

Patriarchal Bargains: Redefining Choice and Agency of Pakistani Women in ‘In Other Rooms, Other Wonders’

Sadaf Mehmood*
Shaheena Ayub Bhatti**

ABSTRACT

Pakistani women are subordinated by its patriarchal societal practices. Their everyday existence is defined and redefined as secondary citizens in the society wherein their positionality generally relies on their geo-economic status that determines their mobility in the domains of private and public space. This research aims to analyze diverse experiences of women’s control and marginalization in patriarchal domains. It argues how socially oppressed women devise strategies to negotiate with patriarchy. Deniz Kandiyoti’s theoretical concept of bargaining with patriarchy and Sylvia Walby’s notion of private and public regimes provide a theoretical foundation for this study. This study interrogates how women while living in private realms or surviving in the public sphere accept this oppression consciously or unconsciously or resist it in Daniyal Mueenuddin’s ‘In Other Rooms, Other Wonders’. This research is significant to highlight that while bargaining with

* Lecturer, Department of English, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

** Professor, Department of English, Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi.

patriarchy the female characters internalize the ideological mechanism of control that eventually contributes to the longevity of their marginalized status. This study, tries to find that how women by adopting negotiation modality attain individualistic favours by asserting their choice and agency.

Introduction

'In Other Rooms, Other Wonders' by Daniyal Mueenuddin is an award-winning compilation of short stories narrating the lives of different people who are connected to K. K. Harouni; a wealthy landowner. Intricately interwoven short stories provide a candid exposition of contemporary Pakistani society. The author manifests hierarchically asymmetrical social structures of Pakistani society wherein individuals shape and are incessantly engaged in reshaping their social relations to endure their survival. This asymmetry defines Pakistani women as secondary citizens whose primary responsibilities include looking after household.

Early feminist scholarship is devoted to defining and describing such asymmetrical social approaches to determine the behaviour of women in a patriarchal society. Patriarchy essentially administers such uneven social praxis that excludes women from public domain of socio-economic empowerment. Patriarchy, in its most general sense, refers "to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways."¹ Feminists examine patriarchy as a tool to control and define women's role and character as inferior by determining and enforcing men as dominant and superior. Patriarchy as theorized by Sylvia Walby is an institutionalized frame of male control and dominance whereby women shape their lives by defining their diversified relationship with men. In *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Walby illustrates "patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women."² This ideological

1 K. Bhasin, *What Is Patriarchy* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2006), 3.

2 S. Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (London: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1990), 20.

manifestation of 'to rule and to be ruled' is synthesized when "the courage of man is shown in commanding of a woman in obeying."³ The contrived notion of male supremacy is challenged by the feminists by stating, "One is not born woman, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch which is described as feminine."⁴ While rejecting the notion of biological determinism, Sylvia Walby elucidates patriarchy as a system to administer that "every individual man is always in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one."⁵ She suggests six separate sets of analytical structures to define the patriarchal processing of controlling and manipulating women in social domains. The six structures she classifies are: a) patriarchal mode of production in the household in which "women's household labour is expropriated by their husbands. Housewives are producing class, while husbands are the expropriating class", b) patriarchal relations in waged work, whereby women are excluded from "the better forms of work and segregate them into the worse jobs which as deemed to be the less skilled", c) patriarchal relations in the state; in which men govern the institutions therefore "systematic bias" is produced through policies and legislation, d) male violence against women, e) patriarchal relations in sexuality wherein men control the bodies of women, f) patriarchal relations in cultural institutions which "create the representation of women within a patriarchal gaze in a variety of arenas, such as religions, education and the media."⁶ Walby's categorization of the six separate spheres ignores this diversity in featuring the relations between men and women. In developing her argument of describing diversity in gender

3 G. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York, London: Oxford University Press, 1987), 11.

4 S. D. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 267.

5 Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, 20.

6 Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, 20-21.

orientation of class, race, region and ethnic diversities, Walby uses the term 'gender regime' instead of 'system of patriarchy' for which she constitutes analytical structure of two major patriarchal relations: private and public to define domestic and public regimes respectively:

The domestic gender regime is based upon household production as the main structure and site of women's work activity and the exploitation of her labour and sexuality and upon the exclusion of women from the public. The public gender regime is based, not on excluding women from the public, but on the segregation and subordination of women within the structures of paid employment and the state, as well as within culture, sexuality and violence. The household does not cease to be a relevant structure in the public form, but it is no longer the chief one. In the domestic form the beneficiaries are primarily the individual husbands and fathers of the women in the household, while in the public form there is more collective appropriation. In the domestic form the principal patriarchal strategy is exclusionary, excluding women from the public arena; in the public it is segregationist and subordinating. In both forms all six structures are relevant, but they have a different relationship to each other. In order to understand any particular instance of gender regime it is always necessary to understand the mutual structuring of class and ethnic relations with gender.⁷

While narrating different stories, Mueenuddin⁸ prodigiously contextualizes the diversity in hierarchical domains of public and private spheres that administer power relations. The male and female characters have specific roles to be performed in their allocated public and private realms. Private space defines women's existence in terms of emotional, weak, dependent and subordinate whereas men are realistic, strong, independent, and therefore dominant. The private space epitomizes chaos which is maintained by

7 S. Walby, *Key Concepts in Feminist Theory* (Aalborg: Aalborg University, 1997), 5-6.

8. D. Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders* (London: Random House, 2010).

the order of public space. Exclusion and outcasts of women from the public realm stabilize the constructed binaries of dependence and weakness. In these confinements, women's mobility is restricted to shun the possibilities of deconstructing patriarchal conventions and strive for becoming independent and strong women.

Stability and maintenance of home and social relations manifest the determination of patriarchal domains with a reiteration of capital interests⁹, while these distinct regimes according to Walby, "coexist as a result of the diversity in gender relations consequent upon age, class, ethnicity and region."¹⁰ Walby's illustration of changing gender relations are interconnected but at the same time different structures provide insight to interpret the organized male dominance for asserting control over women. Pakistani women mostly in rural affinity belong to the traditional orchestration of the domestic sphere and therefore remain subservient and subordinate to men who control the dynamics of the public sphere.¹¹ However, the dividing lines of private and public are compressed through economic determinants that collocate the social standing of both genders. The women due to economic dependence on men have vulnerable social positioning whereas men who are providers relish prestige and authority. Deniz Kandiyoti argues that these fixed public and private domains are challenged by women with their understanding about their economic instability as essential cause that contributes to their disempowerment. With a particular focus on non-European patriarchal structures, she explores the reasons for women's acceptance of the male dominant forms through two distinct patriarchal systems; sub-Saharan African structures; wherein gender relations develop with patterns of resistance after their acquired consciousness of the economic instability.

9 Walby, *Key Concepts in Feminist Theory*, 1997.

10 Walby, *Key Concepts in Feminist Theory*, 6.

11 V. M. Moghadam, "Patriarchy and the Politics of Gender in Modernizing Societies: Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan," *International Sociology*, 7 (1992): 43.

Kandiyoti illustrates this resistance through African women's participation in agricultural labour which makes them economically independent; nonetheless, the problem begins when their labour is granted as unremunerated. Kandiyoti explains, "Women have very little to gain, and a lot to lose by becoming totally dependent on husbands, and hence... resist projects that tilt the delicate balance they strive to maintain."¹² The resistance leads them to dispossession from their own fields and men exacerbate through alternative substitutes like polygamy. Consequently, women were not merely ejected from their fields but also denied the earnings of men. In contrast to the African patriarchal structure of resistance, Kandiyoti examines submission and exploitation of women in classic patriarchy¹³ which reigns in the Asian region. This form of patriarchy, Kandiyoti argues, actively functions in the extended kinship relationships whereby women can shape ambivalent social relations of subservience and exploitation: "It is plausible that the emergence of the patriarchal extended family, which gives the senior man authority over everyone else, including younger men, is bound up in the incorporation and control of the family by the state and in the transition from kin-based to tributary modes of surplus control."¹⁴ Thus, men as sustainers of the family hold decision-making for their families. While living in separate patriarchal spheres, women seem disconnected from the alliance in the public space. Their orbit is defined as fully domesticated and their connectivity to the other women is only possible through their men in the public space. They lack any collective resistance because their relationships are also dependent upon men. In such conditions, women acquire power from their negotiating strategies which maximize their power structure through docility and subservience but equally disable women to form resistance as Kandiyoti puts it, "Systematic analyses of women's strategies and coping

12 D. Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender & Society* (1988): 277.

13 Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," 278.

14 Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," 278.

mechanisms can help to capture the nature of patriarchal systems in their cultural, class-specific and temporal concreteness and reveal how men and women resist, accommodate, adapt and conflict with each other over resources, rights and responsibilities.”¹⁵ The power that women in patriarchy can exert over other women appears to be invisible in resistance strategies which also leave women alone in experiencing patriarchal oppressions that eventually contributes to the longevity of male dominance.

In the context of socio-economic factors, Mueenuddin exhibits complications of the characters for juggling their traditional roles within the established divide of the world outside home and the inside. With the characterization of Nawabdin's wife, Saleema and Husna, the research examines the different social roles of women who belong to different socio-economic backgrounds strive to earn favours from their husbands and lovers through conformities and non-conformities of the fixed social boundaries.

Research Methodology

Drawing over Sylvia Walby' theorization of private and public spaces in the social domains and Deniz Kandiyoti's framework of patriarchal bargains, this research argues that Pakistani women in patriarchal infrastructure assert their agency by adopting negotiating strategies for gaining social stability. This research is significant to explore that in Pakistani society woman's space is confined to private sphere and men to the public space but she asserts her agency to stabilize her socio-economic stratum which directs her to navigate between the two spheres. This research is significant to highlight that while bargaining with patriarchy the women internalize its ideological dominance which reinforces their process of oppression. This study contends that women sacrifice their possessions at the altar of patriarchy to attain emancipation, however, while gaining temporary affluence through bargaining strategies they eternally internalize the subordination and oppression of

15 Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," 285.

patriarchy and cast eternal shades of invisibility in the mainstream of society. By using a qualitative method of research, this study analyses 'In Other Rooms, Other Wonders' by interrogating the following research questions:

- How do the socio-economic conditions predetermine women's secondary status in a patriarchal society?
- How do the female characters adopt bargaining with patriarchy as a strategy to ameliorate their everyday existence?
- How does this strategy further exacerbate patriarchal oppression and subordination of women?

Patriarchal Bargains in 'In Other Rooms, Other Wonders'

Daniyal Mueenuddin's narrative begins with the story of Nawabdin electrician. This beginning story introduces the society of Pakistan whereby both men and women play specific traditional roles that are predetermined by their socio-economic cachet. He highlights that individuals are engaged in incessant struggles to ameliorate their social positioning in both spheres of society; private and public. Such mobilizing endeavours manifest the status-centric orientations in which every individual maintains affluence through material gains. Nawabdin electrician belongs to the middle class in a rural locality and is officially an electrician for K. K. Harouni but he spends his days fixing radios, watches, and old machinery; he even sets up a flour mill but his real income is induced from his technique of "slowing down the revolutions of electric meters" which also secures his employment.¹⁶ Every morning, Nawabdin leaves his home for his livelihood in a public space like a "warrior going out to do battle"¹⁷ in order to sustain his wife and thirteen children with provision of food and material luxuries like black and white TV and running water.¹⁸ Due to his services,

16 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 1.

17 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 3.

18 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 7.

he finally acquires a motorcycle from K. K. Harouni which increases his social status with grace and prestige: “the motorcycle increased his status, gave him weight so that people began calling him, “Uncle”, and asking his opinion on world affairs, about which he knew absolutely nothing.”¹⁹ His elation and satisfaction in public space manifest his contentment in the dealings of the private realm. His role as a provider in the stable confines of public space and a domesticated wife in the private sphere assimilate the traditionalism of a male-dominated society. Nawabdin is fully responsible for the provision of food and shelter to his family whereas his wife remains busy with domestic chores. She prepares meals for her husband, but eats after serving all the family members. As Betty Friedan analyses the images of happy housewives in a patriarchal society which ensures their stability:

The image of women is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies and home but where is the world of thought and ideas, the life of the mind and spirit? In [this] image, women do not work except housework and work to keep their bodies beautiful and to get and keep a man.²⁰

Mueenuddin’s depiction of passivity and the conventional image of a good wife epitomizes her acceptance and satisfaction from her social cachet which also deploys her agency. Nawabdin provides acceptable social status to his wife that she negotiates through her subjugation and devotion within domestic space. Through her characterization, Mueenuddin suggests women’s desire to celebrate the comforts she enjoys in the attire of a good wife which she might not experience in her resistance against an oppressive society.

The position of Nawabdin as sustainer of the family and servitude of his wife sheds light on underlying structure of classic patriarchy. Nawabdin’s social position is further

19 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 5.

20 B. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, INC, 1963), 30.

elated by the birth of his son after twelve daughters because when he will grow up, he will be protecting their socio-economic stability in the public domain. The birth of a son is not merely the symbol of strength for Nawabdin but also for his wife. As Kandiyoti defines docility of a wife and the inevitable need for a male child as conventional strategies for stabilizing her position in the oppressive realm of patriarchy for all women. As she explains that “cyclical fluctuations of their [women] power position, combined with status considerations, result in their active collusion in the reproduction of their own subordination.”²¹ Kandiyoti illustrates the shift from dispossession and powerlessness to dominant and authoritative position by exemplifying the life of a young female bride who is initially dispossessed from her father’s home that is called patrilineal structure and can only find possible survival through her submission in patrilocal realm which is her husband’s home. The panacea of conformity gradually strengthens her position in her new home with the birth of a male child. She states that: a “Woman’s life cycle in the patriarchally extended family is such that the deprivation and hardship she experiences as a young bride is eventually superseded by the control and authority she will have over her own subservient daughters-in-law.”²² The newly born male child of Nawabdin would also connect his twelve sisters living in the private space to the public space where he with his father would earn their means of sustenance.

However, as the mechanism of sustenance is linear, it is interesting to note here that the conformity of Nawabdin’s wife ultimately procures the future of their daughters when Nawabdin develops faith in the inevitability of education for both his son and daughters. Though this education would differ in quality and standard; nonetheless, his willingness to educate his daughters highlights his slight departure from the abstemious sanctions of a male-dominated society and a

21 Kandiyoti, *Bargaining with Patriarchy*, 280.

22 Kandiyoti, *Bargaining with Patriarchy*, 279.

positive outcome of his wife's devotion. The education of twelve daughters gives meaning to the silent subservience of Nawabdin's wife who succeeds in paving the path for emancipation for her daughters. A close reading of "Nawabdin the Electrician" discloses the functioning of the patriarchal structure in Pakistan's rural locality which segmented the society into two distinct spaces of private and public whereby both man and woman are playing their roles smoothly, however, Nawabdin's decision of educating his daughters unleash the turbulence underneath the smoothness of social apparatus. Mueenuddin exhibits education as a harbinger of deconstruction of the underlying rigidity of patriarchal dynamics that merely reiterate male dominance and female docility.

The study of Nawabdin's wife is important to understand the role of traditional wives whose choice to be subservient ultimately stabilizes their children especially daughters who are usually dispossessed from their basic right to education in the presence of sons. This can be further contrasted to the character of Saleema who is an uneducated girl, belongs to Jhulan clan, a clan of bootleggers and blackmailers. Her father was a drug addict, and his death directed her mother to sell her body for their survival. Earning favours in the name of survival renders the lurking desire of Saleema's mother for economic stability that also makes Saleema "a plaything of a small landowner's son."²³ Saleema's marriage with a man from the city who is not merely "weak but depraved" collapses her moral and spiritual uprightness and she becomes "sensual, unscrupulous—and romantic."²⁴ Mueenuddin captures the predicament of her whole life in these three words that define her social status as peripheral. Saleema escapes her sexual exploitation by marrying a "slim and city-bright" suitor who could promise her protection from the oppressions of society.²⁵ However, he loses his job and begins to crave rocket pills. Recollection of her past is filled

23 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 19.

24 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 19.

25 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 19.

with “slaps and harsh words” to which the drug addiction of her husband has poured more bitterness. Her memories of molestation and her mother’s prostitution translate her existence in terms of sexual object and social dependency. Saleema acquires the job of a maidservant in K. K. Harouni’s home when her husband could no longer play his traditional role of a provider due to his addiction to amphetamines. Mueenuddin presents K. K. Harouni’s mansion as a public sphere for Saleema where every servant is male except her. She in extreme immiseration departs from secure realms of her private sphere and ventures into public space for stability. In order to adjust herself in public space, Saleema had to create space for herself. Her delicate skill of making “thin and light” chapattis and her beauty helps her to negotiate with the formidable lines of the public realm which is dominated by men. Her beauty paves her path to Harouni’s kitchen when she begins her relationship with Hassan; the cook, in return the delicacies she receives from Hassan include “things that should have gone to the table, foreign things, pistachio ice cream and slices of sweet pies, backed tomatoes stuffed cheese, potato cutlets”, moreover, Hassan also provides the things that she asks for, “village food, curry with marrow bones and carrot halva. The entire household, from the sahib on down, had been eating to suit her appetite.”²⁶ Saleema enjoys the favours through this relationship. Her terms with Hassan also provide her opportunity to be praised by K. K. Harouni for her commendable making of chapattis: “Mr. Harouni had called her into the dining room at lunch one day and said he’d never in seventy years eaten better ones, while she blushed and looked at her bare feet.”²⁷ However, such negotiations due to their innate transience, do not survive in long term. Saleema’s bargaining with Hassan also ends up without any explicit contention. Kandiyoti coins the term ‘patriarchal bargains’ to define the strategic negotiations of women for their survival in the patriarchal domain. Their bargaining with

26 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 20-21.

27 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 20

patriarchy asserts their agency to organize their support system and social standing for which their subordination cannot necessarily be regarded as their docility. The negotiations with the patriarchal regime escalate lucrative opportunities for long-term survival in a male-dominated system. Kandiyoti exposit:

These patriarchal bargains exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different contexts. They also influence both the potential for and specific forms of women's active or passive resistance in the face of their oppression.²⁸

While bargaining with patriarchal norms, women examine their lines of oppression and exploitation and develop strategic plan of conformity and internalization of patriarchal ideologies. This accolades the adherents; however, it reiterates the patriarchal manifestations of oppression. Unlike the organized strategies of Western feminist scholarship for sisterhood these negotiations in Asian locality take place at the individual level whereby women change the 'rules of the game' to "maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression."²⁹ Being fully aware of her space in society, Saleema at an individual level continuously strives for her prosperous survival.

Saleema, who had been hired to serve Begum Kamila; a "haughty and proud" daughter of K. K. Harouni,³⁰ needs to establish her intimacies, to survive in the public domain. Hassan's ignorance destabilizes Saleema's social positioning and she looks for someone to protect her. Mueenuddin describes her vulnerability by stating that "in this household, a man who had served ten years counted as a new servant" whereby all male servants have over fifty years of service duration and, "with less than a month's service Saleema counted for nothing."³¹ In these conditions,

28 Kandiyoti, *Bargaining with Patriarchy*, 275.

29 Kandiyoti, *Bargaining with Patriarchy*, 274.

30 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 22

31 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 20.

Hassan's rejection makes her position more vulnerable. She seeks Rafik; the valet who served over fifty years in K. K. Harouni household as a man who can protect her from the disturbing pinches of Hassan, from irksome scoffing of drivers and even he intervenes in her expected dismissal from her service after Begum Kamila's departure for New York: "She's a poor girl and her husband is sick and she's useful in the kitchen. She makes the chapattis. If you can give her a place it would be a blessing."³² Growing intimacy between the two allows Saleema to dream of long-term bargaining for her social cachet. Her only possessions; the metal jar of eyeliner and an empty tin box of chocolates epitomize her lurking desire for a luxurious lifestyle but she cannot climb up that opulence. She perceives Rafik as a man who can haul her up to ameliorate her dwindling social standing. However, her acquaintance with Rafik gradually consoles the emotional vacuity in her life through compassion. The socio-economic instability leads her to physical gratification that merely grants her temporary favors which lack any control but her emotional attachment to Rafik directs her to stabilize her social standing while granting her power though, little power.

Saleema, being fully aware of her emotional connectivity, does not allow herself to lose this sustained social status. She knows the power of her husband's name and maintains her relationship with him which eventually protects her during her pregnancy. Without her husband's presence, her character would become doubtful. Meenuddin exposts how Saleema's inclination towards Rafik discloses her discomfort in public space and her silent propensity for seeking the comforts of private space.³³ Her pregnancy and birth of their son give her hope to expect a better and secure future but the letter from Rafik's wife shakes Saleema. She builds a sand-castle and forgets the perils of the tide: "My wife is sixty years old, little girl. She and I have been together for almost

32 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 35.

33 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 39.

fifty. She stood by me, she bore me two sons, she kept my house, my honour has always been safe in her hands.”³⁴ This description uncoils the intricacy of their relationship and Saleema holds her son by exclaiming: “at least this one belongs to me.”³⁵ Mueenuddin delineates how women in the patriarchal frame internalize the hegemonic conceptualization of dependency over men even the newly born male child or the name of an addicted husband who is physically frail are symbols of strength for a physically strong woman. The death of K. K. Harouni summons displacement for every servant in the household. Saleema who could not retain her position in public space remains dispossessed in the private sphere as well. Her eviction from both spheres of patriarchal society directs her to amphetamine and then to her death. Saleema is a representation of the predicaments of Pakistani women in a patriarchal society wherein they collide with diverse challenges that they often negotiate through available options but these negotiations do not give them long-lasting benefits and consequently, they fall.

The character of Husna also develops similar strategies to that of Saleema for ameliorating her status in the story. The relationship of Husna with K. K. Harouni describes the intricacies of negotiations that transform the socio-economic status of Husna and gives her transitory privilege. Mueenuddin through his prodigious narrative technique supplies the minute details of his characters who belong to different socio-economic strata and display their mutual intimacy. Husna belongs to a poor class and visits K.K. Harouni with reference to his ex-wife to find some lucrative opportunity for stabilizing her social status. The tragic downfall of Husna’s family from a prestigious socio-economic position develops empathy in K.K. Harouni’s heart for Husna and he asks his secretary for teaching her typing skills which she learns by hunt and pecking. By displaying her proclivity towards education and professionally grooming

34 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 46.

35 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 47.

young ebullient Husna is able to have Harouni's attention as a different lady opposite to traditional and conservative Begum Harouni who wants to control the mobility and freedom of Harouni in public space.

Husna is a poor girl who finds her father weak enough to provide her the lost glory of their family's wealth and affluence except for its nostalgia; therefore, she liberates herself from the cocoon of the private where she could not imagine the stability of her future. While living in the service of Begum Harouni and enjoying her concession of experiencing the public space, Husna becomes adamant to have the flavour of an elite and wealthy lifestyle. Husna resents her parents, she "despised them for living so much in the past, for retelling the stories of their grandparents' land and money, and yet at the same time she felt entitled to rejoin that world and nursed a grievance at being excluded from it."³⁶ Her downtrodden family which "had not so much fallen into poverty as failed to rise" could not bestow her a happy married life instead it will lead her to more miserable condition for which she gets succeeded in going to the main city where K. K. Harouni could help her departure from fate-smitten life.

The mesmerizing mansion of Harouni instigates Husna to create her space with more fervour and intensity. Husna knows the norms of a patriarchal society which could not give her respect in the public space and to remain in the private sphere she had to play her stereotypical role of an obedient daughter, then a submissively dormant wife, and later a devoted mother. Her life in the traditional outset of patriarchy could only regard her medals of respect and dignity which she renounced by challenging her presence in public space without any professional education and beauty because she is "neither pretty nor presentable"³⁷ but merely as a woman with "determination and cunning."³⁸ With these

36 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 114.

37 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 125.

38 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 115.

invisible qualities, she cajoles Harouni for her ingression in his mansion: “when begum is gone they don’t cook any food at all, just the servants’ food. And Begum Sahiba doesn’t like me to use the electricity. And when she’s gone on hajj, she won’t leave me any money.”³⁹ Harouni who does not “like to see her cry because it upsets him”, asks her in return to stay with him which she accepts genially: “I could keep you company when you’re alone and make your tea for you.”⁴⁰ Husna bargains for her desirous lifestyle which she realizes can only be possible if she becomes K. K. Harouni’s mistress: “Husna would live in better quarters than ever before in her life, with uninterrupted supplies of good food, servants who more or less did her bidding, and occasional use of the car.”⁴¹ Being the young mistress of K. K. Harouni, Husna enjoys a privileged social position. Her vulnerable socio-economic position ameliorates when she begins her relationship with K. K. Harouni. She receives protection from the fury of Begum Harouni, from the contemptuous eyes of his daughters, and from the meaningful smiles of his friends. She also feels free to exercise her power over the servants who belong to a similar lower social stratum as her; furthermore, she gets a regular share in the financial account of Harouni to make lavish purchases.

Mueenuddin manifests the transience of women’s liberty in a patriarchal society wherein women could only celebrate their empowerment when they affiliate themselves with men. Due to this reliance women fail to maintain their stability which leads them to more conundrums. They receive temporary benefits through bargaining but cast doleful shades of patriarchy over them eternally. The sexual desire according to Connell is socially hegemonic which extends the ambivalence of this relationship: “solidarity of the heterosexual couple is formed on the basis of some kind of reciprocity, rather than a basis of common situation or

39 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 118.

40 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 119.

41 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 119.

experience.”⁴² Both women and men are in need of each other whether categorizing ‘sexual fetishism’ or the structural principles of dominance. Husna’s bargaining invades since Harouni also seeks a companion to be loved and cared. He confesses her impermanent position before his daughter:

And I’m lonely, Sarwat. You’re in Karachi, Kamila is in New York, and Rehana hasn’t even spoken with me in ten years. My friends are dying off or don’t go out anymore. She keeps me company. She’s no genius, if you like, but she can play cards and so on. Why don’t you spend more time in Lahore? You have a lonely house here, friends here. I would much prefer to see you than her, but you’re not available.⁴³

Though Husna always had her intentions for bargaining in the background, yet she develops an intimacy with the old man and avoids his approaching death due to a problematic heart. She remains busy living her days in luxury and accumulating symbols of wealth in her room but does not⁴⁴ draw her attention toward her unfixed future and the sudden death of Harouni features her outcast from her short-lived stability. Her inconspicuous wandering in the house informs her that “only she truly cared that she had lost more than all the others.”

Conclusion

Daniyal Mueenuddin’s ‘In Other Rooms, Other Wonders’ portrays the underlying patriarchal infrastructure of Pakistani society whereby woman’s space is confined to the private sphere and men to the public space but she asserts her agency to stabilize her socio-economic stratum which directs her to navigate between the two spheres. Analysis of the selected fiction exposes Pakistani women as socially and economically dependent upon their male counterparts. This study argued that to resist the conventional patriarchal setup, the female characters assert their agency by adopting negotiating strategies for gaining social stability. Against the

42 R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 113.

43 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 112

44 Mueenuddin, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*, 135.

backdrop of Kandiyoti's Bargaining with Patriarchy, this study has investigated women from different socio-economic conditions to demonstrate their variant patriarchal milieu to correspond to their strategic survival. The wife of Nawabdinelectrician appears to be satisfied with her traditional docility because her husband provides her with the luxuries that other women in her ambience do not enjoy. Saleema's character epitomizes the socially and economically unprivileged woman who is acutely aware of her stability due to the men of society. Her deprived lifestyle instigates her to comply with male dominance for her ameliorated social positioning. Husna is also dissatisfied with her social status and seeks K. K. Harouni as a bargaining chip for her future stability. This research concludes that the female characters throughout their lives struggle for stability and amelioration in their social positioning by using bargaining techniques; however, while gaining temporary affluence they eternally internalize the subordination and oppression of patriarchy.