

## **NAILA'S STRUGGLE OVERCOMING GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN AISYA SAEED'S *WRITTEN IN THE STARS* NOVEL**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines gender discrimination and women's struggle as represented in Aisha Saeed's novel *Written in the Stars*. Gender discrimination remains a persistent issue within patriarchal societies, where women are often subjected to unequal treatment, limited autonomy, and coercive social practices. Using a descriptive qualitative research design, this study analyzes narrative passages and dialogues that depict discriminatory practices experienced by the female protagonist, Naila, and her resistance to patriarchal domination. The analysis is guided by Fakh's concept of gender discrimination and Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory. The findings reveal that Naila experiences several forms of gender discrimination, including subordination, marginalization, and psychological violence, particularly in the context of forced marriage and restricted personal freedom. These discriminatory practices position women as objects of control within familial and cultural systems. Despite these constraints, Naila demonstrates resistance through awareness, emotional defiance, and the pursuit of self-determination. Her struggle reflects an existential process of becoming a subject who challenges oppressive gender norms. This study concludes that *Written in the Stars* portrays gender discrimination as a structural problem rooted in patriarchal ideology while simultaneously highlighting women's capacity for resistance. By applying feminist theory to contemporary young adult fiction, this research contributes to feminist literary studies and offers insight into how literature functions as a medium for exposing and contesting gender inequality.

**Keywords:** *gender discrimination; female resistance; feminism; patriarchy; subordination*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Gender discrimination remains a persistent issue in societies structured by patriarchal values, where women often experience unequal treatment in family life, education, and personal autonomy (Fakh, 2013; Beauvoir, 2011). Such discrimination is not only a social reality but also a recurring theme in literary works that reflect and critique gender-based injustice. Literature, therefore, becomes an important medium through which gender inequality and women's resistance can be examined, particularly within cultural contexts that normalize patriarchal authority.

Aisha Saeed's novel *Written in the Stars* portrays gender discrimination through the experiences of Naila, a Pakistani American young woman who is forced into marriage under the guise of family honour and cultural obligation (Saeed, 2015). Raised in the United States with values of independence and self-determination, Naila is confronted with restrictive gender norms when she is taken to Pakistan and compelled to submit to patriarchal control. The novel highlights various forms of discrimination directed at women, including forced marriage, limitation of freedom, and the denial of personal choice, illustrating how patriarchal power operates within both familial and cultural structures.

Previous studies on *Written in the Stars* have largely focused on cultural representation and the issue of forced marriage (e.g., Nagari, 2022; Manugeran, 2020). For example, earlier research has examined the contrast between Pakistani and American cultural values or the psychological impact of arranged marriage on female characters. However, these studies tend to emphasize cultural conflict rather than systematically analyzing gender discrimination and the female protagonist's struggle against it. As a result, the specific forms of discrimination experienced by Naila and her strategies of resistance remain insufficiently explored from a feminist literary perspective.

To address this gap, the present study examines gender discrimination and women's struggle in *Written in the Stars* by applying feminist theoretical frameworks. This study draws on Fakih's concept of gender discrimination to identify the forms of discrimination experienced by the female protagonist (Fakih, 2013), and Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory to analyze Naila's struggle to assert her agency and subjectivity (Beauvoir, 2011). By combining these perspectives, the study seeks to reveal how patriarchal domination is constructed in the narrative and how women resist such domination through acts of awareness, refusal, and self-determination.

Accordingly, this study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What forms of gender discrimination are experienced by Naila in Aisha Saeed's *Written in the Stars*? and (2) How does Naila struggle to overcome gender discrimination within a patriarchal system? Through these questions, the study contributes to feminist literary criticism by demonstrating how contemporary young adult fiction represents women's resistance to gender discrimination and by highlighting literature's role in exposing and challenging patriarchal ideology.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to examine gender discrimination and women's struggle as represented in Aisha Saeed's *Written in the Stars*. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting meanings, experiences, and social relations as constructed through literary narrative rather than measuring phenomena quantitatively (Creswell, 2014). This design allows for an in-depth exploration of how gender discrimination is portrayed and how the female protagonist responds to patriarchal constraints within the novel.

The primary data source of this study is the novel *Written in the Stars* by Aisha Saeed (2015). The data consist of narrative passages, dialogues, and character actions that reflect forms of gender discrimination and women's struggle experienced by the main character, Naila. The selection of data was conducted purposively, focusing on textual evidence that illustrates discriminatory practices such as forced marriage, restriction of freedom, and marginalization, as well as moments that demonstrate resistance, awareness, and agency.

Data collection was carried out through close reading of the novel. The text was read repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline, character development, and socio-cultural context. Relevant passages were identified, highlighted, and categorized based on the research focus. The data were then classified according to Fakih's concept of gender discrimination, which includes marginalization, subordination, stereotyping, violence, and workload (Fakih, 2013). Subsequently, Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory was applied to analyze Naila's struggle to assert her subjectivity and autonomy within a patriarchal system (Beauvoir, 2011).

Data analysis followed an interpretative textual analysis procedure. The selected data were examined by identifying the forms of gender discrimination present in the narrative and interpreting how the protagonist responds to these conditions. The analysis emphasizes the relationship between patriarchal power and women's resistance, linking textual findings to feminist theoretical perspectives. Through this process, the study reveals how literary representation functions as a critique of gender inequality and highlights women's struggle for self-determination.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study based on the analysis of Aisha Saeed's *Written in the Stars*. The discussion focuses on two main aspects: the forms of gender discrimination experienced by the female protagonist, Naila, and her struggle to overcome such discrimination within a patriarchal system. The analysis is guided by Fakih's concept of gender discrimination and Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory.

### Forms of Gender Discrimination Experienced by Naila

The findings reveal that Naila experiences several forms of gender discrimination that reflect patriarchal domination. One prominent form is subordination, in which women's voices and choices are considered less important than male authority. Naila's opinions regarding her future, education, and personal relationships are repeatedly dismissed by her

family, particularly by male figures who assume the right to make decisions on her behalf. This subordination positions Naila as an object of control rather than a subject with autonomy, aligning with Fakhri's (2013) assertion that patriarchy systematically places women in inferior positions.

Another form of discrimination evident in the novel is marginalization (Traesar, Saktiningrum, 2024). Naila is isolated socially and emotionally when she is taken to Pakistan and separated from her familiar environment in the United States. Her access to education, communication, and social interaction is restricted, which limits her opportunities for self-development. Such marginalization reinforces women's dependence on patriarchal structures and reduces their ability to resist oppression.

The study also identifies violence as a form of gender discrimination (Adhitya et al., 2024). Although not always physical, the violence experienced by Naila includes psychological pressure, intimidation, and coercion, particularly in relation to forced marriage. These acts of violence function as mechanisms of control that compel obedience and suppress resistance. According to Fakhri (2013), violence against women often operates subtly through emotional manipulation, a pattern that is clearly reflected in Naila's experience.

### **Naila's Struggle Against Gender Discrimination**

Despite facing multiple forms of discrimination, Naila demonstrates various forms of struggle that signify her resistance to patriarchal domination. Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's feminist perspective, women's struggle is understood as a process of becoming a subject rather than remaining an object within a male-dominated system (Beauvoir, 2011). Naila's struggle begins with awareness, as she gradually recognizes the injustice of the restrictions imposed upon her. This awareness marks the initial stage of resistance, enabling her to question the legitimacy of patriarchal authority.

Naila's struggle is further expressed through refusal and emotional resistance. Although her physical freedom is limited, she resists internally by rejecting the values that justify her oppression. Her emotional resistance reflects Beauvoir's notion that liberation does not always begin with physical action but with the rejection of imposed meanings and roles.

Ultimately, Naila's struggle culminates in her attempt to reclaim agency and self-determination. By asserting her desire for autonomy and refusing to accept forced marriage as her destiny, Naila challenges the patriarchal system that seeks to define her identity. This struggle illustrates how women's resistance, even when constrained, represents an act of existential defiance against gender-based oppression.

The findings demonstrate that gender discrimination in *Written in the Stars* is not merely a personal issue but a structural problem rooted in patriarchal ideology. Naila's struggle highlights the possibility of resistance through awareness, emotional strength, and the pursuit of autonomy. By integrating Fakhri's and Beauvoir's theoretical perspectives, this study reveals how literary narratives function as a space for c.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has examined gender discrimination and women's struggle as portrayed in Aisha Saeed's *Written in the Stars*. The findings show that Naila experiences various forms of gender discrimination, including subordination, marginalization, and violence, all of which stem from patriarchal power structures. These forms of discrimination restrict women's freedom and position them as objects of control within family and cultural systems.

Despite these constraints, Naila demonstrates resistance through awareness, emotional defiance, and the pursuit of self-determination. Her struggle reflects Simone de Beauvoir's concept of women's liberation as a process of becoming a subject who actively challenges oppressive structures. The study concludes that *Written in the Stars* presents gender discrimination as a systemic issue while simultaneously emphasizing women's capacity for resistance.

This research contributes to feminist literary studies by applying Fakhri's and Beauvoir's theories to contemporary young adult fiction. However, the study is limited to a single literary work and focuses on textual analysis. Future research

may explore comparative studies across different cultural contexts or examine reader responses to representations of gender discrimination in young adult literature.

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