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**A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE FICTIONAL NOVEL THE POWER BY
NAOMI ALDERMAN**

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Abstract:

The aim of the study is to analyze the novel *The Power* by Naomi Alderman from a feminist perspective with reference to the feminist theory of Selma James. The novel is science fiction which presents an image of world controlled by women. The novel represents an interesting picture of a society where women have gained a special superpower to produce electric jolts from their fingers; and the discovery of this superpower within women enables them to raise above men. The study explores that how the writer of the novel, Naomi Alderman has depicted the image of world where women are stronger than men. The study aims at exploring the strengths and potentials of women characters in the novel. The novel is examined with two perspectives; first to discover the elevated status of women in the novel where they control the world system and secondly, to justify that women have the same potentials as do men and it is only about the opportunities which women have been denied throughout the course of the study. Moreover, Selma James' theme of feminist theory is found relevant to the novel *The Power*. The article examines how James' theory is evident in Naomi Alderman's novel. The theme of James' theory that women's empowerment depends on the extent of opportunities they are provided is adduced from the textual analysis of the novel *The Power*.

1. Introduction:

Feminism is an ideology that talks about the rights of women. Many scholars have raised their voice for the rights of women such as Donna J. Haraway, Coral Adams, Elizabeth S. Anderson, Bell Hooks, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Since the dawn of world's history, women have been considered as an inferior creature on the earth and consequently have been treated as slaves at their own houses. In the society, women are strictly bound to obey the commands of authoritative members of the house though they are often against their wishes and desires such as family responsibilities, job issues, matrimonial problems, and so on. But these commands are not applicable for men in the society. Many parents do not advocate girls' education only because of their femininity which is regarded as weak and submissive. Women are regarded second to men. Though every man's intuition is nothing without a woman yet women cannot possess her worthy position for her own intuition in the society.

Since the creation of universe, women have been living under the dominance of men. Though women are capable of doing what men do but they are not given the opportunity to stand side by side with men. They are only considered as a sex tool to give birth to babies. Camus says that one rebels when he can endure no more. So, many scholars after the result of enormous researches, have come at the conclusion that the birth of feminism is the result of injustices directed to women by the male dominated standardization of values. Human beings are innately free, so they should be allowed to spend their lives according to their own wishes. It, but, has been observed by many scholars that women are never equally treated at the hands of men since the dawn history of human beings and they are only considered as house keeper. Naomi Alderman also talks about women rights that have been snatched by men; she tries to eradicate the problems through her novel. In this fiction the author portrays hypothetical picture of the world in which women strive towards power and gradually attempt to take over the world.

1.1 Problem statement:

Women have been subject to unequal and unjust treatment all over the world. Women suffer at the hands of both men and the social system which is mainly a product of patriarchy. The place of women is same all over the globe and they are regarded second to men. Though women have got the potential to compete men in every walk of life if they are given opportunities same like men are given. This research aims to conduct a feminist analysis of the fictional novel *The Power* by Naomi Alderman. The story revolves upon a fictional plot in which women all across the world start discovering that they have developed some supernatural powers which enables them to stand up against oppression of women. The author of the novel tries to convey a message that women possess the same potential as men do but they are not allowed to express themselves freely because of social stigmatization.

1.2 Significance of study:

The study is significant because it discovers a new dimension of feminist field of study. The study focuses on the perspective that if women are set free from the gender structured role system, they can do wonders in every field of life. This perspective is clearly and genuinely represented by Naomi Alderman in her novel *The Power*.

The theory of feminism is of great significance to researcher of literature around the world. This research analyzes the chosen novel from feminist perspective that how women can rule the world if they are freed from the patriarchal social values and principles that hold them back and have halted women progress for centuries. The present feminist study enables readers to get an insight of the possibilities of what might happen when the current sexist hierarchical structures are broken and reversed.

1.3 Research Objectives:

The research aims at:

- To give a picture of how the world would function if women acquired the power that the men possess in the present-day society.
- To provide the readers an insight into the hidden strengths and capabilities of women.

1.4 Research Questions:

The research is going to answer the following questions.

Q. What would the world look like if it became women centered rather than male centered?

Q. What strengths and capabilities of women have been depicted in the novel?

1.5 Delimitation:

This study is only limited to the feminist analysis of the novel *The Power* by Naomi Alderman.

1.6 Chapter Breakdown

The present study consists of five chapters. In the first chapter, the topic, problem statement, significance, research objectives, research questions and delimitation have been introduced. Chapter two deals with literature review. Third chapter is reserved for the theoretical framework of the study. Fourth chapter embodies data analysis of the novel. In last, the study is concluded with the selected theory in the fifth chapter.

2. Literature Review:

Feminism is a product of modern times. It deals with issues and problems faced by women population all over the world. Women, a segment of population, have always been victim of injustice, inequality, sexual abuse, racist prejudice and social stigmatization. They have suffered severely at the hands of men and also at hands of social system which has foundations in male-oriented attitude. The woes of women folks were heard first time by the field of feminism.

Feminism is not only an ideology but it is a movement that aims at addressing the issues faced by women in various spheres of daily life. The rise of feminist movements, in every nook and corner of the world, has been successful largely in addressing the issues countered by women. Prior to birth of feminism, the voices for women rights and women empowerment did raise but with less emphasis and almost with no concrete results. However, feminism arose purely in the context of women's sufferings and provided a platform to female population to raise their voices for greater empowerment. Henceforth, the rise of feminism has soothed women population and they have been successful in getting their major worries solved.

Feminist perspective reflected in *Pride and Prejudice* novel by Jane Austen in 1813 is a research carried out by Trisno Tunggal Rahayu Wilujeng and has been published in the 3rd volume of *Jurnal Ilmiah Bahasa dan Sastra* in 2016. The research deals with the feminist analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* by looking at the plot from the protagonist Elizabeth's point of view. (Wilujeng, 2016). The research manifests a feminist perspective of the main character Elizabeth in the novel. The researcher in the research shows how the character of Elizabeth is a character with feminist attributes.

The Color Purple by Alice Walker, in terms of feminist perspective, has been done by Fatma Koyuncu and has been published in *Journal of History School* in 2014. This research studies the novel with respect to the themes of women abuse, sexism, racism, male dominance and power of narrative voice. The researcher Fatma shows feminist perspective of the novel *Color Purple* where researcher finds out in her study the themes of woman abuse, male dominance and racist attitude of male characters towards their female counterparts.

The article telling feminist stories by Clare Hemmings has been published by Sage Publications in 2005. This research identifies and analyzes the dominant stories taught in academics and about the development of the western concept of feminism in these stories. This research is the researcher's own critique on the portrayal of feminism in different genres of literature. Moreover, the researcher portrays true picture of feminist reality. The development and furthering of Western feminism are a key finding in the above-mentioned research.

The article feminism for the 20th century has been conducted by Barbara Ryan in 2000 and has been published in the 12th volume of *NWSA Journal*. This research embodies the researcher's critique on the gradual development of feminism in the recent years and remarks on the nature of depiction of feminist aspects in 21st century literature. Ryan shows that feminism developed gradually with the development of women studies. He further remarks that the birth of feminism is mainly attributed to the injustices and unequal treatment of women with regard to their role and status in the social spheres by the male members. His research also sheds light on nature of depiction of feminism in modern day's literature.

Feminism agendas; the historical revolution of feminism as reflected in the content of American woman's magazine is another research similar to the present research. It has been conducted by Kyra Gemberling and has been published in 5th volume of *Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* in 2014. The research identifies the themes and trends that reflect feminist values in American women's magazines throughout history. It primarily draws upon scholarly sources like journal articles since the researcher is student of journalism (print and online news) at the Elon University.

Research by the title *Defining Feminism* has been conducted by John Hoffman which has been published in SAGE journals in 2001. This research manifests different perspectives from which different critics of different ages have viewed the Feminist theory. In other words the researcher has endeavored to highlight various approaches to feminism by critics of different ages. This particular study also reveals various types and subtypes of feminism put forwarded by different theorists.

Ehrenreich (1976) is one of the famous authors who believes in complete socialist feminist approach. She advocates for greater woman empowerment. She states in her works, with sheer emphasis, that the values established by men have been the sole foundations of our social system. She regards the social values ingrained in patriarchal mindset have been causing much disturbance to women population all over the world. She stated in her various works the fact that if women want greater empowerment, freedom, equality with men in all walks of life, the social value system needs to be revolutionized.

Federici (2011) gives a completely diverse perspective of social feminism where she states that economic imbalance is the root cause of men and women imbalance. She explains that it is economic disparity between the two genders that have further aggravated the situation and which has given birth to many social problems. It is basically a true presupposition that financial imbalance is one of the greatest hurdles in making women equal to man. Her explanation that social problems for women come out of this imbalance is to some extent very much true. Today, in our world, though women have endeavored to stand by men but still lack equality. The reason for this is that the economic structure in the society and financial system at home are both controlled by men. Henceforth, economic imbalance between the two genders is an obvious cause of women suppression.

Beauvoir, author of *The Second Sex* (1949), has given an awe-breaking perspective of how women are seen as the 'other'. Beauvoir states that since the creation of humankind it is man who has been defining everything. According to Beauvoir it is man who has also defined what woman is and what her roles are to be. She says since woman has been described and defined from man hence, she has been regarded as the other. Because man regarded woman other from himself therefore, he labeled her as the other sex as she was different from man's sex. Beauvoir touched the very essence and foundation of women's sufferings. He attributed these sufferings and suppression of women to man's branding of woman as the other.

According to Landes (1998), multidisciplinary exploration of the feminist theory has been discussed in her articles. Landes talks about the concepts of cultural orientation, social stigmatization and value observation in her articles. The impact of gender roles on the identity politics has been a very crucial analysis in Landes' articles. Furthermore, Landes' article gives an important viewpoint on the feminist theory for gender and women's studies, cultural studies, history, political theory, and sociology.

The researchers Tara and Pulla (2014) have thoroughly discussed the patriarchal concept in their researches. They have analyzed patriarchy from various angles and their focus of study has been South Asia and specifically Pakistan. The low degraded situation of women in the society has been on the increase. Moreover, their works show that women have suffered more at the hands of family than the society. Henceforth, their study indicates that family is the foremost and very obvious abuser of women. Women greatly suffer and endure hardships at the hands of

the family. Moreover, a woman does not dare to go against her family because of social stigmatization which consequently halts woman progress. Therefore, more specifically in Pakistan's context, the role of family is more severe and serious. Women who suffer at the hands of their family members cannot dare to speak up against them which shows how oppressive their condition is.

Napikoski (2017) describes patriarchy as an evil in her researches. To her, patriarchy is one of the foremost causes of female subjugation at the hands of male members of the social set up. Patriarchy is the product of male dominance which not only halts the immediate progress of women population but also is the reason behind female suppression at the hands of male. Women can compete man in every walk of life but they are not allowed to do so because if they are given opportunities to stand with men, the structure of society which is male dominant will ultimately be reversed. Henceforth, Napikoski calls patriarchal version of the society as an immediate threat to progress and empowering of women.

3. Research Methodology:

3.1 Research Design:

The research design is qualitative in nature as it does not employ any numerical data or facts and figures. The research is aimed at analyzing the text of novel from feminist perspective with regard to selected theory of social feminism. The researcher has adopted the descriptive way to manifest the link of feminist theory with the novel.

3.3 Research Method

The researcher applies qualitative method in this research to find out the possible answers for research questions and to justify the selected theory with the help of textual evidence from the novel.

3.3 Theoretical framework:

Theory of feminism is applied for analysis of the current research. Feminism is an ideology as well as a movement that talks about the rights of women which have been denied to them in a patriarchal-oriented social system. The Researcher analyzes the selected data from the novel *The Power* from feminist perspective. In feminism, the subfield of social feminism is employed to analyze the content of the novel. With the help of these elements under the feminist theory; objectification, power and oppression, stereotype, gender differences, gender inequality and gender oppression.

The researcher analyzes the content of the selected novel *The Power* by Naomi Alderman from the perspective of feminist theory of Selma James. Selma James is an American feminist author and has given a theory on social feminism which talks about the strengths and potentials of women and the patriarchal nature of society which hinders women to freely showcase their talent and potential. Selma James states that every woman has enough credential and power within herself to compete and stand side by side with man. However, she further says that due to the male dominance and strong patriarchal social setup, women folks are not given opportunities to freely express themselves which consequently leads to their oppression at the hands of male members of the society. Selma James' theory's characteristics which are taken as model for the research are:

1. Women have the same potentials and strengths as do man and they can compete man in every sphere of life.
2. It is because of male dominant nature of the society that women are not given opportunities, equal to man, to express themselves freely and independently in the society.

The researcher analyzes the selected novel with reference to these characteristics from Selma James' feminist theory.

4. Data Analysis:

The research aims at critically analyzing the textual content of the selected novel *The Power* by Naomi Alderman. This novel is a science fiction which narrates the story of a world in which women are superior to men. The novel revolves around the world in which women have developed a special superpower to generate electric shocks or electric jolts from their figures. Resultantly, the whole structure of the world is changed when women discover that they have a special power within themselves to generate electric jolts and by these electric jolts, they can even kill men. This physical strength of women supersedes their position with regard to man in the society. Women who were abused by men begin to take their revenge and men begin to treat women as their masters. Interestingly, with the help of this science fiction novel *The Power*, the author Naomi Alderman wants to convey message to its readers that what the world would look like if women became superior to men and instead of women living in fear of men, the men themselves begin to fear women. The writer has given a very diverse and new perspective on the position of women in the society. The novel is truly an extreme and radical version of feminist approach as it talks about the ultimate power of women over men and such physical power to even kill men. Moreover, the novel manifest a very obvious truth about over society and it is that women are equal to men in every aspect of life however, they are not given enough space in our society to stand side by side with men. Henceforth, the novel presents a picture of the world where women are not only equal to men but they are far superior and powerful as compared to men.

The perspective of a world controlled by women is clearly represented in the novel *thepower*. The life of women characters in the novel is completely changed when they discover the superpower of producing electric jolts from their fingertips. The following extract from the novel shows the discovery of superpower within women;

“Something’s happening. The blood is pounding in her ears. A prickling feeling is spreading around her back, over her shoulders, around her collarbone. It’s saying you can do it, you’re STRONG.”

This line talks about the discovery of superpower within one of the main characters Roxy. When she and her mother are attacked by some robbers in the night, in strife with the robbers, Roxy finds out that she has a special supernatural power of producing electric jolts from their fingertips. She not only saves her mother but also kills one of the robbers. This symbolic power of Roxy manifests that women do have capabilities and potentials to fight the abuses and injustices perpetrated to them by the men. Roxy, after discovery of such superpower within herself becomes one of the most powerful person in her community. Everyman begins to fear and her physical strength turns out to be greater than man. Alderman, with the symbolic

representation of such superpower, conveys a very deep message. The message is for the society which operates at the helm of man power. The woman dominancy in the novel is an obvious message to the patriarchal society of the world that the women do have capabilities within themselves and it is only a question of opportunity; as once they get enough space to express themselves, the structure of world's system would be completely changed.

Women have always remained under the influence of men. It is the man who has dictated terms for women in every field and sphere of life. The novel the power however, is a change in the course of action where men dictate life of women. The female characters in the novel constantly remain fearful of men until the superpower within women is realized. After the realization of such power, it is now men who live in constant fear of men.

Tunde's experiences demonstrating what it's like to come of age as the weaker sex. "Nothing worse has happened to him than to anyone. There's no reason for him to be afraid, no more reason than any other man."

Tunde is the male character in the novel who works as a journalist and is the first person to upload a video of women's superpower of producing electric jolts from their fingertips. The above extract from the novel presents a fearful picture of a man living as weaker sex. Tunde lives in an age-in the novel- where women are stronger sex than men. So, Alderman from the character of Tunde shows that in an age where women are a stronger sex and men a weaker sex, it is a great threat to men to live in such scenario. Indeed, if the society's system is reversed and women become more powerful man then society would consequently be a difficult place for men to live. Through the story of her science fiction novel, Alderman portrays a very interesting picture of world overpowered by women. The theme of the novel is to demonstrate a picture of world with women being at the place where men are placed today. In today's world, it is women folks who live under constant fear of men and it is women population who face abuses at the hands of men. However, in the novel, the scenario is wholly changed where women control the world and it is men population who live under the threat of women's special superpower. Therefore, the novel symbolically aims at showing that if women are given the same opportunities as men are given, they can supersede them in every field of life. The novel is a representation of women's strengths and potentials.

Men are more powerful physically than women; is misinterpreted concept in the modern world's society. In present society, due to man's physical strength, they have gained control in all walks of life. It is also the reason that patriarchy prevails overwhelmingly in almost every social system of the world. If women become equal to men physically then this gender imbalance would be reduced to a large extent. The novel the power is a manifestation of women being more powerful physically than men.

"It doesn't matter that she shouldn't, that she never would. What matters is that she could, if she wanted. The power to hurt is a kind of wealth."

These lines from the novel show the significance of women's physical strength in the society. The extract talks about the super power of producing electric jolts from women's fingers. The line is uttered by Allie, one of main characters in the novel. Women's development of a specific superpower to injure or even kill anyone with their fingers proves to be a blessing for the women because it allows women to be free and expressive in their lifestyle. The power allows women to take the position of men in the society. Henceforth, the power proves to be no

less than a wealth. The power to hurt man who abuses women and the power to make men be afraid of women is a greater wealth for the women who have continuously remained under the influence of male dominancy. Therefore, Naomi Alderman shows that only women's strength can set them free from the chains of patriarchy and male dominance. Moreover, it is very true with today's world where women have been suppressed by dominant men population because the attitude of society is entirely different towards men and women. Men who are regarded as the guardian of social fabric however women are only regarded as the house keepers and housewives. The role of society is very crucial in this regard because it is merely society which has set the parameters for both the genders and it due to the biased nature of our social system which results in male dominancy and women suppression at the hands of our patriarchal-oriented values, customs, principles, rules and regulations. Therefore, the novel the power presents an altered version of society which is not only women oriented but also controlled by women segment of the society.

The role of society is very crucial in setting up the parameters for the role and status of both genders. Moreover, religion also plays a very significant role in determining the status of genders. Religion, since the inception of human beings, has guided human beings in every sphere of life and instructed man in the best possible way. However, the biased misinterpretation of religions has led women to suffer at the hands of man.

"They have said to you that man rules over woman as Jesus rules over the Church. But I say unto you that woman rules over man as Mary guided her infant son, with kindness and with love."

This extract from the novel is an example of radical version of feminism. These lines uttered by Roxy show that it is not man who rules over woman rather it is woman who has guided man throughout the course of the history.

It is very hard for a woman, particularly in a patriarchal world, to stand side by side with man. It is difficult because men do not want women to compete them and moreover the role of social values is also crucial in halting the overall progress and prosperity of women folks. It is the reason that women have been restricted to homes and the exposure to multifaceted world remains an unfulfilled dream for many girls. However, the novel the power provides an altered version of a society where women not only compete men but also fight them whenever any injustice or abuse is carried at them.

"Roxy doesn't what she's done, but she knows when you're fighting someone stronger than you, and they're down, you've got some credentials and potentials greater than them"

This extract from the novel is taken when Roxy injures a man who tries to harass her. Initially Roxy gets confused because of her weakness against man. But when she jolts down man with her superpower of electric shocks, she realizes that her strength and potentials are greater than that of man. Hence, the world presented in the novel symbolically manifests the picture of world controlled by women. Alderman conveys a very obvious message to her readers that it is not about the gender rather it is about the freedom and opportunities. In the novel, women like Roxy and Allie discover a special power of electric jolts within themselves which ultimately changes the structure of society. Resultantly, the male population becomes the victim of women suppression. Moreover, in a case in the novel, a male character named Tunde is even raped by a woman. Henceforth, the novel represents an imaginary world of women's dominance and male suppression at the hands of women. The fundamental purpose of the novel is to paint a picture of the world where women are free, independent and expressive in their lifestyles. The society does

not restrict or limit women under any parameters because their strength comes out in the form of superpower to produce electric jolts from their fingertips. Consequently, this discovery of superpower within women revolutionizes the whole world and results in women's superiority over men.

When women have developed a special superpower to generate electric shocks from their fingertips, it is the men who are the immediate victims of such power.

"They are both injured and hurting. His collarbone, he thinks is broken. There is grinding pain in it every time he shifts its position."

The extract from the novel presents the picture of a man affected by electric jolts from a woman. It becomes very hard for a man to survive under such circumstances where every woman, younger or older, possess such power. The picture of the world painted in the novel is very alarming for men but very soothing for women. The men population in the novel suffers at the hands of women who have superpower in the same way as women suffer at man's hands in the real world. Therefore, the novel the power is a reversal of our society where women are considered second to men however in Alderman's world it is men who are controlled and feared; and are thus second to women.

5. Conclusion:

Gender discrimination is rooted in the history of human existence. Women have suffered at the hands of men from the very history of human civilization. Gender imbalance has been one of the main causes of women's suppression in modern society. Moreover, strong biased values of social system which are derived from the patriarchal nature of society has further aggravated the condition of women population. The researcher has successfully analyzed the novel *The Power* by Naomi Alderman from feminist perspective with reference to Selma James' feminist theory. The researcher has successfully achieved research objectives and answered research questions by providing the textual evidence from the novel. The researcher has justified Selma James's feminist theory's relevance to the novel. The themes of James's theory that women have potentials and capabilities to compete with man in every sphere of life is justified from the story of novel where the world is controlled by women. James states in her theory that women's progress is directly dependent on the extent of opportunities provided to them and this theme is vividly prevalent in the novel in a way that women gain more strength once they are set free to explore the world.

The researcher has achieved the research objectives with reference to Selma James' theory by providing textual analysis of the novel *The Power* by Naomi Alderman. The researcher has established the theme of James' feminist theory in the novel. The researcher has shown from the novel's characters of Roxy and Allie that women do have strengths and capabilities inside them and it is about providing opportunities to them so that they can manifest their talent. The researcher has also established that it is the male oriented nature of the society which halts the overall progress and empowerment of women.

Moreover, the researcher has manifested the picture of world where women are powerful than men. Women, in the world of novel, control and run the affairs of the world. It is women who set the parameters for the society. The researcher justifies James' theory from the fact that once women stand side by side with men, they overpower men in every field of life. The special power of women to generate electric jolts from their fingertips results in their victory over men.

Therefore, the researcher successfully achieves the research objective that women have the same strengths and capabilities as are possessed by man provided that equal opportunities are provided to both genders.

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