarriageable*, Bina Shah's *Before She Sleeps* and Sana Munir's *Unfettered Wings*.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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I also extend my gratitude towards my family and friends, who encouraged me in every way possible.

## DECLARATION

This dissertation for my MS Degree is my work. The works that I have used for references, I have clearly stated that those pieces of literature are the works of other researchers, and due references are also mentioned to clarify the efforts of the different literary researchers. So, I certify that appropriate credit has been given to the other researchers. I assure you this work has yet to be presented for any professional degree. The included findings of the work are entirely my own, depending on my understanding of the topic.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gurmeet Singh". Below the signature, the date "21/11/2023" is written in a smaller, straight-line font.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my parents and husband, who have been a source of constant support, inspiration, guidance, and motivation throughout my pursuit of education. Without them, this achievement would not have been possible. This achievement will fulfil the dream they had foreseen for me.

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## **Chapter – 1**

### **Introduction**

In Pakistan, Feminism gained popularity during the last decade and especially after the 9/11 attacks when certain misconceptions and stereotypes were attached to Pakistani women, mainly Muslim women; for instance, Pakistani women were referred to as victimized Muslim women because Western scholars believed that Muslim women were the subjugated victims of their own culture and religion. These Western scholars were of the view that Islamic practices such as the ‘veil’ subjugate and oppress women. So, after the catastrophic attacks of 9/11, some of the proclaimed feminists came forward to break the silence of the conspiracy and oppression that was attached to Islam and Pakistan, in particular concerning women. Women from different cultures, ethnicities, classes, traditions, and sects came forward to protest patriarchal trends that limited women from their fundamental human rights, resulting in control and restriction. These feminist movements tried to dismantle the divisions between public and private spheres; this division was not on humanitarian grounds for them. Before the last decade, Pakistani feminists were more inclined towards the aftereffects of war and partition, with their entire focus on the rehabilitation process. But with time and increased awareness, feminists started to focus on other issues which were inherited from the pre-partition time, such as child marriage, polygamy, divorce, education, fewer career opportunities, etc. With this shift in focus, many specific reforms were made on different platforms.

Organizations such as ‘All Pakistan Women’s Association (APWA)’. The Women’s Action Forum (WAF) and many more were prominent as they protested and

challenged patriarchy in different domains. These organizations took a radical stand for women's rights and fought for their rights related to career, education, family, politics, body, law, and sexuality. This revolutionary approach gave women freedom of expression and focused on fundamentalism and democracy. Now, women can raise their voices for their rights and break the silence on violence and inequality. Women activists and feminists in Pakistan gave voice to women through different platforms, from marching on the streets to raising their voices on social media, television, etc. This feminist discourse to reclaim female identity, forgets the social, religious and cultural roots of the country.

Apart from the social platforms, women are given a privileged position and status by our religion, i.e. Islam, which explicitly claims that for Allah Almighty, both men and women are equal without any discrimination. Islam gave women recognition by giving them equal rights and high status in contrast to other religions and societies. Islam believes "men and women complement each other" (Anwar 2). With its focus on female subjectivity and equal rights, Islam also promotes that both genders are different in nature and, therefore, both of them have different roles to play, but only based on equality and justice.

In an attempt to challenge patriarchy and speak against capitalist reforms that undermined women's rights, these feminists have started following the path of the Western world to get recognition and appreciation from the global world. Instead of focusing on the women's issues that are relevant to their society and culture, the current world feminists have forgotten their socio-cultural and religious paradigms. There is a dire need to promote our own culture and religion instead of promoting Western trends.

The purpose of my research is to explore the influence of Neoliberalism on Feminism to highlight how a “new variant of feminism” (*The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism* 6), which Catherine Rottenberg identifies as “neoliberal feminism”, has permeated selected Pakistani feminist novels to celebrate singlehood among women.

The selected texts present the neoliberal ideology of patriarchs and the capitalists. I have observed that the influence of Neoliberal feminist ideals is not limited to the West; it has also reached the Eastern world. I find that these Neoliberal feminist ideals have influenced recent Pakistani novels. These texts seem to fight for individual rights, particularly women’s rights, but may be viewed as sites of further oppression of women with the idea of adoration of a single woman. Therefore, for the present study, I have chosen Soniah Kamal’s *Unmarriageable* (2009), Bina Shah’s *Before She Sleeps* (2018), and two short stories ‘Maria’ and ‘Meera’ from Sana Munir’s collection of stories, *Unfettered Wings: Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women* (2018). The selected texts reflect how a woman subject sacrifices her family for a career and struggles hard to balance the private and public spheres of her life. The idea of being single still puts her under pressure, as she has no family and is not stable in her career. My initial reading of the selected texts suggests that the idea of glorification of a single woman is subtly (consciously or unconsciously) codified in them.

*Unmarriageable* presents a school teacher who encourages all the women around her to live according to their choices. She is portrayed as a single woman enjoying her single life and encouraging other women to live the same. Similarly, in the dystopian novel, *Before She Sleeps*, women are asked to marry several times and

reproduce children during wartime, as the male population is decreasing. Opposing this idea of marriage, women go underground to save themselves and form a group that comes out at night, meets rich men, and returns to its hiding place without marriage and child-bearing responsibility. *Unfettered Wings: Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women*, a collection of ten short stories, also adds to this Neoliberalist ideology. I choose two stories, 'Maria' and 'Meera', where singlehood is reviewed as:

Tales of some absolutely independent women who have learned to take care of themselves; Maria, for example, believes she has the right to make her own informed choices . . . she is very much aware of reality and the fickleness of love, and so chooses her solid reality over fanciful dreams. Meera, a professor, refuses to accept the pressure to conform and get married, and instead pursues her dream of becoming a successful writer. (Akhtar para. 7)

Glorification of singlehood has gained increasing visibility in the past few years because of the promotion of the idea of a 'single woman'. The 'pleasure' of leading a life as a single woman is a tool neoliberals use, as suggested in various studies (Budgeon; Bolick; Eschle and Maiguashca; Fraiser; Gimenez). The acceptance of such ideals in the Pakistani culture is a crucial point; therefore, I argue that this is an implicitly formulated idea of women's exploitation. It is a form of exploitation codified in the social construction of a 'single woman'. My goal is not to deny that women are free to make choices; however, being free does not automatically mean that they are justified to be living under various forms of exploitation and oppression hidden behind the ideologies of Neoliberal Feminism. Feminism has been a movement for women,

for their rights and struggles, whereas neoliberalism promotes individuality and “the abolition of the welfare state” (Wikan 4). In this regard, my study reveals that feminism is not just a struggle against patriarchy; instead, it has become a political ideology.

The Neoliberal Feminist ideology is presented in some significant Western feminist non-fictional works, which include Brooke Hauser’s *Enter Helen: The Invention of Helen Gurley Brown and the Rise of Modern Single Woman* (2017), Kate Bolick’s *Spinster: Making a Life of One’s Own* (2016) and *All the Single Ladies: Unmarried Women and the Rise of an Independent Nation* (2016) by Rebecca Traister. Neoliberal Feminism promotes the idea of individuality, self-identification, independence, and self-love, along with the concept of a ‘single woman’. This assigned single identity, I assume, is a tool of neoliberal feminism to prepare an entire workforce of subjects to extract maximum profit as compared to male subjects. In short, capitalism through neoliberal feminism favours a certain kind of women’s emancipation for generating profit. One example is the existing pay gap that causes a vast economic gap between men and women, which contradicts the neoliberal motto. Women are encouraged to work with a hidden promise to increase capital, which highlights hegemony in financial sectors. Women’s “labor is seen as cheap and flexible, and is the most exploited labor within the context of the new international division of labor as part of the globalization” (Oztimur 3). The neoliberalists sell feminism in the market by using feminist manifestos to exploit women; they make singlehood among women a commodity in the capitalist project. These women make a workforce that is compliant and flexible and can be paid less. This exploitation is intensified through the idea of glorification of singlehood. In this way, ‘independent’

women are oppressed in the capitalistic structures, which further strengthens gender discrimination and social inequality. Hence, an unequal allocation of authority within the genders exists. In this regard, I argue that neoliberalism is making ‘woman’ a subject that is herself responsible for the choices which she is conditioned to make.

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

I argue that the ideology of neoliberal feminism has influenced selected Pakistani novelists. In doing so, the selected authors unconsciously promote Western ideals that ignore their cultural values and societal differences. Such cultural agnotology then becomes problematic in the context of Pakistani society.

My study develops on Rottenberg’s idea of the “individualizing and political anaesthetizing effect of this new variant of feminism” (5): neoliberal feminism. I analyze how women are conditioned to view family responsibilities as a burden and join the workforce to be exploited by being paid less than men. As ‘feminine’ ones, they continue to have low value. I further argue that this mode of life is presented by glorifying the idea of a single woman, which is an alternate way to codify women’s subordination. I propose that selected Pakistani writers ignore the cultural and societal differences between the two worlds (First-World countries and Third-World countries, if I may say so). Such writers become a part of the neoliberal feminist discourse and present these ideologies as acceptable and natural. Following Western ideals represents a lack of understanding of one’s own culture and a conscious ignorance of Pakistani women’s significant problems in the current scenario.

## **1.2 Significance of Study**

This research work offers a new perspective on Feminism presented in Pakistani feminist novels. This study will bring a further critique that has yet to be done in Pakistani Literature. The codified neoliberal ideologies exist in these texts, yet very few have analyzed their contemporary implications, a gap this study fills. It also offers insight to other researchers interested in exploring new dimensions in the current productions of feminist fiction. This research will benefit working women, the new female generations, and policymakers who make policies for women and men to make them understand how to treat women.

## **1.3 Methodology and Theoretical Orientation**

My study is an in-depth analysis of the complex and confounding issue of acceptance of singlehood among Pakistani women. Its theoretical framework explores the rapid shifts within this new feminist discourse. The study traces where and how neoliberal feminism has appeared in the selected books – and through what particular examples it has operated in these texts. This study explores the new dimensions of exploitation and the hidden agendas behind this exploitation and glorification of women. The selected works will be analysed under the theoretical lens of ‘Neoliberal Feminism’ by Catherine Rottenberg and ‘The Neoliberal Theory of Society’ by Simon Clarke. To complete my study, I have consulted various sources from published articles, journals, books, websites, etc..

In my three analytical chapters, i.e., 3, 4, and 5, I detail neoliberal feminism’s influence on the selected texts. Each of these three illustrative chapters investigates a “new variant of feminism”; neoliberal feminism. I have integrated literary analysis with

the theories of neoliberalism and feminism. In the concluding sixth chapter, findings and conclusion are given.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

1. To trace neoliberal feminist ideals present in the selected texts.
2. To explore and highlight the idea of glorification of singlehood among women as a tool of neoliberal feminism by exploiting female characters by using them as an ideal commodity for the capitalist market.
3. To present a counterargument against neoliberal feminism to reorient and reclaim feminism as a social justice movement.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

1. What neoliberal feminist ideals are present in the selected texts?
2. How do the selected texts glorify the concept of a single woman manipulating women in capitalist projects?
3. How can the role of feminism be restored as a social justice movement?

## **Chapter – 2**

### **Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this research is to highlight the influence of neo-liberal feminism on feminism, to trace neo-liberal feminist ideals, and to bring forth the exploitative role of neo-liberal feminism in the lives of women.

#### **2.1 Women Activists Negotiating Feminism**

Feminism started as a movement that struggled and fought for women's rights. Still, its amalgamation with neo-liberal ideals has made it a controversial theory as it further manipulates women in the name of independence and freedom.

Aya Gruber, in her article “Neo-Feminism”, is of the view that neo-feminism is a reply to all the rhetoric that says that ‘Feminism is dead’ and that this is a new vibrant progressive feminism’ that can counter the exaggerated claims of feminism’s demise, a belief that feminism has been devastated by the postmodern critique. She condemns that feminism, in the literal sense, is losing its pure essence and is deviating from its dogmatic past while moving ahead with new domains and vigour. According to her, modern feminists strongly advocate women’s rights and emancipation as they focus on women’s legal, social and economic position in the present world. On the other hand, they also question some of the proclaimed feminist trends of the second wave of feminism, such as making women objects or agents. She says that the troubling nature of the second wave of feminism led to the emergence of neo-feminist trends.

Karen Vintages, in “Feminism Versus Neo-Liberalism: Women’s Freedom Practices in the World Perspective”, is of the view that the neo-liberal ideology influences feminism in the current world. Feminism started as a social movement that advocated solidarity and radical democracy. Still, in the contemporary world, feminism seems to be entangled in the political motives of neo-liberalism, and now it promotes capitalism in the name of justice and democracy. It focuses on autonomy, individualism, freedom, and progress, but the neo-liberal mottos strongly influence them. Initially, feminism focused on transforming cultural and social norms that were masculine to promote and empower women’s rights, but now feminism, along with neo-liberalism, promotes individualized subjects that are exploited in the name of empowerment and progress. Its focus shifted from individual well-being to universal well-being, particularly state well-being. Now, feminism offers alternative social, political, and ethical strands for both individuals and society. These alternative ways result in the invention of new cultural, social, economic and political mentalities that limit and manipulate female subjects in the financial sector.

In her thesis, ‘The False Promise of Gender Neutrality’ published in 2009, Maria Eriksson highlights the debates that are taking place between neo-feminism and traditional feminism in the United Kingdom. She is of the view that neo-feminists believe that feminism does not exist anymore because it consists of biases, and this causes feminism to lose its essence. She has based her argument on the laws of International Relations.

Christina Maries Scharff, in her thesis “Young Women’s dis-identification with Feminism: Negotiating Heteronormativity Neo-Liberalism and Difference”,

published in September 2009, conducts a quantitative study, where she explores the relationship between women and feminism and how the current trends of neo-liberalism are affecting their thinking processes. She takes a performative approach and explores the effects of gender differences, particularly sexuality, on the feminist responses of young women. She further highlights the role of heteronormativity in the development of post-feminist perspectives by considering the theoretical perspectives of individualism, post-feminism, neo-liberalism etc. In short, Scharff's thesis is a critical understanding of feminist "dis-identification" (5). The author of the thesis mentioned above believes that the views of young feminists regarding feminism have been shaped and undergone a severe change due to the differences in education, employment, gender, and other inequalities. This marked difference leads to a decrease in the marriage rate with an increase in an alternative family form. According to Scharff, family is essential for these young women, but this family is not necessarily the outcome of marriage. This is not only the result of progress and modernity but also of inequality based on racism and sexuality. Her thesis is an insight into the young women's negotiations with feminism and the emergence of new trends in feminism, which led to the dis-identification of feminism.

Nancy Fraser, in her article "Feminism, Capitalism and Cunning of History", explains the relationship of the second wave of feminism with capitalism; firstly, feminism challenged capitalism; secondly, it joined with neo-liberalism, but at last, it came back to the revival of its spirits which again challenged capitalism. By the term capitalism, she refers to 'the state organized capitalism', which emerged in the post-war era due to hegemonic social formation. Such capitalists are endocentric as they

only consider men as the ethnic majority as their salary is principal and his wife's salary is supplemental. This difference makes females an ethnic minority. The gender wage ideal reinforced male authority by naturalizing gender inequality and keeping women from political domains. This inequality forced second-wave feminists to come forward to guard the social and political rights of women. They not only rejected gender inequality, but they also criticized maldistribution based on gender. They rejected Marxism, which focused on economics in the political spheres, and liberalism, which focused on law, social feminists, and black feminists in an attempt to install the female gender as a privileged gender. The second-wave feminists extended the preview of justice to not only class, race and sexuality but also to housework, reproduction, oppression, etc. This attempt was made not only to foreground the economic inequalities but also to dismantle hierarchies and political powers. In short, it can be said that they introduced a new three-dimensional understanding, focusing on economy, culture, and politics. In an attempt to deconstruct the amalgamation of capitalism and patriarchy, the second-wave feminists advocated for the radical transformation of a different structure to minimize the problems of maldistribution, misrecognition and misrepresentation.

On the other hand, second-wave feminists were also against androcentrism, which caused gender division of labour. They focused on the responsibilities of women towards themselves and their families, gender discrimination in the labour markets, domination of men in the political domain, etc. Fraser further states that gender inequality devalues female labor, either paid or unpaid and proposes free markets that are not under state control to maximize women's participation in the economic sector.

She adds that the second-wave feminists strove against state capitalism by dismantling its key elements. In such an attempt, they joined hands with neo-liberalists, which promotes individual freedom.

Andrea Cornwall, Jasmine Gideon and Kalpana Wilson, in their article 'Introduction: Reclaiming Feminism: Gender and Neo-Liberalism', introduce neo-liberalism, and on the other hand, they highlight how feminism is influenced by it. They have exposed various discrepancies in the notion of the empowerment of women according to the neo-liberal perspective. The writers mentioned above believe that neo-liberal ideals that promote different economic and social policies in the name of empowerment and development have a progressive agenda. Due to this agenda, the neo-liberal paradigm had to face severe criticism. The neo-liberal notion that the economic sectors will serve public interests and that the resources will be distributed equally and efficiently clearly shows the hypocrisy of the neo-liberals who promote the ideas of gender inequality in terms of labour, deteriorated working conditions, gender-based labour standards and low wages. This inequality and discrimination destabilize the economic sectors and bring forth the patriarchal social structures. According to Cornwall, Gideon and Wilson, such neo-liberal practices reinforce patriarchal relationships, and they also challenge feminist manifestos.

In Addition, Sheryl Sandberg's '*Lean In*' has played an essential role in bringing neo-liberalism into feminism. This work, like the previous one, has become a best-seller. Catherine Rottenburgh says in her article 'The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism' that Sandberg's feminist manifesto can be seen as symptomatic of a larger cultural phenomenon in which neo-liberal feminism is fast displacing liberal

feminism' (2). Sandberg gives three important terms and describes the process of getting equality. The first aspect she discusses is 'Internalizing revolution'; a woman should work towards equality and resolve her internal issues. For this, they should be 'Outspoken'. Secondly, they should 'lean in' in their career; for example, they should focus only on their job because only then can they feed their families. Again, the focus is on women and their careers and how they should work towards equality, in other words, ignoring the fact that men are more than half of the population and how they are influencing the lives of women. In short, she strongly advocates individuality and suggests that women deal with inequality and discrimination in the economic sector with confidence, bravery and determination. In her contention, women can climb the ladder of success in the corporate world with sheer determination and will. She promotes Neo-liberal feminist manifestos, which claim that to bring revolution, women need to stand for themselves and achieve their ambitions like men do. Women should not hold themselves back and should overcome all the obstacles to become a part of the global workforce. She claims that due to the lack of self-confidence, women keep themselves at the boundaries, which in return further strengthens male dominance. Through the book's title, Sandberg suggests women lean into the advanced world to overcome the problems of discrimination, authority and male power. Women are themselves responsible for their misrepresentation as they consider themselves to be undeserving, worthless, unfit and ineligible beings who cannot work in the economic sectors on equal grounds with men.

In her famous work *Why Women Still Can't Have It All*, Slaughter says there should be no binary between men and women and only then can women achieve

absolute equality. In her book, she highlights the difficulties a working woman faces in a patriarchal economic and social system. She says that women have to juggle between work and home as both the jobs are challenging. While working in a male-dominated society, these jobs become more complex as men are more privileged in such societies. This inequality becomes a hindrance for women who are career-oriented and suggests that specific policies and norms need to be changed and replaced to provide women equal opportunities. This gender inequality is the reason that made her question why women cannot have all those opportunities and benefits that men enjoy in a self-centred, male-dominated society. While criticizing the social structures that promote hegemony and dichotomy, Slaughter says that both men and women can have it all, but for this, specific reform will be made in the social structures. She states that the capitalist economic sector looks down upon women as less professionals and primary caregivers, and for this, they are less privileged. On TED in 2013, while talking about her book, she said that for her, absolute equality is not something that gives women more value compared to the status of men provided by society, but it simply means creating equal opportunities for women and giving respectable choices to them. So, she is trying to promote the idea that one should destroy the binary, and by doing this, she is taking away the real essence of feminism and the things it was struggling for. So, her notion promotes Neoliberalism's individualism that everyone is responsible for themselves.

Hence, when describing neo-feminism, one must understand neo-liberalism and its influence on feminism. So, these two women who have written these works, respectively, belong to the corporate world; Sandberg is a top member of Facebook,

Slaughter is a political and economic activist, and the neoliberals greatly influence the world of corporate and are running on neoliberal ideals.

## **2.2 Gender Inequality in the Workplace**

There has always been a link between capitalism and gender inequality. Martha E. Gimenez has raised this problem in her article 'Capitalism and the Oppression of Women: Marx Revisited' and how Marxism exposes the imbalances created by capitalism. Gimenez states that to understand the basis of inequality between men and women in the capitalist structure, it is essential to have a basic understanding of Karl Marx's methodology in which he not only puts forward the conditions where women are a weak gender, but he also proposes some changes in terms of politics and legislature to overcome gender inequality. She further states that since the end of the Soviet Union, capitalism has taken hold of the entire world. Unless this mode of production is functional, it is impossible to fully understand the forces that are inequalities between men and women without getting into the details of Marx's thought-provoking ideas. Marx's theory goes hand in hand with women's liberation and feminist theory. Gimenez highlights that female oppression is much visible in the labour market in terms of division of labour and socio-economic stratification. While talking about women's oppression, Gimenez says one thinks of different social, cultural and political issues, sexual harassment, discrimination, etc., but in the current world, the most critical issues related to women's oppression are low-paid labour (unequal pay), sexual division of labour, work demands on the basis of gender, reproductive roles and many more to name. These issues put women in a disadvantageous position in every sphere of life. The following author suggests that it

is important to transform the current social relations, especially in the economic sectors, to cope with the issues related to inequality between men and women. He also talks about how feminism is relevant because the majority of women are being exploited.

Louis Dalingwater, in her article "Neo-liberalism and Gender Inequality in the Workplace in Britain, " exposes the pay gaps in Britain, that though women work in large populations, there are wage inequalities. She highlights how this inequality is the direct result of neo-liberalism. She further highlights the differences in the quality of work for both males and females. On the one hand, males are given jobs with decent pay and opportunities for development and progress. On the other hand, women get 'pink collar jobs' lacking decent pay scales and progress opportunities. This difference in the labor market makes women critical of the inequality based on gender in the employment sector. This essential understanding is the direct impact of neo-liberalism, which makes women aware of their workplace rights and freedom. Dalingwater believes that individuals should have a right to enhance their behavior and choices in the employment sector. Like the other post-feminist authors, she believes that the changing trends in Feminism and liberalism have contributed to women's empowerment.

David Coburn, in his article 'Beyond the income inequality hypothesis: class, neo-liberalism, and health inequalities', critiques the income-inequality approach of neo-liberalism and exposes how neo-liberalism is creating inequalities among people and is responsible for health and class differences within a country. He also talks about how various countries have rejected neo-liberalism.

In “Troubling intra-actions: gender, neo-liberalism and research in the global academy”, Louise Morley questions the gender inequality in neo-liberal society. He discusses the policy and financial agreements made in this kind of society and how it affects women in particular. He describes the whole of a neo-liberal-based economy and its adverse effects on society as it leads to the under-representation of women in academic fields, making women a global commodity. Neo-liberals create an unsustainable labour which lacks agency. They are not only the refusers of dominant ideologies in the economic sectors but also the infusers of counter-hegemony and epistemic injustices. This hegemony and epistemic injustice are not only a hindrance that minimizes the chances of competition, self-identification promotion and ownership but also creates an unhealthy workplace environment that is toxic for the low-paid labour. Their new identities are constructed through a functional state apparatus, i.e., neo-liberalism, which affects the labor's status, class, individual performance, etc. Through low-paid work, neo-liberals try to produce a capital on which delivery has little or no control.

In an article titled ‘Towards a Radical Re-appropriation: Gender, Development and Neo-Liberal Feminism’, Kalpana Wilson traces the shift from ‘liberal’ to ‘neo-liberal’ feminism. Wilson believes this shift strengthens the inequalities between both genders and promotes global capitalism instead of undermining it. The approaches “reinforce and extend unequal gendered structures and relations” (Wilson 2). The author further criticizes “the extension and intensification of women’s labour as central to sustaining neo-liberal capital accumulation” (Wilson 7). These gendered and racialized female workers are an excellent source for increasing capital. For neo-

liberals, these women are a tool that can be used according to their desires despite the subject's abilities, expertise and qualities. She thinks that feminism needs to reclaim its essence to undo the gendered inequality within the neo-liberal capitalist structures and also to recognize inequality and discrimination hidden behind power and privilege.

Ruth Pearson, in "A Feminist Analysis of Neo-liberalism and Austerity Policies in the UK", brings forth the state interventions of the government in the economic sector and how these policies and interventions are affecting citizens, especially women, as these policies are gender biased, resulting in discrimination and increased burden on the female gender. Women are made the target of social inequality to sustain the economic growth of the country by creating unpaid employment for female citizens. The state officials prioritize market benefits over citizen benefits, especially female citizens, as they introduce economic policies that are based on gendered structures. They prioritize social infrastructure over equality within a society to enhance the economy. They pay no attention to the division of labour based on gender. This gendered inequality in the workplace creates cheap and costless labour that can take the burden of all the extra work. One of the most prominent discriminatory acts can be seen in the form of the 'social security system', which includes cuts in residence allowances, limited tax credits, benefits for people with disabilities, etc. This discrimination in the labour market and the pay gap makes women vulnerable in the eyes of the male members of society. They have to face discrimination and bear the burden of family responsibility and unpaid work. This burden and discrimination make them dependent on the state as they lack workplace benefits. Not only is there a reduction in salaries, but there is also a cut in health and

educational facilities as women are costless labourers. According to Pearson, neo-liberal thinking works by limiting the female gender and by introducing gender-based state policies and those only for the benefit of the state.

### **2.3 Impacts of Neo-Liberal Feminism on Women's Identities**

Neo-liberals are trying to shape women's identities, and literary works are helping neo-liberals in promoting the idea. As a result, many women are influenced by these works, and most work outside their households.

In her article 'The Rise of the Neoliberal Chinese Female Subject in Go Lala Go', Su-lin Yu highlights the same contradictory ideals of neo-liberalism and how Neo-Liberal feminism is significantly influencing the identities of working women. Yu critiques neo-liberalism through the lens of feminism and highlights how neo-liberal feminist subjects are created. The author contends the rhetorical approach of neo-liberalism through which, on the one hand, female subjects are encouraged to work and be successful, but on the other hand, there is also a hidden agenda behind that approach—this rhetorical approach of neo-liberals results in the loss of the true essence of feminism. Through the slogan of women empowerment and individuality, females are exploited in the economic sectors. This global capitalism is influencing women's identities in China as in other parts of the world. By making women a privileged subject in the process of revolution, women are conditioned to maximize their abilities and opportunities with minimum wages and reproductive roles as compared to their male co-workers. This approach not only eradicates hegemony between men and women, but it further strengthens this hegemony as this approach is

not gender neutral. These female subjects that serve the economic sectors are still self-sacrificing, suppressed and submissive who have fewer opportunities and avenues, no autonomy, and controlled reproduction. In short, neo-liberals are trying to mobilize genders by introducing new modes of control and governance over genders. Apparently, they tend to celebrate women's independence, freedom and individuality, but in reality, they have created a more incredible consumer culture by making women low-paid labour. In short, Yu claims that a new gender regime is created where social structures are exploiting women in the name of empowerment and individuality.

In another research paper, 'The Impact of Neoliberalism on Women in Mexico: A Survey of the Evidence and Prospects for the Future', Linda Wilcox Young highlights the idea that young women's ideals are based on neo-liberalism and that women should get control of their economic need, is affecting them negatively in the form of Pay-Gap. These neo-liberals are using this for their own benefit by making a woman's financial position a significant disadvantage for her as she is excluded from opportunities, development, personal growth and equal distribution of resources. Where women are encouraged to break the social barriers and gender hierarchy, they are also made to stay entangled under male authorities so that they are not able to gain a stronger position as compared to males. The so-called reforms in the social structures have drastically affected women's identities, resulting in a lack of self-confidence. This so-called growth and independence came up with various other problems and challenges for women in the corporate sector. By eradicating the social and cultural barriers, neo-liberals have shackled women in terms of wealth, resources and avenues. Women still are not allowed to hold a respectable position in the patriarchal society

that is equal to the work of men on humanitarian grounds. Hence, according to the author, women need to come together with more power and self-confidence to cope with the problems threatening their survival. This must be done to reshape and redefine specific parameters and gender roles so women can participate equally in the economic sectors.

*Neo-liberalism and Everyday Life*, which is edited by Susan Braedley and Meg Luxton, is excellent research on the effects of neo-liberalism and how it is affecting the daily life of people. It explains how neo-liberalism is the reason behind the economic crash in 2008. It describes how, from political, economic, and business, it led to inequalities among genders and races. This book also discusses the process of globalization and privatization. Braedley and Luxton try to draw attention to the bitter reality of the global market where neo-liberalism has caused radical and extreme problems for the commoner in the corporate sector. It has seeped into the social, economic and political domain of societies by introducing some policies that seem to be progressive and that tend to expand the global market, but in reality, these policies are highly destructive as they reinforce certain social and cultural inequalities in terms of gender, class and ethnicity. The writers mentioned above challenge neo-liberalism for making people's everyday lives difficult and strenuous by intensifying work at the expense of labor. Neo-liberalism, in order to be successful, reinforced sexual and racialized division of labor and, as a result, affected family structure and individual identities.

Taylor C. Boas and Jordan Gans-Morse, in their article 'Neo-Liberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti Liberal Slogans', take a new direction and discuss how neo-liberalism was once considered an extension of liberalism and how it changed itself from it and became an anti-liberal philosophy. Neo-liberalism has transformed from classical to radical liberalism, where economic reforms are based on inequalities. They have used 'W. B. Gallie's framework criticizes Neo-liberalism and highlights how neoliberalism has lost its true meaning. Boas and Gans-Morse propose several ways this term can regain its true meaning and be a helpful tool. Both authors criticize neo-liberalism's idea of individuality and its attempt to minimize individual freedom. On the contrary, they propose that individuals should be allowed to make choices of their own to pursue their ambitions as the devastating manifestos of neo-liberalism are resulting in inflation and depression. In other words, individuals should be free to compete in the marketplace, which can drive economic prosperity in the corporate sector. In order to restore social and economic order, there is a dire need to let markets and the economy function freely. Neo-liberals should not tend to get a desirable neo-liberal object to improve the economy and restore social order.

#### **2.4 Neo-Liberal Feminist Subjects in Global Literature**

Neo-liberal feminism has been under debate in the global world and literature, where middle-class white women are portrayed to be neo-liberal agents who promote Western ideals such as individualism, self-actualization, the importance of wealth, etc.

Dr. Adnan Tahir, Dr. Zia Ahmed and Dr. Ayaz Qadeer, in "Neo-Liberal and Post-Feminist Fiction in Pakistan: A Globalized Critique", suggest that Post-Modern

Pakistani authors have pulled themselves away from the traditional feminism that the neo-liberal and neo-colonial manifestos have shattered. These writers portray female characters as success stories who fight patriarchal norms and the state rules and regulations to achieve their dreams and live according to their will and desires. These female characters are portrayed as revolutionary regardless of social, ethical, and cultural norms. Such literary works show a shift from the oppressed female subject to the liberated female subject. Mohsin Hamid's *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* is one such literary work that dismantles moral and ethical values by focusing only on the pursuit of wealth. As a result, marriage and love have lost their natural essence. The two important female characters of the novel, i.e., 'the pretty girl' and 'Mrs. Hero' shows a prominent shift from traditional feminist ideals to post-feminist ideals. The pretty girl focuses more on money and status and is unconcerned about society's moral and ethical values. Similarly, Mrs. Hero also runs after material things, and like the other female characters of the novel, she can also reject societal and cultural norms to achieve her dreams. Both the characters run after their material desires and follow their dreams by departing from traditional social, cultural, and ethical standards.

"An Analysis of Liberal Feminism in the *Notebook* Novel (1996) by Nicholas Sparks" by Pande Mde Gunawati, Dewa Komang Tantra and Putu Adi Krisna Juniarta is another example of neo-liberal ideology. This story of the novel revolves around an inspirational woman who fights for her dreams. The story is about a loving couple who belong to different families in terms of status and wealth. The characters Noah Calhoun and Allison Nelson represent neo-liberal feminists as they are strong, devoted, firm, confident, responsible, brave, and independent. In order to get married, they both

struggled a lot and faced many challenges as they had completely different family statuses, but they stood firm and fought strongly for their love. After the family's disapproval, both had to part ways for fourteen long years, but their families couldn't successfully make them forget each other and their love for each other. Instead, their love came forward with more intensity after reuniting, and they both felt the same passion and affection for each other. After their reunion, unfortunately, Allison was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and forgot everything, but Noah never lost hope and took great care of her in every way possible. Both had many neo-liberal feminist traits, and the first one was appreciation. They appreciated each other no matter what the circumstances were. Allison appreciated Noah for his job and fantastic house, whereas Noah appreciated Allison for her beauty and looks, as she had ocean eyes. Another trait of neo-liberal feminism seen in the characters of Allison and Noah is that of forcefulness and determination. Both the characters stayed determined on what they wanted despite the repercussions, and both were adventurous, so they took every step to enjoy their lives. Noah and Allison proved to be solid and devoted characters, and that is another vital trait of neo-liberal feminism. They both faced their problems bravely. They found strength in each other, leading them to fight for each other and pass every obstacle. This strength and bravery made them stay devoted. Noah remained dedicated to Allison when she had Alzheimer's. Noah wrote a diary to remind her of their beautiful memories. Noah and Allison were sensitive and showed this through their emotions, but their strength, confidence, and patience helped them stay strong and determined. According to the others, all the traits mentioned above show that both characters followed neo-liberal feminist ideology.

Halit Alkan's "A Liberal Feminist Approach to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*" also shows neo-liberal feminist ideology. The story of the novel revolves around the narrator and her husband, John, who is a physician. After having a child, she is diagnosed with hysteria and is forced to live in an isolated room for three months in the name of a 'rest cure'. The isolated room deprives her of her ability to think, and she gets disappointed as her husband limits her to a small space. Alkan is of the view that in a patriarchal society, men have the ultimate authority over legal rights and power, whereas women are dependent on and in control of men. This forcefulness, control and loneliness drive her mad due to limitations. The authors believe this limitation and control makes 'an angel in the house' to be 'the madwoman in the attic' in the name of rest and cure. Alkan supports the author of the novel in his view that if women are financially independent and autonomous beings, they can fight for themselves and free themselves from such limitations and control.

In conclusion, the author of the article and the novel suggest that masculine powers control females to limit their participation in the public sector. Alkan says that Gillman refers to women who are bound to spend their lives in closed vicinities as 'mad' because it limits their thinking process and consciousness and leads to disappointment, death and suppression. So, to free themselves from such shackles of patriarchy, women need to be strong, independent and autonomous beings.

## 2.5 Narratives Beyond Neo-Liberal Feminist Discourses

Andrea Cornwall, in an article titled 'Beyond "Empowerment Lite": Women's Empowerment, Neo-Liberal Development and Global Justice' critically analyse women's empowerment approach based on inequality and prejudice within the

economic sector and labour market that ignores individual potential and capacity. In the name of empowerment and modernity that aims for female agency, freedom and choice, the female subjects of society have to face discriminatory social, cultural, economic and gender roles. Instead of focusing on the development of female subjects, the female members of the society themselves are made the subjects, resulting in inequality and discrimination. They are used for the development of society rather than introducing new reforms for female development. Cornwall states that women need to realize their hidden potential and calls it “empowerment lite” (3). According to her, this empowerment lite will enable female members of society to challenge the existing prominent societal and cultural norms that lead to inequalities and power-based hierarchies. For her, Empowerment Lite is a twofold process focusing on empowerment in the economic sector and the nature of the market. She encourages women to critically examine the relationship between capitalism and gender inequality to fight for their rights and contribute to economic growth, but only based on equality. The author wants women to be empowered and autonomous, and for this purpose, she raises consciousness among the female subjects in the globalized world. She wants women to critically analyze their lives, considering global politics to liberate themselves from gender-based hierarchies and attain autonomy and self-determination. This will not only help them achieve a respectable status in society but will also enable them to speak against patriarchy to dismantle and destabilize patriarchal trends. According to her, women need to focus on empowerment on an individual level to exercise agency and autonomy. She promotes “women entrepreneurialism” by overcoming the gender gap in the corporate world (Cornwall

16). This entrepreneurialism will bring forth a self-actualizing female subject and help women self-sustaining in the economic sector. Therefore, according to Cornwall, there is a need to reclaim the mainstream feminist ideals that can reject the power structures that oppress and exploit female subjects in the name of progress and development.

Dieter Rucht, in his article 'Social Movements Challenging Neo-liberal Globalization', discusses how the process of Globalization is another result of neo-liberalism. With the emergence of globalization, modernization seems to have lost much of its appeal. He exposes how this word has many positive vibes but also negatively influences the world. As a result, he says people have started protesting against Neo-liberal globalization, which has resulted in various social and civil movements. These social movements were a direct result of hatred and criticism that neo-liberals had to face due to their rhetorical approach, through which they tried to achieve their economic goals at the expense of the weaker beings of the society. These movements started in Seattle and then went beyond it and were led by different groups such as ethnic groups, humanitarian groups, social activists, and religious groups. All these groups were strong advocates for the people who are the victims of globalization. This neo-liberal Globalization benefits and privileges the social democrats and deprives the weaker, i.e., labour. It is viewed as a deliberate economic, political and ideological project through which only the capitalist class can benefit. It is also considered a hegemonic process that fulfils the needs of those with power and authority. Hence, globalization can be called an extension of neo-liberalism and modernization, which fails to bring forth social justice and global solidarity. As it fails to develop friendly relations between the society and the state, it erodes societal

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standards, hegemony between the privileged and the underprivileged, inequality, etc. In short, these anti-globalization movements gained ground around the world, making the critique against globalization a global phenomenon which tends to promote social justice, international solidarity and a free economy by focusing on different concepts such as ownership, freedom and participation of both state and society to steer the global economy.

An article named “Solidarity in Struggle. Feminist Perspectives on Neo-Liberalism in East Central Europe”, edited by Eszter Kovats, is a critique of neoliberalism and highlights the challenges feminist stakeholders must face in the current socio-economic system that is profoundly transforming the feminist manifestos. One of the article’s authors, Ebert Stiftung, claims ‘liberal progress’ to be a crisis and a bad dream and thinks that a specific agenda needs to be built to overcome and break the existing economic and political frameworks. The author believes that the concepts, i.e., ‘progression’ and ‘enlightened opportunism’, cannot stand face to face. The amalgamation of these two concepts is causing significant issues in East-Central Europe, such as reproductive female labour, same-sex marriages, etc. Feminists need to develop counter approaches to dismantle this dichotomy and introduce alternatives that can acknowledge the dignity and membership of both genders on equal grounds in the current political communities. Neoliberalism started as a movement with three major manifestos, i.e., a global economic system that deregulates the market, a mode of governance that can maintain unequal social and political relations and a system that can shape social and cultural values. This movement proved to be a challenge for feminism as it increased social inequalities and

also declined the democratic mode of governance. The problems, such as gendered-based low income, exploitation, vulnerable working conditions for females, etc., clearly depict the consequences and effects of neo-liberalism. This gendered-based ideology exploited and marginalized lower and working-class women and increased social inequality within the economic sector.

So, all these works mentioned in the literature review, whether on neo-liberalism or neo-feminism, have discussed important things that should be paid attention to. However, this research paper will focus on a whole new idea of how Neo-liberalism, instead of using the market to create inequality among people and manipulate them, have infiltrated feminism itself and how it is manipulating working women.

## Chapter – 3

### Methodology and Theoretical Orientation

Feminism is not just a political ideology but a struggle that spreads across centuries. It is these feminist movements that have exposed patriarchy, how it is a dominant part of society, how men consider themselves superior to women and how culture has further legalized this status of men. This ideology puts men in an objectionable role. Feminism is a social justice movement that focuses on women's rights in every sphere of life, whether legal, social, economic or political. It advocates solidarity and radical democracy, focusing on autonomy, freedom and emancipation. It opposes the concept of oppression and subjugation of the female gender as well as the concept of gender inequality. It defies the patriarchal trends that consider men superior to men.

The feminist movement is majorly divided into three waves. The earliest feminist ideas came forward in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication for the Rights of Women*. Later in the 1920s, the first wave of Feminism started, which questioned the exclusion of women from every field of life. It stood for the rights of women, such as their right to vote and education, and rejected the stereotypes that are associated with them.

Then, in the 1960s and 70s, the Second Wave of Feminism started with the motto: 'Personal is Political'. It highlighted the social and political issues affecting women and suggested that they should have a right to make their own decisions without any external influence. This wave stimulated the idea of sisterhood, advocating that women should support each other. During this wave, 'Coloured

Feminism and Third-World Feminism' also started. Both of these groups said that white privileged women dominate feminism. They rejected essentialism, which gave rise to Transnational Feminism.

The Third Wave of Feminism, which emerged in the 1990s, focused on the same ideology as the second wave but with the idea that women should be taken as a separate identity and not be defined by men.

Now, Feminism is in its Fourth Wave, termed 'Neo-Feminism' or 'Post-Feminism'. This ideology is still in the developing phase, with its focus being on the glorification of the feminine body as well as the deconstruction of male-female relations. According to the general definition, neo-feminism is a term previously used by feminists. Still, the movement started after separating itself from the other three waves and feminist ideologies.

### **3.1 Neo-Feminism**

Neo-feminism, or in other words, Liberal Feminism, mainly refers to the idea that it is opposite to Orthodox feminism. So, everyone who takes feminism away from traditional feminism is creating a new kind of feminism.

### **3.2 Neo-Liberalism**

Neo-liberalism is another significant movement in the current world and a major concern. It is an economic model policy that focuses on free trade, globalization, minimization of government regulations, and less government control over the economy. It is a political ideology that emphasizes economic freedom with its shift from the public to the private

sector. This policy does not entirely oppose government interventions but limits its role where necessary to support the free market and accessible interventions.

Neo-liberalism functions as a political model that shifts the control of economic factors from the public sector to the private sector. It tends towards free market capitalism (Investopedia). It also supports individualism and that every person is responsible for himself. Some self-proclaimed feminist's work starts this new stage or wave, and these works have brought Neo-Liberal ideals into feminism. These Ideals include that women are responsible for family life and the work she does in office, and only through destroying the binary can one get true equality. Wendy Brown explains the whole system of Neo-liberalism in the following words in her article ““Neo-Liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy”, ‘this type of governance produces subjects, manipulate their minds and bend them in a certain way that they become part of the cooperate world” (Rottenburg 420).

### **3.3 Neo-Liberal Feminism**

Neo-Liberal Feminism promotes the concept of individuality, self-identification, independence and self-love with the idea of free trade. It favors women's emancipation for generating profits on economic grounds and works for universal well-being rather than individual well-being. Rottenberg, in her book *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*, states that in recent years, feminism has moved away from significant feminist slogans such as equal rights, social justice, and freedom and has started to adopt neoliberal ideals such as responsibility, individuality and austerity. This change gives rise to Neoliberal Feminism, which advocates a “happy work-family balance”

(Sjöstrand 3). Under this notion, women are not just responsible for their families but also for their careers to reproduce human capital. Women are encouraged to balance family and work with a promise to increase capital. Rottenberg claims that Neoliberal Feminism is a mode of governance and political discourse that sets rules and practices for governing individuals; it produces a neo-feminist subject responsible for her own “well-being and self-care” (2). She believes that neoliberalism has colonized feminism through the production of its variant. This variant is well aware of the inequalities between men and women. This variant is neoliberal as it defies the social and cultural factors and the economic forces producing this inequality. “The neoliberal feminist subject”, according to her, “is thus mobilized to convert continued gender inequality from a structural problem into an individual affair” (4). Rottenberg believes Neoliberal Feminism introduces a new form of morality that connects moral values with self-reliance and self-identification, promoting individual freedom and choice. In this respect, it rejects the notion of social justice. By using the terms equality, opportunity, and free will, the neoliberal feminist ideology is producing individualized and entrepreneurial subjects in nature. In short, neoliberal feminism promotes governmentality and hegemony in economic sectors (1-6).

This new stage or wave of feminism started with some of the self-proclaimed feminist works such as Anne-Marie Slaughter’s *Why Women Still Can’t Have It All* (2015) and Nell Scovell and Sheryl Sandberg’s *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013). These books have brought neoliberal ideals into feminism, including “privatization, austerity, deregulation, free trade and reductions in government spending” (Terzoglou 5). Such models deconstruct gender hierarchies in

the economic sector. Along with feminist manifestos, these ideals promote the idea that women are responsible for family life and work in the office. Only through the destruction of the binary can one get true equality.

In my study, the theory of neoliberalism will be critiqued in the light of Simon Clarke's article "The Neoliberal Theory of Society" (2005). Clarke compares neoliberal ideology with that of a mercantilist state. In his view, the power structures generate a workforce through the gain of one party and the other's loss. He considers the division of labour and liberalism as a political ideology whose repercussions are eliminated by the capitalists in an urge to gain profit. According to him, the power structures tend to extract maximum profit through force and manipulation. The capitalists, being the minority, accumulate their profit or capital at the expense of the minority, i.e., cheap labour. Clarke believes that neoliberalism is based on unrealistic and restrictive assumptions as it fails to make an adequate model for the world. Instead, it makes the world as a whole OK for one particular model. This unrealistic nature makes neoliberalism a political project that neglects the demand for social reform.

## **Chapter – 4**

### **Does A Woman Feel Free ‘before she sleeps’? An Analysis of *Before She Sleeps***

Bina Shah, a famous Pakistani novelist, is well known for her profound contribution to Pakistani literature in English and the *International New York Times*, *the Dawn*, *Al-Jazeera*, etc. Her works are primarily based on feminine spirituality, and through her works, she seems to be a strong advocate of matriarchy, and in doing so, she defies patriarchy. For her, female agency is important, and so she tends to give voice to females who are subjugated victims of patriarchy and other social structures.

According to her, patriarchy is practised as a religion throughout the world, strengthened by multiple factors, including the ‘State Apparatus’ or the government sector. For a State Apparatus or any form of government that withholds power, matriarchy is a threat because it defies a system which dictates women and positions them lower than the male members of the society. Men, considering themselves the dominant social group, oppress and exploit women in the name of societal and cultural norms. As a result, women are deprived of their rights and are dependent on men and their identities are also shaped by them. Women are considered to be biologically inferior to men, less intelligent, weak and irrational. The male-female dichotomy gave men absolute power, and this power influenced women’s identity and subjectivity, resulting in silencing them. Women are considered to be commodities, and their bodies are like machines. Bina Shah considers such a system to be rotten and substandard,

having terrible effects on the female community. For her, this gender-based hierarchy is not a natural product but rather a social construct that can be changed.

According to Shah, men and women should not be superior or inferior. For her, feminism is about equality between men and women under the same government, society and law. Women should have equal job and career opportunities and should not be excluded from the public space just because of their gender. She, like Neo-liberal Feminists, promotes individuality and austerity. For instance, women's work should be of the same importance and value as men's, and their salaries should be equal if both are in the same position under the same conditions. Suppose women have the potential to grow in the economic sector. In that case, they should be appreciated for going miles ahead and contributing to the organization's and country's progress. Like Neo-Liberalists, she encourages women to manage both work and family side by side and that too with a promise to increase the capital. Shah wants women to have the same status in society as men, where they should have the authority to be decisive for themselves and their families and control themselves and their bodies.

Bina Shah wants a change in the existing system that only promotes patriarchy and in which women are dictated in every sphere of their lives. For that purpose, Shah has taken writing as a platform with a mission to highlight the bitter realities of society, gender discrimination and oppression of the weak to educate women about their rights and the injustices and cruelty of the system.

According to her, there should be a system that governs both men and women for the benefit of the state and the individuals, a system that promotes honor and

respect of both genders and mocks discrimination that women have to face in every sphere of their lives. This system should recognize women by their strengths, talents and abilities instead of their relations with men. She wants a system where women are allowed to vote, not forced to marry, have equal opportunities, and enjoy their fundamental human rights with dignity and honor. There should be a system under which women do not have to look up to the male members of their society for their needs and desires. She wants a system in which women are independent, can construct their identities, and can enjoy individual freedom.

She wants to dismantle a system in which women are merely used as a tool for the benefit of the powerful. She does not want women to be “the passive recipients of development, devoid of agency” (Wilson 6). She empowers and encourages women to stand and fight for their rights through her work. In short, her literary works aim to inform, empower and educate women to make them active members of society. She encourages women to reject the traditional patriarchal norms to shape their own individual identities.

Her novel *Before She Sleeps* is an accurate depiction of gender-based ideology. In this dystopian novel, she combines feminist and neo-liberal manifestos to empower and educate women and give voice to her female characters. The female characters of the novel are used merely as commodities by the state officials, forced to marry several times and reproduce children to increase the population that was decreasing due to war and gender-based viruses. The state machinery, like neo-liberal feminists, only thinks about its benefit by using the female gender and ignoring the sufferings of women in the process of development. The oppressive state machinery,

following the power structure ideology, keeps women under constant surveillance to penalize those who defy the system and to set an example for the rest of the citizens. This surveillance forces a few women to resist state officials and reject the traditional roles prescribed for them by the male authorities in the name of social and cultural norms and the betterment of the state. This resistance takes place to overcome the problems of forced marriages, oppression and control. These resisting women make an underground colony to escape from tyrannical state officials and to save themselves from multiple marriages. This escape is a survival tactic women of the Green City use to live freely. They form a group of young women living in an underground colony called Panah, which comes out at night, meets rich people, and then returns to live their lives freely without polygamy and child-bearing responsibilities. These women go against the government officials who do not give them the right to control their lives and bodies according to their own needs and desires. They oppose the state system that does not appreciate the decisiveness of women and excludes them from the public arena for the sake of the benefit of state machinery.

Bina Shah, in this novel, promotes the idea of singlehood to unchain women from the shackles of the Green City, where power structure ideology is merely based on patriarchal norms. She brings forth the idea of women's emancipation, where women can fight for their rights and go against the state machinery to be independent. In this work, she has combined feminist and neo-liberal ideology to promote women's liberation and highlight the bitter reality of Green City, which is cruel and unkind to women. This cruelty makes Green City "a prison" for women (Shah 211). She promotes the idea that women are not just responsible for their families but also their

careers and can also benefit the state as they can enhance economic growth. She aims to produce individualized and free subjects by promoting equality, free will and self-identification.

The novel is based in Southeast Asia and revolves around the impact of war and gender-based viruses in Green City. War equally affects both parties physically as well as emotionally. Some of the most devastating effects of war on physical health include injury, disability, death, and sexual violence. The torture and repression that is a direct result of war causes loss of life and physical disability. Its effects on mental health include anxiety, depression, and trauma. This trauma and depression disrupt human lives and especially human relations as it leads to a loss of trust on the individual level. Apart from its effects on human health, the war also affects the economy and infrastructure of a state.

War affects those who are part of the process and other people globally. It diverts human survival by destroying essentials and resources required for everyday life. War forces people to leave their houses and move to safer places where there is no violent conflict going on. This displacement affects human health as there is no proper facility for food and shelter. Such people are also at higher risk of getting ill and contracting infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, etc. Many factors contribute to illness, such as poverty and poor living conditions, as there can be limited access to food, sanitation and other essential elements required for everyday life. Such situations can also lead to malnutrition and other chronic diseases such as cholera, etc. These disturbing effects of war are also evident in the novel, where Shah explains the

drastic effects of nuclear war on the citizens of Green City. As can be seen through the lines;

five megatons of carbon were released into the air, and the black carbon rain killed millions in those unfortunate lands. Within days, people's lungs collapsed – we saw them on the bulletins, turning blue and gasping for breath. Children of survivors had severely underdeveloped respiratory systems and suffocated to death almost as soon as they were born. The atmosphere was choking them to death, in revenge for what they had done to it. (Shah 34)

The effects of war are deadlier for women as compared to men, as men might die or become injured, but women have to face lasting consequences of war and violence. Family planning becomes challenging in such conditions. Apart from these, women also have to face sexual violence such as rape etc. These effects, either physical or psychological, further affect the health of children, especially children born during the time of war. This is evident through the novel, where the officials of Green City tried to minimize acts of sexual violence. "The officials tried to put a stop to the men roaming the city in packs, assaulting and gang-raping any woman they could find, in those chaotic days of Restoration and the new rule" (Shah 61).

Throughout history, Green City has survived based on hierarchies: "rich over the poor, the strong over the weak... the Leaders, watchful hawks circling over a society in crisis" (Shah 123). Throughout history, the leaders of Green City have exchanged powers and steeped "into the vacuum brought about by the chaos of the

Final War" (Shah 123). The word 'Final War' refers to all the chaotic fights and violent conflicts that took place across Asia, especially on the land of Green City, which resulted in displacement, migration, blood, death, injuries, destruction of land and infrastructure, etc. In dismantling the power structures, the foundations of Green City have been shaken "not all at once but over decades of slow collapse" (Shah 123). During the twenty-first century, Green City has seen some of the cruellest events of all time, such as war, which resulted in "mass migration, the dissolution of old boundaries, the bloody unseating of old kings and dictators" and climatic disasters; such as rain and floods which destroyed resources and infrastructure as well as affected human health (Shah 123). These cruel events have further led to the destabilization of the economy, shutting down all the nearby trade routes and threatening human existence in one way or another. Still, Green City survived one way or another just on the expanse of human lives.

The most important factor that has shaken the foundations of Green City is the Gendered Virus that threatened the lives of a large number of women across the state. This virus has made the officials declare an "Emergency over Green City" (Shah 124). The pandemic has affected men, but women have been inclusively affected by the virus, and many women could not even survive. "Virus ... morphed from a rare strain of HPV into a fast-spreading cervical cancer epidemic. Men could be carriers, but women were felled quickly and inclusively. Most died within four to six months of catching it" (Shah 61). It can also be seen through the lines, "The Virus was a disease that only women could catch, but men could give it to them – a fact that nobody liked to discuss in Green City" (Shah 185).

Similarly, Fairuza and Joseph's wife also fell prey to the virus. It can be seen through the lines taken from the text, "Fairuza died of the virus ... The Virus lay dormant in her system, choosing to emerge when there was no way we could get help, even to soothe the pain at the end of her days. It was a terrible death she suffered" (Shah 62).

The bitter reality of war and the virus made the officials of Green City declare a 'Gender Emergency' as "half of the population had been lost to war, terror and disease" (Shah 35). The rapid decrease in the population has resulted in the establishment of an Agency and a Perpetuation Bureau to discipline the citizens, to make the entire city a police state and to make them follow the directions the state gave. The state officials have a selfish agenda behind their directives, as well as the gender emergency. The Green City has stringent rules for the citizens who disobey the state machinery so that no one can dare to break the state directives. The city officials use women as a tool to increase the city's population, as is evident through the lines "the remaining women in Green City found themselves put on an eerie pedestal to bring an entire nation back to life" (Shah 35).

The government of Green City follows National Socialism that advocates the honor of men. For them, the best place for women is their home, and their "glorious duty is [was] to give children to their people and nation, children who can continue the line of generations and who generate the immorality of the nation" (Wodenshek 48). The government of Green City made a system that they called perfect, but it was only ideal for the state machinery as it was to "Reform, repopulate, redress the imbalance that [we] were left after the War" (Shah 134). This politics of gender forces women to marry several times and have multiple husbands at a time to

boost the process of reproduction and increase the population of the city. They were “buried alive in the marriages they didn’t want” (Shah 23). One of the female characters of the novel, Sabine, claims that “we knew that when we were women, we would be forced into marriages at least twice but more likely three or four times” (Shah 23). For instance, Lin’s mother had three husbands and was unaware of whose daughter she was, nor did her mother’s three husbands know who Lin’s father was.

Similarly, Chicken was also “a product of one of those multiple marriages, and sadly had no idea – and was never told – which of her mother’s four husbands was her father” (Shah 23). This shows that the state officials use women as a tool to secure the future of the Green City. They appreciate women who married several times as they become a role model for the rest of the female citizens. This is done to make all the female citizens “accept the Bureau’s directives, like all good citizens of Green City. They won’t even think to investigate” (Shah 19). In Green City, the death of a woman is grieved just because the state officials thought that they lost a precious soul who could have served and given herself and her body for the selfish needs of the state. This grief is not on humanitarian grounds but has a hidden agenda.

Women of Green City are considered precious, protected and respected not for their abilities and talents but for their bodies. As Shah demonstrates, “Women in Green City were precious resources, to be treasured and protected, looked after and provided for, in return for their bodies given to the cause of repopulation” (Shah 23). This shows that a woman’s status is based on how many children she reproduces. Whether the woman is rich or poor, once she gives birth to a child, she becomes respectful and honorable, and once she loses a child, she becomes a useless being who

is not worthy of respect. The state government gives them double allowances after the birth of every child. "Her womb was a ticket from poverty from the comfort of the middle class for her as well as all her husbands" (Shah 23-24). It is also evident through the lines, "With each new baby, a new hope for Green City and South West Asia" (Shah 33). Women in Green City are trained at an institute called 'Girls' Markaz' to be housewives and are given classes on subjects such as Reproductive Sciences, Household Technology, Health, etc. After their secondary education, male students go to universities for higher education, whereas female students "learn how to become good Wives" (Shah 26). This education is not for themselves but rather to educate them on reproduction and how they can contribute to their state's progress by reproducing more children.

Women in Green City are only influential because they can recover the decreased population during the war and pandemic. Their efforts and, most notably, their devotion are required to stabilize, sustain and secure the future of the state, and only women can turn the dream of the officials into reality by giving their bodies to them. Women are asked to "better dictate themselves to performing their specific functions ... for the good of the nation" (Wodenshek 12). They have no freedom to live according to their own will and needs; instead, the government controls their lives and needs. They do not even own their bodies, considered the state's property. This shows the cruelty of the state, which has destroyed the present as well as the future of female citizens. Women have to undergo monthly examinations, and their bodies are prodded and poked. No one can even imagine the pain women have gone through for the sake of the prosperity of the state.

Women who can reproduce children are worthy of respect, and those who cannot are considered to be useless citizens of the state and become a burden on the state. Women who cannot reproduce children, despite whatever the reason is, have to live their lives as “martyrs of infertility, a poor invalid who had to make monthly declarations that her body had failed her and Green City” (Shah 113-114). A perfect example is Sabine’s mother, who could only give birth to one child, i.e., Sabine. The guilt and pain she had to endure took her life, and she died suddenly, and the cruel state officials labelled it as a suicide. As Sabine claims that:

My mother died suddenly. When the Officials visited, and the crews came to take my mother’s body away, they labelled it a suicide. They painted a compelling portrait of my mother’s mental state before her death. The psychological counsellors sent by the Agency wrote in their report the guilt and anxiety my mother underwent was too much for her; it drove her to an impulsive, impetuous decision to remove herself from our lives. (Shah 114)

Women are expected to reproduce children one after the other despite their health. This bitter reality of Green City is highlighted by Sabine when she addresses the state officials and says, “You pump us full of hormones and expect us to produce children as if we’re cows” (Shah 134). The state neglects the fact that pregnancies are “a tough burden for women to bear” (Shah 149). Women with poor health are not even allowed to abort babies as it is mentioned in ‘The Official Green City Handbook for Female Citizens’ that “abortions are forbidden in all Southwest Asian territories. Under no circumstances will any pregnancy be terminated at any stage” (Shah 141). Similarly,

the substances that can be used to terminate pregnancies are also banned. If anyone is caught selling or trading such substances, strict action is taken against that person according to the rules set by the government. The state officials make clear that:

Anyone caught trying to procure an abortion for herself or others will feel the full wrath of Green City's authority ... Authorities consider anything that harms an unborn child no less than treason against the state. Beware of those who urge you to revolt against Green City; they cannot be trusted, and you, no matter how young, will receive the same punishment as your cohorts. (Shah 141)

Those who resist the state machinery are punished severely, and some cannot even survive the punishments and commit suicide. It is obligatory for all citizens to follow the rules and be selfless for the sake of the state. These women are trained to be "foot soldiers, working hard to fulfil your role as the mothers of a new nation" (Shah 3). This shows that their only role was to be the mothers. They can survive in the city only when they follow the rules set by the authorities; otherwise, they would be punished for pushing the boundaries as "there is no justice as far as the woman is concerned" in the Green City (Shah 102).

The officials have created an agency and a protection bureau to ensure everyone follows the rules. The Agency uses different techniques to monitor the citizens, for instance, electronic tracking, digital surveillance, etc. This is evident throughout the text, "The Agency had so many ways to spy on citizens: electronic tracking, digital surveillance, following any display emissions or emissions of energy from a vehicle"

(Shah 184). By doing so, the individual freedom of the citizens is stolen as per the requirement of the authorities as they control human life in each sphere in the Green City.

Through constant surveillance, government officials are influencing the identities of the citizens, giving rise to various issues such as mental enslavement and exploitation. As Shah demonstrates, "The Bureau trotted out women regularly on the Networks: young, beautiful faces unlined with care or worry" (169). For the sake of personal benefits, the power structures are commodifying and manipulating female citizens. They are trying to "establish a tyrannical monopoly" in the name of the betterment and prosperity of the state (Knibbs 2017). They are threatening the freedom and autonomy of female citizens by eroding their privacy to control their lives. They are threatening the agency and dignity of the female citizens for material gains. The lives and actions of the citizens are constantly watched, but whatever the Agency does is hidden from the citizens as "everything is done remotely and anonymously" (Shah 6). A perfect example of the hypocrisy of the state is that in Green City, at the time of birth, a blood sample is taken from the foot of the child and is preserved without informing the family, and that sample is used when required. The Agency monitors every citizen without letting them know they are being watched. They erode the citizens' privacy by keeping their actions a secret. "The Agency watched everyone, but its higher-ups insisted on complete privacy, autonomy and impunity for themselves. Their unlimited freedom kept everyone else in line: they needed absolute power to guarantee absolute civic order" (Shah 122). This clearly shows that the citizens of the Green City are not free or autonomous beings but instead are trapped in

the shackles of state welfare. Hence, the illusion of betterment, along with the control carried out through surveillance, leads to social injustice and the politics of gender.

Both the Agency and the Bureau do not mind sacrificing a few women's lives to teach the rest of the women a lesson. They think that dead women will be an example for them, and it will not let them resist the authorities. It is evident through Sabine's words, "The Perpetuation Bureau will easily sacrifice a few errant women to teach the rest a lesson. Green City will use our deaths to illustrate the fertility of revolt" (Shah 61). With the fear of death, these women will sacrifice their lives "for the better good of the society and its reconstruction" (Shah 62). Women are aware that in Green City, the rebellions are "disgraced and executed publicly to serve as a lesson to the rest of the society" for defying the state officials (Shah 42). The authorities warn the citizens that "Rebelling against our generosity ... is synonymous with transgressing against society and will be answered with re-education as deemed necessary by the authorities. So be mindful that you do not even come near the limits of rebellion, in thought and action" (Shah 93).

The city officials publicize the state's rules in the media to arouse fear and dread among the citizens in an attempt to stop citizens from violating the rules and transgressing the boundaries set by the authorities. "The Agency has made sure to publicize all crimes well in the Flashes on the display, the Bulletins, even through door-to-door visits, something almost unheard of in this time where almost everything is done remotely and anonymously" (Shah 6). There is no mercy for humanity on the land of Green City. The one who violates the rules or in other words defies the authorities is "stripped of his rank and titles, disgraced and executed publicly to serve

a lesson to the rest of the society" (Shah 42). This can be seen through the incident of Nurya Salem's death where she was found dead "in a pool of her own blood" (Shah 169). The news of her death was made to go on air as a "warning to every woman in Green City. The Agency must have instructed the sensors to leave the news item uncut so that everyone could see that there was no redress for everyone who resisted" (Shah 169). The Agency never spared those who resisted for "the crime of interfering with their self-designed order" (Shah 136). All these tactics made citizens follow the rules despite their willingness and desires.

The above-mentioned social injustice, discrimination, exploitation and politics lead to resistance against the authorities. To defy the power structures of the Green City, some female citizens have stepped forward and acted bravely to end the tyrannical rule of the city officials. These female citizens want "the dust to settle" so they can live according to their own will and desires. These women, in an attempt to resist the forced and multiple marriages, start disappearing. These "disappearing women and disappearing girls" hence became a threat to the state officials through revolt, resistance and rebelliousness and are considered criminals by the authorities as there is "no justice as far as a woman is concerned" in the Green City (Shah 102). These women resist and revolt against the authorities because they think that "Green City stole their normality, our childhoods, our futures ... We live in bizarre circumstances; either we cope, or we crack and shatter like glass" (Shah 82). These female citizens of the Green City come under Elaine Showalter's feminist phase. Showalter's feminist phase encourages women who defy traditional roles prescribed to women by the male authorities. Similarly, the women of Green City have started

defying the traditional roles given to them by the state officials. They struggle to construct their identities without the shadow of male citizens.

Unlike other female city citizens, these resisting women have decided not to hide behind men for escape and happiness; instead, they should try to find new ways to gain their freedom and enjoy their fundamental human rights. These women think that “men aren’t doors to escape through, or even mirrors to find ourselves in. We’re fooling ourselves if we think they can help us” (Shah 76). They have stopped longing for physical contact and started appreciating differences among individuals and things that are special in them. They do not “like the idea of being the sandpaper to smooth a man’s rough edges” and want to focus on themselves to find their strengths and abilities (Shah 56). In doing so, these women have started enjoying ‘singlehood’ and are contended by the freedom which Panah provides them. Now, they are “free women, unattached to anyone else... loyalties belonging to no one but the Panah” (Shah 30). In Panah, these women tend to discover their inner selves and realize, “We need to record our own history and tell our stories, if only to each other. We need to know that we can survive, even if we are outcasts and criminals” (Shah 35).

In search of freedom and individuality, they fake their deaths and leave their belongings and their families. As Lin demonstrates, ““We represent a commodity no longer available in Green City. It’s not just economics; it’s also the science of a sort: the alchemy that takes place between a man and a woman, far more compelling than any drug for its powers to soothe, heal, and rejuvenate a spirit broken by the stresses and strains of the day.”” They escape their destiny and disappear “like a cloud in the sky or a snowdrift that would simply melt away with a warming sun” (Shah 22). For

them, Panah is a place where they can enjoy their existence as women and as humans.

It can be seen through the lines taken from the text:

It may be a life in the shadows, but at least no Bureau tells us whom to marry, whom to open our legs for. Nobody can experiment on our ovaries and wombs, pump us full of fertility drugs, monitor our menstrual cycles and ovulation patterns. Our bodies are not incubators that will 'boost the numbers of women up to appropriate levels'. Above ground, we are only women, but here in the Panah, we are humans again. (Shah 63)

Panah, which means sanctuary, provides these women a shelter where they can enjoy their lives without being in the possession of several men. Women living here get an opportunity to think about themselves, which is very unusual for many women, and it takes them months to realize that, like men, women can also live freely. This difference between life above ground and life underground is also demonstrated by Sabine as she claims that:

When I got to the Panah, I was unused to the sight of women's bodies not swollen and distorted by pregnancy. It seemed wrong at first, as if something was missing. It took me months to realize that a woman's stomach wasn't always convex; that its default state was not always filled with another being. (Shah 24)

Women in Panah gained something they lacked while living in Green City and something females can never think of while living above ground, such as freedom,

choice, autonomy, individuality, etc. This makes women feel blessed for being no longer part of a system that is not only usual but also cruel and unnatural.

Through the novel's female characters, Bina Shah highlights the neo-liberal feminist traits. Human qualities such as carefree, devotion, appreciation, force, strength, firmness, sensitivity, confidence, responsibility and dependence are neo-liberal feminist traits that promote women's rights and equality in a patriarchal society. The women of Green City, despite facing problems, choose to have a separate community where they can exercise their rights according to their own will and desires. These female characters are carefree about the issues they will have to face in their futures and focus only on present life to free themselves from the political agendas of the state officials as well as to get rid of the patriarchal norms that only work for the benefit of the male gender. Sabine, Chicken and other female characters of the novels, through their devotion, strength, firmness, forcefulness, confidence and responsibility, resist the cruel state officials so that they can live independent lives without fear and control. They appreciate each other and take complete responsibility for protecting their community and fellow members. These traits of women of the Green City make them the followers of the neo-liberal feminists.

All the above discussion shows that Bina Shah has highlighted the cruel and bitter reality of the Green City. She highlights how the state system used women and how women resisted the state system. Through the novel's female characters, Shah gives voice to all females facing subjugation, exploitation and cruelty and highlights new ways to live according to their own will and desire. She educates women on how they can defy the traditional roles prescribed to women by the male authorities. To

enjoy freedom and autonomy, the female characters of her novel resist an unnatural and political system. Here, a question arises: Are these resisting women really free? Are women of Green City living there without fear and dread? Do they need help in the underground colony? It might seem that these women ran away from the problems, but in reality, they are trapped in uncertainty and fear. The respect and honor they could have gotten while living above the ground still lacked in their lives. They resisted a system that commodified them, but the truth is that they are still commodifying themselves. In search of freedom and autonomy, they risk their lives and dignity. They do not like having husbands and choosing a life where they have to spend it in fear of getting traced by state officials.

Life in Panah is challenging for such women, but there are some perks. For instance, women in Panah have to “pay four times the normal prices” for the essential things for their survival (Shah 44). Some women struggle to adjust their routines, sleep cycles, and appetites as life differs above and below the ground. Some of them have to deal with “depression for six months to a year after entering the Panah” (Shah 45). They also have mundane and boring days at Panah as there is less interaction with people. While spending a night with their clients, these women do not sleep and leave the client’s house “in the darkest part of the morning. The half hour before dawn, when the night’s at its thickest and the Agency officers are at their slowest” making their lives more miserable as compared to life above ground. Instead of having a respectable relationship with men, they choose to spend nights with people whom they do not even know and trust them with their bodies.

The combination of feminism and neo-liberalism in the novel seems to dismantle gender-based hierarchy and inequality, but in reality, it is further creating inequalities, competition, insecurity and an unhealthy environment among the female members of the society. Here, a question arises: through such liberation and the formation of an individualized identity, are women of the underground community still free? Is the 'escape' really an escape for the women of Green City? The reality is quite different from what it appears to be. The survival tactics that the women of Green City use threaten their lives more deeply, as the escape from Green City is temporary. The female characters have abandoned Green City in search of their identity and a sense of ownership over their lives. However, in doing so, they still lack an individual identity, respect and honor, as they are not free to live without fear and control. In short, in an attempt to break the shackles of the Green City, they have trapped themselves in an illusion of freedom and liberation.

## CHAPTER – 5

### Should the Idea of Being ‘unmarriageable’ be Celebrated? An Analysis of *Unmarriageable*.

Mainstream feminism encourages women to fight for their fundamental human rights and challenge the gender roles that are traditionally prescribed to both men and women. These feminist trends, on the one hand, criticize patriarchy to promote women’s rights and emancipation. On the other hand, the union of Neo-Liberalism and Feminism also questions the institute of marriage, and it became “an important touchstone for equality in feminist works” (Spier 6). Neo-Liberal feminists question the institute of marriage and claim that it has different dimensions, such as legal, sociocultural, economic and psychological, which make it political and, in return, result in the marginalization and discrimination of the female gender. This institution makes men the ‘centre’ and women the ‘other’. According to them, the institution of marriage defines the needs, desires, identities and values of the female gender as less important in comparison to the male gender. These feminists have highlighted “the legal discrimination against married women and challenged coverture, or the set of laws that presumed and subsumed married women’s legal, economic and sociocultural identities under that of their husbands” (Spier 5). They challenged marriage in its traditional forms and advocated women’s rights, such as the rights to divorce, abortion, women’s rights about their bodies, decision-making regarding their own lives, working and becoming financially stable, etc.

They criticize women's sufferings, either psychological or social, in terms of dependence on male gender and isolation. They believe that after marriage, women are given a lower status as compared to their male companions. This psychological and social manipulation strengthens male supremacy and control, and it also forces women to become women according to the standards of society. As Simon De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* claims, women are not born to be women; rather, they are socially and psychologically conditioned to become one. Furthermore, womanhood is not something naturally constructed or innate; instead, it is socially constructed through cultural, social and psychological enforcement. A society that promotes male dominance cannot function properly as women are not inferior to men, but they are different. Males have some strengths that differ from those of females, and females have strengths that differ from males. Today's society puts women on the periphery, making men the 'centre' and the women 'the other'. "De Beauvoir identified women's relationship to men and society as 'the Other' and argued that throughout history, men had perpetuated themselves as the 'One' through socio-economic, political and psychological hegemony that defines women as a helpmate to their interests" (Spier 40). Neo-Liberal feminists believe that while society is male-dominated, it gives benefits to the male citizens in every sphere of life, either professional, social or political. In doing so, they limit the female citizens to certain areas, and they have to spend their lives following the shadows of the male citizens. This makes their struggle more complex and more difficult as the existing gender gap affects them. The Western influence within the Eastern Culture has reorganized the gender roles, making the

females believe that they are inferior to their male partners. This influence strengthens the male-female hegemony, resulting in an imbalance within marital relationships.

Soniah Kamal, like the other Neo-Liberal feminists, also promotes women's independence in terms of singlehood. Through her novel *Unmarriageable*, *she critically analyses the traditional society that teaches women to grow up and become homemakers as if marriage were* the ultimate end for every woman. Through her work mentioned above, she challenges the patriarchal society, which views women as "a weaker sex and is compelled by ideology and social norms to attach themselves to men through romantic relationships, and the institute of marriage" (Tweed 2). Soniah Kamal discourages those who think that a woman's life revolves around "marriage, children, death" (Kamal 3). She dismantles the societal norms that promote the concept that the status of a woman gets elevated after she accepts a marriage proposal. For instance, "It is a truth universally acknowledged that a girl can go from a pauper to princess or princess to pauper in the mere seconds it takes for her to accept a proposal" (Kamal 3). According to her, the institution of marriage threatens the autonomy and freedom of women as "women don't seem to have a choice that is free from judgment" (Kamal 4). This shows that marriage conditions women socially and psychologically. She also insists that the sole purpose of marriage should not only be security; rather, it should be companionship and understanding. Kamal attempts to educate society that a daughter/woman should be independent like a son/man. As can be seen through the lines, "the daughter earns a good income of her own and secures this freedom for herself" (Kamal 6). Through the character of Tahira, it is evident that the author is against the concept of early marriages. Tahira got married at sixteen and was told by

her mother that after marriage, she “won’t be attending school... there are more important things than fractions and ABC” (Kamal 8). In Kamal’s contention, “It was a lucky few who went to college while the rest got married, for this was the Tao of obedient girls in Dilipabad” (Kamal 7). Kamal tries to restructure the institute of marriage because, according to her, it limits women only to their houses, forcing them to become ‘homemakers’ and ‘child-bearers’, disrupting their private and social lives. Women are forced only to take care of day-to-day matters and are considered to be property that the male members possess. She shows that marriage only leads to oppression and determination of roles based on gender, but it also results in the social conditioning of the young girls who, from a very young age, are taught to become good wives and good mothers. John Spier, in an article named “Breaking the Wedding Vows: Woman-Centered Critiques of Marriage, 1963-1982”, demonstrates that women are “trained for roles as wives and mothers by dedicating themselves to appear attractive for prospective husbands” (41). A perfect example of such social conditioning is how Mrs. Binat raised her daughters. Mrs. Binat plays the traditional role of a mother who is always keen to influence her children’s lives. Like the other traditional mothers, Mrs. Binat also wanted to groom her daughters in a way that would help them become good wives and mothers in the future. Mrs. Binat, mother of five daughters, Jenazba, Alysba, Marizba, Qittyara and Lady, had a huge responsibility to groom her daughters in a way that is acceptable within the society. She always supported her daughters in achieving their goals and doing whatever they wanted, but on many occasions, she could also be seen opposing them regarding their views about marriage. She did not want her daughters to get married at a very early age, as she

married at seventeen. She encouraged them to pursue their dreams and become independent, but she also wanted them to get married in good families and at a pretty good age. This is evident through the lines taken from the novel; “Mrs. Binat’s ambitions for her daughters were fairly typical: groom them into marriageable material and wed them off to no less than prince and presidents” (Kamal 320). She took her daughters here and there to make them meet other community members to get good proposals. She “made sure she and the girls put in an appearance every now and then” (Kamal 20). She wanted to marry her daughters not just for the sake of marriage but also for the sake of security. She wanted them to get married to rich men as she thought that “getting married to a middle-class Western Abroad could mean exhaustion and homesickness, and she would not allow her daughters a life of premature ageing and loneliness. As such, she was unwilling to marry them off to frogs and toads because she was too good a mother to plunge her girls into marriage simply for the sake of marriage” (Kamal 32-33). Mrs. Binat had a Marxist approach as she wanted financial benefit out of marriage. However, as a mother, she wanted her daughters’ future to be happy and bright. She thought that “it was her full-time job as a good mother to get her daughters married well, and she was determined to do her duty regardless of all obstacles, even Alys’s obstinacy” (Kamal 54). She always dressed up her daughters in the most fashionable and contemporary attires. She wanted them to look beautiful to attract the attention of those around them. Nadir-Fedie’s wedding festivals clearly show that “Mrs. Binat wanted Jena to once again stand out as the epitome of purity and had picked for her white chiffon- paired, however, with a real diamond set”

(Kamal 76). She wanted Jena to get married to the Bungles family, and for that, she wanted her to look perfect.

Mrs. Binat wanted her daughters to get married because she knew that never-married women are socially segregated from the rest of society and also that certain stereotypes are attached to them, such as “spinster” (Tweed 14). Such women are considered “childless, awkward, middle-aged, and ultimately regarded as pathetic” (Kamal 14). They are also stereotyped as lonely, failures, pitted, barren, unfulfilled, deficient, sexually available to men, unwanted and deviant” (qtd. in Tweed 15). This stigmatization and stereotypical representation are due to the deviation from the social and cultural norms. In order to save them from this, Mrs. Binat was eager to marry off her daughters despite all the barriers and obstacles. Though Alya does not want to get married as she wants to stay single and enjoy the freedom and independence, Mrs. Binat does not miss any chance to find husbands for them. The social conditioning and training are only for the females and not for the males as the lives of the females entirely revolve around the male partners, whereas men consider women only to be a part of their lives. This discrimination, oppression and inequality in marriage show that the gender hierarchy is a social construct which females can reverse, and this is what the Neo-liberal feminists want women to realize and practice in their lives in order to live a free and happy life.

Soniah Kamal, in this novel, following the footprints of neo-liberal feminists, portrays marriage as a burden that limits women to their houses, disrupting their private and social lives. On the contrary, marriage is a contract between two humans

on humanitarian grounds where none is inferior or superior. It is a “union consecrated by God and unalterable by the parties” (Brinig 6). In this contract, both parties need to play their individual roles wholeheartedly, as one partner’s fault can “violate the canons of marriage”, and that will not fulfil the obligations of marriage (Brinig 6). Kamal, under Western influence and unthinkingly following the Neo-Liberals and the feminists, forgets the positive aspects of marriage and promotes the concept of ‘singlehood’. She encourages women to prioritize their careers and sacrifice their families, and in doing so, she overshadows the real essence of marriage, which means that “marriage as a lifelong commitment is gone” (Brinig 10). She promotes financial success outside of marriage. The character of Alys Kamal encourages “women to pursue paid employment to challenge traditional duties of wife and mother” (Spier 49). She, like neo-liberal feminists, suggests that women focus on their individual identities and achieve their goals and ambitions in order to become successful and independent.

Soniah Kamal portrays Alys as a revolutionary character who promotes Western ideology and singlehood, which promote “choice and a status characterized by happiness, career, and social mobility” (Tweed 18). Through the character of Alys, Kamal opposes the concept of marriage, as she thinks that marriage is “a way of life for women in which the domestic labor that wives performed stripped away their individuality” (Spier 44). Women are expected to stay home and look after the household chores, reproduce children, and care for them. So, they are restricted to housework and child-rearing. This restriction results in resistance, leading to singlehood, promising women freedom, independence, and opportunities. Marriages commodify women as the standards of marriage are based on “a pretty face, a fair

complexion, a slim figure, and a good height" (Kamal 3). Alys is portrayed as a revolutionary character who promotes singlehood. Unlike the other girls of Dilipibad, she does not enjoy the "good luck of having at least once being engaged" (Kamal 7). This is evident from the incident where Alys was asked, "When are you getting married?" (Kamal 9). Alys replied, ""never"..."unfortunately, I don't think any man I've met is my equal and neither, I fear, is any man likely to think I am his. So, no marriage for me"" (Kamal 10). She does not consider marriage an essential part of life, whereas others think "marriage is a cornerstone of our culture" (Kamal 11). Alys thinks "marriage should be a part of life, not life" (Kamal 10). Alys chooses to stay single to pursue her career as a single woman as she opposes the idea that ""there's no noble career than that of being a wife and mother.""" (Kamal 10). Alys is against "the role of housewife and mother and the drudgery of housework" that limits and restricts women from social circles (Spier 43). According to her, the institution of marriage lacks love, respect and other essential elements such as decency, care, etc. Like neo-liberal feminists, they demand all these factors to be essential elements within marriage. The factors that lack in marriage make women "exhausted, unfulfilled, and at times psychologically damaged" (Spier 42). Women are domestic laborers who undergo psychological trauma, oppression, suppression and inequality. They sacrifice their personal, social, and professional commitments to help their husbands succeed economically and socially.

Alys encourages her students to think beyond marriage, as it cannot promise happiness and social security. She wants them to pursue their careers, achieve their goals and become independent and successful. She encourages them to live according

to their own will and desires, enjoy singlehood, and fly abroad to find their fortune. While addressing Principal Naheed, Alys admits, “I want my girls to at least have a chance at being more than well-trained dolls. I want them to think critically” (Kamal 14). She wants her students to have knowledge about every aspect of life, especially those directly related to them. “Alys is such a forward-thinking teacher who never shies away from any subject” (Kamal 84). She discusses a variety of subjects with her students, such as marriage, singlehood, pre-marital sex, polygamy, polyandry, abortions, divorce, etc. Principal Naheed wants to groom the “girls into the best of marriageable material”, whereas Alys wants them to be the kind of unmarriageable material (Kamal 16). She regrets that her mother always wanted her and other sisters to be the best marriage material and wished that “her mother had asked them even once what they wanted to be when they grew up instead of insisting the entire focus of their lives be to make good marriages” (Kamal 26). In reality, Alys’ mother is “the best mother because all she wanted was for her daughters to live happy, successful lives according to her times” (Kamal 332).

Alys focuses on “the advantages never-married women often talk about, such as greater freedom and independence” (Tweed 25). Like the neo-liberal feminists, she believes that once women get married, they lose their freedom and free will, and their position becomes weaker as compared to men. The institution of marriage bounds women to live their lives in isolated spaces that can limit their thinking abilities and consciousness, resulting in madness and suppression. It can make ‘an angel in the house’ to be ‘the madwoman in the attic’. This is evident through the incident when Mrs. Binat tells Alys that once they get married, women can do whatever they want to

do; Alys replies, “That’s a lie … The dangling carrot to lure us into marriage” (Kamal 98). For Mrs. Binat, life is lonely without marriage, but Alys finds companionship in books, as can be seen through the line, “I’ll never be lonely … because I’ll always have books” (Kamal 98). Alys promotes the idea that marriage is not necessary for happiness, contentment, fulfilment and life satisfaction. Through the character of Alys, Kamal encourages women to “endorse ideas of choosing to be single rather than ideas of barriers to entering the institution of marriage” (Tweed 22). Alys motivates women to pursue their dreams and become models, actresses, or singers. Her father did not allow her younger sisters to join the showbiz industry. “She recalled how bitterly the lady had cried at their father forbidding her to model. The truth was that behind every successful Pakistani girl who fulfilled a dream stood a father who allowed her to soar instead of clipping her wings, throwing her into a cage, and passing the keys from himself to brother, husband, son, grandson, and so on” (Kamal 100). So, Alys does not want other girls to regret not fulfilling their dreams and change the social and traditional norms that limit opportunities for females.

Alys, following the footsteps of the liberal feminists, “deferred marriage and child-bearing” (Brinig 30). She prioritizes career over marriage, and women who prioritize and “highly value their careers are less likely to marry” (Tweed 11). Alys enjoys singlehood to the fullest and opposes the institution of marriage. Her happiness and contentment are evident through her dialogue with Wickaam:

She is as content as a single girl in this country can be when all everyone asks her is why she isn’t married yet, and they tell her she better hurry up before her ovaries

die. It's you men who are lucky. You might be asked about your marriage plans, but everyone leaves you alone the second you mention career. If we women mention career, we're considered aberrations of nature or barren. (Kamal 126)

She further says that we (women) can also support our families and "We can do bread too ... And as for baby, science allows for babies to grow at any age now" (Kamal 126). Alys does not want to take the burden of child-rearing and child-bearing and opposes the idea that women are meant to stay home, do household chores, and look after children. Alys believes that women and men are equal in status and that both can work and feed their families. Alys believes there is much more in a woman's life than being a homemaker, as she thinks that "Homemakers are unpaid and so undervalued" (Kamal 323). She further says she "was more than a child-bearing and child-rearing machine" (Kamal 193). Women should be as independent as men and should not be given the burden of marriage and child-rearing.

Alys does not regret being unmarried, even at the age of 31. She was happy being single, as can be seen through her words: "Single. Happily single, much to the disappointment of many who think that single women are miserable" (Kamal 124). She defies the traditional norms of marriage because she believes that "once wedded and bedded", women lose independence and autonomy (Kamal 143). Like other marriage proposals, she also rejects Farhat Kaleem's marriage proposal just because she thinks they are incompatible. She calls him a "buffoon", and for her he is not a marriageable material (Kamal 183). She does not want to get married as she thinks that the institution of marriage caged women. She also considers Darsee unmarriageable

and rejects his proposal, saying, “I would never marry you under any circumstances” (Kamal 240). She advocated that women should have a right to choose whom to marry and when to get married. She objects to the standards of society for marriage by saying, “If we women decide to marry according to standards, then we are gold diggers, but when you weigh us in matters of looks and chasteness, then you’re just being smart. I can’t understand these double standards” (Kamal 241).

Alys thinks that before marriage, mothers dictate to their daughters the standards of society and marriage, and after that, husbands dictate them. So, girls have no freedom, will and autonomy of their own. She was also of the view that it is better to die unmarried and virgin than “copulate with a potbelly” (Kamal 49). For her, the concept of marriage is merely a “husband-hunting business” (Kamal 50). According to Alys, “Shaadi equals barbaadi, marriage equals misery, a socially constructed battleground” (Kamal 324). Alys seems to be against the concept of traditional marriage and rejects the social norm that “Dignified women do not work outside the home, and men who expect their wives to earn are losers” (Kamal 194). She considers marriage a social contract and claims, “There is no guarantee of happiness in any marriage, and being in love with your prospective partner is not going to solve that. People change, relationships change” (Kamal 195). She does not want to get married just for the sake of marriage as she believes that in the name of marriage, “women are stuck in a bind” (Kamal 249). Alys rejects the concept of dressing up and going in front of people for a marriage proposal and considers this trend or norm a process of selling women like property or a commodity, for her marriage is a system through which females are bought and sold. While addressing her aunt Nona, she insolently

claims, “I’m truly not cut out for marriage, children, that sort of thing” (Kamal 208). On another occasion, she also says, “The desire for sex can lead to early marriage ... legal sex is a big reason people in Pakistan get married” (Kamal 226). Through her ignorant comment, she seems to be neglecting the religious concept of marriage as well as the legal marriage.

The influence of Western culture is so dominant in her mind that she considers Pakistan “The home of marriage-industrial complex. Always a wedding taking place everywhere. Weddings are our nation’s bread and butter and foundation and flag” (Kamal 236). In reality, Alys is the product of the system influenced by Western culture, ignoring her roots and norms, either cultural, social or traditional. She ignores her cultural and societal values as well as the difference between Eastern and Western cultures. She considers the East “a woman’s world, where we are valued for tits, ass, wombs, sometimes earning capacity, but above all else being servile brainless twits” (Kamal 241). Alys thinks that life in Dilipabad mainly resolves around two factors: “marrying well and eating well” (Kamal 42). This is also obvious through Alys’ statement, “Did anyone talk about anything except marriage in this country” (Kamal 43). Therefore, she found her own culture and country backwards, exotic and bad. The Western culture is so ingrained in her that she does not even care what people would think about her.

Through the character of Alys, Kamal is trying to “increase the acceptability of singleness as a social identity” (Tweed 25). This new ideology, i.e. neo-liberal feminist ideology, reinforces the dichotomy between male and female. It also tore down the

differences in the domestic and commercial spheres of life and men and women. Kamal encourages women to step away from their traditional roles as homemakers and step into the professional domain to regain their respect and dignity. She, like Neo-Liberal feminists, knows that “With expanding economic opportunities for women, marriage, child-bearing, and the traditional domestic role would become less attractive” (Brinig 26). Kamal argues against the institution of marriage and portrays it as something unacceptable, but in reality, marriage promises the social and financial security of the wives. To increase the number of working women, Kamal promotes female independence, making women believe it is useless to rely on male partners for social or economic security. She tries to make females believe that instead of thinking about their homes or children, women should think about their jobs and careers.

Kamal under the influence of Western culture through her work promotes individualism, a key element of neo-liberal feminist ideology, which “focused more on women’s assertion of independence from traditional gender expectations, creating something of a reversal of gender roles. This redefinition and reorganization of gender roles is a “fault standard to secure greater economic security of women” (Brinig 46). Herma Hill Kay terms this redefinition of gender roles as “marital bargain” (Brinig 43). This rise of individualism influenced further eras of gender emancipation for women’s rights” (Tweed 7-8). The increase in single women or the popularity of singlehood is due to the “increased participation of women in the workforce” (Tweed 11). This increased the “number of women who are financially independent resulting in higher socio-economic statuses for single women” (Tweed 11). Kamal thinks that if women are independent and have a stable identity, it will raise their social status.

The kind of singlehood Kamal promotes, through the character of Alys, leads to immorality. Instead of emphasizing the positive aspects of society and marriage, the author highlights issues that do not even exist in Pakistani society. In her novel, she consciously or unconsciously promotes pre-marital sex, polygamy, abortions, illegal marriages, prostitution, etc. For instance, Darsee's sister has "premarital sex that had ended in an abortion" (Kamal 248). Darsee's sister Juju gets pregnant with Wickaam's child without marriage, and in the end, Wickaam abandons sixteen-year-old Juju. Darsee hides her sister from the world as she is the "unwed mother" (Tweed 13). Apart from this, Kamal portrays prostitution as something normal or acceptable. Alys says, "My grandmother was indeed a prostitute. Maybe she was the biggest, baddest, busiest prostitute in all of history ... I'm very proud of my prostitute grandmother. She was a working woman putting food on the table and a roof over heads, unlike women ... who are born into an inheritance or luck out into marrying one" (Kamal 311). Another instance of immorality that Kamal promotes in her work is a pre-marital affair. Lady Alys' sister runs away with Wickaam, enjoys pre-marital sex, and does not even regret what she has done. It leads to 'cohabitation', which "refers to the act of sharing a household by an unmarried couple" (Tweed 11). Tweed further contends that "With the single boom has come a rise in levels of "cohabitation" in the population, and a rise in the number of children born to unmarried and never-married mothers" (12). Wickaam and Lady share and live together without getting married. In the name of independence and autonomy, women like ladies enjoy "premarital sex and abortions ... but they'll put on such self-righteous airs you'll think they are the world's greatest naik parveens, pious women" (Kamal 253). This so-called independence and female

autonomy forces women to forget their values and their social and cultural norms. It further encourages them to think men “are only meant to preoccupy” (Kamal 253).

Meanwhile, men “are free to focus their energies on the important things in life” (Kamal 253). Kamal thinks that men are controlling and they suffocate the lives of women in the name of marriage. Immorality promoted by Kamal can also be seen through Jeorgeullah Wickaam’s character, who seduces three of his maids at the age of seventeen. “Wickaam Sahib had seduced them by promising them marriage, money, gold earrings, etc.” (Kamal 246). Two of these maids get pregnant. Wickaam’s aunt requests them not to disclose the matter to anyone. She uses “Wickaam’s inheritance to set a school for underprivileged children, in which Wickaam’s offspring would also study for free, as well as a facility for taking in abandoned infants who may otherwise be victims of infanticide” (Kamal 246). Through the characters of Lady and Juju, Kamal proves that ““A loose woman is a flower every man wants to pluck and chuck”” and Wickaam does the same (Kamal 295). Kamal portrays all the above subjects as normal. However, she forgets the social, cultural and traditional norms that must be followed to have a respectable life within a society. She, like modern women and neo-liberal feminists, forgets that “A woman is nothing and no one without her virtue. Her virtue is the jewellery of her soul” (Kamal 294). The popularity of singlehood not only makes non-marriage acceptable but also refers to cohabitation “as a youthful vocation from commitment to seeing it as a valid life choice” (Kamal 13).

The above analysis clearly shows that Kamal, like neo-liberals, promotes singlehood through the characters of Alys and Jena, who prefer to remain single and

focus on their careers rather than bounding them in any commitment. They stay “single to be free to do what they have wanted” (Apostolou and Esposito 1). This is merely the result of Western influence within the Eastern culture that makes Kamal believe that marriage restricts women from freedom and independence. Like Shah, Kamal also assists immorality in terms of extra-marital affairs and sexual acts outside marriage. This is evident through the example of Darsee’s sister and Wickaam. In an attempt to encourage women to pursue their goals and live their lives with complete autonomy and freedom, she ignores the real essence of marriage as well as the societal, cultural and religious norms. She advocates singlehood to motivate women to have their identities and special status within society, but in reality, the marital bargain that Kamal advocates in this novel does not benefit women at all, as women can be seen suffering because of their selfish and ignorant decisions, e.g. Lady, Juju etc. Kamal in an attempt to criticize the socio-cultural norms and gender differences not only further strengthens the male-female dichotomy, but also forgets the major issues that need to be addressed and resolved. Instead of highlighting the issues unknown to a large part of Pakistani society that need to be addressed as soon as possible for the benefit of the society on a larger scale, Kamal calls attention to the issues considered taboo within our own culture and religion.

## Chapter – 6

### **Do ‘unfettered wings’ Promise Freedom? An Analysis of *Unfettered Wings: Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women***

In her collection of short stories, *Unfettered Wings: Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women*, San Munir promotes women’s emancipation and empowerment through the stories of ten different women from different localities but with the same social, cultural, and societal backgrounds. Munir, like Shah and Kamal, promotes neo-liberal feminist ideals in terms of women’s independence and equality. These women had to face inequality in terms of male preferences, acceptability and needs. While highlighting patriarchal dominance, Munir tends to bring forth the bitter reality of Pakistani society, where “the protector became the haunter of the woman” (Syed et al. 47). These women had to face violence and dominance either emotionally, psychologically or physically.

Through her female protagonists, Sana Munir tries to make every female aware of the hidden reality that “women are worthy of happiness, emotions, thoughts and their desires” (Syed et al. 47-48). Gender inequality within the Pakistani culture is a significant hindrance to the success of female citizens. Munir advocates that gender inequality, freedom, and justice bring peace to a society, and a society without these factors faces frustration and imbalance.

Female protagonists of the novel are the subjugated victims of their understanding of their culture, society, family, etc. Munir calls these female characters “fighters, survivors and very much brainy” (Syed et al. 48). Through the stories of these

female protagonists; she dismantles the customs, trends, norms and taboos that functioned to chain and restrict women in different spheres of life. Munir unfolds the stories of ordinary women facing extraordinary circumstances that make them achieve their goals. ‘Meera’ and ‘Maria’ are the perfect examples of women who choose freedom to achieve their goals and are portrayed as “brave, strong, realistic and active” (Syed et al. 49). Maria is described as a single woman who rejects marriage and promotes immorality in terms of prostitution. Through her character, the author advances a subject forbidden in our religion and culture. On the other hand, Meera is portrayed as a single, independent woman who rejects the institution of marriage and spends her life as a teacher.

Maria is against the institute of marriage and legal love and also owns a brothel. She chooses to use her sexuality and beauty as a means to earn money and, as a result, spends her whole life promoting immorality in terms of prostitution. The story’s female protagonist uses her beauty to attract the attention of men to meet her desires, and that too in an immoral manner. Through her character, Sana Munir dismantles the concept that males exploit females through their beauty. In the current scenario, it is evident that the protagonist herself uses her beauty to attract the attention of the male figures. Female sexuality plays around the lives of men and also influences their life experiences. Instead of patriarchy, matriarchy functions and oppresses, subjugates and suppresses the other gender. Maria, a matriarch, uses her beauty and charm to attract Baseer’s attention and, as a result, destroys his life.

Through her character, role reversal can be seen. Maria, instead of being a victim of oppression, oppresses the male gender, i.e. Baseer, objectifies and exploits him by using her sexuality and beauty. In her case, the female gaze is prominent instead of the male gaze, making Baseer the ‘other’. Instead of patriarchy, sexuality is controlled and influenced by Maria by reversing the hierarchy. She intricates the life of Baseer as well as the other male members of the society by using them for their selfish desires and to show that women do not need male support to live independent lives. By doing so, she is exploiting her sexuality in the name of independence, liberation and freedom. So, feminism seems to have lost its real essence as it fought for women in terms of exploitation, oppression and suppression. It criticized men for exploiting women for their sexuality. However, through the character of Maria, it is evident that females use their sexuality to exploit men in order to get independence and freedom. She uses her beauty to earn money so that she does not have to depend on the male gender for finances. Financial independence forces her to sell her body and sexuality, ignoring the fact that it can be harmful and oppressive for her. Instead of working in a respectful domain in order to earn money and become financially independent, she chooses sexual slavery.

The protagonist of the other story, named ‘Meera,’ also rejects the institution of marriage. Like Alys and Jena of *Unmarriageable* by Kamal, Meera stayed single to pursue her career and goals and get independence and autonomy. Meera was a teacher at Punjab University and gave “all her youth and age to the Political Science department as a teacher, instructor, advisor and chairperson” (Munir 183). She considered herself successful as she did not depend on the male gender for financial security, as “Staying

single was a choice, and she had defended that choice vehemently" (Munir 185). She was against marriage, and every time a proposal came, she demanded to interview him herself and, in the end, rejected him, saying that the suitor was not up to his expectations. She considered marriage to be an "unstable and insecure bandage" and did not want herself to be bound in any relation that could threaten her freedom and independence in her life. She was the daughter of a wealthy landlord, brought up with a silver spoon in her mouth, educated in the best institutes of the city and even went abroad for higher studies. Despite all these luxuries, she left her family to overcome marriage pressure and moved to Lahore, where she lived alone. The urge to become financially independent forced her to leave her own family as her life only revolved around herself, and "Meera Malik was happy with herself and her life" (Munir 195). After she retired from the University of Punjab, she started a new journey of book writing, which was "like getting a new lease of life, professionally" (Munir 197). "A new surge of accomplishment and self-actualization had begun at the age when people are financially wrapping things up" (Munir 197-198). Even at that stage, she did not regret her decision to stay single even though she praised her "several colleagues, who were married, had kids and had successful careers" (Munir 197). She was happy reading and writing books without a companion in her life.

These characters show "their strength, power, bravery, courage and fortitude of relationships in an ordinary setting that is unfolded into extraordinary circumstances" (Syed et al. 53). These characteristics and traits make them the strong advocates of neo-liberal feminist ideology. Through their strength and courage, they form their own identities free of repression, subjugation, and oppression. However, they stand nowhere

within society as individuals with strong existence and stature. Munir, in an attempt to present women, promotes female characters who lack strong personalities and standing within their own society due to their rejection of the local culture and the adaption of foreign culture. Munir is of the view that the female gender, like the male gender, has a right to live their lives freely and peacefully with complete freedom and abundance. For her, both Meera and Maria are a symbol of compassion as they resist the patriarchal society and prove to be powerful through their struggles.

## **Chapter – 7**

### **Findings and Conclusion**

After a detailed analysis, it can be concluded that neo-liberalism has greatly influenced Feminism, and now it promotes the idea that one should not look at women's problems in relation to men. Instead, they should be taken as a separate entity. This analysis has also exposed how neo-liberalism first tries to promote the concept that women should be made economically independent. Then, they should be held responsible for everything that happens to them. Neo-liberalism openly glorifies singlehood and rejects the institution of marriage. They also encourage to have sexual relations outside of marriage but without any commitment. Neo-liberals then use another technique of promoting the idea of a single life and its pleasure and how single women are more potent than married ones. In this way, more women will be single and required to work, joining the corporate world in a large population. Though these Neo-liberals are shown as protectors of the rights of women, in reality, they are manipulating women and using them for their benefit. So, when Feminism promotes these Neo-liberalist ideals, it is losing its essence.

So, in the end, it can be concluded that neo-liberalism has infiltrated Feminism and changed into something different from the original feminist movement. Now, it is termed as neo-feminism or neo-liberal feminism. The recent Western works are promoting these Neo-Liberal feminist ideals, and this is not just limited to the Western world; instead, it has reached Third-World countries where feminist writers are greatly influenced by them, which includes Pakistani writers in English, primarily feminist

writers who have presented these neo-liberal feminist ideals in their works too. It also exposes how this glorification of single women is actually a technique of the Neo-liberalists, who want to increase female labour and make them neo-liberal subjects.

The research aimed to investigate the influence of neo-liberalism on neo-feminism. Then, it had to investigate the feminist ideals presented by the Western non-fictional works. Thirdly, it has to investigate the female characters in Pakistani feminist works and then find whether the Western neo-liberal feminist ideals influence these works. For this, I have first discussed in detail about neo-feminism and Neo-Liberalism and how it has become Neo-Liberal Feminism. Then, I analyzed the non-fictional Western feminist works and exposed the feminist ideals and how they are a tool of neoliberalism. Then, I investigated three Pakistani novels and exposed the influence of Western neo-liberal feminism. I have analyzed three Pakistani novels, which include Kamal's *Unmarriageable*, Shah's *Before She Sleeps*, and Munir's *Unfettered Wings: Extraordinary Stories of Ordinary Women*; through a detailed investigation, it exposed how the influence of neo-liberal feminist ideals are influencing and present in these three novels.

Bina Shah, a strong advocate of matriarchy, in her novel, *Before She Sleeps*, tends to give voice to women who are the subjugated victims of patriarchy through her strong female characters. According to her, men have absolute power, and they rule over women by influencing and shaping their identities as well as subjectivities. Shah believes that patriarchy functions to silence women, commodify them and then use them for their interests and benefits. Through her novel, she tries to defy the gender-

based hierarchy as she considers it a social product, not a natural one and wants a system that promotes honor and respect for women and men. Through her female characters, she wants to empower and educate other women around her to be members of society by rejecting the traditional patriarchal norms to construct their solid identities. She combines feminist as well as neo-liberal manifestos to promote female emancipation. The female characters of her novel are the subjugated victims of the state machinery, i.e., the government of the Green City. These women are forced by the government to get married several times to increase the population of the Green City decreased due to wars and gender-based viruses and are kept under constant surveillance that erodes their privacy. This surveillance forces women to resist against the system in order to fight for their rights. They resist the oppressive government, forced marriages and constant control. While doing so, they set up an underground colony where they live freely without the pressures of several marriages and child-bearing responsibilities. These women stay single, come out at night, meet wealthy people, sell their bodies, earn money and have complete control over their lives as well as their bodies.

On the one hand, while giving voice to women and portraying her female characters as strong and independent, Shah forgets her religious, cultural and traditional norms that do not promote women's autonomy to the extent that it leads to immorality. The decisiveness of the women of the Green City promotes singlehood that results in sexual relations outside marriages that are purely immoral and illegal. On the other hand, Shah's female characters might seem free and independent and enjoy their lives according to their desires, but these women's lives are under constant

threat. Freedom, choice, autonomy and individuality leave them empty-handed as they live in uncertainty and fear. If life in Green City was not easy for them, neither was life in Panah, as they had to leave their families and adjust to the perks of Panah. If they cannot trust their families and husbands, they cannot even trust unknown men to whom they sell their bodies. They still lack honor, respect and individual identities as they live in fear and trepidation. In an attempt to reject the patriarchal norms and break the shackles that resist women, these women have themselves in an illusion of freedom, autonomy and individuality, which leaves them empty-handed.

Soniah Kamal, following the footsteps of neo-liberal feminists, promotes women's independence and tries to re-organize gender roles by empowering women to build their individual identities. She motivates women not to be 'homemakers' and binds them in relationships that lack respect, honor and dignity. Through the character of Alys, Kamal tries to dismantle the institute of marriage and gives it a secondary status in the lives of women. For her, marriage and children should not be the goals of women; instead, they should move away from the norms of a traditional society that teaches women to grow up and get married to gain independence and higher status in society. The institute of marriage restricts women to their houses and threatens their freedom and autonomy. She educates women to be independent, achieve their goals, and achieve financial success without marriage. The female character of her novel, Alys, also focuses on her identity and chooses to stay single to become successful and independent. Kamal portrayed Alys as a revolutionary character who rejects marriage as she thinks that marriage takes away the individuality of women. Alys does not want to be a domestic laborer restricted to household chores and child-bearing and child-

rearing. So, she resists the traditional concept of marriage and chooses singlehood which she thinks can promise her freedom, autonomy, opportunities, honor, independence and dignity.

Alys also encourages her students not to think about marriage and to live according to their will and desires. She discusses a variety of subjects with her students, such as marriage, prostitution, polygamy, singlehood, pre-marital sex, divorce, abortions, etc. The Western influence is so dominant in her mind that she thinks Pakistan is a marriage complex and finds her culture to be exotic and bad, whereas the Western culture is progressive and good. Instead of portraying the positive image of marriage, Kamal opposes marriage and promotes singlehood that leads to immorality, such as prostitution, polygamy, pre-marital sex, abortions, etc. This is evident through the characters of Juju, Darsee's sister, and Wickaam. Darsee's sister has sexual relations outside of marriage that ended in abortions. Darsee has to hide her sister from the world as she is an unwed mother.

Similarly, Wickaam had many pre-marital affairs that resulted in several illegal children he abandoned afterwards. Alys's sister also runs with Wickaam and enjoys sex outside of marriage. Apart from this, Kamal also portrays prostitution as something acceptable and normal. In short, in an attempt to promote women's emancipation, Kamal promotes singlehood and immorality. She ignores the real essence of marriage and cultural and traditional norms.

Sana Munir, like Bina Shah and Soniah Kamal, also promotes women's emancipation and empowerment by rejecting the institute of marriage. Through the

stories of various women belonging to different areas, Munir highlights male dominance to motivate females to fight for their rights to live freely and independently. Through her female characters, she tries to educate women that they are worthy of happiness, so they should choose a path that can provide them happiness and satisfaction. Munir portrays her female characters as the victims of their culture to encourage them to resist that system. Through her female characters, Maria and Meera, she rejects her cultural and traditional norms by promoting things considered taboo within her culture. Maria rejects marriage and chooses to be a prostitute. Through her character, the author promotes an immoral subject forbidden in her religion and culture.

On the other hand, Munir has portrayed Meera as an independent woman who chooses to stay single and focus on her career to form a strong individual identity free of repression and subjugation. Though Munir portrays these characters as strong and independent, they stand nowhere within society. The characters' lives revolve around themselves but fail to choose the right path.

The female characters of the novels mentioned above resist the social and political structures that are influenced by the neo-liberal ideology that further suppresses, constrains and exploits women. These female characters think "Resistance is the secret of joy" (qtd. in Lascelles 5). These women fight for their womanhood and identity, but they get trapped in the neo-liberal ideals and further enslave them. The stories of these characters communicate "forms of agency, complicity, exploitation, violence and rebellion" (Lascelles 6). These women are presented as someone who are

not interested in marriage and are more focused on their careers. These women indulge in sexual acts outside the institution of marriage.

Mainstream Feminism encourages women to fight for their fundamental human rights in order to live their lives respectfully. It started as a mass movement to eradicate gender inequality and oppression that prevails in society due to patriarchal trends and advocates equal rights and opportunities for both genders. Though it functioned to defy patriarchy, it never functioned to promote the immorality and illegality that new feminist trends, in combination with the neo-liberal ones, are promoting in the present-day world. It encourages women to fight for their rights in politics, careers, work opportunities, family planning, education, etc. It endeavors to make women realize male dominance to make them aware of their equal rights in every domain of life. It challenges the institute of marriage and foregrounds the rights to divorce, abortion, decision-making, etc., but it never rejected this institute in its full strength. Feminists struggled to restructure the institute of marriage in order to overcome the problems of women's suffering, either psychological or social. However, they do not attempt to promote sexuality, polygamy, pre-marital sex, prostitution, etc. The acceptance of these feminist trends within the global world is making Feminism lose its real essence.

Keeping in view all the above discussion in the context of Pakistan, Pakistani authors, in an attempt to speak for women, have forgotten their own culture, traditions and societal and religious norms that are much different from the Eastern countries. This cultural agnotology that directly results from the absence of knowledge is resulting in the extinction of local culture and traditional knowledge. These authors,

like some other Pakistanis, belong to a social class that is still enslaved to colonial thinking and is following the colonial legacy in terms of following the Western Culture. They are ignoring the real issues of Pakistan and are introducing foreign traditions within their own culture. This ignorance is disassociating Pakistanis from their indigenous roots and cultural, societal, political and religious norms. Instead of highlighting the significant issues that are dominant in Pakistani society, Shah, Munir, and Kamal are highlighting issues which do not exist in Pakistani culture. In short, they are unconsciously promoting Western ideals through their works.

Instead of mimicking the West, Pakistani authors should engage in the complexities and specialities of their culture and tradition. Rather than critiquing immoral acts such as polygamy, prostitution, pre-marital sex, etc., these writers are portraying them as if they are something acceptable and routine within the Pakistani culture. These factors might be considered normal within the Western culture, but Pakistani culture has its own norms that must be followed. These writers are ignorant of the fact that they are disregarding their own cultural and traditional values and are promoting certain norms that are not indigenous but rather are internalized or adapted. This pervasiveness of the foreign culture within Pakistani culture is clearly ‘cultural agnosia’, which is blindfolding them and not letting them realize the influence of Western ideals within their works. This will eventually result in the extinction of the Pakistani traditions, values and norms. This ignorance of the local cultural values leads to cultural agnotology, which is entirely a negligence of the indigenous values and the promotion of foreign values among the masses. This, in return, isolates these writers from the alternative realities and generates misinformation in Pakistani society.

Intentionally or unintentionally, Bina Shah, Soniah Kamal and Sana Munir are transforming their traditional values and practices and ultimately destroying their culture. They are defying logic and sense and are highlighting the things that are not part of Pakistani culture. The competition with the Western culture and its influence within Pakistani culture makes Pakistani people a blend of two different localities and cultures, pushing them away from the boundaries and limitations, which only makes them a part of them. In search of their new identities, they deconstruct their native identities, making themselves unacceptable and vulnerable to the local customs. More substantial aspects of Pakistani culture should be highlighted to make an international mark. Instead of promoting the osmosis of Eastern and Western cultures, these Pakistani writers should try to make their literary pieces a narrative that can disrupt the global narrative about Muslims and Pakistan. Like Pakistani authors and poets, including Bapsi Sidhwa, Shehryar Fazli, Taufiq Rafat, Duad Kamal, Raza Ali Hasan, Muneeza Shamsie, Uzma Aslam Khan and many more, Pakistani authors should focus on and display indigenous cultural patterns and paradigms to advertise ecological mimeticism and cultural nationalism. They should address social issues of their discursive cultures, but not from the predominant neo-liberal feminist angle to inspire the Western culture and the Global world. They should celebrate their cultural paradigms in their works to engage the readers with immediate culture and localize their land, history, lifestyle, politics, etc.

There is an utter need to make these writers realize that there is a need to eliminate cultural agnosia and cultural agnotology for a better future. These writers should portray the positive side of their country and culture to promote their culture

and traditions and build a better image of their country in the eyes of the Global World. Only this can save Pakistani cultures and traditions from decay. These writers should string along with their cultural, traditional, religious and societal strengths and norms. They should re-value and redefine them to motivate people to follow them to succeed.

By not mindlessly following the Western culture, these writers should try to represent the fundamental issues of Pakistani women, which will, in return, help Feminism regain the role of Feminism as a social justice movement. Feminists need to deviate from the neo-liberal path in order to reshape and redefine the social parameters and gender roles to help women become equal participants in the economic sector. These reforms can help Feminism regain its real essence as a movement for social justice. This will make Feminism no longer a political ideology. Feminists need to introduce new policies that are progressive and can redefine social and cultural inequalities in terms of gender, class and ethnicity.

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