

**OPPRESSION TOWARDS MAIN FEMALE CHARACTERS IN
RAO'S *GIRLS BURN BRIGHTER***

THESIS

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UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK IBRAHIM
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2023**

**OPPRESSION TOWARDS MAIN FEMALE CHARACTERS IN
RAO'S *GIRLS BURN BRIGHTER***

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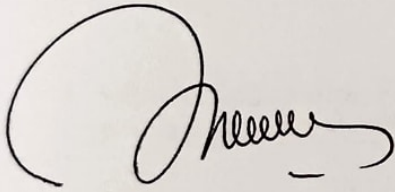
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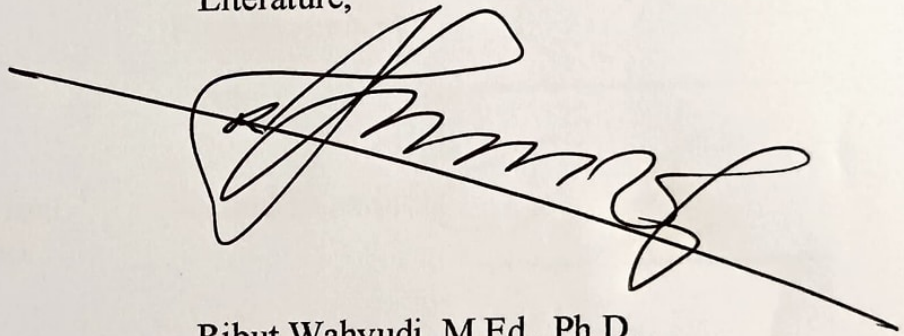
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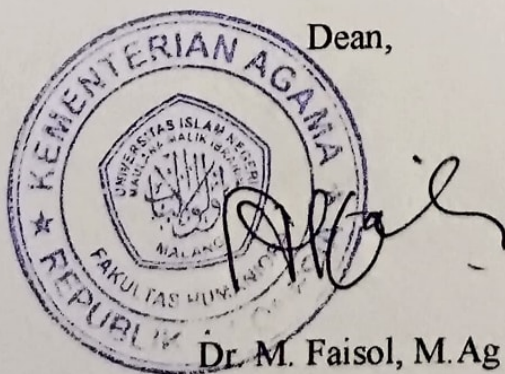
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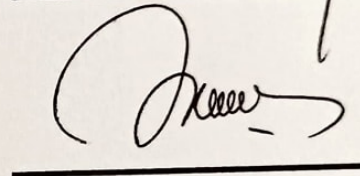
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MOTTO

Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero

(Seize the day, place in the hours that come as little faith as you can)

- Horace -

DEDICATION

This thesis I dedicated to:

My beloved parents, Mr. Mochammad Wardi and Mrs. Holiyah

My lovely sister, Hilda Safira Ramadhan

All of you

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All praise be to Allah SWT who has granted His blessings and guidance to the author to complete this thesis entitled *Oppression Towards Main Female Characters in Rao's Girls Burn Brighter* as one of the requirements for the degree of *Sarjana Sastra* (S.S.) in Department of English Literature. Peace and blessings be upon the beloved Prophet Muhammad, who has been a role model for humanity in every aspect of life. The researcher would also like to express gratitude and appreciation to all parties who have helped and supported during the process of writing this thesis:

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Finally, the researcher hopes that this study can provide a new reference in conducting further studies in the field of Feminist Criticism and literary criticism development. Nevertheless, the researcher acknowledges that this thesis has limitations and is open to receiving constructive criticism and suggestions to enhance it.

Malang, 19 May 2023
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ABSTRACT

Rizky, Wilma Afrilia (2023) *Oppression towards Main Female Characters in Rao's *Girls Burn Brighter**, Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University Malang. Advisor: Dr. Hj. Istiadah, MA

Key word: *oppression, intersectionality, feminist literary criticism*

The perception of the women's inferiority in society has created significant issues in the form of oppression of women. Furthermore, literary works portrayed these issues to raise awareness because it has an important role as one of the means to address the issue of oppression against women. Shobha Rao's novel *Girls Burn Brighter* is a feminist literary work that highlights the oppression of women. This study aims to examine the oppression of main female characters as revealed in the novel through literary devices. This study used a sociological approach since the novel raise the social phenomena of female oppression which is examined through the perspective of feminist literary criticism. The researcher applies Iris Young's theory of oppression to explore the forms of oppression and Kimberly Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality to look out the factors of oppression experienced by main female characters. The results of this study found that the main female characters, Poornima and Savitha, experience oppression in the forms of marginalization, exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. They experience marginalization in terms of limited access to resources, exploitation in both sexual and labor aspects, and violence that affects their lives physically, and sexually. Poornima experiences powerlessness in accepting mistreatment, and cultural imperialism that reinforces societal expectations for women. In the perspective of intersectionality, their experiences of oppression are influenced by multiple intersecting factors such as gender, social class, political power, and cultural representation.

مستخلص البحث

رزقي، ويلما أفريليا (٢٠٢٣) القمع تجاه الشخصيات النسائية الرئيسية في رواية كيرلس بورن بريكتير لشوبها راو. البحث الجامعي. قسم الإنجليزي و أدابها ، كلية العلوم الإنسانية ، جامعة الإسلامية الحكومية مولانا مالك إبراهيم مالانج. المشرفة: دكتور إستعادة الحاجة، الماجستير

الكلمات الأساسية: القمع ، التقاطع ، النقد النسوي الأدبي

إن تصور دونية المرأة في المجتمع قد خلق قضايا مهمة في شكل اضطهاد المرأة. علاوة على ذلك، صورت الأعمال الأدبية هذه القضايا لزيادة الوعي لما لها من دور مهم كأحدى وسائل معالجة قضية اضطهاد المرأة. رواية شوبها راو " كيرلس بورن بريكتير" هي عمل أدبي نسوي يسلط الضوء على اضطهاد المرأة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فحص اضطهاد الشخصيات النسائية الرئيسية كما كشفت عنه الرواية من خلال الأجهزة الأدبية. استخدمت هذه الدراسة منهجا سوسيولوجيا حيث أثارت الرواية الظواهر الاجتماعية لاضطهاد المرأة التي يتم بحثها من خلال منظور النقد الأدبي النسوي. تطبق الباحثة نظرية إيريس يونغ في القمع لاستكشاف أشكال القمع ونظرية كيمبرلي كرينشو للتقاطع للنظر في عوامل القمع التي تعاني منها الشخصيات النسائية الرئيسية. وجدت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن الشخصيات النسائية الرئيسية ، بورنينا وسافينا ، تعاني من القمع في أشكال التهميش والاستغلال والعجز والإميرالية الثقافية والعنف. إنهم يعانون من التهميش من حيث محدودية الوصول إلى الموارد، والاستغلال في كل من الجوانب الجنسية والعمالية، والعنف الذي يؤثر على حياتهم جسديا وجنسيا. تعاني بورنينا من العجز في قبول سوء المعاملة ، والإميرالية الثقافية التي تعزز التوقعات المجتمعية للمرأة. في منظور التقاطع، تتأثر تجاربهم مع القمع بعوامل متقاطعة متعددة مثل الجنس والطبقة الاجتماعية والسلطة السياسية والتمثيل الثقافي.

ABSTRAK

Rizky, Wilma Afrilia (2023) Penindasan terhadap Karakter-Karakter Utama Perempuan dalam novel *Girls Burn Brighter* Karya Shobha Rao. Skripsi. Jurusan Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Pembimbing: Dr. Hj. Istiadah, MA

Kata Kunci: *penindasan, interseksionalitas, kritik sastra feminis*

Persepsi inferioritas perempuan dalam masyarakat telah melahirkan isu-isu signifikan berupa penindasan terhadap perempuan. Lebih lanjut, karya sastra mengangkat isu-isu tersebut untuk membangkitkan kesadaran karena memiliki peran penting sebagai salah satu sarana untuk mengatasi isu penindasan terhadap perempuan. Novel *Girls Burn Brighter* karya Shobha Rao adalah karya sastra feminis yang menyoroti penindasan terhadap perempuan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penindasan terhadap tokoh utama perempuan yang terungkap dalam novel melalui perangkat sastra. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan sosiologis karena novel ini mengangkat fenomena sosial penindasan perempuan yang dikaji melalui perspektif kritik sastra feminis. Peneliti juga menggunakan teori penindasan Iris Young untuk mengeksplorasi bentuk-bentuk penindasan dan teori interseksionalitas Kimberly Crenshaw untuk melihat faktor-faktor penindasan yang dialami tokoh utama perempuan. Hasil penelitian ini menemukan bahwa tokoh utama perempuan, Poornima dan Savitha, mengalami penindasan berupa marginalisasi, eksploitasi, ketidakberdayaan, imperialisme budaya, dan kekerasan. Mereka mengalami marginalisasi dalam hal keterbatasan akses terhadap sumber daya, eksploitasi baik dalam aspek seksual maupun tenaga kerja, serta kekerasan yang mempengaruhi kehidupan mereka secara fisik dan seksual. Poornima mengalami ketidakberdayaan dalam menerima penganiayaan, dan imperialisme budaya yang memperkuat ekspektasi masyarakat terhadap perempuan. Dalam perspektif interseksionalitas, pengalaman penindasan mereka dipengaruhi oleh berbagai faktor yang bersinggungan seperti gender, kelas sosial, kekuatan politik, dan representasi budaya.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher elaborates and explains background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and definitions of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

The perception of inferiority towards women has created a significant issue of oppression against them. In the present society, there is a prevailing idea that places higher values on men than women in various aspects of life including power, education, and employment opportunities. This leads to negative consequences for women in societies since they are frequently oppressed. In this regard, Lerner (1989) highlighted the importance of men's authority in all vital societal institutions that limit women's access to power. The dominance of men in positions of power restricts women's participation in access to resources and decision-making. Because of their perceived inferiority, this reinforces oppressive practices on women.

The portrayal of male superiority is reflected in the way society treats women on a daily life. For instance, one country that is often associated with the notion of male superiority over women is India. According to Johnson & Johnson (2001), the attitude of male superiority and positioned women as servants in India contributes to the perpetuation of women's oppression manifested in harmful practices. The existence of unequal power between gender and strong social norms

limit women's autonomy in family and society. As consequence, women are subjected to various forms of oppression, such as domestic violence, child marriage, the dowry system, and injustice in the legal system. Thus, this practice of oppression is a real threat to women in India as they are still being oppressed to the present day.

The high prevalence of oppression in India indicates a serious persistent issue. Data released by the National Crime Records Bureau of India (NCRB) revealed that in 2021 there were 4,05,861 registered cases of crimes against women, which is an increase of 15.3% from the previous year. These cases include domestic violence, dowry-related fatalities, sexual assault, and rape. This growing number demands serious attention since the practice of oppression on women harms women's lives and violates their human rights.

The pervasive nature of women's issues has encouraged the extensive exploration in numerous fields of study including literature. Literature plays a significant role in addressing the occurrence of women's oppression as it reflects an existing societal reality. By depicting the women problems through female characters, literary works can serve as a platform for raising awareness about the oppression of women. As mentioned by Barry (1981, p. 117), the portrayal of women in literature has an important role of socialization since it depicts female characters that defined acceptable forms of femininity and legitimation goals for both women and men. In this context, literary works reflects the representation of women in real life through the exploration of characterization, theme, and

narratives. In short, one form of literary works that depicts the problem of oppression to women is a novel.

One of the novelists who represents the women oppression in her works is Shobha Rao. As the fictional characters in literary works are verbal representations of human being, it conveys certain moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities through characterization (Abrams, 1981; Barry, 1981). Rao is the author of literary works that highlights the complexity of Indian women's lives through the representation of oppressed female characters. In many her works, she explores various women issues including domestic violence, gender inequality, oppression, cultural expectations on gender role, and limitation on women's freedom. According to Hannah from The Guardian (2018), *Girls Burn Brighter* is one of Rao's works that shows horrific scenes of human trafficking, cultural misogyny, and various women's issues that relates to unfair treatment and violence. In line with that, Times of India (2019) reported *Girls Burn Brighter* novel portrays how the value of Indian women is measured in society as well as the efforts to escape from male abuse. Hence, Rao's portrayal of oppression provides a pathway to using literature as a medium of social critique since it illustrates social issues.

Furthermore, Shobha Rao's novel *Girls Burn Brighter* is a story about two girls separated by circumstances, struggling to find each other despite their lives being controlled by the men around them. These two girls, Poornima and Savitha, are born into poverty in a small Indian village called Indravalli. Poornima is forced to take responsibility for household chores after her mother's death, while Savitha dreams of a better life because of her family's poverty. They met when Poornima's

father hired Savitha to work on their weaving loom. However, their friendship is tested when Poornima's father rapes Savitha. Savitha runs away from Indravalli, and Poornima is married off to a man she does not love. Poornima's painful marriage takes her on a cross-continental journey that forces her to overcome poverty, violence, and discrimination. Meanwhile, Savitha is forced into prostitution. The girls try to escape from acts of cruelty such as human trafficking, abuse, rape, and other humiliation. In this novel, Poornima and Savitha subject to various forms of oppressions related to caste, gender, and social class. In short, Rao's *Girls Burn Brighter* is a novel that presents the oppression of women in society.

Based on the explanation above, the primary focus of this research is to examine the oppression and intersectionality of the two main female characters from a feminist perspective. This study is important to describe the experiences of women's oppression in various aspects of life that are still happening today. In the novel, it is revealed that Poornima and Savitha were subjected to various forms of oppression. The existence of overlapping social category factors such as gender, poverty, and social class influences their experience of oppression. The two main characters serve as representations of fictional characters who experience oppression in society. Thus, this novel is interesting to study because it shows the reality of women's oppression that still exists in certain social and cultural contexts

There are several previous studies related to this study that fall into three categories. The first category is the study of the novel *Girls Burn Brighter*. Such studies found that the female main character in the novel experiences psychological

suffering and becomes a victim of their status and agency as a woman influenced by an oppressive system (Agarwal, 2020; Asif, Zafar, and Iftikhar, 2021; Qamar, 2023). The second category is the oppression of women. Such studies discussed about female characters living in a society that prioritizes males encounter several forms of oppression. (Rehman and Rabbani, 2018; Dominilla, Kuncara, and Valiantien, 2020; Alfando and Wahyuni, 2022; Kristami, Surya, and Lubis, 2022). The third category is intersectionality. These studies have discovered the experiences of intersectional oppression faced by female characters (Mustaqim, 2018; Istiadah, Furaida, and Nabillah, 2021; Sibuea, Udasmoro, and Cholsy, 2021).

However, there has been no previous study that examined oppression and intersectionality experienced by main female characters in the novel *Girls Burn Brighter*. This study aims to complement the gap from the previous studies that did not explore the complexity of oppressed female characters in the perspective of intersectional feminism by considering the interacting dimensions of social identity. The position of the novel *Girls Burn Brighter* is important to demonstrates intersectional oppression experienced by women. In this study, the researcher will investigate the form of women's oppression using five faces of oppression theory by Iris Young and the intersectionality theory by Kimberle Crenshaw. Therefore, the present study intends to assist future researchers in understanding the women oppression and intersectionality as depicted in Rao's novel.

B. Research Question

1. What types of oppression do the main female characters experience in Rao's *Girls Burn Brighter*?

2. What are the underlying factors contributing to the oppression experienced by the main female characters in Rao's *Girls Burn Brighter*?

C. Significance of the Study

This study is designed to provide two practical understanding for the readers. Firstly, this study will enrich the knowledge of intersectional feminism, particularly in Shobha Rao's novel *Girls Burn Brighter*. Secondly, this study also will assist the reader in determining the forms of oppression and why the oppression happens relating to the intersectionality. In short, this study is intended to be useful for the next researcher who will analyze feminist criticism of literary works and use it as a reference in their study of women's oppression in literature.

D. Scope and Limitation

In this study, the researcher conducted an analysis on the oppression of Indian women depicted in Rao's *Girls Burn Brighter* because this novel represents depictions of Indian women's lives. The scope of this study is the various forms of oppression experienced by Poornima and Savitha characters, as well as how multiple oppressions arose for them. This study is limited to *Girls Burn Brighter* by Shobha Rao, with 309 pages, was published in 2018 by Flatiron Books in the United States. This study examined the narratives, sentences and dialogues that indicate the oppression that the main character faces through the theory of oppression which is divided into five structures and intersectional feminism.

E. Definition of Key Term

1. Oppression

Oppression is a concept that implies the existence of inequality when one group is oppressed and another social group benefits from the obstacles the previous group faced (Higgins, 2019).

2. Women's Oppression

Women's Oppression refers to how women perceive sexism as a system of dominance. Men are responsible for the majority of women's oppression because of their sexuality and bodies. (Humm, 1990)

3. Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the way social categories such as race, class, gender and other are overlapping to produce systems of discrimination. This recognize that every individual has unique experiences of oppression due to the intersection of their identities (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW ON RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter covers a review of the literature relevant to this study. In this chapter, the researcher provides some descriptions of oppression and intersectionality that support this research. The researcher discusses about the feminist literary criticism, which covers intersectional feminism and the theory of oppression by Iris Marion Young.

A. Sociological Approach in Literary Criticism

Sociology of literature is an approach in literary studies to understand or analyze literary works as a representation of the reality of society by focusing on social aspects (Wiyatmi, 2013). The theory of sociology of literature emerges with a social perspective in which the creation of literature cannot be separated from the social background, social problems, and social life of the author and the characters presented. Thus, the sociology of literature is a method of understanding literary works by examining the social phenomena that exist in them.

One subfield of the theory sociology is a feminism. According to Griswold, the sociological approach in the study of literary works is relevant to feminist literary criticism because the discussion of social construction in the study of feminism involves a sociological aspect (Nugraha, 2020). Next, Buana (2009) argues that the way people treat and view women as reflected in literary works, as well as how women describe the way they treat and view themselves in literary works are essentially part of the study of sociology of literature.

1. Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist literary criticism is an approach to analyze and interpret literary texts through the perspective of feminist theory (Bell, 2016, p. 1). According to Guo (2018, p. 453) feminist literary criticism attempts to analyze and describe how literature depicts the narrative of male domination by exploring the social, psychological, political, economic, and forces embedded within literature. In line with Humm, feminists use literary criticism to interpret patriarchal politics as they are conveyed in language. This approach emphasizes examining literary works from the perspective of women (1990, p. 121).

The focus of feminist literary criticism is the study of literary works with female characters. The female character in the literary work is defined by her social position in society. According to Endraswara (Buana, 2009, p. 266-271), the position and role of women are central to the discussion of literary works. Feminist literary criticism research focuses on the male dominance over the women's movement. Thus, this approach emerged to analyze literature by focusing on women's roles and positions in literary works. In the application of feminist literary criticism, this critique seeks to analyze gender relations, the socially constructed relationship between men and women in patriarchal societies or under male dominance (Wiyatmi, 2017, p. 16).

In addition, feminist literary criticism also arose in response to the depiction of women's oppression in literature. According to Humm, feminist literary criticism tries to describe the oppression of women depicted in literary works (Wiyatmi,

2012, p. 11). Hence, one aspect that can be examined through a feminism perspective is female oppression.

Furthermore, the feminist literary criticism is related to the novels analyzed by the researcher. Since the main characters in the novel *Girls Burn Brighter* are women, it is important to examine women specifically by referring to the principles of feminism. Thus, the previous study that occupied as the foundation for this study focused primarily on feminism. Intersectionality is one approach to feminism that will be discussed further because this theory is used to analyze the position of women in the novel *Girls Burn Brighter*.

B. Character and Characterization

Characters are crucial in establishing the reader's connection to the author's imaginative world. Characters are individuals presented in a dramatic or narrative work that the reader recognizes to have certain moral, intellectual, and emotional attributes through their speech and behavior (Abrams, 1981, p. 32). In line with Roberts and Zweig, a character in a fictional story is a verbal representation of a human being. The characters created through actions, descriptions, words, and the author's explanations in literary works can evoke emotional responses from the audience, just as humans respond to one another. They can generate feelings of care, sympathy, love, or even hatred towards these characters (2011, p. 156).

In literary works, characters are divided into major characters and minor characters. According to Di Yanni (1990, p. 36), major characters are characters who take center stage in the story. They are characters who have influential roles in the plot's development. As the center of the conflict or struggle in the story, these

main characters are frequently referred to as protagonists. On the other hand, minor characters have smaller parts and limited appearances in the story. They often serve as supporting characters for the main or protagonist characters. Minor characters can provide contrast, conflict, or assistance to the main characters to clarify or emphasize their roles.

Moreover, characters and characterization are interconnected in literary works. Characterization is the way an author introduces or describes characters (Di Yanni, 1990, p. 36). In describing and revealing the character of an author's character, Pickering and Hooper (1981) formulated two commonly used methods, namely the direct method (telling) and the indirect method (showing).

a. Direct Method (Telling)

The Direct Method (Telling) involves the direct exposition of a character by the author. This method is usually used by older fiction writers, where readers solely rely on the author's explanations. The direct method (telling) includes the following:

1. Characterization Through the Use of Names

The names of characters in a literary work are used to clarify characterization. Characters are given names that depict distinguishing characteristics from other characters. This can include names that indicate their dominant traits or physical appearance (1981, p. 28-29).

2. Characterization Through Appearance

The appearance of a character plays a significant role in describing and portraying a character in literary works. The character's appearance encompasses

various aspects, including the clothes they wear, their physical appearance, and the expressions and attitudes they shown (1981, p. 29-30).

3. Characterization by the Author

This method allows readers to understand the personalities of characters through the author's description. Authors have broad freedom in determining the plot of the story. They provide insights into the nature and personalities of the characters, even delving into the thoughts, feelings, and internal conflicts experienced by these characters (1981, p. 30).

b. Indirect Method (Showing)

The indirect method (showing) is carried out by disregarding the presence of the author, allowing the characters in the literary work to directly present themselves through their behavior. In this case, readers can analyze the characters themselves.

1. Characterization Through Dialogue

Not all conversations conveyed in a narrative have significant impact on the plot. Nevertheless, these conversations can still provide important insights into the personality, values, attitudes, beliefs, and social norms of a character. It is important to minimize unnecessary conversations in the work.

1) What is Being Said

Pickering and Hoeper emphasize the significance of analyzing the content of a dialogue. It is necessary for readers to determine whether or not the dialogue is important to the progression of the plot. If a speaker often talks about themselves, it creates the impression that they are self-centered. On the other hand, if a speaker

frequently discusses other characters, it may imply that they enjoy in gossiping around and interfering in other people's business (1981, p. 32).

2) The Identity of the Speaker

The identity of the speaker refers to the statements made by a protagonist (major characters), which should be considered more important than what is said by minor characters, although conversations involving minor characters often provide important information about other characters (1981, p. 32-33).

3) The Occasion

The context or location of the character's dialogue should be noted by the readers since it affects the topics being discussed and the situation that is being supported. The setting provides context for the conversation, and its ambience might influence the talk's mood, closeness level, or seriousness. For example, serious conversations may take place at night, while casual conversations may occur during the day. Conversations in a family living room are usually more significant than chatting on the street or in a theater. Serious discussions, for instance, may happen at night, whereas casual discussions, for example, may happen during the day. In general, family living room discussions are more meaningful than those held in public spaces like theaters or on the street (1981, p. 33).

4) The Identity of the Person or Persons the Speaker is Addressing

The speaker here refers to the utterance conveyed by a character in the story. It means the speech delivered by a specific character about other characters. The

author constructs each dialogue or scene in a well-structured manner to ensure the familiarity between characters is established effectively (1981, p. 33).

5) The Quality of Exchange

The mental quality of characters can be recognized through the flow of their speech during conversations. For example, characters engaged in a lively discussion and receptive to it indicate that they have an open-minded attitude. On the other hand, characters who avoid responding to something may be sensitive or closed-minded and hiding something (1981, p. 33).

6) The Speaker's Tone of Voice, Stress, Dialect, and Vocabulary

The significant characteristics of a character are indicated at this stage. The manner in which something is spoken, the audience the character is addressing, and the current circumstance are all included. A persona is in good spirits if their voice has a relaxed tone; on the other hand, rage is indicated by a high tone. This reveals the socioeconomic status, level of education, employment, and background of the character as well (1981, p. 33–34).

In evaluating characters in a dialogue, there are several important aspects to consider. One of them is the tone of voice used by the character, both explicitly and implicitly. This can provide readers with insights into the characteristics of the character, whether they are confident, self-aware, or perhaps shy. Furthermore, the stress, dialect, and vocabulary within the character's speech can also provide valuable information about the character. It can reflect the authenticity of the character and even indicate their education, occupation, and social class.

2. Characterization Through Action

To build a character, it is important to carefully examine their actions in relation to the plot, as they reveal aspects of their personality, subconscious emotional and psychological states, as well as conscious attitudes and values. Characters' spontaneous or unconscious actions can convey their personality to readers if they pay attention and understand them.

C. Oppression

Oppression is the practice of tyranny by the ruling group, which results in the disadvantage and injustice of some people who suffer. Oppression is always related to social groups, in which the victims of oppression are individuals within that group. Young defines oppression as an institutional process that systematically prevents some people from using appropriate and developed skills or abilities in socially recognized settings, limiting people's ability to act and communicate with others or express their perspectives on social life (Young, 1990, p. 38).

Young gives a more detailed account of the practice of oppression. The five forms of oppression are exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Since this study intends to explore the oppression that occurs in the novel *Girls Burn Brighter*, Iris Young's theory of oppression can be an appropriate reference for the topic raised in this study. The following is a description of the five faces of oppression, namely:

1. Marginalization

Marginalization is the process of systematically excluding some people or groups from meaningful participation in society. These individuals are usually left

defenseless and not able to control their own lives result in a loss of rights and even potential harm. Individuals or groups are marginalized based on their usefulness in social life (Young, 1990, p. 53). Marginalization occurs when people are isolated or separated based on their perceived value in society. For example, the minority groups such as women, black people, the unemployed, and the disabled are often do not receive adequate recognition or attention in society.

2. Exploitation

Exploitation is utilizing another individual's labor for financial gain or profit without paying them fairly (Young, 1990). It is distinguished by the transfer of the surplus value of one social group's labor to another group. In the division of labor, exploitation occur as a result of efforts to use the energy from one social group for the benefit of another. Furthermore, women are the victims of arbitrary actions carried out by men or society that force them to take actions against their will in order gain his own economic, social, or political objectives. For example, exploitation of women occurs in the context of women's wage workers. Delphy stated that married women are required to do household chores. They do various tasks to serve their husbands without expecting anything in return. Domestic work, which is mostly done by women, has never been considered to be waged work. Thus, men become parties who also take advantage of this unpaid labor (Young, 1990, p. 50).

3. Powerlessness

Powerlessness is the situation where individual experience lack of authority to make decisions about their life and actions. Powerless are those without authority

or power, as well as those who are unable to exercise their power. The powerful group force them (powerless) to obey orders without ever having the right to use their power. Powerlessness is the weakness of the power of minority groups in the public space, so that minorities do not have influence in the public sphere (Young, 1990, p. 56). Some of the basic injustices associated with powerlessness are barriers to developing one's capacities, lack of decision-making power, and disrespectful treatment due to lower status.

4. Cultural Imperialism

Cultural imperialism is adopting the culture of the ruling class and establishing it as the norm. Cultural imperialism is associated with social phenomena. The practices and symbols of the majority group's culture become the general rule. The majority group becomes the preferred group, so that the minority group is forced to follow the rules made by the majority group. This form of oppression arises as a result of the universalization of experience and the dominant culture which is then developed as the norm. Thus, groups that have power in society control how people in that society interpret and communicate (Young, 1990, p. 59-60).

5. Violence

Violence is an action taken by certain groups against other groups in society with the motive and purpose of damaging, humiliating, or destroying them through social practices that cause suffering (Young, 1990, p.61). People of the oppressed group live with the knowledge that they should fear unprovoked attacks on their person or property, one of which is women. For example, the oppression of violence

is sexual violence and racial discrimination. Offensive acts of. Furthermore, violence causes minority groups in society, such as women, people of color, and other minority groups to experience physical, sexual, verbal and psychological pain.

D. Intersectionality in Feminism Theory

Intersectionality recognizes that the combination of socio-political identities forms a various levels of discrimination and privilege. These identities can be based on factors such as race, gender, religion, disability, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and so on (Crenshaw, 1989; Knudsen, 2006). This concept rejects viewing aspects of discrimination as separate entities but as layered aspects that influence the oppression experienced by marginalized identity groups.

In 1991, Kimberlé Crenshaw is introduced Intersectionality in her work "Mapping the Margins". It emphasizes the fact that people are different and that their experiences are shaped by their own backgrounds. Crenshaw uses the intersectionality theory to demonstrate the way factors such race, sexual orientation, economic status, and other aspects of identity intersect with the systems of oppression that women experience (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139–167). She also underlines the various contexts in which discrimination and assault against women occur that highlights the significance of identifying intersecting the oppressive forms. Intersectionality is centered on the experiences of Black women but adaptable to a variety of situations, including third-world nations like India when caste system, untouchability, religion, culture, and other repressive societal systems are the ways that women in India are oppressed.

In the development of feminism theory, Intersectionality theory recognizes that women face oppression in diverse ways and varying degrees of intensity. This variation is attributed to the understanding that women's oppression is influenced not only by gender but also by intersecting forms of social inequality, such as class, sexual preference, race, global location, and age. Intersectionality theory highlights the hierarchical nature of inequality, where unequal power relations shape social structures. The theory suggests that dominant groups maintain control over subordinate groups by justifying oppressive practices through political ideologies. In social contexts, these differences are used to establish a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority (Ritzer, 2011, p. 481- 482).

As mentioned by Carastathis, intersectionality also provides a framework to understand the interconnectedness of systems of oppression, which shape the multiple identities and the position within the power and privilege hierarchy (2014, p. 304). Furthermore, intersectionality recognizes the interconnections between various factors such as race, social class, gender, sexuality, and others that shape the experiences of discrimination faced by individuals or specific (marginalized) groups.

Crenshaw developed three concepts of intersectionality in considering the intersection between race and gender, also class. There are structural, political, and representational intersectionality (1991, p. 1244–1245):

1. Structural Intersectionality

Structural intersectionality refers to the understanding that the experiences of individuals within a specific identity category are qualitatively distinct based on

their intersecting identities (Dennissen et al, 2020). It emphasizes the individual experiences of people at the intersections of multiple identities, such as race and gender. In addition, structural intersectionality involves the convergence of race, gender, and class domination. This concept highlights the idea that social interventions aimed at addressing the consequences of individual systems of power such as racism, sexism, or poverty alone would not be enough to meet the needs of marginalized women of color who face the intersecting effects of all three systems (Cooper, 2018).

Furthermore, intersectionality focuses on the individual experiences of people of various races, genders, cultures, and classes in dealing with oppression ranging from poverty to employment issues. It recognizes that inequalities and their intersections directly impact people's experiences in society. For instance, a black woman may experience discrimination not just due to her ethnicity but also because the employment that are available for black people in a particular circumstance are strongly male-oriented (Verloo, 2006). Women of color also experience rape and domestic abuse in qualitatively different ways than white women do because of their intersecting identities. as an example of this, interventions that only depend on the experiences of women who do not share the same racial or socioeconomic backgrounds would only be able to offer limited support to women who face particular difficulties as a result of the combined influences of race and class (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1246). Furthermore, laws imposed by the government can oppress women who are in marginal positions, such as those who lack English proficiency, are poor, or are women of color.

In other words, the combination and interactions of multiple social identification variables including race, gender, social class, sexuality, and others, which produce dynamics in the experiences of people and groups within society, are the causes that lead to structural intersectionality. When these factors intersect, they form a complex framework of social inequalities. For example, when race and gender intersect, the experiences of violence and policies aimed at addressing adverse conditions will qualitatively differ between women of color and white women.

2. Political Intersectionality

Political intersectionality highlights the significance of inequalities and their intersections in shaping the policies and political strategies of marginalized groups with multiple subordinate identities (Dennissen et al, 2020). Crenshaw uses the concept of political intersectionality to demonstrate the difficulties that black women confront in politics. Political intersectionality believes that because of the confluence of race and gender, black women's experiences are different from those of white women and men of color. She exemplifies how antiracist and feminist movements frequently failed short in addressing their particular issues. Both women and people of color continue to be subordinated as a result of feminism's neglect of the issue of race and antiracism's failure to address patriarchy. Consequently, the subordinate status of women of color is perpetuated as a result of the neglect of these overlapping forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1251–1252). Political intersectionality examines that women of color are situated within multiple subordinate groups, often facing conflicting political agendas.

Additionally, it investigates how laws and policies designed to promote equality have obscured the visibility of violence against women of color. Women frequently endure marginalization and lack of respect when they pursue their political objectives while navigating the difficulties of racial and gender inequalities

Furthermore, the factors that contribute to political intersectionality include structural disparities, the lack of representation in policy-making processes, the fragmentation of social movements, and the perpetuation of stereotypes and biases. These factors lead to the marginalization and lack of recognition experienced by women of color who navigate the challenges of intersecting race and gender differences in pursuing their political agendas.

3. Representational Intersectionality

Representational intersectionality refers to the cultural construction of identity, encompassing the production and contemporary critiques of that identity (Crenshaw, 1991). It explores how the portrayal of certain races and genders in media images marginalizes the positions of women. Crenshaw specifically examines how the media perpetuates oppressive stereotypes of women of color. The construction of popular culture by the media shapes women's self-perception in terms of race and gender, inadvertently devaluing their original identities. As a result, these cultural representations produced by the media frequently undervalue the importance of the problems faced by women of color (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1282–1283). By portraying women of color in negative ways, the media frequently propagates the idea that white women are more attractive than black women. Because they are typically perceived as minority, women's issues are frequently

disregarded by society as they are perceived as worthless. The development of popular culture also frequently imposes narrow stereotypes on women, leading to their marginalization and injustice.

Thus, the factors underlying representational intersectionality include the cultural construction of identity in the media, the influence of popular culture, and prevailing stereotypes and dominant perspectives. Media plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of race and gender, often marginalizing women by presenting representations that overlook their issues. The perpetuation of stereotypes, particularly related to beauty, by the media tends to diminish the value and significance of women of color's identities. Consequently, this results in their marginalization, injustice, and a lack of attention towards the challenges they face within both culture and media.

In order to examine how the main female characters in the *Girls Burn Brighter* manage their intersecting identities and the causes of their oppression, the researcher apply intersectionality theory. This study aims to comprehend the multiple factors that contribute to their marginalization and mistreatment by emphasizing not only on the gender framework but also on other factors that intersect and stimulate oppression. By exploring the structural, political, and representational aspects that influence their experiences, the research attempts to examine the factors that contributes to their oppression.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH OF METHOD

This chapter point out the research method that used by the researcher in this study. These are including research design, data source, data collection, and data analysis.

A. Research Design

This study is a part of literary criticism as it explores the role and depiction of women in literary works (Bell, 2016). The researcher proposes this study to analyze the literary work Shobha Rao's *Girls Burn Brighter*, which refers to the oppression of Indian women. In conducting this study, the researcher applies a sociological approach to examine the representation of women in literary works. There are two theories used as the foundation of this study. The first theory is the five faces of oppression by Iris Young, it is used to determine what forms of oppression which were faced by Poornima and Savitha in the novel. The second theory is the intersectionality theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw. It is used to look out the factors of oppression of main female characters.

B. Data Source

The data of this study are taken from the novel *Girls Burn Brighter* written by Shobha Rao. The novel used in this study is the first edition published by Flatiron Books in 2018, which consist 309 pages. The data of this study is presented in the forms of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and dialogues which indicate the

type of oppression and reveal the occurrence of oppression against Poornima and Savitha as the main characters in the novel.

C. Data Collection.

In conducting this study, the researcher takes several steps to collect the data. The first step is reading the novel using close-reading method. The researcher reads the novel being analyzed by understanding the story in depth as well as highlighting dialogues, sentences, and paragraphs that indicate forms of oppression against women and refer to the factors that occur. The next step is identifying the highlighted data and quote the original data in the novel and then relate it to the forms of oppression and the intersectionality. Then, these data are utilized in the data analysis process to expose the oppression conveyed in the novel with the aim of answering the problem of this study.

D. Data Analysis

There are several steps that the researcher formulates to conduct this analysis systematically. The first step is reviewing the collected data related to oppression. The second step is classifying the data that indicates the oppression of women using Iris Young's theory of oppression and investigating the intersectional oppression of women who have experienced oppression by applying Crenshaw's intersectionality theory. The third step is the researcher interpreted the data that has been identified. And the last is the researcher drew a conclusion regarding the oppression of women in the novel.

CHAPTER IV

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents an elaboration of the finding concerning the multiple oppression depicted in the novel entitled *Girls Burn Brighter* by Shobha Rao and discusses the finding of the study. The discussion of study is divided into two main points. The first section expounds the forms of oppression that happened to the two main female characters named Poornima and Savitha using Young's Five Faces of Oppression. Then, the second section reveals the factors of oppression experienced by Poornima and Savitha as viewed from Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality.

A. The Depiction of Oppression Encountered by the Main Female Characters in Rao's *Girls Burn Brighter*

In her novel *Girls Burn Brighter*, Shobha Rao narrates the oppression experienced by women from low backgrounds in India. The setting of this novel takes place in two main locations, namely a small village in India and some cities in America. The story explores the influence of social categories on the lives of the two main female characters in a time span from the 2000s to the present. In this novel, both Poornima and Savitha face oppression based on their identities as women from low caste backgrounds in traditional Indian society. They live in a society where poor women are often treated as inferior to men. As a consequence, they are not being given the equal opportunities to access education, freedom, or better chances in their personal lives.

Furthermore, this study examines two main female characters, Poornima and Savitha, who encounter various forms of oppression and unfair treatment in

various ways. They confront an unjust social system and are perceived as objects that mistreated by men who have positions of power in society. Moreover, the girls face violence, forced marriage, sexual abuse, exploitative labor. In their attempts to escape from these situations, Poornima and Savitha must dealing with serious consequences. Furthermore, *Girls Burn Brighter* novel illustrates several forms of oppression including marginalization, exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.

1. Marginalization

In Rao's novel *Girls Burn Brighter*, Poornima and Savitha face marginalization in various aspects of their lives. The story begins with the fact that they have no information about their date of birth. In addition, they are also marginalized by social circumstances that limit their participation in meaningful work for gaining financial stability. This is evidenced by the following excerpt

Datum 1

Poornima turned. "Who?"

"Savitha."

So that was her name.

Poornima stood still, a mat half unrolled. "She's all I could find," her father said, "...She was a year or two older, Poornima guessed, though neither truly knew their exact ages. Only the birthdates of the boys were recorded in the village". (Rao, 2018, p. 12-13)

In the datum 1 above, the marginalization of girls in the village is conveyed through the indirect characterization of Poornima and Savitha, who are both shown to be unaware of their own birthdates. This is indicated in the dialogue "*She was a year or two older, Poornima guessed...*" that Poornima does not know Savitha's age. In their society, the age of the girls is not considered important to have their births recorded as it is mentioned in the line "*Only the birthdates of the boys were*

recorded in the village". Therefore, the absence of the basic right to know their own age means that women were not given the same level of recognition or importance as boys in their village.

The case above exemplifies the marginalization of women in the terms of social recognition in society. According to Iris Young's theory, marginalization excludes certain groups, especially women as marginalized group, from meaningful participation in society. It is leaving them unable to control their lives and often receiving less recognition (p. 53). In this context, Poornima and Savitha are excluded from the identity data due to their disadvantaged position in society. The fact that only the birthdates of boys are recorded in the village reflects a lack of social recognition for women. This means the devaluation of women's lives because their existence is ignored. The uncertainty regarding their own ages indicates that Poornima and Savitha do not have equal access to information that should be accessible to all members of society, regardless of their gender.

In addition, Poornima also experienced marginalization in terms of social participation. Her mother-in-law instructed her to stay upstairs and not show her face when Aruna's groom-to-be come. This exclusion indicates that Poornima is excluded from meaningful social engagement in her family. The explanation is as follows.

Datum 2

"When they arrive, don't show your face. Stay upstairs. We'll make up something. We'll tell them you had to go back to Indravalli for the day. Something. Just don't make a sound." Poornima turned from the stove. "Why? Why would I stay upstairs?" Her mother-in-law sighed loudly. "You're not—well, we don't want to bring Aruna's status down, do we? Besides, six months, seven months, and you're still not pregnant? I don't want you to rub off on my Aruna. On her chances. Barren women are a bad omen, and I don't want you down here." (Rao, 2018, p. 93)

In the datum 2 above, Poornima is excluded from social activities associated with motherhood, especially family gathering, due to her infertility. Poornima's mother-in-law perceives infertile women as a bad omen because she believes that Poornima's presence could lower her daughter Aruna's social status in front of others. As it is mentioned in the *line "Barren women are a bad omen, and I don't want you down here"*. This portrayal of Poornima as unimportant highlights the prevailing stigma surrounding infertility in their culture.

Poornima's case exemplifies the marginalization of barren women within society. Woman is marginalized based on her perceived usefulness in social life and faces various consequences as a result. According to Young's marginalization theory, Poornima's engagement and voice in important social interactions are limited (p. 53). This exclusion deprives her of the opportunity to be recognized and valued within the family. The Indian societal expectation places a great pressure on woman's ability to bear children and maintain the family's reputation. As a study conducted by Balen & Bos (2009) in the Indian subcontinent found that women who are infertile often experience exclusion from social gatherings or ceremonies (Community effects), as well as harassment, pressure, and rejection from their in-laws (Economic and in-law effects). By hiding Poornima during meeting, her mother-in-law aims to protect Aruna's status and avoid the impact of Poornima's "infertility". In the case of barren women, Poornima feels isolated and left out from her family. Therefore, Poornima's marginalization stems from societal pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and meet expectations regarding family honor.

Apart from Poornima's marginalization within the family, Savitha also faces marginalization in terms of job opportunities. Her family's poverty forced Savitha to work to support her family. This low background limited her work options and trapped her in a job that did not provide enough income to provide for her family. This is explained in the following excerpt.

Datum 3

... tallied all the ways in which she could make money: she could collect garbage, which clearly wasn't bringing in enough; she could cook and clean, as her mother did, though there were hardly any families rich enough in Indravalli to keep even her mother employed; she could work the charkha and the loom—she did belong to the caste of weavers, after all—but money from making cotton saris was dwindling each year (p.9)

This provided datum is supported by the following statement:

"A week later the girl [Savitha] was seated at her [Poornima] mother's loom" (Rao, 2018, p.11)

The datum 3 above shows that Savitha had limited choices for finding appropriate work to earn money. She considered some of the low-paying positions that would be suitable for her as a woman, such as collecting garbage or working as a housekeeper. The line *"she could collect garbage"* suggests that Savitha considered this option, but she likely realized that it would not be enough to support herself. The line *"there were hardly any families rich enough in Indravalli"* suggests that there were not many opportunities for Savitha to work as a housekeeper because Indravalli did not have many wealthy families. However, these options were not enough to cover her expenses. In the end, she was left with little choice but to rely on her weaving business to support herself. The line *"was seated at her mother's loom"* shows that Savitha took over Poornima's mother's position as a weaver. This means that weaving is the only one job that could support herself and her family. Even though its lack of profitability, Savitha chose to continue working as a weaver in order to support her family.

Furthermore, Savitha encounters marginalization in terms of job opportunities due to her disadvantaged background. As Young's claim that marginalization restricts women's access to employment, which contributes to their economic poverty (p. 53). Instead of working for personal benefit, women are encouraged to do menial jobs in order to support their families financially. The limited choices Savitha faces for work indicate the restricted options available to women and contribute to their economic poverty. Savitha's case demonstrates that how difficult it is for women in the weaver caste in Indravalli to find decent work. Hence, she was marginalized to low-paying jobs that did not provide her with enough income to support herself and family.

In short, the novel *Girls Burn Brighter* portrays that the characters Poornima and Savitha face marginalization in various fields. The oppression ranges from their lack of knowledge of their own date of birth to their exclusion from meaningful social engagements and limited job opportunities. They experience various forms of marginalization that limit their agency, recognition, and economic stability. The absence of birth date records for girls in their village indicates the devaluation of women's life, while Poornima's exclusion from family gatherings and Savitha's limited employment options indicate the social pressures and constraints placed on them. This portrayal highlights the marginalization that women in India still face.

2. Exploitation

In Rao's novel *Girls Burn Brighter*, Poornima and Savitha are two female characters who face exploitation. In this context, exploitation occurs in various forms and situations, including domestic labor and the prostitution industry. Savitha

and Poornima come from impoverished backgrounds and face many challenges from the start. They are not given proper rights and often endure inhumane working conditions. The novel depicts the destructive impact of such exploitation on the lives of Savitha and Poornima.

Savitha's oppression begins when the owner of the weaving business (Poornima's father) takes advantage of her position to demand more work from Savitha with unfair compensation. His request for Savitha to stay longer and the promise to pay her more are signs of the abuse of power and coercion. In this context, exploitation occurs when a worker like Savitha is exploited by the employer to weave for longer hours. This exploitation is demonstrated through indirect characterisation in the form of dialogue. The explanation is as follow.

Datum 4

“He said it was because they were falling behind on the sari orders. “Doesn’t she know we have work to do?” he’d say if Savitha went home for even an hour or two in the evenings. “Tell her I’ll pay her extra for staying longer. I can’t afford much. Hardly any to spare. But some,” he said”. (Rao, 2018, p. 45)

In the datum 4 above, Savitha is asked to weave for longer hours due to high demand for saree orders. In the dialogue, *"Tell her I'll pay her extra for staying longer,"* it shows that Savitha's employer takes advantage of her by forcing her to work overtime without fair compensation. This is evident in the employer's statement, *"I can't afford much. Hardly any to spare,"* implying that he is aware he is not providing fair compensation to Savitha but is reluctant to give her appropriate compensation.

Furthermore, Savitha's case depicts labor exploitation with unfairness in the wage system. The fact that Savitha's employer is willing to pay extra for her to stay longer shows that he values her work, but he is only paying a small amount of

additional money. This indicates that he is exploiting her willingness to work long hours for a low wage. In this context, exploitation occurs when a worker is treated unfairly or taken advantage of by their employer. In this case, Savitha is forced to work longer by her employer without compensation for business purposes. Thus, this kind of exploitation is a violation of workers' rights.

Moreover, Savitha is raped by Poornima's father, who is her boss, while working on the loom. However, the village elders decide to marry her off to her perpetrator, which leads Savitha to escape. After fleeing her village, Savitha is trapped in a prostitution network at a brothel. A man manipulates the situation to exploit Savitha by giving her a glass of tea laced with drugs. Subsequently, Savitha endures long working hours as a prostitute without pay and faces harsh treatment from her brothel owner. This indicates the sexual abuse of power against Savitha.

Datum 5

Her first customer was a middle-aged man, ...and said, "Will you give me a kiss?" Savitha looked up at him. "I don't know how," she said. The statement so guileless that the man seemed to almost wilt when he heard it. "Here," he said finally, "let me show you."
"...After that, the mechanics of it all became routine: the five to six customers she had per day, the constant clucking and recriminations from the madam." (Rao, 2018, p. 133-134)

Datum 5 above describes sexual exploitation in which Savitha was forced into prostitution. She became a victim of power abuse by men who forced her into the sex trade. Furthermore, the quote *"Will you give me a kiss?"* shows that the customer arbitrarily requested sexual intimacy from Savitha without considering her consent. This reflects that Savitha is considered as an object that only exists to fulfill the sexual satisfaction of male clients. In addition, the line *"the mechanics of it all became routine"* narrates how Savitha's body is treated as a tool to meet the

daily demands of sexual work with numerous clients. The phrase "routine" indicates that the sexual work she performs is seen as a repetitive task driven by financial interests or customer demands, rather than an activity involving consent between equal individuals.

In this context, Savitha is exploited within the realm of prostitution, where her desires are disregarded in order to satisfy the customers' needs. This demonstrates the abuse of power by men involved in the prostitution industry and the objectification of her body. According to Young, exploitation occurs when someone is unfairly used for the benefit or satisfaction of others without considering the rights, needs, and dignity of the exploited individual with adequate compensation. In Savitha's case, the abuse of power by the men who trade her as a prostitute represents a form of exploitation that reflects injustice and disregard for her dignity and rights as a human being. Thus, it portrays the value transferred from Savitha's labor to the consumers and brothel owners.

In addition, Savitha becomes a victim of human trafficking by her procurer named Guru. They make a deal where Savitha is expected to sacrifice a body part to earn money that will be shared with Guru. Guru tries to make her believe that her worth is determined by her physical appearance and that she can only be more valuable if she is willing to mutilate herself for sale abroad. At first Savitha is promised to go to Saudi Arabia, but it is later decided for her to go to America to work as a domestic worker. This is shown through indirect characterization in the form of dialogue as follows.

Datum 6

"What do they want me for?" she asked, afraid of the answer.

"To clean houses. Flats. Apparently, they have to pay maids so much over there, it's cheaper to buy them from here."

"But how will I—" she began, but Guru, before she could finish, said, "I told them you'd work twice as fast."

"Where?"

"America. Someplace called Sattle. Good money, too."

..... "How much?" she asked.

"Twenty thousand. Ten for you, ten for me." (Rao, 2018, p. 149)

In datum 6 above, Savitha decides to work in America for Guru. After the previous offer for Saudi Arabia is canceled, Poornima is expected to go to the America to work as a domestic worker with the promise of good pay. Guru plans to divide the money received from Savitha's services by giving ten thousand rupees to Savitha. This illustrates how Guru tried to exploit Savitha's situation and profit from her hard work. Savitha seizes every opportunity to escape her situation, even if it means going abroad and working as a maid. This is evidenced by the line *"So she was going to clean houses. That was fine. That was better than sleeping with men"* (Rao, 2018, p. 150). She is so desperate to escape that she is willing to give up her hand and work aboard.

This case depicts exploitation of the character Savitha. Savitha is coerced by Guru to consider offers that are detrimental to herself, such as selling body parts in hopes of gaining profit or money for herself. According to Iris Young's theory of exploitation, Guru takes advantage of his power position and gains personal benefit at the expense of Savitha's well-being. This action reflects the injustice in their relationship and shows how Savitha is exploited in difficult situations and trapped in unfair choices.

Furthermore, the next female main character who experiences exploitation is Poornima. Poornima who works with her father in her family's weaving business

experiences labor exploitation. There is abuse and extortion of Poornima in the context of domestic work. Her work of taking care of the household is made an obligation and has not been considered as equal work as men do in earning a living. The explanation is as follows.

Datum 7

Poornima began again. "Nanna, why did you—"

"Is dinner ready?"

"Almost."

"How many times do I have to tell you to have it ready when I come in?" (p.1)

"She woke early in the morning to spin, then spun after the breakfast dishes were washed, after lunch was prepared and served, and then again after dinner. Their hut had no electricity, so her spinning was a race against the sun" (Rao, 2018, p. 2)

In Datum 7 above, Poornima's labor is exploited to serve the entire family.

The line *"How many times do I have to tell you to have it ready when I come in?"* depicts how Poornima's father using his power over her. The demand emphasizes that Poornima is expected to fulfill orders and prepare all her father's needs without appreciation for the time and effort required to complete those tasks. Furthermore, the line *"She woke early in the morning to spin, then spun after the breakfast dishes were washed ... then again after dinner"* portrays the constant demands on Poornima to engage in weaving duties throughout the day. Additionally, the lack of electricity in their home forces Poornima to weave quickly before sunset.

Overall, the depiction of Poornima's case aligns with the issue of labor exploitation in domestic work. Young's argument (1990) that labor exploitation occurs when individuals are forced to work long hours without fair compensation resonates with Poornima's situation. She performs extensive household chores and spinning without receiving wages or fair recognition for her time and effort. The abuse of power, unfair demands, and difficult working conditions are indications of

the detrimental exploitation Poornima faces. Furthermore, the practice of labor exploitation continued when Poornima moved to her husband's family

Datum 8

There were the lunch dishes to wash and dinner to prepare. Her mother-in-law and Aruna liked their tea at four o'clock, and it was already ten past. Poornima hurried to the kitchen" (Rao, 2018, p. 86)

In datum 8 above, Poornima also experienced exploitation in the context of household work at her husband's house. First, Poornima is given excessive and unbalanced household duties. She had to wash the lunch dishes and prepare dinner for the entire family, as well as being given additional responsibility to serve tea at specific times. This is reflected in the line, "*Poornima hurried to the kitchen,*" which indicates an additional workload on Poornima. She rushes into the kitchen to fulfill the family's needs without considering her own needs or limitations.

The above case provides an illustration of how Poornima became an unpaid domestic worker in her husband's family. Delphy (as cited in Young, 1990) emphasizes the issue of women's labor in marriage, highlighting how Poornima's husband and family profit from her domestic work without providing fair compensation. This is in line with the statement of Singh and Pattanaik (2020) that Poornima, as a woman in Indian society, is expected to do household work without payment. The fact that Poornima rushed into the kitchen to serve tea to her mother-in-law and Aruna further revealed the additional burden. These tasks are often seen as a natural obligation for women, regardless of the time, effort and valuable contribution they require.

In short, the characters of Poornima and Savitha experience exploitation in various forms and situations. Savitha is trapped in the prostitution industry and

subjected to harsh treatment, depicting the sexual abuse and objectification of her body. In addition, Savitha was also a victim of human trafficking to work as a maid. Meanwhile, Poornima faced exploitation in domestic work and the weaving industry, with unfair demands and unequal compensation. Thus, both of the girls become victims of oppression of their rights as individuals.

3. Powerlessness

Women become vulnerable to oppression when they lack awareness of their own oppression and accept their inferiority to men as a societal norm. Women do not fight against the oppression they experience because they do not identify their own voice and their own enslavement. Iris Young's theory of powerlessness offers a framework for comprehending how some groups of individuals are denied the ability to make decisions that have an impact on their own life (1990, p. 56).

The novel *Girls Burn Brighter* shows how women's lack of awareness of their own oppression can lead to them accepting their inferior status and remaining silent. Despite her unhappiness, Poornima does not challenge her arranged marriage. She accepts her fate as a wife and daughter, and she does not speak out against the oppression she experiences.

Datum 9

“But the air was stifling, no longer lovely, and Poornima felt a rising panic. She tried to stop him, she tried to buck him off, but he kept his grip on her elbow and steered her toward the dais. “I want to stop,” she said to her father. Her father tightened his hold on Poornima’s elbow. He said, “Don’t be stupid.” Poornima thought, and the words seemed decent enough”. (Rao, 2018, p. 71)

Datum 9 above depicts the powerlessness of Poornima as she is forced into a marriage with a man she has never known before. Despite her disagreement with this arranged marriage, her father disregards her objections and forces her to

proceed. This indicates that Poornima has no control over her marital life, thus losing agency over her own fate. Even when Poornima tries to reject this arranged marriage, her father dismisses her unwillingness and warns her not to be "foolish". Her father's rejection of Poornima's desires shows that the opinions of the daughter are not considered important in family decision-making. Therefore, she feels devoid of choices or the ability to change the situation and must accept her fate.

In this context, powerlessness is seen in the oppression experienced by Poornima in a forced marriage situation. All of this demonstrates that Poornima lacks control over her own life. Her father's rejection of her agency in the decision-making process aligns with Iris Young's theory of powerlessness, where certain groups systematically lose the ability to make decisions that affect their own lives (1990, p. 56). In this case, the pressure from Poornima's father regarding her arranged marriage exemplifies this powerlessness, as she is not given the autonomy to determine her own path and is forced to comply with her gender expectations.

Next, Poornima is expected to do all the household chores her husband's house, including washing her sister-in-law's clothes. Her powerlessness is further highlighted by the fact that she was accused of damaging her sister-in-law's clothes, even though she did not do it. This evidence is shown through indirect characterization in the form of dialogue in the following quotation:

Datum 10

"Somebody discolored my silk shalwar. Amma, do you know who it could've been?" It had been a delicate pink, splotted with blue and purple. They both turned to Poornima. ... "You soaked it with something blue, didn't you? Was it that blue towel? I bet you soaked it with that towel. ...her mother-in-law was at her side, yanking her head back by her braid. "Ask forgiveness," she growled. "Ask." Poornima was so surprised she couldn't get any words out, not even a scream. Her mother-in-law finally let go, and Poornima did ask forgiveness. (Rao, 2018, p. 81-82)

Datum 10 above depicts the situation of powerlessness for Poornima within her household. Poornima is accused of damaging Aruna's shalwar sutra without any clear evidence. Despite her efforts to defend herself, she has no evidence to prove her innocence. Furthermore, the physical violence she experiences from her mother-in-law showed her powerlessness. The actions of her mother-in-law pulling her hair and forcing her to apologize indicate that Poornima lacks the strength or ability to resist such abusive treatment. As a daughter-in-law, she is expected to submit to the authority and commands of her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. Thus, this limitation of power leaves her feeling powerless in such situations.

In this case, Poornima feels she has no power or influence in facing accusations due to her weak position within the family. This illustrates Poornima's powerlessness in the face of her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law, who have authority and force her to comply. In this context, Poornima lacks the power or influence to resist the harsh treatment or question the commands of her mother-in-law. As explained by Young regarding powerlessness (p. 56), this situation reflects the injustice within the power of the household and demonstrates how Poornima feels she has no influence or control over her life, due to her marginalized position within her household.

In summary, Poornima's experiences in the novel depict a sense of powerlessness in the context of her arranged marriage and her role as a daughter-in-law. She is forced into marriage without her consent, highlighting the lack of control over her own life. Poornima's acceptance of her fate and her silence in the face of oppression further demonstrate her powerlessness. Additionally, her

position as a daughter-in-law leads her to unfair treatment and accusations, further highlighting her lack of power within the household. The physical violence she experiences from her mother-in-law further reinforces her powerlessness. This case of powerlessness is in line with Iris Young's theory of powerlessness, which emphasizes the loss of decision-making power and autonomy for certain groups, especially those considered minorities.

4. Cultural Imperialism

The novel *Girls Burn Brighter* explores how cultural imperialism can oppress Indian women. In this context, the presence of cultural imperialism has reinforced patriarchal norms in India, leading to the oppression of women. Women are expected to conform to these norms to avoid negative consequences. According to Young, dominant cultural norms, values, and practices are often imposed on subordinate societies (1990, p. 51). In India, the traditional concept of "Pita, Pati, Putra" (Father, Husband, Son) found in Manusmriti emphasizes women's roles and expectations. According to this concept, a young girl is expected to prioritize following her father's commands during childhood, her husband's after marriage, and her son's in widowhood (Haq, 2013, p. 173). Women are seen as part of the family and expected to adhere to the traditional roles determined by men in the family. As a result, women's freedom within the household tends to be limited. Additionally, the novel also demonstrates how cultural imperialism can lead to the loss of cultural identity.

In *Girls Burn Brighter*, women have been assigned the primary role of managing domestic duties, particularly those related to the kitchen as experienced

by Poornima. This is shown through direct characterization in the form of author's description in the following quotation.

Datum 11

At fifteen, Poornima came of marriageable age, and she stopped going to the convent school. She began to sit at the spinning wheel, the charkha, in her free time to help the household. ... She woke early in the morning to spin, then spun after the breakfast dishes were washed, after lunch was prepared and served, and then again after dinner (Rao, 2018, p. 2)

Datum 11 above shows the influence of cultural imperialism on the life of Poornima. This is evident from the fact that Poornima was expected to drop her education at the age of fifteen due to entering the appropriate age for marriage, demonstrating the priority of the dominant culture that considers marriage more important than education. Apart from that, Poornima was then involved in traditional domestic tasks, such as in the line *“began to sit at the spinning wheel, the charkha, in her free time to help the household”*. This shows how traditional gender roles are imposed on Poornima. Thus, the forces of the dominant culture forcing their values onto the minority culture also reinforce the control exercised by the ruling group.

Poornima experiences limited choices and autonomy because the dominant culture determines the way individuals socialize. This is in line with Young's concept of cultural imperialism, as Poornima's case reveals how cultural imperialism occurs when the dominant culture influences and coerces minority cultures to adhere to their values, practices, and prescribed roles. This results in oppression in the form of restrictions on freedom and control imposed by the ruling group.

Furthermore, cultural imperialism also influences beauty standards, leading to oppression against Poornima. The dominant culture influences beauty standards in Poornima's society, where fair skin is considered more valuable than dark skin. This leads to discrimination against women who do not conform to these beauty standards. Poornima experiences double oppression based on her gender and skin color.

Datum 12

"The farmer was no longer interested. He sent word to Poornima's father. He said ... he had heard his daughter was as dark as a tamarind. Poornima's father was crestfallen. He prodded Ramayya, who'd brought the news, ... She's hardly as dark as a tamarind. Do you think she is? It's a curse: daughters, darkness."
(Rao, 2018, p.23)

In datum 12, the beauty standards measured by Poornima's skin color reflect the dominance of culture that influences her identity. Poornima becomes a victim of a culture that views dark skin as undesirable. The line *"The farmer was no longer interested... he had heard his daughter was as dark"* indicates the rejection of her prospective groom due to her dark skin. Her father's statement, *"It's a curse: a daughter, darkness,"* further highlights the internalization of Western beauty standards within Indian society which believe that fair skin is more desirable while dark skin is not.

In Poornima's case, Western beauty standards that emphasize fair skin have been imposed on Indian society. This leads to the marginalization of dark-skinned women like Poornima. The rejection of the farmer towards Poornima as a bride is a form of oppression. The farmer's preference for a fair-skinned bride reflects the prevailing colorism in Indian society, where fair skin is considered more attractive than dark skin (Nagar, 2018, p. 2). These standards continue to have a negative

impact on the lives of dark-skinned women in India. This belief is a product of cultural imperialism. As explained by Iris Young, the dominant culture can influence society's views, values, and norms. Thus, the discriminatory beauty standards based on Poornima's skin color reflect the dominance of a culture that favors beauty based on specific standards, such as fair or light skin.

Furthermore, the impact of colorism on the lives of Poornima continues in the context of marriage. Under these circumstances, Poornima is forced to marry a man chosen by her father, without considering her personal preference. The low regard for her dark skin color has limited her life choices.

Datum 13

“They’re looking for matches for the older one ... When Ramayya finally spoke, his voice was lowered. “There’s nothing wrong with him. Nothing like that.” More huffing, a further drop. “But what is it?” Poornima’s father’s voice rose with suspicion. “Our girl’s no catch, you know. So no need to be so dubious. Just a small affectation. An idiosyncrasy” (Rao, 2018, p.41)

“She gasped. His right hand: it wasn’t whole. He was missing two fingers. His middle and most of his index. ... So this, she thought with disgust, this is what they meant by idiosyncrasy” (Rao, 2018, p.72)

Datum 13 above highlights the impact of cultural imperialism on Poornima. In this case, Poornima is discriminated against because she does not conform to the dominant cultural norms of beauty. After previously receiving rejection from the farmer, Poornima's father is informed that there is a potential husband available for Poornima. Poornima's father was suspicious because the man had "idiosyncrasy" in which in this context the man who was to be married lost two fingers on his right hand (Rao, 2018, p. 72). However, her father realized that the phrase "*Our girl's no catch*" suggests that Poornima's physical characteristics do not conform to the dominant cultural norms of beauty. According to Kukreja (2020, p. 96), colorism forces women to willingly marry men who have been rejected in the local marriage

market due to physical disabilities. Poornima's dark skin makes it difficult for her to find a suitable husband. As a result, Poornima's father is willing to ignore the man's disability in order to find a husband for her.

In the novel *Girls Burn Brighter*, cultural imperialism is evident in the termination of Poornima's education and her role in domestic tasks, indicating the limitations on choice and autonomy imposed by the dominant culture. Additionally, beauty standards affect Poornima's life through the rejection of potential husbands based on her skin color. As Young argues in her theory of cultural imperialism (1990, p. 59-60), groups with power in society control how people interpret and communicate within that society. The beauty standards that prioritize fair skin result in discrimination and low self-esteem for Poornima. Thus, the novel depicts the negative consequences of cultural dominance and beauty standards that restrict freedom and perpetuate social injustice.

5. Violence

In the novel *Girls Burn Brighter*, Rao portrays gender-based violence experienced by female characters such as Poornima and Savitha. Various forms of physical, sexual, and mental violence are depicted throughout the story. This novel reveals how commonplace violence against women is and how it is rooted in cultural norms that demean women. These norms allow for harsh treatment of women without any consequences.

One of the main characters, Poornima, becomes a victim of violence from her father, husband, and in-laws. The violence she endures not only damages her physical well-being but also shatters her mental health. Poornima's character

illustrates the experiences of many women in India who fall victim to gender-based violence within the confines of their households.

Datum 14

"negotiations with the family from Repalle fell apart. They refused to budge from their dowry demands ... Poornima's father slapped her, hard. Then he grabbed her by the hair. He said, "You see this? You see what you've done?" His grip on her hair tightened and he said, "The next time somebody asks you to sing, what're you going to do?"

.... Poornima blinked. She held back tears. Her scalp burned, hairs snapped like electric wires. Her brothers and sister crowded around the door of the hut to see. "What?" he growled. "What will you do? Say it. Say it." "Sing," she whispered, wincing in pain. "I'm going to sing." (Rao, 2018, p. 34)

In datum 14 above, Poornima experiences physical violence from her father after the failed negotiation for her marriage with the Repalle family. Poornima refuses to sing when requested by the prospective groom's family because she does not want to be married off to a man who would take her away from the village where Savitha lives. This is evidenced by the line *"What would she do in Repalle, alone, without Savitha?" (Rao, 2018, p. 29)*. However, her actions anger her father as it becomes difficult for him to find a man willing to marry Poornima. In the line *"... Poornima's father slapped her, hard. Then he grabbed her by the hair,"* her father used physical violence by slapping and pulling her hair to intimidate her and make her believe that she has no choice but to submit to him.

The physical violence experienced by Poornima is a representation of the violence faced by women from impoverished families in society. As Young argues, the physical violence she experiences is linked to cultural imperialism in society (1990, p. 63). Cultural practices such as dowry demands become one of the triggering factors for this violence. Poornima and her family have no power or control over the high dowry demands and gender role expectations of the Repalle family. They are forced to comply with those demands. The Repalle family refuses

to back down from their dowry demands, and Poornima's father cannot fulfill them. As a result, he responds with physical violence to force Poornima to comply with the demands of the next prospective groom's family.

Even after marriage, Poornima experiences physical violence from her mother-in-law. Poornima is unable to bearing a child for her husband, which triggers her mother-in-law's hatred towards her. In some cases, the marginalization of barren women impact on women's mental and physical health. In this context, the violence is caused by Poornima's inability to fulfill the expected roles as a wife and mother. This is illustrated in the following quote.

Datum 15

"How do you know your son isn't the one who's barren?" The slap that followed was so powerful that it knocked Poornima backward, reeling, crashing into the stove. (p. 89)

In datum 15 above, Poornima's mother-in-law demonstrates physical violence by striking her so hard that she is thrown back and hits the stove. Poornima's question in the line *"How do you know your son isn't the one who's barren?"* triggers her mother-in-law's anger towards her. This violence also illustrates the silencing of women's voices within the family. When Poornima attempts to challenge the assumption that her husband might be the one infertile, her mother-in-law immediately silences her through physical violence.

This case demonstrates how women's voices and opinions are often silenced in Indian society. They are trapped in traditional roles that expect them to bear children and are blamed if they are unable to do so. The actions of Poornima's mother-in-law in silencing her voice is a form of oppression. Thus, Poornima is

oppressed under the pressure to have children because this expectation is only placed on women, while men often is not blaming for infertility issues.

Furthermore, Poornima experiences severe physical torment due to her father's failure to provide the promised dowry. This angers her husband and mother-in-law, leading to a cycle of abuse. Every day, Poornima is threatened that even worse things will happen.

Datum 16

"Kishore and her mother-in-law sprang away and raced to the other end of the kitchen. ... She turned her head to follow them, and that was why, when the oil landed, it splattered across the left side of her face, down her neck, and caught her upper arm and shoulder. Poornima felt a fire, and then the fire, and everything with it, went out." (Rao, 2018, p. 98)

"The five thousand rupees was still outstanding, and her mother-in-law and Kishore reminded her of it every time she put a bite of food in her mouth, or drank a glass of water. "You think it's free?" her mother-in-law hissed". (Rao, 2018, p. 94)

In datum 16 above, Poornima becomes the target of hot oil being thrown at her by her husband and mother-in-law. Previously, she faced constant reminders of the unpaid dowry debt from her father, with her mother-in-law hissing, *"You think it's free?"* every time she eats or drinks. This verbal abuse highlights the dissatisfaction her husband and mother-in-law have towards her. In the line *"Poornima felt a fire, and then the fire, and everything with it, went out,"* it portrays the intense pain she experiences, signifying the severity of her injuries. This traumatic incident left permanent scars, both physical and emotional. After this incident, Poornima is sent back to her father's house, as depicted in the line *"Her father-in-law had come upstairs the previous night and handed her a train ticket to Indravalli"* (Rao, 2018, p. 102).

Poornima's experience exemplifies the destructive consequences of the unpaid dowry system. It leads to acts of violence in women's married lives. The absence of dowry makes her a target of abuse from her husband's family, highlighting the injustice perpetuated by this tradition. Umar (as cited in Rastogi & Therly, 2006, p. 68-69) stated that unfulfilled dowry promises facilitate the return of the bride to her parents' home leading to violence, which is one of the most accepted crimes against women in the household.

Apart from physical violence, both Savitha and Poornima experienced different forms of sexual violence which had detrimental effects on them. The experiences of violence by these two characters show that sexual violence can occur in various life contexts, both in the workplace and within intimate relationships. In fact, both victims experienced trauma and long-term effects due to the violence they experienced. Sexual violence takes away individual autonomy, dignity and rights, and creates an unsafe and unfair environment for women.

Datum 17

“She couldn't decide—as she watched his face, its grimace, its shudderings—what hurt more: the thing coming in or the thing going out. But then it ended. Just like that. After one final push, Kishore looked down at her and smiled. A true smile. And she thought, Yes, after all, yes, you are the one I belong to now.” (p. 78)

Datum 17 above shows that Poornima experienced sexual violence in the form of marital rape by her husband. The sexual relationship between Kishore and Poornima can be categorized as marital rape because Kishore imposes his sexual desires on Poornima without her consent. The majority of marital rape cases are experienced by women and often involve violence (Banerjee & Rao, 2022). In Poornima's case, she does not respond to Kishore's sexual desires and experiences intense pain during the incident. As her husband, Kishore feels entitled to control

his wife's body and forces her to engage in sexual intercourse. This is evident in the line *"you are the one I belong to now."*

In this context, Poornima is powerless in the face of Kishore and unable to stop his desires. Poornima is bound by her duty as a wife, so she must serve her husband. This demonstrates that Kishore violates Poornima's rights to her own body and sees her as a sexual object that can be owned and treated according to his desires. Such sexual violence ignores Poornima of her autonomy and rights, forcing her to experience pain and trauma. Furthermore, Poornima's acts of violence got worse as explained in the following quotation.

Datum 18

"Kishore's mode of escalation was more subtle, though also more painful: the sex became rougher. Violent. He'd grab her hair, yank her around the bed by it, slam into her with such force that her head would hit the wall behind the bed. The next day, bruises bloomed across her body". (Rao, 2018, p. 91-92)

In datum 18 above, Poornima experiences violence during intimate moments with her husband, Kishore. Kishore engages in rough and painful actions, such as forcefully pulling Poornima's hair and hitting her body, causing Poornima's head to hit the wall. This makes Poornima injured and bruised all over her body. Additionally, the phrase *"the sex became rougher"* refers to how Kishore begins behaving aggressively and violently during their sexual activities. His position as a husband encourages Kishore to use this violence to dominate and control Poornima during intimate moments. In this context, rough and violent refers to actions that involve excessive physical force and cause pain or injury to Poornima. This incident demonstrates a disturbing power imbalance in their relationship. Kishore's actions not only cause physical harm but also degrade Poornima's dignity as a wife.

As for Savitha, she becomes a victim of sexual violence by various men. She is forced into sexual harassment without being able to resist. The sexual violence she experiences is not limited to India, but she also subjected to rape when she is moved to America. This violence is shown through direct characterization in the author's description.

Datum 19

“A darkness fell over the lantern light. Savitha turned and saw Poornima's father. He smiled, and she thought, But he's never smiled. And then he said, “Come with me.” ... It was then that she saw Savitha's clothes, ripped. Some on, some off. Lying around her like torn sails”. (Rao, 2018, p. 56-57)

Datum 19 above describes Savitha's experience of sexual violence while working for Poornima's father. When Poornima sees Savitha's torn clothes, she realizes that Savitha had been a victim of sexual violence perpetrated by her own father. It is revealed that when Savitha worked for Poornima's father as a weaver, she was seen as a vulnerable and powerless subordinate. In Savitha's case, the sexual violence she experienced from Poornima's father reflects oppression involving social and structural factors. The sexual violence experienced by Savitha is a violation of her fundamental rights.

In addition to being a victim of Poornima's father's cruel actions, Savitha also experiences sexual violence while working in America. In Savitha's case, the power imbalance between the employer, named Suresh, and Savitha as a worker puts Savitha in a vulnerable position to be exploited. This sexual violence is shown through direct characterization in the author's description.

Datum 20

“When she lay on her back, he said, No, you'll do the other thing. And so she turned, but he said, No, no, that's not what I mean. Savitha looked at him, confused, and then he showed her what to do. He had a bottle of something clear that he smeared over her stub, and then he showed her. He said, Like this, and then he got on the bed. On all fours. He told her to go in and out, and when she

did, he said, Oh, yeah, like that, like that. A pain hit somewhere behind her eyes, and she turned away. But the pain was thunder, it broke and it broke. And he said, Yeah, oh yeah, yes, just like that. And she began to cry, willing it to end". (Rao, 2018, p. 173)

Datum 20 above depicts a scene of sexual violence experienced by Savitha in America. In this scene, Suresh forces Savitha to perform a sexual acts against her will. Savitha is only used as a sexual object in Kishore's fetish. Despite Savitha's crying and experiencing pain, Suresh continues to forced her to continue the action. Savitha finds herself in a difficult situation with no choice but to do as Suresh demands. This shows that as a victim of sexual violence, Savitha feels powerless.

Savitha's case represents how women are treated as objects to satisfy men's sexual desires. She is forced into sexual acts without her consent, disregarding her rights as an individual, especially the right to be free from violence. Savitha's feelings of crying and experiencing pain show the traumatizing nature of the sexual violence she endures. She has no control over what happens to her body and lacks the strength to resist or stop the actions. Furthermore, the tragedy of sexual abuse experienced by Savitha continues when she attempts to escape from Suresh's place. Along her journey in search of help, she encounters a stranger who brutally assaults her.

Datum 21

"I said, put it in your mouth." When she still stood, unmoving, not knowing what he wanted, he grabbed her arm again and shoved her stub against her mouth. It knocked her teeth into her bottom lip, drawing blood, but he kept shoving. ... "Open it, and put it in." He pushed the gun up to her face, ... "Bitch, not that. You know better." And he reached over, grabbed her by the hair, and rammed her face into the stub. She choked on her own arm. Tears filled her eyes. He then pulled her head back up, and then back down, and then back up. "Like that," he said. And so she did. By now, the baby-faced one had unzipped his pants and was moaning at the edge of Savitha's blurred vision. (Rao, 2018, p. 267-268)

In datum 21, a man at a gas station forces Savitha to perform a sexual act against her will using violence and threats. Initially, the man forced Savitha to put

something in her mouth. However, when Savitha does not respond and does not understand what is being asked of her, the man forcefully pushes the stump of his leg into Savitha's mouth, causing her teeth to hit her lower lip and bleed. Despite Savitha crying and experiencing pain, the man continues to force her. Later, the man forced Savitha to perform more violent sexual acts using a gun.

This scene reflects sexual violence as Savitha is treated roughly, hurt, and threatened using physical violence and weapon intimidation. It illustrates the difficulty for Savitha as a victim to resist or escape the perpetrator of violence. Savitha has no choice but to do as the perpetrator demands because she is threatened with a weapon and physically attacked. Sexual violence involving the use of force like this force the victim of autonomy and rights over their body and personal choices. Savitha's character also depicts how victims of sexual violence often feel powerless in such situations. Wherever Savitha goes, she is forced into sexual acts that violate her rights and harm her body. Therefore, this sexual violence against women not only damages the physical integrity of the victim but also undermines their emotional and psychological well-being.

Furthermore, Rao's novel *Girls Burn Brighter* portrays gender-based violence experienced by female characters like Poornima and Savitha. The experiences of these two main female characters depict the common mistreatment of women in Indian society. The physical, sexual, and mental violence they endure reveals cultural norms that demean women and allow for abusive treatment towards them. This portrayal is related to the concept of violence defined by Young as the deliberate action of specific societal groups against other groups, aimed at causing

harm, humiliation, or destruction through the implementation of social practices that cause suffering.

B. The Factors of Women Oppression: Intersectionality Perspective

This section explores how the oppressions faced by the main female characters in Rao's *Girls Burn Brighter* are examined through the perspectives of intersectionality. Intersectionality theory recognizes that oppression is not solely influenced by a single factor, but rather the result of the intersection of various interconnected factors such as gender, race, social class, religion, and so on. In the context of this novel, intersectionality theory examines the experiences of oppression of the female characters in various dimensions of their lives.

The three basic conceptualizations of intersectionality offered by Crenshaw (1991) are political, structural, and representational. First, Structural Intersectionality recognizes that individuals' experiences within specific identity categories differ in significant ways based on the intersections of their identities, such as race and gender. It emphasizes the interconnected nature of race, gender, and class domination in addressing complex social inequalities. Second, Political Intersectionality highlights the importance of considering intersecting and multiple subordinate identities in shaping policies and political strategies for marginalized groups. It exposes how the lack of attention to the intersections of race and gender leads to the marginalization and lack of recognition for women of color. Third, Representational Intersectionality focuses on the cultural construction of identity and critiques its portrayal, particularly in the realm of media. It examines how the

media often perpetuates harmful stereotypes of marginalized identities, undermining the significance of the challenges faced by women of color.

In the novel *Girls Burn Brighter*, the main female characters face multiple forms of oppression that intersect to shape their experiences. These intersecting factors contribute to their oppression throughout the story.

1. The Factors of Oppression based on Structural Intersectionality.

Structural Intersectionality highlights the qualitative differences in individuals' experiences based on their intersecting identities and addresses the convergence of race, gender, and class domination.

a) Oppression based on Gender and Social Class

In the Marginalization section (see datum 3) previously, it was revealed that Savitha experienced marginalization in obtaining decent employment. She aware that the limited choices of jobs available to her, such as working as a garbage collector or a domestic worker, were insufficient in terms of providing a sufficient income. This circumstance can be viewed through Crenshaw's theory of structural intersectionality, which highlights how the oppression faced by women in seeking adequate employment opportunities.

Datum 22

Poornima stood still, a mat half unrolled. "She's all I could find," her father said, lying back on his hemp-rope bed, smoking. "The weaving collective said I should be happy. As if my wages are low. Besides, she should be grateful. That father of hers, old Subbudu, can hardly feed himself, let alone that miserable wife and those four daughters." (Rao, 2018, p. 12)

In Datum 22, Poornima's father's words reveal the Savitha's marginalized position in workplace. As mentioned in the line "*she should be grateful*," he implies that Savitha should be grateful for any job, regardless of the wages, because she is

from a poor family. This attitude reflects the belief that women from lower-class backgrounds are less deserving of fair wages and opportunities. As Savitha is placed in low-paying jobs, it also suggests that the weaving collective is exploiting her labor for as little cost as possible. The line *"That father of hers... can hardly feed himself, let alone that miserable wife and those four daughters"* is reinforcing the idea that Savitha's family is poor.

The two structural factors that contribute to Savitha's oppression are gender and social class. These factors intersect to create a system of oppression that restricts Savitha's opportunities and choices. As a woman, Savitha faces limitations in economic opportunities, particularly in choosing her occupation. Her gender limits her options to low-paying jobs traditionally dominated by women, such as domestic work. Savitha's low socioeconomic status in Indravalli also creates structural imbalance in economic resources. According to Sethi and Roy, higher education increases employment opportunities, as the modern job market demands individuals with advanced qualifications (2021, p. 790). However, Savitha faces difficulties in accessing the same educational opportunities as individuals from more privileged backgrounds. This can result in limitations in skill development and available job prospects for her. The overlapping factors of gender and social class create a system of oppression. For instance, Savitha's gender limits her access to education, which in turn restricts her employment opportunities. This cycle of oppression makes it challenging for Savitha to improve her economic status and break free from poverty.

In the context of structural intersectionality, the case of Savitha can be compared to Kishore in terms of the differential opportunities. In the quote *"What does the boy do? An accountant!" Ramayya said jubilantly. "He studied. There's no money in weaving. You know that"* (Rao, 2018, p. 41), Ramayya emphasizes the importance of education and jobs that are perceived to have higher income potential. The comparison of situation between Savitha and Kishore illustrate how intersectional factors, such as gender, social class, and education, can play a role in determining job opportunities and available income for individuals. Savitha, as a woman, faces marginalization in her pursuit of suitable employment. She is subjected to lower wages and restricted occupational choices due to prevailing gender norms and expectations. In contrast, Kishore, as an educated man, has easier access to jobs that have the potential for higher income, such as being an accountant. The emphasis on gender, education and its correlation with financial success allows Kishore to navigate an easier path in terms of employment prospects.

b) Oppression based on Gender, Skin Colour, Social Class, and Culture

In the Cultural Imperialism section (see datum 13) previously, it was revealed the oppression faced by Poornima in her search for a suitable partner or husband. The physical appearance holds significant value, making it challenging for her to find a husband due to her physical characteristics not aligning with the prevailing cultural norms. This circumstance can be viewed through Crenshaw's theory of structural intersectionality, which highlights how the oppression faced by women because her physical characteristics do not conform to the beauty standards.

Datum 23

So this, Poornima thought with disgust, this is what they meant by idiosyncrasy. ... But who is this man? And why am I to hand him these two bananas and an apple [as a part of the Hinduism wedding ceremony]. These fruits. I don't want to place them in his hand, she thought; I don't want to place them in a hand so harmed. (Rao, 2018, p. 72)

In datum 23 above, Poornima's reaction of disgust towards her husband's missing finger highlights her rejection of his physical disability. It is mentioned he line *"I don't want to place them in a hand so harmed"*. However, this line also implies that only men with disabilities are willing to marry Poornima, reinforcing the notion that women of lower social class and darker skin tone are considered undesirable in her culture. Poornima's case serves as an illustration of how various intersecting factors, such as gender, skin color, social class, and the influence of dominant culture, interact to shape her experiences of oppression. Poornima encounters oppression due to her perceived physical, which makes her unworthy of finding a partner who meets the standards set by the dominant cultural norms. These intersecting factors determine the value placed on women and influence the judgments they face in their pursuit of life partners.

Moreover, Poornima's situation can be compared to that of Aruna, who shares a privileged background with Kishore. Aruna is Kishore's sister. The line *"She was six months older than Poornima and yet still not married. The problem, according to Aruna and her mother, was the boys. They were never good enough"* (Rao, 2018, p. 88) suggests that Aruna encounters a different set of challenges in finding a suitable partner. Despite having more suitors, Aruna and her family hold high standards that potential partners fail to meet. This shows that Aruna has the

freedom to determine what her life partner is like, while Poornima has to accept the fact that only disabled men want to marry her.

The difference in social and economic backgrounds between Poornima and Aruna affects their ability to choose life partners. As a woman from a low socioeconomic background, Poornima faces limitations in selecting a desired partner due to factors such as social status, education, and wealth, which often hold significant considerations in a patriarchal society. In contrast, as Aruna coming from a wealthy family, she has more freedom and opportunities in choosing her life partner who align with her preferences. These contrasting circumstances reflect the role of intersecting factors in their pursuit of fulfilling relationships, as influenced by gender, social class, dominant cultural norms, and personal preferences.

2. The Factors of Oppression based on political intersectionality

Political Intersectionality emphasizes the importance of considering intersecting subordinate identities in shaping policies for marginalized groups and exposes the marginalization experienced by women of color due to the neglect of race and gender intersections.

a) Oppression based on Gender, Social Class, and Political Power

In the violence section (see datum 3) previously, it was revealed that Savitha experienced sexual violence while working for Poornima's father. She is set to marry her rapist, which further exacerbates her experience of oppression. This circumstance can be viewed through Crenshaw's theory of political intersectionality, which highlights how the oppression faced by women in seeking proper justices.

Datum 24

Deep into that night, the village elders came to a decision: Poornima's father was to marry Savitha. They all agreed: it was to be his punishment, and it was just. (Rao, 2018, p. 62)

In the datum 24, the case demonstrates how political, gender, and power factors play a role in the oppression of Savitha. The decision of the village elders to force Savitha to marry her assailant, who happens to be Poornima's father, reflects imbalanced power dynamics and patriarchal norms within society. The village elders, predominantly male and holding positions of authority, utilize their political power to enact laws that are more favorable to men.

In the context of the theory of political intersectionality, the political and legal systems contribute to the oppression of women in obtaining proper justice. Despite Savitha being a victim of sexual violence committed by Poornima's father, the village elders make an unfair decision by suggesting that Poornima's father marries Savitha as a punishment. This decision reflects a perspective that views women as objects that can be controlled and owned by men, as well as a disregard for women's rights to obtain proper justice. Thus, the intersection of gender and political factors, such as an unfair political and legal system, plays a role in the oppression of women in seeking proper justice in cases of sexual violence experienced by Savitha.

3. The Factors of Oppression based on Representational Intersectionality

Representational Intersectionality examines the cultural construction of identity, especially in media, and critiques how it perpetuates oppressive stereotypes that undermine the challenges faced by women of color.

a) Oppression based on Gender, Skin color, and Cultural Representation

In the cultural imperialism section (see datum 12) previously, it was revealed that Poornima is discriminated due to her dark skin color. In her case, her skin tone is regarded as undesirable, reinforcing the pervasive notion that white women are considered more beautiful than black women. This circumstance can be viewed through Crenshaw's theory of representational intersectionality, which highlights the devaluation and unfair treatment of dark-skinned women due to popular culture and internalized by society.

Datum 25

“If her skin had been lighter, her hair thicker, or if her eyes had been bigger, her father might’ve found a better match for her: someone who wanted a wife, not an ox. She’d once heard Ramayya saying, when he’d come to see her father, “Your Poornima’s a good worker, but you know these boys today, they want a modern girl. They want fashion.” (Rao, 2018, p.7)

Datum 25 above shows that Poornima faces expectations related to her physical appearance and the ideal image of a wife. When a woman's beauty does not meet societal expectations, she is often seen as an object to be admired and sometimes even ridiculed. Poornima is bound by the beauty standards that must be maintained as a result of these social expectations. Furthermore, the quote reflects how women are often perceived as objects that can be used by men to achieve their own goals. Poornima is referred to as an "ox," which illustrates how women are often seen as objects that men can exploit for their own interests. In this case, Poornima is a woman who is deemed worthless because of her skin color, reflecting the social stereotype that dark-skinned women are considered unattractive.

Thus, Poornima's experience is influenced by the interaction between gender and her skin color. Poornima faces discrimination and unfair treatment due

to the image shaped by popular culture regarding beauty and the value of women. As a woman with dark skin, Poornima faces social expectations that do not align with her appearance. This reflects how women are often perceived as objects that can be exploited by men to achieve their own goals.

b) Oppression based on Gender and Culture

In the violence section (see datum 17) previously, Poornima had to live up to the image of a good wife by obeying all her husband's orders even though this was against her will. The representation of wife in marriage can be viewed through Crenshaw's theory of representational intersectionality.

Datum 26

After one final push, Kishore looked down at her and smiled. A true smile. And she thought, Yes, after all, yes, you are the one I belong to now.” (Rao, 2018, p. 78)

“No,” he said, “take that off, too.” She did so reluctantly, shy, unaware, even after six months of marriage, and even with Kishore on top of her practically every night, of her adolescent body, and of the crude brutality it could inspire” (Rao, 2018, p.84)

In datum 26, it is revealed how Poornima experiences the objectification of her body as a sexual object by her husband within the context of marriage in Indian society. Poornima faces two forms of oppression related to her self-image as a wife. Gender oppression is evident in the objectification and control of Poornima's body by her husband. Her body is seen as a sexual object that must satisfy her husband's sexual desires, as mentioned in the line *"after all, yes, you are the one I belong to now."* This reflects a view that simplifies women's roles as mere sexual servants to their husbands and places women's bodies under male control.

In the context of marriage in India, Poornima also experiences oppression as a wife who is expected to submit to her husband's authority. As previously explained in the concept of Pati (Husband) in Indian culture, Poornima is expected

to prioritize following her husband's orders after marriage. In the line "*No, he said, take that off, too. She did so reluctantly,*", she is considered obliged to prioritize following her husband's commands after marriage because her body is fully owned by her husband.

Therefore, the oppression experienced by Poornima is influenced by factors such as gender and culture. Cultural constructions of identity make Poornima experiencing intersectional oppression as a woman in Indian society and marriage. Poornima experiences the objectification of her body as a sexual object by her husband, which reflects gender stereotypes that discriminate against women. In the cultural and traditional context of India, Poornima is expected to submit to her husband's authority and obey his commands, placing her body entirely under her husband's control. These social factors interact and reinforce Poornima's experiences of oppression.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

After the researcher analyzes the novel titled *Girls Burn Brighter* using Iris Marion Young and Kimberly Crenshaw' theory, the researcher comes to the final chapter of the research. In this chapter, the researcher sums up the idea that is present in the previous chapter. Then, the researcher offers some suggestions for readers, particularly for future researchers who may be interested in this field of study.

A. Conclusion

This study found that there are five faces of oppression and intersectionality in the novel *Girls Burn Brighter*. Firstly, these forms of oppression include marginalization, exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. In the novel *Girls Burn Brighter*, Poornima and Savitha face marginalization in various aspects of their lives, including lacking of information regarding birth dates, limited social participation and opportunities. They also face exploitation in domestic work, the prostitution industry, and human trafficking. For the aspect of powerlessness, this novel highlights how women like Poornima accept their inferior status and remain silent in the face of mistreatment. In addition, cultural imperialism reinforces patriarchal norms, limits women's freedom and autonomy, and leads to discrimination based on skin color. It is exposing the negative consequences of cultural domination in influencing the lives of the Poornima and generating social injustice. Thus, the gender-based violence experienced by Poornima and Savitha reflects the destructive impact of gender oppression.

Secondly, the oppression experienced by the two main female characters is influenced by the intersection of factors such as gender, social class, political power, and cultural representation. The experiences of oppression faced by Savitha and Poornima is divided into structural, political, and representational. In structural intersectionality, the oppression occurs through the intersection of gender and social class factors. Savitha faces limitations in finding decent work and faces economic restrictions due to existing gender norms and social expectations. The factor of political intersectionality highlights how political power and the legal system can influence oppression, such as injustice in seeking justice for victims of sexual violence. In addition, representational intersectionality examines how cultural and media construction reinforces oppressive stereotypes against women of color, such as judgments based on physical appearance and women's roles in marriage. Overall, this study reveals how oppression occurs through the intersection of various identity factors, which creates complex experiences and limits freedom and opportunities for the female characters in this novel.

B. Suggestions

Furthermore, the researcher suggests that future researchers examine this novel more deeply by using potential approaches and theories, such as psychoanalysis, structuralism, or other theories of feminism. This novel can be studied through a psychoanalytic approach that examines the traumatic experiences of the oppressed characters in the novel and their impact on their behavior. In addition, other feminist approaches can be applied to explore women's struggles in facing gender injustice. In addition, the research on *Girls Burn Brighter* can focus

on sociocultural studies to uncover the societal context within the story, as well as postcolonial perspectives to explore the impacts of colonialism and the dependency of third-world countries. By utilizing these suggestions, future research can provide a deeper understanding of this novel and explore the issues it encompasses.

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CURRICULUM VITAE



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APPENDIX

A. Five Faces of Oppression Experienced by Poornima and Savitha

No	Five Faces of Oppression	Datum from the Novel <i>Girls Burn Brighter</i>
1	Marginalization	<p><i>Datum 1</i> <i>Poornima turned. "Who?"</i> <i>"Savitha."</i> <i>So that was her name.</i> <i>Poornima stood still, a mat half unrolled. "She's all I could find," her father said,</i> <i>"...She was a year or two older, Poornima guessed, though neither truly knew their exact ages. Only the birthdates of the boys were recorded in the village". (Rao, 2018, p. 12-13)</i></p> <p><i>Datum 2</i> <i>"When they arrive, don't show your face. Stay upstairs. We'll make up something. We'll tell them you had to go back to Indravalli for the day. Something. Just don't make a sound."</i> <i>Poornima turned from the stove. "Why? Why would I stay upstairs?" Her mother-in-law sighed loudly. "You're not—well, we don't want to bring Aruna's status down, do we? Besides, six months, seven months, and you're still not pregnant? I don't want you to rub off on my Aruna. On her chances. Barren women are a bad omen, and I don't want you down here." (Rao, 2018, p. 93)</i></p> <p><i>Datum 3</i> <i>"... tallied all the ways in which she could make money: she could collect garbage, which clearly wasn't bringing in enough; she could cook and clean, as her mother did, though there were hardly any families rich enough in Indravalli to keep even her mother employed; she could work the charkha and the loom—she did belong to the caste of weavers, after all—but money from making cotton saris was dwindling each year (Rao, 2018. p.9)"</i> <i>This provided datum is supported by the following statement:</i> <i>"A week later the girl [Savitha] was seated at her [Poornima] mother's loom" (Rao, 2018, p.11)</i></p>
2	Exploitation	<p><i>Datum 4</i> <i>"He said it was because they were falling behind on the sari orders. "Doesn't she know we have work to do?" he'd say if Savitha went home for even an hour or two in the evenings. "Tell her I'll pay her extra for staying longer. I can't afford much. Hardly any to spare. But some," he said". (Rao, 2018, p. 45)</i></p> <p><i>Datum 5</i> <i>Her first customer was a middle-aged man, ...and said,</i> <i>"Will you give me a kiss?" Savitha looked up at him. "I don't know how," she said. The statement so guileless that the man seemed to almost wilt when he heard it. "Here," he said finally, "let me show you."</i></p>

		<p>“...After that, the mechanics of it all became routine: the five to six customers she had per day, the constant clucking and recriminations from the madam.” (Rao, 2018, p. 133-134)</p> <p><i>Datum 6</i> “What do they want me for?” she asked, afraid of the answer. “To clean houses. Flats. Apparently, they have to pay maids so much over there, it’s cheaper to buy them from here.” “But how will I—” she began, but Guru, before she could finish, said, “I told them you’d work twice as fast.” “Where?” “America. Someplace called Sattle. Good money, too.” “How much?” she asked. “Twenty thousand. Ten for you, ten for me.” (Rao, 2018, p. 149)</p> <p><i>Datum 7</i> Poornima began again. “Nanna, why did you—” “Is dinner ready?” “Almost.” “How many times do I have to tell you to have it ready when I come in?” (p.1) “She woke early in the morning to spin, then spun after the breakfast dishes were washed, after lunch was prepared and served, and then again after dinner. Their hut had no electricity, so her spinning was a race against the sun” (Rao, 2018, p. 2)</p> <p><i>Datum 8</i> There were the lunch dishes to wash and dinner to prepare. Her mother-in-law and Aruna liked their tea at four o’clock, and it was already ten past. Poornima hurried to the kitchen” (Rao, 2018, p. 86)</p>
3	Powerlessness	<p><i>Datum 9</i> “But the air was stifling, no longer lovely, and Poornima felt a rising panic. She tried to stop him, she tried to buck him off, but he kept his grip on her elbow and steered her toward the dais. “I want to stop,” she said to her father. Her father tightened his hold on Poornima’s elbow. He said, “Don’t be stupid.” Poornima thought, and the words seemed decent enough”. (Rao, 2018, p. 71)</p> <p><i>Datum 10</i> “Somebody discolored my silk shalwar. Amma, do you know who it could’ve been?” It had been a delicate pink, splotched with blue and purple. They both turned to Poornima. ... “You soaked it with something blue, didn’t you? Was it that blue towel? I bet you soaked it with that towel. ...her mother-in-law was at her side, yanking her head back by her braid. “Ask forgiveness,” she growled. “Ask.” Poornima was so surprised she couldn’t get any words out, not even a scream. Her</p>

		<i>mother-in-law finally let go, and Poornima did ask forgiveness. (Rao, 2018, p. 81-82)</i>
4	Cultural Imperialism	<p><i>Datum 11</i> <i>"At fifteen, Poornima came of marriageable age, and she stopped going to the convent school. She began to sit at the spinning wheel, the charkha, in her free time to help the household. ... She woke early in the morning to spin, then spun after the breakfast dishes were washed, after lunch was prepared and served, and then again after dinner" (Rao, 2018, p. 2)</i></p> <p><i>Datum 12</i> <i>"The farmer was no longer interested. He sent word to Poornima's father. He said ... he had heard his daughter was as dark as a tamarind. Poornima's father was crestfallen. He prodded Ramayya, who'd brought the news, ... She's hardly as dark as a tamarind. Do you think she is? It's a curse: daughters, darkness." (Rao, 2018, p.23)</i></p> <p><i>Datum 13</i> <i>"They're looking for matches for the older one ... When Ramayya finally spoke, his voice was lowered. "There's nothing wrong with him. Nothing like that." More huffling, a further drop. "But what is it?" Poornima's father's voice rose with suspicion. "Our girl's no catch, you know. So no need to be so dubious. Just a small affectation. An idiosyncrasy" (Rao, 2018, p.41)</i></p> <p><i>"She gasped. His right hand: it wasn't whole. He was missing two fingers. His middle and most of his index. ... So this, she thought with disgust, this is what they meant by idiosyncrasy" (Rao, 2018, p.72)</i></p>
5	Violence	<p><i>Datum 14</i> <i>"negotiations with the family from Repalle fell apart. They refused to budge from their dowry demands ... Poornima's father slapped her, hard. Then he grabbed her by the hair. He said, "You see this? You see what you've done?" His grip on her hair tightened and he said, "The next time somebody asks you to sing, what're you going to do?"</i> <i>.... Poornima blinked. She held back tears. Her scalp burned, hairs snapped like electric wires. Her brothers and sister crowded around the door of the hut to see. "What?" he growled. "What will you do? Say it. Say it." "Sing," she whispered, wincing in pain. "I'm going to sing." (Rao, 2018, p. 34)</i></p> <p><i>Datum 15</i> <i>"How do you know your son isn't the one who's barren?" The slap that followed was so powerful that it knocked Poornima backward, reeling, crashing into the stove. (p. 89)</i></p>

	<p><i>Datum 16</i> <i>“Kishore and her mother-in-law sprang away and raced to the other end of the kitchen. ... She turned her head to follow them, and that was why, when the oil landed, it splattered across the left side of her face, down her neck, and caught her upper arm and shoulder. Poornima felt a fire, and then the fire, and everything with it, went out.” (Rao, 2018, p. 98)</i></p> <p><i>“The five thousand rupees was still outstanding, and her mother-in-law and Kishore reminded her of it every time she put a bite of food in her mouth, or drank a glass of water. “You think it’s free?” her mother-in-law hissed”. (Rao, 2018, p. 94)</i></p> <p><i>Datum 17</i> <i>“She couldn’t decide—as she watched his face, its grimace, its shudderings—what hurt more: the thing coming in or the thing going out. But then it ended. Just like that. After one final push, Kishore looked down at her and smiled. A true smile. And she thought, Yes, after all, yes, you are the one I belong to now.” (p. 78)</i></p> <p><i>Datum 18</i> <i>“Kishore’s mode of escalation was more subtle, though also more painful: the sex became rougher. Violent. He’d grab her hair, yank her around the bed by it, slam into her with such force that her head would hit the wall behind the bed. The next day, bruises bloomed across her body”. (Rao, 2018, p. 91-92)</i></p> <p><i>Datum 19</i> <i>“A darkness fell over the lantern light. Savitha turned and saw Poornima’s father. He smiled, and she thought, But he’s never smiled. And then he said, “Come with me.” ... It was then that she saw Savitha’s clothes, ripped. Some on, some off. Lying around her like torn sails”. (Rao, 2018, p. 56-57)</i></p> <p><i>Datum 20</i> <i>“When she lay on her back, he said, No, you’ll do the other thing. And so she turned, but he said, No, no, that’s not what I mean. Savitha looked at him, confused, and then he showed her what to do. He had a bottle of something clear that he smeared over her stub, and then he showed her. He said, Like this, and then he got on the bed. On all fours. He told her to go in and out, and when she did, he said, Oh, yeah, like that, like that. A pain hit somewhere behind her eyes, and she turned away. But the pain was thunder, it broke and it broke. And he said, Yeah, oh yeah, yes, just like that. And she began to cry, willing it to end”. (Rao, 2018, p. 173)</i></p> <p><i>Datum 21</i> <i>“I said, put it in your mouth.” When she still stood, unmoving, not knowing what he wanted, he grabbed her arm again and shoved her stub against her mouth. It knocked her teeth into her bottom lip, drawing blood, but he kept shoving. ... “Open it, and put it in.” He pushed the gun up to her face, ... “Bitch, not that. You know better.” And he reached over, grabbed her</i></p>
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		<i>by the hair, and rammed her face into the stub. She choked on her own arm. Tears filled her eyes. He then pulled her head back up, and then back down, and then back up. "Like that," he said. And so she did. By now, the baby-faced one had unzipped his pants and was moaning at the edge of Savitha's blurred vision. (Rao, 2018, p. 267-268)</i>
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B. Intersectionality

No	Intersectionality	Datum from the Novel <i>Girls Burn Brighter</i>
1	Structural	<p><i>Datum 22</i> Poornima stood still, a mat half unrolled. "She's all I could find," her father said, lying back on his hemp-rope bed, smoking. "The weaving collective said I should be happy. As if my wages are low. Besides, she should be grateful. That father of hers, old Subbudu, can hardly feed himself, let alone that miserable wife and those four daughters." (Rao, 2018, p. 12)</p> <p><i>Datum 23</i> So this, Poornima thought with disgust, this is what they meant by idiosyncrasy. ... But who is this man? And why am I to hand him these two bananas and an apple [as a part of the Hinduism wedding ceremony]. These fruits. I don't want to place them in his hand, she thought; I don't want to place them in a hand so harmed. (Rao, 2018, p. 72)</p>
2	Political	<p><i>Datum 24</i> Deep into that night, the village elders came to a decision: Poornima's father was to marry Savitha. They all agreed: it was to be his punishment, and it was just. (Rao, 2018, p. 62)</p>
3	Representational	<p><i>Datum 25</i> "If her skin had been lighter, her hair thicker, or if her eyes had been bigger, her father might've found a better match for her: someone who wanted a wife, not an ox. She'd once heard Ramayya saying, when he'd come to see her father, "Your Poornima's a good worker, but you know these boys today, they want a modern girl. They want fashion." (Rao, 2018, p.7)</p> <p><i>Datum 26</i> After one final push, Kishore looked down at her and smiled. A true smile. And she thought, Yes, after all, yes, you are the one I belong to now." (Rao, 2018, p. 78) "No," he said, "take that off, too." She did so reluctantly, shy, unaware, even after six months of marriage, and even with Kishore on top of her practically every night, of her adolescent body, and of the crude brutality it could inspire" (Rao, 2018, p.84)</p>