

**DECODING TEHRAN THROUGH *LOLITA* AND *LOLITA* THROUGH TEHRAN:
ANALYZING THE PATRIARCHAL IMAGINATION THROUGH AZAR
NAFISI'S *READING LOLITA IN TEHRAN***

Dr. Munejah Khan

Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature
Islamic University of Science and Technology Pulwama J&K, India

Abstract

Azar Nafisi, the Iranian writer gained popularity with the publication of her work *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* in 2003. The memoir documents important pre and post-revolution events and Nafisi intertwines the history of Iran with the personal histories of her characters. The novel is woven around a secret 'reading group' initiated by Nafisi for her seven female students. Together they read Western books banned in the post-revolutionary Iran and try to draw a parallel between literature and the life of women in Iran. The memoir takes its title from Vladimir Nabakov's *Lolita* (1955), banned for its pornographic content which how Humbert confiscates Lolita's freedom to turn her into an object of his imagination. For Nafisi, *Lolita* is relevant because the freedom of the women in Iran stands confiscated by the patriarchal imagination. The paper analyses how patriarchy is dominant both in the pre-revolution era and the post-revolution era in Iran. It is generally thought that women in Iran were empowered before the revolution and their freedom was curbed post-revolution. This stance is usually put forth by citing the 'unveiling' in pre-revolution and the 'veiling' in post-revolution era.

The focus of this paper is to emphasize that the women of Iran were always under patriarchal control as all the political regimes shared patriarchal ideology. Women were denied control over their destinies irrespective of whether the regime was headed by the moderate Reza Shah Pahlavi or the staunch Ayatollah Khomeini. According to Adrienne Rich feminists do not only confront inequality in society and property possession, but also take into account pervasive cluster of forces, ranging from physical brutality to control of consciousness. Through recourse to feminist literary theory the paper focuses on the physical and mental control exerted by the patriarchal forces on the 'body' and 'psyche' of women in Iran.

Key words: patriarchy, oppression, Iran, women, veil

Introduction

I

Feminist theorists across cultures converge that the subordination of women is consequential to patriarchal ideology. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1969) affirms that