

PERILOUS EMBRACE INTERSECTING WOMEN STIGMA IN WOMEN AT POINT ZERO BY NAWAL EL SAADAWI.

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Abstract: “Woman is a collective identity of a mother, a sister, a wife, a daughter, a friend and a human being. The power of this collective existence is immeasurable and indomitable if it wakes up once.” Nawal El Saadawi often called the Mother of Arab Feminism has depicted the reality of woman by projecting the women question in her brazen novel **women at point zero**. She has whole – heartedly condemned the stereotypic thinking of patriarchal society by pointing at women’s dignity which is not in dancing in tune to the male invented professions neither like Prostitution, nor in taking their lives, but in sensitizing society to the awareness of its short comings.

The present paper analyzes the inexplicable suffering of a female prisoner who is on death row waiting to be executed shortly. She did not appeal for life time imprisonment instead of death sentence. Firdaus fights throughout her life against patriarchy, never giving up like her counter parts, striving for education and economic freedom from men and ultimately unveiling the truth about gender bias and control so that she may liberate herself from it.

Keywords: Identity, Indomitable, Brazen, Stereotypic, Society, Patriarchy, Economic Independence, Gender Bias.

Introduction: Traditional patriarchal practices have given us a male dominated society where it is the man’s perceptions and mindset which lay the foundation of our social order. If a man projects a woman in the role of mother or sister, she is elevated, respected and even worshipped. If he ill treats her, she is branded by society as the evil while not an iota of blame goes to him. This male dominated projection of life has to change, for it distorts reality. Since in our society, power lies mostly with men, the onus of change too lies first and foremost with men.

Saddik Gohar in an article “Empowering the subaltern” in *women at point zero* (2016), talks about how women are marginalized by the patriarchal set up. Saddik explores that *women at point zero* is not the story of Firdaus but it is the story of every girl particularly living in Egyptian society. “Firdaus suffers from humiliation, rape, incest and violence, and the text reinforces her identity as an abused subaltern (184). Saddik has investigated how sexual exploitation made an innocent girl so violent that she started hating the pious relation between man and woman and turned into a murderer. When she felt awakened by her intrinsic self she murdered the accused.

“By the end of the narrative, she is located in a position to rebel the forces of oppression and exploitation. She is not powerless anymore contesting and confronting an entire tyrannical system” (185).

The tormenting journey of Firdaus’s life from an innocent girl to a murderer is not only due to societal background but cultural and false religious beliefs played a great role in turning her life from bad to worse. She is born in a society where a girl is groomed that she is inferior to boy. A woman is ‘other’ to man. “all my life I have been searching for something that would fill me with pride, make me feel superior to everyone else, including kings, princes and rulers”. (9)

GA Fwangyil in her article *cradle to grave: An Analysis Of Female Oppression In Nawal El Saadawi’s Woman At Point Zero* (2012), takes up an issue an issue of female suppression in almost all walks of life

by their male counterparts. According to her, this female oppression is deeply rooted in the culture of societies and because of this only females do not liberate themselves. This article is based on the patriarchal setup which keeps women in slavery only. Firdaus as an innocent girl faces so much tribulations in her life and finally found the emancipation by death sentence.

False religious practices are the backbone of any crime in the society. Women are marginalized so that men may control the lives of women. Women are subjugated by patriarchal society. According to UNICEF's report entitled 'changing a harmful social convention female genital and mutilation in innocent girls', it is argued that every year almost 3 million girls are subjected to this cruel practice which is often life threatening to them.

Firdaus also faces same kind of situation when she was a child and her aunt cut her clitoris. She did not understand what was her crime. She thought it a kind of punishment of some mistake of hers.

Empowerment comes with education but it is also the ironical fact that girls are deprived of education in many parts of the world. It is also the monopoly of men to make women feel that they are superior to men and can't match their standards.

When Firdaus literally wanted to study in university, her uncle laughed at her and said, "university is for men". She wanted to rise high in life by educating herself but all her dreams dashed to the ground due to patriarchal set up of society. Even when she got married life became more worse for her. She is forced to marry an old man and goes through humiliating experiences. Her husband beats her and when she tries to run away from the cage of her husband, she is realized by her uncle that "all husbands beat their wives, and my uncle's wife added that her husband often beat her" (46). She is time and again realized that she is a mere puppet in the hands of men. When she tries to break the clutches of male dominancy she is told that a virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience. Obedience to what - a male dominant society? Once again she runs away from her husband's cage to a coffee shop owner, Bayoumi. He also misuses her. She is raped and sexually exploited by Bayoumi, he also allows his friends to molest her sexually. He locks her in the room. She is able to run away from this place by the help of neighbour. She meets Sharifa Salah el Dine, an old professional prostitute and is introduced to prostitution. She endures the pangs of prostitution everyday until she decides to run away. Although Firdaus resorts to prostitution in order to free herself from man's control and sexual exploitation, Chukwuma agrees that "in both institutions, marriage and prostitution, man is still dominant, the difference being that in the latter only, the female calls the tune" (2). Talking about the concept of Prostitution, Nenden Syahbana M and Ali Mustofa in their article Dismantling Prostitution as an Institution in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman At Point Zero* (2014) says that there has always been a negative concept attached to prostitution. But according to them *Women at Point zero* depicts it differently. It is regarded as equal to marriage, social institution. According to them, prostitution proves to be a source of emancipation for the fallen women in order to get her success, protection, respect.

When Firdaus leaves the job of prostitution she works in a company. When she refuses to follow the tune of other man she is determined to protect her self esteem and live a decent and honourable life. Because of her commitment to keeping her honour and integrity, "word went round that I was an honorable woman, a highly respected official, infact the most honourable, and the most highly considered of all the female officials in the company it was also said that none of the men had succeeded in breaking my pride and that not a single high-ranking official had been able to make me bow my head, or lower my head to the ground" (76). Firdaus is sentenced to death for killing a pimp. She narrates the whole story on the day when she is being executed.

Conclusion: Nawal -El - Sadaawi has engraved the position of women in the society through the voice of Firdaus. She points out that women suffers a lot in life and should get freedom. In the world of so much struggle Firdaus is prepared to die soon and is actually wanting a spiritual and physical freedom. This way we go through the perilous stigma embracing the life of Firdaus in *Women At Point Zero*.

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