

**WOMEN'S STRUGGLE AGAINST PATRIARCHY IN MARJAN  
KAMALI'S *THE LION WOMEN OF TEHRAN***

**THESIS**

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI MAULANA MALIK IBRAHIM  
MALANG  
2025**

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KAMALI'S *THE LION WOMEN OF TEHRAN***

**THESIS**

Presented to  
Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of *Sarjana Sastra* (S.S.)

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2025**

### STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I state that the thesis entitled "**Women's Struggle Against Patriarchy In Marjan Kamali's *The Lion Women Of Tehran***" is my original work. I do not include any materials previously written or published by another person, except those cited as references and written in the bibliography. Hereby, if there is any objection or claim, I am the only person who is responsible for that.

Malang, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025

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## APPROVAL SHEET

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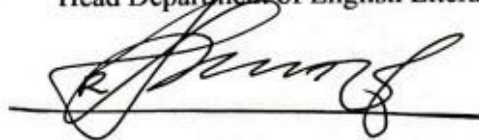
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## MOTTO

*“You'll have time to rest when you're dead.”*

*- Robert De Niro*

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to:

My father Muhammad Malik, and my mother, Nazilatul Indadiyah, who always  
love, care, work hard and pray for the success of my life.

My sister, Ummu Hasna Haura, who always encouraging me to finish my study.

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In compiling this thesis, the researcher absolutely found difficulties and obstacles, but thanks to the help, guidance and advice from various parties I was able to complete this thesis. Therefore, the researcher would like to express his deepest gratitude to:

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The researcher realizes that this thesis is far from perfect. As for with all humility the researcher expects all criticism and suggestions for the perfection of this thesis. Hopefully this thesis can provide benefits for the author and also the readers.

The Researcher

Muhammad Addo Annigo G

## ABSTRACT

**Georgiano, Muhammad Addo Anniqo** (2025) *Women's Struggle Against Patriarchy In Marjan Kamali's The Lion Women Of Tehran*. Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.

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Keywords : *Patriarchy, Struggle, The Lion Women of Tehran*

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This research aims to analyze the patriarchal system depicted in the novel *The Lion Women of Tehran* by Marjan Kamali. The objective of this study is to identify the forms of patriarchy present in the novel and to explore the various forms of women's struggle in resisting these patriarchal systems. This research is a work of literary criticism, and the analysis is conducted using Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy, which comprises six main structures: patriarchal household, relations in paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions. The findings reveal that five of these patriarchal structures are represented in the novel, namely patriarchy in paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions. In addition, the study also uncovers various forms of resistance carried out by female characters against each structure, demonstrating women's struggle, resilience, and determination in challenging patriarchal norms. This research highlights the significance of literary narratives in reflecting and confronting gender-based oppression.

## مستخلص البحث

جيورجيانو ، محمد أدو أنيقو (٥٢٠٢) نضال النساء ضد النظام البطريكي في رواية *"The Lion Women of Tehran"* لمارجان كمالي. أطروحة . برنامج دراسة الأدب الإنجليزي , الكلية العلوم الإنسانية ، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية الحكومية مالانج

المستشارة ويدا روزيتاما ، م. هوم

الكلمات المفتاحية: البطريكية ، النضال ، *The Lion Women of Tehran*

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يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل نظام الهيمنة الأبوية كما هو مصور في رواية *The Lion Women of Tehran* للكاتبة مارجان كمالي. الغرض من هذا البحث هو تحديد أشكال النظام الأبوي الموجودة في الرواية، بالإضافة إلى استكشاف أشكال نضال النساء في مقاومة هذه الأنظمة الأبوية. يُعد هذا البحث من أبحاث النقد الأدبي، وقد تم إجراء التحليل باستخدام نظرية النظام الأبوي لسيلفيا والبي، والتي تشمل ستة هياكل رئيسية: النظام الأبوي في الأسرة، العلاقات في العمل المأجور، الدولة، عنف الذكور، الجنس، والمؤسسات الثقافية. أظهرت نتائج البحث وجود خمسة أشكال من هذه الهياكل الأبوية في الرواية، وهي: النظام الأبوي في العمل المأجور، الدولة، عنف الذكور، الجنس، والمؤسسات الثقافية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، توصل البحث إلى أشكال متنوعة من المقاومة التي قامت بها الشخصيات النسائية ضد كل من هذه الهياكل، مما يدل على وجود نضال وصمود وعزيمة لدى النساء في مواجهة المعايير الأبوية. يؤكد هذا البحث على أهمية السرد الأدبي في عكس ومواجهة القمع القائم على النوع الاجتماعي.

## ABSTRAK

**Georgiano, Muhammad Addo Anniqo** (2025) *Women's Struggle Against Patriarchy In Marjan Kamali's The Lion Women Of Tehran*. Skripsi. Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang.

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Kata kunci: *Patriarki, Perjuangan, The Lion Women of Tehran*

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Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis sistem patriarki yang digambarkan dalam novel *The Lion Women of Tehran* karya Marjan Kamali. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi bentuk-bentuk patriarki yang terdapat dalam novel tersebut serta mengeksplorasi berbagai bentuk perjuangan perempuan dalam melawan sistem-sistem patriarki tersebut. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kritik sastra dan analisis dilakukan dengan menggunakan teori patriarki dari Sylvia Walby, yang mencakup enam struktur utama: rumah tangga patriarkal, relasi dalam pekerjaan bergaji, negara, kekerasan laki-laki, seksualitas, dan institusi budaya. Hasil temuan menunjukkan bahwa lima bentuk struktur patriarki tersebut hadir dalam novel, yaitu patriarki dalam pekerjaan bergaji, Negara, kekerasan laki-laki, seksualitas, dan institusi budaya. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menemukan berbagai bentuk perlawanan yang dilakukan oleh tokoh perempuan terhadap masing-masing struktur, yang menunjukkan adanya perjuangan, ketahanan, dan tekad perempuan dalam menantang norma-norma patriarkal. Penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya narasi sastra dalam merefleksikan dan melawan penindasan berbasis gender.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter consists of background of the study, research questions, objectives of study, scope and limitation, significance of study, and definition of keyterms.

### **A. Background of the Study**

Patriarchy is a social system that places men in a dominant position over women in almost all aspects of life, including economics, politics, and culture (Walby, 1990: 20). This system is not merely an interpersonal relationship, but also a deeply rooted social structure that is continuously reproduced through institutions and cultural norms (Walby, 1990; 20). In patriarchal societies, women are reduced to subordinate entities, experience limitations in their rights, and are often constructed as “the Other” in social discourse (Beauvoir, 2010). This gender inequality manifests in the form of restricted access to education, wage disparities, and the severe underrepresentation of women in politics and decision-making (Tong, 2009).

Although the struggle for gender equality has shown progress in recent decades, data indicate that patriarchy still exists and remains adaptive in contemporary contexts. According to the *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*, global gender disparities are still significant, particularly in the areas of economic participation and political representation. Women around the world continue to

experience gender-based violence, labor exploitation, and limitations in decision-making within both family and society . Patriarchy now operates not only through formal institutions but also through symbolic and ideological control, including the media, religion, and education (Moghissi, 1999). Through repeated narratives, representations, and teachings, they define what is considered appropriate behavior for men and women, often framing male dominance and female subordination as natural or divinely ordained. This ideological control is particularly powerful because it operates without the need for overt coercion, embedding patriarchal values into everyday life in ways that appear normal and unquestioned. Media, for instance, frequently portrays women in passive or secondary roles, while education and religious doctrines often reinforce traditional gender hierarchies. As a result, patriarchy becomes self-sustaining, not through direct force, but through the internalization of beliefs and values that justify and normalize gender inequality. This shift from overt institutional control to symbolic domination demonstrates how patriarchy evolves to maintain its power within modern, even democratic, societies. Therefore, it is important to study how patriarchy operates systemically and how women respond to it in different social and cultural contexts (Tong, 2009).

In the Middle East, including Iran, patriarchy presents a convoluted dynamic: traditional are interwoven with conservative religious interpretations, and autocratic politics (Afary, 2009). After the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, State became the principal actor in refreshing patriarchal norms. It did so through legislation that restricts women's freedoms; for example, compulsory hijab was



gradually transformed to mandatory veil and there were limitations on divorce rights. As a result, women still do not have the same inheritance laws as men do (Afary, 2009). Hoodfar (1998) notes that after the revolution new state policies not only control women's bodies and movements but also ideologically define women's role as guardians of family honor, morality. In addition, social norms usually emphasize obedience, purity, and the subordination of women. They do so not only at cultural level but also inside homes. All these factors help to strengthen patriarchal background (Moghissi, 1999). In this context, patriarchy operates not only externally through the state but also internally through the reproduction of values within families and communities (Walby, 1990: 24).

Nevertheless, women are not entirely passive in facing patriarchal oppression. In various contexts, including Iran, women demonstrate resistance against the system that oppresses them through a range of strategies, from public protest to cultural expressions such as literature and art (Afary, 2009). The collective resistance of Iranian women, for instance in the “Zan, Zendegi, Azadi” movement that emerged after the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022, shows that women possess political agency and structural awareness of the oppression they experience. Beyond street protests, forms of resistance also occur in symbolic domains, including through literary writing, identity construction, and cultural defiance against gender norms (Moghissi, 1999). Rejection of dress codes, demands for educational rights, and the creation of alternative narratives are ways in which women reclaim control over their bodies and identities (Afary, 2009).

Literary works is able to depict and oppose social institutions, such as those of the patriarchal power which dominates women's lives (Moi, 1995). According to feminist literary criticism, literary writings can become ideological sites in which meanings of masculinity and femininity are contested, challenged or subversively deconstructed (Showalter, 1985: 15-25). Literature is also considered a symbolic space for the revelation of the suppressed voices of women in both personal and political realms (Eagleton, 2010). In the Iranian context, female authors such as Azar Nafisi (*Reading Lolita in Tehran*), Marjane Satrapi (*Persepolis*), and Marjan Kamali (*The Lion Women of Tehran*) used Literature to portray women's stories within a repressive patriarchal regime (Nafisi, 2003; Satrapi, 2000; Kamali, 2024). These narratives allow space for women to voice social criticism, describe trauma and offer voices of resistance which can be hidden from public sight.

One of the important voices in contemporary Iranian diasporic literature is Marjan Kamali. She is a novelist that, through involving and empathetic fiction, narrates womens' experiences in patriarchal systems; this also makes her one of the significant voices of contemporary Iranian diasporic literature. Kamali was born in Turkey and spent her childhood moving between Iran, Germany, Kenya, and the United States. This transnational standpoint enables her to write stories about identity, diaspora and the struggles of individual women. Kamali published her novels *Together Tea* in 2013 and *The Stationery Shop* in 2019, as well as her more recent *The Lion Women of Tehran* in 2024. In an interview with NPR, Kamali stated that her writing is greatly inspired by the political history of Iran as

well as the voices of women who have been marginalized in national discourse and dominant culture.

*The Lion Women of Tehran* novel is set in 1950s Iran, a time of political tension leading up to the coup against Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. Amid this turmoil, the story follows the lives of two young girls, Ellie and Homa, who form a close friendship within a society that systematically oppresses women. Ellie, the daughter of a conservative aristocratic family, faces cultural expectations to marry young and live in complete obedience. In contrast, Homa comes from a lower-class background but possesses the courage and intelligence to challenge social norms and aspires to become a journalist. Together, they share a common identity as members of the group “The Lion Women,” representing strength and unity among women wishing to break free from the hold of patriarchy (Kamali, 2024). The tension of the book comes from the fact that the two have to make tough decisions about being loyal to a repressive system, or risking everything and breaking the rules to live free. Conveyed through these characters is not just the pain but also the power and defiance of women who are forced to deal with an oppressive society.

This novel is relevant to be examined from a feminist perspective because it presents the dynamics of relationships among women in facing social and state repression. The novel highlights the experiences of main characters such as Ellie and Homa in navigating lives constrained by social norms, gender roles, and family expectations—while showing their efforts to maintain dignity and personal

freedom. This novel offers a complex portrayal of how women live, rebel, and endure within an oppressive social structure.

Based on the story in the novel, the researcher intends to conduct an analysis of this novel through the lens of Sylvia Walby's *Six Structures of Patriarchy* (1990), which allows for a deeper exploration of the mechanisms of oppression and potential resistance within the patriarchal cultural context of Iran. Previously, there has been no research that examines *The Lion Women of Tehran*. However, studies on women's struggles against the patriarchal system have been conducted by many researchers using the patriarchal theory developed by Sylvia Walby. The researcher has already found several previous studies that can help provide information on the topic and theory.

The first study was conducted by Indriati (2022) in her thesis *The Main Character's Struggle Against Patriarchal Structures in Abi Dare's The Girl with the Louding Voice*, which shows that the main character, Adunni, experiences four forms of patriarchal structures, namely household production, male violence, sexuality, and culture. In her struggle, Adunni chooses to voice her desire for education and rejects the violence and oppression she faces (Indriati, 2022).

Next is the study by Setyawati, Harjani, and Saraswati (2024) in the journal *The Portrayal of Patriarchy in Malala Yousafzai's I Am Malala*, which uses Walby's theory to identify four forms of patriarchy: household, state, male violence, and cultural institutions. Malala is portrayed as a woman who resists

through her involvement in educational campaigns for girls and her struggle for social justice (Setyawati et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, the journal by Rahayu (2019) in *Women's Oppression and Liberation in Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come* highlights how female characters such as Enitan and Sheri experience exploitation, marginalization, and violence in Nigeria's patriarchal society. Using Walby's theory and Iris Young's perspective, the researcher shows that the women's liberation takes the form of independent decision-making, divorce, and the pursuit of education and careers (Rahayu, 2019).

Moreover, Hajir and Marsih (2023), in their study entitled *Women's Struggle Against Patriarchal Practice as Portrayed in Miriam Toews' Women Talking*, describe how women in a closed community experience male dominance, restricted access to education, and sexual violence. Using Walby's theory and Kate Millett's radical feminism, the authors find that the female characters build collective awareness and resist patriarchy through solidarity and collective decision-making (Hajir & Marsih, 2023).

Furthermore, Naufina (2021), in her article *The Portrayal of Hegemony and Patriarchy in Louise O'Neill's Only Ever Yours*, investigates how patriarchal domination is naturalised within O'Neill's dystopia; drawing on Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Sylvia Walby's six patriarchal structures, she reveals that the novel foregrounds patriarchal mode of production, state control, and cultural

norms—and shows television to be the key ideological apparatus that sustains these power relations (Naufina, 2021).

Another Study is the thesis by Zahra (2024) entitled *Female Characters' Struggle Against Patriarchy in Meg Elison's The Book of Flora*, found four patriarchal structures in the novel: household production, male violence, sexuality, and the state. The characters Flora, Dinty, and Etta are depicted as resisting through efforts to escape, building a female-led community, and rejecting the oppressive authority of the state (Zahra, 2024).

Next, Wardani et al. (2024), in their study entitled *Patriarchy Depiction through the Female Main Character's Relationship in Marie Lu's The Kingdom of Back*, investigate how patriarchal culture manifests through the relationships between female and male characters. Using Stuart Hall's theory of representation and Michel Foucault's discursive approach, combined with Sylvia Walby's six structures of patriarchy, the authors find that the protagonist, Nannerl, experiences domination, oppression, and exploitation within a male-dominated society. The study shows how patriarchal norms influence not only character dynamics but also limit women's opportunities, silencing their creative potential and reinforcing gender hierarchy through family and societal expectations (Wardani et al., 2024).

Then, Indryani (2021) in her thesis *Patriarchal System in Anna Quindlen's One True Thing* explained how the character Ellen was forced to leave her job due to her father's wishes, which reflects patriarchal structures in the household and

paid work. This study also highlights patriarchal relations within cultural institutions and sexuality (Indryani, 2021).

Further, Khaerati and Iskandar (2023), in their study entitled *The Representation of Patriarchal Ideology in Amy Poehler's Movie Moxie*, examine the multiple forms of patriarchal oppression portrayed in the school environment through Sylvia Walby's six structures of patriarchy and Simone de Beauvoir's theory of women's struggle. Their analysis reveals how female characters are subjected to cultural, sexual, and institutional forms of patriarchy, including psychological and sexual violence, gender-based discrimination, and leadership exclusion. Through the feminist movement led by the protagonist Vivian, the study illustrates how young women resist these systems by reclaiming agency, forming solidarity, and asserting their voices through symbolic and direct action (Khaerati & Iskandar, 2023).

The Next is article by Istifadah and Rohmana (2022), *Patriarchal Hegemony in the Novel 'Women at Point Zero' by Nawal El Saadawi: A Feminism Study and Its Correlation with Islam*, investigate manifestations of patriarchal domination in El Saadawi's novel using Antonio Gramsci's hegemony concept alongside Sylvia Walby's six patriarchal structures. The authors identify verbal, physical, and sexual violence, as well as marginalisation and exploitation of women, and conclude that these practices stem from cultural misinterpretations rather than Islamic doctrine itself (Istifadah & Rohmana, 2022).

Lastly, the study by Hilmiadiani (2023) in *Helen's Struggles Against Patriarchy in Sophie Treadwell's Machinal Drama* applied Walby's six structures of patriarchy to analyze the injustice experienced by the character Helen. Her struggle is portrayed as an attempt to resist social pressure and forced marriage, although it ends tragically due to the patriarchal legal system (Hilmiadiani, 2023).

Based on the previous studies above, *The Lion Women of Tehran* has never been analyzed using Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct a study focusing on women's struggle against patriarchy using Sylvia Walby's theory in the novel.

### **B. Research Question**

1. What forms of patriarchy are found in Marjan Kamali's *The Lion Women of Tehran*?
2. How does women characters struggle against patriarchy in Marjan Kamali's *The Lion Women of Tehran*?

### **C. Objectives of Study**

From the problem of study that the researcher has written, thus the objective of the research is to analyze forms of patriarchy and how women character struggle against patriarchy in the novel *The Lion Women of Tehran*.

### **D. Scope and Limitation**

The main objects of this study are *The Lion Women of Tehran* Novel by Marjan Kamali. In this research, the researcher use Sylvia Walby's theory and



only focus on forms of patriarchy and women characters struggle against patriarchy found in the novel.

### **E. Significance of Study**

This research holds significant urgency considering the importance of women's representation in literature as a reflection and critique of patriarchal social structures. By using Sylvia Walby's structural patriarchy theory, this study is able to provide a more systematic and in-depth reading of the novel *The Lion Women of Tehran*. This analysis not only reveals the forms of gender inequality represented in the text, but also highlights the strategies of resistance employed by women to reclaim their autonomy and agency.

The academic contribution of this research lies in two main aspects. First, theoretically, this study expands the application of structural patriarchy theory in literary studies. Second, practically, this research provides a more critical understanding of women's conditions under the patriarchal system, which can serve as a foundation for advocating gender equality in the fields of education, culture, and public policy.

### **F. Definition of Keyterms**

In order to avoid misunderstanding on what will be discussed in this research, it is essential for the researcher to provide a term of about the definition in this study. Some term defined as follows bellow:

1. **Feminist literary criticism:** Feminist literary criticism is an approach in literary studies that analyzes how women are represented in texts, as well as how patriarchal social structures are reflected or challenged in literary works (Moi, 1995). This approach questions dominant narratives that often ignore women's experiences (Showalter, 1985: 6).
2. **Radical feminism:** Radical feminism is a branch of feminism that views patriarchy as the primary form of domination in society and demands a fundamental change in the social structures that oppress women (Millett, 1970: 23-26). Its focus is on the body, sexuality, and personal relationships as arenas of political struggle.
3. **Patriarchy:** Patriarchy is a social system that places men at the center of power in various social and cultural institutions, creating a structurally embedded gender inequality (Walby, 1990: 20).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The following chapter consists of the feminist literary criticism, radical feminism, patriarchy, Sylvia Walby's six structure of patriarchy, and Struggle.

#### **A. Feminist Literary Criticism**

Feminist literary criticism is an approach in literary studies that originates from the overall feminist movement and tries to explain and analyze literary texts in the context of gender representation, patriarchal power structures, and the position of women within literary texts. This approach not only questions how women are represented in literary works but also critiques the patriarchal values embedded in the narratives, structures, and ideologies of a text (Eagleton, 2010). Feminist literary criticism developed as a reaction to the dominance of male perspectives in the world of literature and the humanities, as well as an effort to reconstruct the history of literature from a female point of view.

Historically, feminist literary criticism can be divided into several waves. The first wave focuses on the struggle to secure a place for women's literary works in a canon dominated by men. The second wave , emphasizes the analysis of how women are depicted in texts and the importance of women's experiences as the center of literary reading. The third and fourth waves take further an intersectional approach, examining the intersections between gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and geopolitical position in the construction of women's experience (Plain & Sellers, 2007).

According to Showalter (1985), feminist literary criticism aims not only to "find women" in literature but also to deconstruct the gender constructions inherent in texts and to dismantle the power structures that support the patriarchal system within literary culture. In practice, this approach can reveal that many classical and contemporary literary works have normalized gender inequality, both implicitly and explicitly.

Feminist literary criticism also broadens its focus from character and theme analysis to the study of form, genre, and even the language used in texts. For example, women's writing styles are often studied as a form of "*écriture féminine*," or women's writing, which attempts to express women's bodily experiences and emotions beyond patriarchal logic (Vacchani, 2019). This indicates that feminism in literature is not only about content but also about form and aesthetic approach.

## **B. Radical Feminism**

Radical feminism emerged as a form of dissatisfaction with liberal feminism, which is seen as too compromising with the patriarchal system. Unlike other feminist approaches that focus on formal equality within the existing system, radical feminists argue that the system itself—namely patriarchy—must be fundamentally challenged. "The personal is political" became an important slogan in this movement, indicating that personal relationships such as family, sexuality, and gender roles are never neutral, but are highly political because they are shaped within imbalanced power structures (Hanisch, 1970).

According to Millet (1970), The relationship between men and women in society becomes politics, namely a power relationship based on domination and subordination. Millett (1970) explains in her book that patriarchy finds expression through laws and state institutions yet extends across ideology along with culture and psychological structures found within daily relationships between men and women. Therefore, radical feminism demands not only legal reform but also a comprehensive transformation of value systems, social institutions, and ways of thinking.

Radical feminism places women's bodies and sexuality as the main battleground for power struggles. Sexuality is considered a primary area where patriarchy operates: from the regulation of women's bodies within the institution of marriage, moral labeling, to control over reproductive rights (Firestone, 2015: 8-15). According to them, patriarchy persists not only through norms or laws but also due to the naturalization of gender roles through education, culture, and family. Therefore, radical feminists often criticize traditional institutions such as marriage and the nuclear family, which are seen as forms of "cultural prisons" for women.

In literary studies, the radical feminist approach allows for critical readings of texts to reveal how gender power relations are formed, maintained, or challenged through narratives and characters. For example, how female characters are portrayed in passive roles or as sexual objects in male narratives. Conversely, how they build agency—despite being in repressive social contexts—through actions, choices, and even the narratives themselves. Showalter (1985), states that

radical feminists in literary criticism do not only read "what" is being told but also "who is telling" and "for whom the story is written."

### **C. Patriarchy**

Patriarchy is a central concept in feminist theory and is used to explain the social system that grants privileges to men and places women in subordinate positions in various aspects of life. Patriarchy operates not only through the direct domination of men over women but also through social structures, institutions, ideologies, and cultures that systematically perpetuate gender inequality (Walby, 1990: 20). In Simone de Beauvoir's (2010) view, patriarchy has created a dualistic construction in which men are defined as the "universal subject" while women are made into "the Other," whose existence is defined in opposition to men. Consequently, women become socially constructed entities that are expected to submit, serve, and be controlled, both in domestic and public spaces.

Patriarchy also operates through the internalization of gender values and norms formed from childhood through education, religion, and popular culture (Tong, 2009). This leads women to often be unaware that their lives are governed by larger power structures. Therefore, feminists like Millett (1970) emphasize that women's struggles must target power relations at both the personal and ideological levels, not just the legal and institutional ones (p.23-25).

In contemporary contexts, patriarchy continues to exist in various forms, even as gender equality is increasingly recognized in law. Patriarchy is adaptive and able to infiltrate new forms through more subtle mechanisms, such as beauty

standards, discrimination in the workplace, media stereotypes, and culturally legitimized gender-based violence. Because of its complex and multidimensional nature, the analysis of patriarchy requires a structural approach that can systematically examine power relations.

#### **D. Six Structures of Patriarchy by Walby**

To explain how patriarchy functions in various areas of life, Sylvia Walby in her book *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990) offers a comprehensive analytical model through the concept of six structures of patriarchy. This theory divides patriarchy into six main interconnected areas that reinforce the system of male domination over women: (1) household production, (2) relations in paid work, (3) the state, (4) male violence, (5) sexuality, and (6) cultural institutions.

##### **1. Household Production**

This structure refers to the division of domestic labor based on gender, particularly within the household. Women are placed in domestic roles such as caregiving and housework, while men dominate the public production space and are wage earners. The restriction of women to the domestic sphere makes them economically dependent and reduces their power in decision-making. Patriarchal household production refers to a system in which women work in the domestic sphere—such as managing the home, cooking, cleaning, and caring for children—without receiving wages, recognition, or equal power. This work is often seen as a "natural duty" of women and is rarely valued economically or socially (Walby, 1990: 87).

## **2. Relations in Paid Work**

In this structure, women experience discrimination in the workplace, including job segregation, wage gaps, and barriers to career mobility. The patriarchal work system maintains gender hierarchy by placing women in economically and symbolically inferior positions

Therefore, In the workplace men are often given greater opportunities to obtain higher-quality jobs compared to women. For instance, women are seldom appointed as chairpersons or heads of organizations. This happens because society tends to place more trust in men, believing they are more capable leaders than women. As a result, it is common for men to hold superior positions over women (Walby, 1990: 30–32).

## **3. Patriarchal State**

Walby states that many nations remain "patriarchal, as well as capitalist and racist." She points out that there has been minimal progress in advancing women's status in the public sphere, and that gender equality legislation is often not properly implemented. In patriarchal states, women are continuously disadvantaged by biased legal systems that impose unjust penalties. Laws that are truly free from gender discrimination are still uncommon in many countries.

The state as a formal institution also reproduces patriarchy through policies, laws, and bureaucratic structures that often neglect women's needs or even reinforce their subordinate positions. Examples include family law,



inheritance rights, and minimal protection against gender-based violence (Walby, 1990: 153).

#### **4. Male Violence**

Violence against women—whether physical, sexual, or psychological—serves as a tool of patriarchy to maintain control and social discipline over women's bodies and behaviors. This violence often occurs not only within domestic spheres but is also legitimized by state institutions and culture.

Violence toward women can occur in both private and public settings, whether deliberately or not. Such circumstances often arise when an individual reaches a breaking point and can no longer control their emotions. In times of economic hardship, men who feel they have failed to secure a stable income may express their frustration by inflicting harm on those around them. In these situations, violence becomes a means for men to reassert control over women when their traditional sources of power are diminished (Walby, 1990: 128-136).

#### **5. Sexuality**

Women's sexuality in patriarchal society is often regulated and controlled by social norms that support male dominance. Women are positioned as objects of male desire and are expected to maintain their morality, while men are not held to the same standards

Sexuality also used to maintain male dominance over women. Patriarchy controls women's sexuality in various ways, such as restricting sexual rights, enforcing cultural norms that marginalize women, and using sexual violence as a

tool of control. Women are often pressured to conform to certain moral and sexual standards, while men are granted greater freedom. This control is also evident in limiting women's access to reproductive health and their freedom to choose partners. Thus, sexuality becomes a crucial arena through which the patriarchal system subjugates and exploits women (Walby, 1990: 110-115).

## **6. Cultural Institutions**

Cultural institutions are one of the main structures within the patriarchal system that play a crucial role in maintaining male dominance over women. Cultural institutions include symbolic systems such as religion, education, media, language, and art, which ideologically shape society's perception of gender roles. Through these institutions, patriarchy reproduces negative stereotypes about women, portraying them as weak, emotional, and subordinate to men. In media, women are often depicted as sexual objects or merely as complements to male characters, while in education, women's contributions are frequently overlooked in historical and scientific narratives. Everyday language also perpetuates this inequality through terms or expressions that belittle women. Furthermore, religion—when interpreted through a patriarchal lens—reinforces women's subordinate roles by limiting their access to spiritual leadership. Thus, cultural institutions play a significant role in legitimizing and normalizing gender inequality, making them a key arena in women's struggle to challenge patriarchal dominance.

Cultural institutions such as religion, education, media, and language play a key role in shaping and maintaining patriarchal norms. The representation of women in literary texts, advertisements, and religious teachings often reinforces the image of women as weak, emotional, and dependent (Walby, 1990: 91–93).

This six-structure model allows for an analysis of patriarchy that does not focus on just one area, but examines the interconnections between economy, culture, law, and psychology in creating a system of domination. In the context of literary criticism, this framework is very useful for tracing how female characters experience, reflect on, and respond to various forms of patriarchy in fictional texts.

### **E. Struggle**

Struggle refers to a social condition that emerges when individuals or groups strive to attain their goals. It involves efforts to seek justice, including movements for women's rights and other forms of social justice. One form of such struggle is the fight carried out by women (McKechnie, 1989: 367). Women's struggle represents their efforts to obtain fairness and realize their aspirations. It serves as an initial step in confronting the injustice and mistreatment they endure. Patriarchy is one of the key factors driving these struggles, as it often enables men to dominate, exploit, and suppress women. Through struggle, women gradually begin to express their voices, and this act is recognized as resistance. Success is achieved through persistent struggle. Attaining justice, fulfilling ideals, or reaching success often involves overcoming numerous challenges through

determined effort. These struggles may arise from a range of issues, including social, economic, ideological, personal, or other life-related difficulties. Struggle represents the actions taken by individuals or groups in their pursuit of a better life or the justice they seek (McKechnie, 1989: 367).

In this research, the concept of women's struggle is the central focus. It explores the different forms of resistance carried out by the main character in confronting the patriarchy present in her surroundings. The novel *The Lion Women of Tehran* portrays patriarchy as a persistent system sustained by cultural norms and male dominance. Through her struggle, the women character is able to confront and respond to the challenges she faces.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter consists of research design, data source, data collection, and data analysis.

#### A. Research Design

This study uses feminist literary criticism approach and Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy to analyze and explore women's struggle in fighting patriarchy and patriarchal structures found in Marjan Kamali's *The Lion Women of Tehran* by relating it to Sylvia Walby's theory.

#### B. Data Source

The primary data source for this study is the novel *The Lion Women of Tehran* by Marjan Kamali, published on July 2, 2024 by Gallery Books. The novel consists of 327 pages and is written in English.

#### C. Data Collection

Data were collected through close reading of the novel, with emphasis on identifying quotation that reflect Walby's six structures of patriarchy and women's struggle. Relevant quotation were highlighted and classified based on their thematic connection to answer the research questions.

#### D. Data Analysis

All the data collected related are analyzed using teori Six Structures of Patriarchy oleh Sylvia Walby (1990). The researcher then filters and selects parts of the text that are relevant to the research objectives, especially those that represent one or more of the six patriarchal structures. After that, the researcher

interprets the meaning of the analyzed narrative based on the cultural and ideological context in the text. At this stage, critical reading is also carried out to see the form of women's struggle in the story. Furthermore, after describing and discussing all the data collected and analyzed, the researcher then concludes the result while connecting with the study.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDING AND DISCUSSION

This chapter consist the analyzes carried out by the researcher. The analysis in this chapter is the answers to the research questions. The analysis will contain the relationship between the findings and the discussion using the existing theory in this study. There are two sections to this chapter. The first section examines patriarchal structures as seen by Sylvia Walby's patriarchy theory in the novel *The Lion Women of Tehran*. The second section discusses how women's characters struggle against patriarchy.

#### **A. Patriarchal Structures in *The Lion Women of Tehran***

##### **1. Patriarchal Relations in Paid Work**

Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy identifies the world of work as one of the most visible domains of male domination over women. Patriarchal relations in this context include the formal exclusion of women from certain professions, vertical restrictions that prevent them from rising to influential positions, as well as horizontal segregation that channels women into types of work constructed as "feminine." The delegitimization of women's labor also occurs through social stigma, which regards their work as a sign of moral decline or social failure..

The novel *The Lion Women of Tehran* portrays this form of patriarchy through two main characters who experience different forms of pressure and limitations in the world of work. Homa, a bright and progressive young woman, refuses to submit to laws and norms that exclude women from the legal field. She

expresses her desire to become a judge, even though both the legal system and cultural expectations deem it impossible. Meanwhile, Ellie experiences a symbolic form of rejection toward work, as her mother belittles her job as a perfume stand attendant in America. The work she performs is considered unworthy for a woman of noble blood, even though she lives independently and survives in a foreign environment.

The structure of patriarchy in the world of work, as depicted in the novel, does not exist in isolation but is intertwined with domestic and cultural values. However, through the attitudes, choices, and defiance of these two female characters against the limitations imposed upon them, it becomes evident that the workplace is not only a tool of exploitation, but also a site of struggle. The following analysis will explore how labor is framed both as part of a system of oppression and as a field of resistance for women within the context of Iran and the diaspora.

#### **a. Stigma Against Working Women**

In the novel, Ellie recalls how her mother believed that working for wages was inappropriate for women. Her mother took pride in remaining unemployed even though they were poor and dependent on her uncle:

*“She said that true ladies didn’t touch a thing to sully their hands. That work for pay was beneath her. She was proud that despite everything, she hadn’t sunk to being a “desperate” working woman, even if it meant we were dependent on Uncle Massoud’s allowance (p. 42).” (chapter six)*

This quotation shows how wage-earning labor was not seen as a form of independence, but rather as a sign of desperation. Women who worked were



viewed as having failed to preserve their dignity. In Ellie's family, employment became a symbol of class and honor degradation, especially for women of noble descent. According to Walby, the restriction of women's access to work does not always take the form of formal prohibition, but can also appear as ideological limitation through stigma. The patriarchal system constructs the norm that a "good woman" should not work, as her primary role is to manage the household and uphold the family's social status. In this case, Ellie's mother has become an ideological agent of patriarchy by instilling this stigma in her daughter.

### **b. Neglect of Women's Career Aspirations**

In a conversation between Ellie and Homa, Homa expresses her desire to become a judge, while Ellie immediately responds that women are not allowed to become judges:

*"I want to be a ghazi, a judge!" "Women can't be judges (p.42)." (chapter six)*

In the quotation, Ellie reflexively rejects the possibility of women becoming judges—not because she is against equality, but because she has internalized the belief that the legal field is not a space for women. Homa, on the other hand, rejects this rejection and seeks to enter a space that has been closed off to her. This highlights the difference between individuals who have normalized cultural prohibitions and those who recognize and resist them. Walby categorizes this as a form of *structured exclusion*, in which social institutions marginalize women through "unthinkability"—that is, even the desire to work in certain fields is considered impossible. In this narrative, Ellie has become a victim of the

internalized boundaries of patriarchy in the world of work, while Homa demonstrates feminist consciousness and a desire to challenge the masculine legal system.

### **c. Inequality of Social Support for Working Women**

In Chapter Twenty-Nine, when Ellie is about to move to New York to pursue her new future, her mother focuses instead on gifts and Ellie's appearance, not her career potential:

*"She mentioned a trousseau and how I should fill it with gifts for Mehrdad's future coworkers and boss. She said I had to buy the best Iranian handicrafts and souvenirs (p.191)." (Chapter Twenty-Nine)*

Her mother's attention is not directed toward Ellie's career as something of value. Instead, she is concerned with how Ellie might present herself well in front of her husband's colleagues. This demonstrates how women, even in the diaspora, are still viewed as complements to men rather than as individuals with their own professional goals. *Relations in paid work* encompass not only the job itself but also how women's labor is constructed through the presence (or absence) of social support. In this case, Ellie is never truly supported in building a career, and her work remains considered secondary to her relational roles as a wife, rather than as an individual.

## **2. Patriarchal Relations in the State**

According to Walby (1990), patriarchal relations in the state refer to how the state, as a formal institution, reproduces male domination through laws, policies, and bureaucratic systems. A patriarchal state not only enforces gender discrimination through legal means (such as inheritance laws, marriage

regulations, and reproductive rights) but also facilitates cultural ideologies that normalize the subordination of women.

The Iranian state becomes a dominant actor in reinforcing patriarchy, particularly after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. *The Lion Women of Tehran* portrays the state as an oppressor of women through the erasure of civil rights, the institutionalization of morality based on religion, and the criminalization of women's bodily autonomy. The following is an analysis of the manifestations of state patriarchy in the novel based on narrative data and interpretative meaning.

#### **a. Legislation Controlling Women's Bodies and Clothing**

Homa recalls one of the first decrees of Ayatollah Khomeini after the revolution:

*"Women can go to offices, but they must be veiled (p. 215)." (Chapter Thirty-Four)*

This decree illustrates how the state began to use its power to control women's bodies. The obligation to wear hijab is no longer a spiritual choice, but a legal obligation. It takes away women's autonomy over their bodies. Walby states that the patriarchal state produces laws that objectify women and regulates their appearance for the sake of "public morality". Women no longer have sovereignty over their bodies and clothing; the state replaces that role as the protector of patriarchy.

#### **b. The Elimination of Women's Legal and Professional Rights**

In the narrative, Homa states that female law graduates are unlikely to become judges:

*“Suddenly, women who have finished their studies in law might no longer be able to take the oath to become judges (p.215).” (Chapter Thirty-Four)*

This illustrates how state policies create a legal glass ceiling that limits women's access to judicial power. Education no longer guarantees vertical mobility in the legal profession. Walby argues that the patriarchal state designs the legal system to remain controlled by men. By limiting women from judicial institutions, the state ensures that the law will continue to be made and enforced by and for men's interests.

### **c. Repression Against the Women's Movement by State Apparatus**

Homa and thousands of other women took to the streets in the Women's March of 1979 to protest against the mandatory *hijab*. However, this movement was quickly met with repression, including the establishment of the morality police:

*“Hijab becomes mandatory. Improper hijab is punishable by fines, beatings, even imprisonment. We have a new morality police. They patrol the streets looking for visible strands of hair (p. 219).” (Chapter Thirty-Five)*

The emergence of the morality police indicates that the state not only enacted repressive laws but also formed violent institutions tasked with directly disciplining women's bodies. This positioned women's bodies as the primary site of state control. This is a form of state violence in the context of patriarchy, in which the state legitimizes violence against women as a means of control. Women are not only treated as second-class citizens but also become targets of state apparatus.

#### **d. Restriction of Women's Mobility and Civil Rights**

Homa wrote that she was prohibited from leaving Iran and had her access to travel abroad restricted in any form:

*"They did not allow me to leave Iran for twenty-one years. Photographs. Letters. Phone calls. That was how we kept in touch throughout the 1980s (p. 304)." (Chapter Thirty-Five)*

The state not only regulates how women appear and work, but also limits basic civil rights such as the freedom of movement. This turns women into prisoners within their own country. Walby notes that a patriarchal state manipulates legal and security frameworks to confine women both symbolically and literally. This prohibition is an explicit manifestation that women are considered to lack full authority over their own fate and spacial freedom.

#### **e. Silencing Through Censorship and the Threat of Espionage**

Ellie warned Homa not to be too outspoken during phone conversations for fear of being wiretapped:

*"Look, Ellie. You haven't been here. I don't think you know what this country has become. We thought we got rid of one dictatorship, but we only got another." "Homa, be careful." Didn't she know our phone call could be bugged by the regime? Mother reminded me of the regime's spying in a roundabout way every time I spoke to her on the phone (p. 245)." (Chapter Thirty-Eight)*

The fear of surveillance indicates that the state creates an atmosphere of terror and monitoring, where women can no longer freely express their opinions even in private spaces. Walby states that a patriarchal state uses ideological control not only through media and education but also through the control of communication. In this case, censorship and surveillance are used to silence voices of resistance, especially from politically active women like Homa.

### 3. Male Violence

The patriarchal structure in the form of male violence is the most evident manifestation of domination that positions women as objects to be controlled physically, verbally, and psychologically. Sylvia Walby emphasizes that this violence does not stand as an incidental or personal act, but rather operates as a social system legitimized by norms, supported by institutions, and structurally inherited. Acts of violence function as tools of control, as forms of punishment against women who exceed normative boundaries, and as affirmations of masculine supremacy within the spaces of women's lives.

The novel *The Lion Women of Tehran* presents male violence in varying degrees of intensity, from direct physical assault to institutionalized political repression. Women's bodies become the battlegrounds of power—whether through Homa's abduction and torture due to her involvement in activism, or Ellie's defense of her daughter from sexual and verbal attacks in public spaces. The tension between the subdued body and the resisting body places the issue of violence at the center of the gender conflict depicted by Marjan Kamali.

#### a. Physical Violence Against Female Activists

In one of the most dramatic scenes, Homa is kidnapped by state officials in front of the campus because of her involvement in activism:

*“Two men in black suits and dark sunglasses jumped out, grabbed her, and pushed her into the back seat. I screamed, but it was too late. I wanted to run after the car, to chase it down the road. Within seconds, she was driven out of sight (p. 156).” (Chapter Twenty-Two)*

Homa's arrest is a form of systematic physical violence directed at women who dare to challenge the system. Women like Homa are targeted primarily because their voices disrupt the status quo. Male violence is used to maintain structures of domination by creating fear and punishing women who dare to reject passive roles. This violence is not incidental, but operational: it is intended to paralyze resistance and send a symbolic message to other women.

### **b. Symbolic and Verbal Violence Against Women Who Speak Out**

During the Women's March, male crowds attacked women with insults, curses, and threats:

*"A young man approaches my section of the crowd, pulling women apart like he is making his way through stalks of wheat in a field. He is up close to us now. I smell garlic on his breath. He sees Bahar and leers at her, screaming in her face, "Whore, whore, whore!" Kesafat, he calls her. Garbage. He screams in my daughter's face. "What is so wrong with covering your hair? Why do you insist on being Western and naked? Why do you prostitutes resist modesty and chastity?" (p. 217)" (Chapter Thirty-Four)*

Women who challenged patriarchal cultural identification—such as dressing freely or demanding their rights—were immediately constructed as “whores” or “trash.” This is a mechanism of verbal violence that functions as a form of collective control: instilling fear to prevent women from voicing themselves. Walby refers to this kind of violence as *gendered ideological enforcement*—where verbal aggression and sexual stigma are used to maintain gender hierarchy. This violence publicly degrades women, silencing their voices through shame or fear.

This is also evident in another passage that shows how women are subjected to verbal violence.

*“It’s the jeering that I hear first. I look up. On a bridge above the street where we march, a mob of men shout what, from the timbre and tone of their voices, are clearly obscenities... They yell: ‘Prostitutes, prostitutes, prostitutes!’ (p. 216)” (Chapter thirty-four)*

The quotation describes a moment when the peaceful demonstration attended by Homa and other women was immediately met with verbal attacks from a group of men standing on a bridge. Sexual insults like “prostitutes” were used not only to humiliate, but to degrade the women’s self-worth and the purpose of their struggle. The imposition of such labels reveals how women who dare to occupy public space are automatically viewed as “immoral”—a stigma deeply familiar in patriarchal culture.

This scene highlights how patriarchal violence is not always manifested physically. Collective verbal assault becomes a mechanism to generate fear, intimidate, and symbolically expel women from public space. Demonstrations organized to demand justice and bodily autonomy are instead met with a sonic terror filled with harassment. Rather than being protected, women who appear in public are subjected to mass punishment for their “bravery.” In this context, society is not merely passive but becomes the agency of patriarchy itself—with men taking active roles in silencing women through insults and threats.

This incident also shows that women’s bodies are always linked to their sexuality, and any attempt to resist dominant structures is perceived as a form of moral deviance. The novel sharply illustrates that this kind of collective harassment is not an anomaly, but part of a social system that institutionalizes



violence as a means of reasserting patriarchal order when women begin to cross the boundaries imposed upon them.

#### **4. Patriarchal Relations in Sexuality**

Patriarchy regulates female sexuality through norms of chastity, control over partner choice, forced marriage, and repression of expressions of love. Sylvia Walby explains that the patriarchal system positions female sexuality not as a personal right, but as a social instrument controlled by men and institutions. In this novel, sexuality is not always depicted in vulgar terms but is wrapped in morality, social pressure, and deep repression of bodily agency and women's choices. The following analysis divides this structure into several sub-forms:

##### **a. The Subjugation of Female Sexuality through Social Marriage**

Ellie observes how marriage is often used as a “social regulator” that erases personal desire:

*“I forced myself to relax into Mehrdad’s affections. It was 1963. We were a new Iran. And we were engaged, for goodness’ sake (p. 127).” (Chapter Eighteen)*

Although Ellie and Mehrdad appear to be an ideal couple, there is an emotional pretense that Ellie experiences. She forces herself to accept an expression of love she does not fully desire. This indicates that female sexuality does not belong to the woman herself, but must align with her public role as a proper fiancée. Walby emphasizes that female sexuality in patriarchy is not recognized as an autonomous domain. In this novel, even affection is portrayed as

performative—women must adjust their bodies and emotions to meet social expectations.

### **b. Stigma Against Women Who Reject Traditional Sexual Roles**

Homa is described by Ellie's mother as "foolhardy, idealistic" because of her political views and her courage to live outside the norms:

*"She was foolhardy. Idealistic. Her head was filled with nonsense from day one. That father of hers was a communist too. I hate communists. Even as we sit here, it's the communists making an alliance with the religious right to topple the Shah. How disloyal they are! I thought they didn't even believe in God. But they are happy to make an alliance with fundamentalists if it gets them what they want. I'm not as stupid as you think, Ellie. I was worried for you. Always. But that Homa girl was the least of it. What would I do if, as you grew up, you were accosted by one of those alley boys? Or fell in love with one?(p.237)" (Chapter Thirty-Seven)*

This statement, delivered by Ellie's mother, is a monologue filled with prejudice, anger, and hidden control. Homa is attacked not for any concrete action, but for her thoughts and idealism—particularly her rejection of the social and political norms upheld by the previous generation. Homa is seen as dangerous because she does not fulfill the expected role of a woman: obedient, feminine, and submissive to the existing system. Even the mere possibility of Ellie "falling in love with a man from a lower class" is portrayed as a horrific scenario, as if the greatest social transgression for a woman is crossing the boundaries of class, sexuality, and honor norms.

This quote illustrates that women who do not conform to traditional sexual roles—submissive, normatively heterosexual, and bound by moral restraints—are immediately stigmatized. Homa is not mentioned in the context of sexual acts, but is instead demeaned and viewed with concern because she thinks freely, because

she is idealistic, because she refuses to “play the role” assigned to women in the pre-established social script.

Ellie’s mother is not only afraid of Ellie interacting with men from a lower class, but also fears that a woman like Homa could “infect” her daughter with independent thought. The fear that Ellie might “be approached by a street boy” or “fall in love with someone from a lower class” is in fact a fear of losing control over her daughter’s body and sexual choices.

In a patriarchal society, control over women’s sexuality is not only exerted through the prohibition of physical relationships but also through the stigmatization of ideas and affections. By disparaging Homa and associating her with communism and social freedom, Ellie’s mother frames progressive women as moral and sexual threats. This is a patriarchal control mechanism that operates not through legal means, but through symbolic degradation and moral panic.

## **5. Patriarchal Relations in Cultural Institutions**

Patriarchal structures in cultural institutions include how media, religion, education, and tradition become tools for spreading values that place women in subordinate positions. According to Walby (1990), cultural institutions not only reflect patriarchy, but also politicize the meaning of femininity and naturalize inequality through symbols, language, education, and social narratives. In the novel *The Lion Women of Tehran*, this structure is strongly present through the views of Ellie's mother, gender-biased educational practices, the role of post-

revolutionary religion, and cultural symbols that construct the "ideal woman."

Here is an analysis of each sub-form:

**a. Education as the Reproduction of Patriarchal Norms**

The structure of patriarchy operates not only through domestic power, state laws, or direct violence, but also through educational institutions. Within Sylvia Walby's framework, education is one of the main arenas of cultural patriarchy, where values of obedience, morality, and gender hierarchy are taught and systematically reproduced in a subtle yet pervasive manner. Schools become not only places where women are taught to be "knowledgeable," but also where questioning is limited, criticism is silenced, and adherence to the gender and ideological boundaries set by the state or community is enforced. In *"The Lion Women of Tehran,"* the forms of patriarchal control in education are evident through the restriction of freedom of thought, the symbolic regulation of women's bodies, and the narrowing of spaces for critical discussion experienced by both teachers and students.

*"It's an unwritten rule among teachers: Don't say or teach anything that disparages the Shah. The girls know this... They are seniors in a high school in an impoverished neighborhood... I steady my voice and tell them we will work hard together so they can apply for college later that year (p. 203)."*  
(Chapter Thirty-One)

This quotation reveals how educational institutions are governed by unwritten rules that prohibit teachers from openly discussing political issues or social injustice. Female students are aware of these limitations, and although they may wish to discuss protests and social change, they know that the school is not a safe space for critical thinking, especially for women.

Education, which should be liberating, instead becomes a medium for ideological control. Teachers like Homa, despite their activist backgrounds, are forced to balance their idealism with vigilance because the system does not provide a safe space. In schools, women are taught to avoid critical questions and obey the politics of silence. In the post-revolutionary Iranian context, this illustrates how the state expands patriarchal control through education by isolating critical discourse from the curriculum and disciplining the minds of female students to remain "obedient" and "worthy".

According to Sylvia Walby, education as a structure of patriarchy plays a role in reproducing the ideology of obedience, both through the curriculum and the symbolic supervision of teachers and students. In this passage, women are not only constrained in their bodies (through dress code regulations), but also limited in their minds. The prohibition on discussing politics in education is a form of structural subjugation of women's intellectual capacity. Through Homa's experience as a teacher and her anxious but silent students, Kamali shows that repression in education is not always overt - it operates through collective silence and discursive boundaries, symbolically imprisoning women in classrooms that shape them not as thinking subjects, but as obedient objects.

#### **b. Religion and Tradition as Legitimation of Domination**

Homa notes how strong the power of culture and religion is in determining how women should live:

*"My mother covers her hair. She wears a chador and has for my entire life. No matter that my father has been a communist for decades, no matter that*

*her own daughter was one too. It is my mother's choice to be veiled. And I respect that choice. As she does mine. Not once has Maman asked me or Sara to cover our hair or bodies. It was always up to us to choose hijab or not. But now. Our new leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, is making a decree (p.215)."*  
(Chapter Thirty-Four)

Her mother's choice to wear the *hijab* was initially personal. However, when the state used religion as the basis for law, the choice became coercive. Tradition became a tool of institutional control, and religion was used to silence dissent. Walby explains that religion in patriarchal societies is often politicized to reinforce women's subordination. What was initially a spiritual choice becomes a moral obligation, and women who deviate are stigmatized culturally and legally.

## **B. Women's Struggle against Patriarchy**

Patriarchy, as a social system that places men as the central authority in various dimensions of life—whether in the household, the state, the world of work, or cultural institutions—is neither absolute nor uncontested. In the context of the novel *The Lion Women of Tehran*, Marjan Kamali portrays women not only as objects oppressed by patriarchal structures but also as active subjects who resist and negotiate that oppression through various forms of resistance. This resistance comes in a broad spectrum: from symbolic acts of refusal and emotional fortitude to involvement in political action and defiance of cultural norms that limit women's life choices. Each form of resistance, whether it takes place in public or domestic spaces, demonstrates that the women in this novel do not passively submit but continuously build agency in the face of institutionalized patriarchal control in their daily lives.

## 1. Resistance to Patriarchal Relations in Paid Work

In a patriarchal society, the world of work is not necessarily a neutral space. According to Sylvia Walby, patriarchal relations in the realm of work are manifested through restrictions on women's access to high-paying jobs, the narrowing of career choices into "feminine" sectors, and social judgments of women who work as acts beyond their natural bounds or tarnishing the honor of the family. In the novel *The Lion Women of Tehran*, resistance to this form of patriarchy appears clearly in the figures of Homa who aspires to become a judge and fights through legal channels, and Ellie who persists in her job as a cosmetics salesperson despite being rejected by her mother and her environment. These two characters show that work is not just about economics, but a space for struggle for self-recognition and autonomy.

### a. Resistance to structural restrictions on professions

*"It is 1953. We have a democratically elected prime minister! This country is modernizing, Ellie. Where have you been?" She took another bite of her ice cream sandwich. "I'm going to check it all out with Khanom Tabatabayi. And if we're not allowed, that's another reason I should become a lawyer. To change the laws." She winked (p.43)." (Chapter six)*

Homa explicitly expresses her desire to become a judge, fully aware that the legal system does not allow women to hold such a position. However, instead of submitting, she chooses the legal path so she can change the rules from within. Homa's resistance is not only personal but structural. She seeks to enter the very system that discriminates against her in order to transform it from the inside. This is not merely a career ambition, but a form of rejection against the systematic exclusion of women. In the cultural context of Iran at the time, becoming a lawyer was already considered radical—let alone declaring the intention to become a

judge. Homa not only demands equality but claims legal authority as her right.

Homa's determination inspires others to support her aspirations.

*"Your lawyer! Your future judge! Or should I say our judge! The country's judge!" He lifted his cigar in tribute. "And why is she the bravest exactly? (p. 154)" (Chapter twenty two)*

This quotation comes from the Colonel, a man from the ruling elite. He recognizes Homa as a courageous woman who will become a judge and fight for the people's rights. Recognition from this patriarchal figure is significant, as it shows that Homa's resistance is beginning to challenge the dominant narrative. She is not only "brave," but also seen as competent by the male elite. This reflects that consistent resistance by women can generate influence even at the heart of a patriarchal system.

#### **b. Resistance to Employment Stigma**

*"What happened to your ambition, Ellie?" she asked. "You're a lowly perfume saleswoman."  
"I sell all kinds of cosmetics, not just perfume," I countered.  
"Still," she said. "Why are you working in that shop? (p. 234)" (Chapter Thirty-seven)*

In the quotation, the mother's condemnation reveals that working in a shop is considered inappropriate for a woman, especially one from an aristocratic family. Work is seen as a sign of social despair, not a conscious choice. Ellie does not voice her resistance explicitly, but she remains in her job. This is a form of symbolic resistance against values that degrade women who work. By continuing to work, Ellie rejects the narrative that a woman's worth lies solely in being a "respectable" wife or daughter. On the other hand, although Ellie acknowledges



having lost her ambition, she still maintains her agency—working not out of compulsion, but because she chooses to.

The resistance shown by Homa and Ellie reflects two poles within the patriarchal structure of the workplace: one confronts legal systems openly, while the other quietly defies social norms. In Walby's theory, this represents resistance to two forms of workplace patriarchy: explicit (legal exclusion) and implicit (symbolic delegitimization). Homa rejects the exclusion of women from the legal system and actively declares her intent to become an agent of legal change. Meanwhile, Ellie resists cultural stigma against working women by remaining in her job, despite being ridiculed by her own family. Both characters demonstrate that the workplace is not merely an economic field, but a battleground for identity, agency, and equality. By portraying these two forms of resistance, Kamali shows that each woman has her own space for struggle—whether through the megaphone of activism or the quiet persistence of daily life.

## **2. Resistance to Patriarchal Relations in the State**

Patriarchal relations in the state are the most striking in the political and legal context. Sylvia Walby explains that the state in patriarchal societies tends to produce and enforce policies and laws that maintain women's subordination, including the limitation of civil rights, the imposition of moral rules (such as mandatory hijab), and repression of women's political participation. In the novel *The Lion Women of Tehran*, the form of resistance against the patriarchal state is intensively displayed through the figure of Homa, who is actively involved in demonstrations and women's organizations, and continues to resist despite facing

repression, surveillance, and administrative punishments such as passport revocation.

#### **a. Join the Demonstration**

*“On March 8, 1979, my students and I do not show up to school. I arrive at Tehran University with Bahar by my side. She will turn fifteen in a few months and she, too, is worried about women losing their rights. We meet a group of my students at a designated spot. More and more women join us. Women wearing raincoats, women with their hair up and hair down. Tehranian women of all ages and walks of life: little girls, schoolgirls, college students, women like me, grandmothers. Women who are worried that if we do not remain careful and vigilant, our rights will erode in front of our eyes. In our collective presence, we find solace and strength (p. 216).” (Chapter thirty-four)*

This quotation illustrates Homa’s conscious decision to boycott formal state activities and instead take to the streets during the commemoration of International Women’s Day. This act rejects Ayatollah Khomeini’s decree on mandatory hijab, which represents state control over women’s bodies. The demonstration is not merely a protest, but a form of active female engagement in street politics that endangers their lives. Homa not only refuses to comply with the regulation, but also brings her daughter along, signifying that this struggle is intergenerational and rooted in women’s collective awareness of bodily autonomy. In the repressive atmosphere following the revolution, this act becomes an act of defiance against the most explicit symbol of state patriarchy: policies based on controlling women’s appearance and behavior.

The consequence of Homa’s action is a ban on traveling abroad, restrictions on communication, and surveillance. This ban is a repressive measure by the state against women deemed politically deviant or dangerous. The status of

*mamnoon khoorooj* (exit prohibition) indicates that Homa is not only physically restricted but also symbolically marked as a threat to the national narrative.

The state's decision to prohibit Homa from leaving the country is proof that her involvement in resistance is considered serious enough to warrant administrative sanctions. Yet rather than remain silent, Homa continues to communicate with her family abroad and even leads an underground organization for women. This shows that state repression does not extinguish the spirit of resistance—instead, it reinforces it.

#### **b. Civil Disobedience as a Response to State Control over Women**

Homa emerges as a female figure who refuses to submit to state control. Despite having been imprisoned and tortured for her involvement in the women's movement, she chooses to continue her resistance—not merely through open demonstrations but by establishing an underground organization that advocates for women's rights. Activities such as drafting mission statements, writing articles, and distributing pamphlets are carried out covertly but hold significant meaning as forms of rejection against a system that seeks to erase women's political presence.

*"I start an organization for women's rights. The regime is absolutely deaf to our demands, but soon we grow in numbers and in reach. We have meetings in basements and we draft mission statements. We also begin to write and distribute articles and pamphlets. Several of our members were lawyers who have been demoted since the new government changed everything. But I watch these young women write articles and ght for the rights of clients represented by men they used to work with, who consult them in secret and with admiration. We will not take this lying down. We are making a difference. I feel like we can only see things improve (p. 220)." (Chapter Thirty-Five)*

Homa's actions represent a form of civil disobedience that is strategic and sustained, and they demonstrate that state power is not an absolute, unshakable force. Even under the pressure of a conservative Islamist regime, Homa does not cease her struggle. She utilizes underground spaces and activist networks to spread ideas, voice injustice, and organize collective strategies. This reflects a form of strategic and collective resistance against the state. By remaining politically and intellectually active, Homa asserts that women will not surrender simply because public spaces have been taken from them. She creates alternative public spaces—in the form of community, literacy, and resistance networks.

Within Walby's theoretical framework, the state is a key arena for the production and preservation of patriarchy. Authoritarian regimes often use law and administrative power as tools to define, restrict, and punish women. Resistance to such structures requires high political awareness, the courage to face physical and social risks, and the ability to form collective solidarity.

Homa demonstrates resistance against the state on various levels, including direct action through participation in demonstrations; resistance against administrative repression when she continues her struggle despite being banned from leaving the country; and grassroots organization by founding an underground movement. This resistance is not merely an emotional response, but a conscious strategy to confront and challenge the legitimacy of patriarchal power. The novel vividly illustrates that in the context of a patriarchal state, the female body is a field of power—and women's resistance is a form of reclaiming sovereignty over the body, voice, and space.

### 3. Resistance to Male Violence

The patriarchal structure in the form of male violence, according to Sylvia Walby, encompasses physical, verbal, and psychological actions committed by men to maintain dominance over women. This violence does not always occur within the household, but can also emerge from the state, legal apparatus, or individuals in public spaces. In *The Lion Women of Tehran*, violence against women becomes an instrument of patriarchy used to silence women's active social and political voices. However, the novel also shows how women do not surrender, but instead resist with courage—both physically and through moral and psychological resilience.

#### a. Physical Resistance

*“I hit him and hit him and hit him until screams of others beg me to stop. I hit him until my arm is weak and limp. I hit him for calling my daughter kesafat, for daring to come near her, for lifting his club and shouting in her face (p.217).” (chapter thirty five)*

This quotation describes how Homa responds to a man's assault on her daughter. She retaliates not only for her daughter but for all women who have experienced violence. Homa's resistance is a direct resistance to male violence in public spaces. She does not let her daughter's body become a target, and she does not let herself be forced into silence. This goes beyond a maternal role; it is a political act—against the legacy of fear and resignation. Homa creates a moment of power reversal, where women become the defenders and fighters, not victims.

### **b. Homa's Resistance When Kidnapped and Imprisoned**

Violence against women is not limited to physical or sexual assault but also includes institutional violence institutionalized by the state, authorities, and the legal system. This violence is used to silence women's activism, strip them of political agency, and conquer their courage through interrogation, detention, and psychological torture. However, *The Lion Women of Tehran* shows that violence does not always succeed in paralyzing its victims. In Homa's case, violence becomes fuel for powerful inner resistance. She does not submit to threats but responds with the strength of identity and inner resolve as a woman.

*"Over and over again, I think: shir zan, shir zan, shir zan. I will be the lioness, I will be lionhearted. From me they will not mine one bit of information. Had I known when we drew up the plans for our protests that I would be fueled by so much anger when arrested, I would have done more, not less. Because my rage is a shield. It increases my confidence. I do not give the questioner one inch, one name, one tidbit of information (p. 164)."*  
(Chapter Twenty-Four)

This quotation portrays Homa's emotional and physical response during her abduction by authorities. Instead of fear, Homa responds with tremendous rage that transforms her into a figure ready to fight. The kidnapping is carried out by the state as a form of repression against Homa's political activism. Yet Kamali's narrative firmly rejects the typical portrayal of women as passive or traumatized beings. Homa not only endures but also demonstrates that her body and mind cannot be controlled. Prison does not diminish Homa's courage; rather, it reveals the strength of resistance that comes from her anger against injustice.

In Walby's framework, male violence is the most brutal and direct tool of domination. It is used to intimidate, subjugate, and discipline women's bodies and

minds. However, *The Lion Women of Tehran* illustrates that women are not only capable of surviving but also of fighting back—physically, like Ellie, and morally and psychologically, like Homa. The resistance to male violence in this novel affirms that the female body is not a space of submission but a battlefield. In their actions, Ellie and Homa refuse to be victims and choose to become agents brave enough to rewrite the patriarchal narrative. Their resistance not only saves themselves but also awakens awareness in other women that violence should not be endured in silence, and that resistance is the highest form of defending one's dignity.

#### **4. Resistance to Patriarchal Control of Sexuality**

Patriarchy also manifests in the form of control over women's sexuality, by restricting women in terms of desire, emotion, and bodily autonomy through norms such as chastity, early marriage, and submission to male figures. Sylvia Walby refers to this as a patriarchal structure that shapes perceptions of women's bodies and sexuality through social and cultural morality. In *The Lion Women of Tehran*, resistance to this form is clearly depicted through Homa, who rejects the institution of marriage, and Ellie, who struggles with the affection and pressure surrounding her intimate relationships. Both reflect women's defiance against the narrative that a woman's body and love belong to society.

##### **a. Rejection of Marriage and Romantic Love**

When Homa refuses Abdol's proposal, it is seen as an unusual act:

*“Abdol proposed marriage a second time. By then, his own mother had sadly passed away from heart failure, but Homa's answer was no different. She*

*wanted them to be classmates. Friends. She didn't want to be his wife. She told me that she explained to him that she did not wish to marry. Ever (p. 126).” (Chapter Eighteen)*

This quotation reveals that Homa consciously and firmly rejects marriage, even from a man who respects and loves her. She states that she does not want to be anyone's wife, rejecting not out of trauma but as an ideological choice. In a culture that places marriage as the pinnacle of a woman's existence, Homa's decision to reject Abdol's proposal twice is a direct act of resistance against the narrative that a woman's value is determined by who marries her. Homa reverses that logic: she evaluates herself not by her ability to attract a partner, but by her capacity to think, learn, and act as a free human being. She places the freedom of her body and mind above the social contract called marriage.

Through Homa, who rejects the entire institution of marriage and romantic love, Kamali emphasizes the importance of a woman's right to determine her own path in life—including the right to love, or not to love. Although Homa eventually marries Abdol, it happens as a consequence—an outcome of her arrest after a demonstration. By marrying Abdol, she seals what happened to her during imprisonment. The novel shows that resistance to patriarchy does not always take the form of heroism, but also comes through personal decisions that claim the body and emotions as autonomous spaces—not as a woman's submission to a patriarchal tradition of marriage that turns women into instruments of service for men.



## 5. Resistance to Patriarchal Cultural Institutions

Cultural patriarchy operates through symbols, norms, and values that are passed down through generations via institutions such as family, religion, education, and media. In this context, women are not only governed by law but also by what is considered “good,” “appropriate,” and “honorable” in society. Sylvia Walby refers to this structure as the most subtle yet deeply rooted form of patriarchy. In *The Lion Women of Tehran*, resistance to cultural patriarchy is evident through the characters’ efforts to reject conservative cultural values, construct new identities, and reclaim social symbols that were previously used to oppress them.

### a. Symbolic resistance to the culture of female silencing

In Sylvia Walby’s theory of patriarchy, the structure of *cultural institutions* refers to the system of values, symbols, and cultural norms that reproduce women’s subordination in subtle yet profound ways. While the state oppresses through laws and authorities, cultural institutions operate through language, symbols, gender myths, and moral expectations that define women as passive, silent, and obedient beings. Culture does not always inflict physical harm, but it creates invisible boundaries—about how women should dress, speak, or even age.

*“An old woman, her hair white, walks at night in a crowd of protesters. She holds her arm up in the air, her st tight. Her gait has a limp, but she moves to the chants of the crowd. Her voice can be heard quite clearly: “Zan, Zendegi, Azadi.” Women, Life, Freedom. Leily feels a throbbing in her ears; her face is now burning; she is trans xed. For Leily knows what her mother sitting to her right and her grand-khaleh Ellie sitting to her left know. This is her grandmother, whom she calls Maman Homa. They are watching, as they sit in the café her family built in the northeastern United States, her seventy-*

*nine-year-old grandmother join the women protesting in the streets (p. 301)."*  
*(Chapter Forty-seven)*

In quotation above, Homa's action at the age of 79, when she takes to the streets and shouts "*Zan, Zendegi, Azadi*," may appear as a form of resistance against the state. But beyond that, her act is a reversal of the silencing culture that has persisted throughout her life. In patriarchal societies, elderly women are often positioned as submissive figures—forgotten and voiceless. Homa rejects that position. She not only joins the crowd but symbolically leads it through her aging yet vocal body.

When she chants the slogan that has now become the icon of the Iranian women's movement—"Woman, Life, Freedom"—Homa is not merely protesting government policies, but also striking at the cultural norms that have long demanded women remain indoors, submit to tradition, and stay away from the public stage. This is what distinguishes her action as a form of *resistance to cultural institutions*: she is not only confronting the state, but culture itself.

### **b. Rejection of Aristocratic Femininity as a Tool for Taming Women**

In patriarchal societies where cultural values are closely tied to social class, aristocratic women are often constructed as symbols of honor, purity, and passivity. Class identity is used not only to differentiate status but also to bind women to specific roles that glorify dependence and powerlessness. In *The Lion Women of Tehran*, Ellie's mother explicitly states that royal-blooded women should not work—a view that frames labor as undignified for upper-class women. Ellie, who grows up within this construction, chooses to reject that symbolic

inheritance. She lives independently, works in retail, and raises her child without the support of social status. Ellie's choice is not merely economic; it is an act of resistance against a patriarchal culture that confines women's roles through the glorification of class and dependency.

*"You can't expect me to work, Ellie," my mother said, using my nickname.  
 "The descendant of royalty should not touch a thing to make a wage (p. 13)."  
 (Chapter two)*

In quotation above, Ellie's mother bequeaths a set of values that claim honorable women should not work and should maintain the family's dignity by appearing proper and graceful. This narrative shapes young Ellie into a girl who must live according to aristocratic symbolism. However, Ellie grows up with different experiences. She works, lives abroad, and leads a life far removed from the elitist values passed down by her mother. Ellie's resistance is symbolic: she does not openly rebel against her mother, but she quietly rejects the values that have been imposed on her. Even in silence, Ellie dismantles the construction of the "noble woman" imposed upon her. Cultural patriarchy operates more subtly than violence or law—through customs, social expectations, family values, and moral symbols attached to women's bodies and roles.

In *The Lion Women of Tehran*, Homa and Ellie emerge as two figures who show how women can resist dominant symbols and values in different yet complementary ways. Homa rejects cultural narratives about the roles of elderly women, about women as guardians of tradition, and about how women should behave in public. She replaces the image of the conservative woman with that of a revolutionary—through the cry "*Zan, Zendegi, Azadi*." Meanwhile, Ellie rejects

aristocratic narratives and the construction of the “ideal woman” inherited from her mother, instead building her own authentic identity. Within Walby’s theoretical framework, they have resisted symbolic domination—by reclaiming narratives, breaking expectations, and creating new meanings of what it means to be a woman.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

After applying Sylvia Walby's patriarchal theory and radical feminism to analyze the data, the researcher moves on to the last chapter, which contains conclusions and suggestions. The analysis' findings are discussed in conclusion, which is the last chapter of the study, and suggestions are made to the next researcher interested in *The Lion Women of Tehran* as a research. The conclusion of this study is provided in this chapter for the benefit of all readers, but in particular for upcoming researchers.

#### A. Conclusion

This study finds that *The Lion Women of Tehran* thematically highlights the experiences of women in facing various forms of social, political, and cultural oppression within Iran's patriarchal society, both before and after the Islamic Revolution. The female characters in this novel—particularly Homa and Ellie—experience institutionalized pressure through family relations, state regulations, cultural norms, and direct experiences of violence. Through a cross-generational and cross-locational narrative (Iran and the American diaspora), the novel frames how women's lives are shaped, limited, and directed by a deeply rooted patriarchal system that operates across multiple life structures.

The researcher analyzes the novel using Sylvia Walby's theory of six structures of patriarchy: household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions. The findings show that five

structures are strongly represented and interwoven throughout the novel, namely patriarchal relations in paid work, the state, sexuality, male violence, and cultural institutions. Patriarchy is not only present in male-female relations, but is also reproduced by fellow women, institutionalized through state policies, and inherited through education and family. In addition to displaying forms of domination, the novel also presents various forms of resistance, both overt such as protests, and symbolic such as the rejection of norms or the choice to live independently.

*The Lion Women of Tehran* presents more than just a depiction of patriarchy in women's lives; it creates a narrative space that enables women to demonstrate resistance to the domination they face. Its characters represent female agency that endures and acts, despite being constrained by oppressive social structures. Various forms of struggle—political, cultural, social, and personal—indicate that patriarchy is not an absolute system. Courage, awareness, and intergenerational solidarity emerge as keys to challenging and transcending oppressive orders.

## **B. Suggestion**

Based on these findings, the researcher suggests that literary studies should not focus solely on aesthetic and narrative aspects, but also develop critical readings of power relations and social representation in literary works, particularly those concerning gender issues and patriarchal structures. *The Lion Women of Tehran* demonstrates that literature has immense potential to serve as a

medium for symbolic resistance, a tool for consciousness-raising, and a documentation of women's experiences that have long been marginalized by official histories.

This research is also expected to serve as a reference for future studies interested in exploring the representation of women in contemporary literature, especially from feminist and intersectional perspectives. There remains room to develop more diverse approaches, both theoretically and comparatively, such as examining women's experiences in transnational, diasporic, or postcolonial contexts that are also embedded in this novel. This study can also serve as an initial stepping stone to bridge the discourse between literature, identity politics, and gender equality advocacy in both academic and public spheres.

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## **CURRICULUM VITAE**



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