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## Muteness and Oppression of Women in *The Wasted Vigil* from the Perspective of Patriarchy and a Muted Group Theory

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### Abstract

In this research article, the focus is on the idea of Muteness and Oppression of Women in the novel, *The Wasted Vigil* (2008). Two theories, i.e., Patriarchy and A Muted Group have been employed as a theoretical framework for the research. This research is qualitative in nature. The objectives are designed to find and dissect the factors that contribute to social oppression and muteness. In the light of A Muted Group and Patriarchy Theories, the research attempts to expound the aspects of gender oppression, muteness and social marginalization. MGT, pioneered by scholars like Ardener and later elaborated by Kramarae, serves as a crucial lens through which the silencing of women was examined. Simultaneously, the patriarchal tenets discussed by Connell and hooks offer a space to explore the systemic hierarchy that marginalizes women. Excerpts from the novel depicted women as not merely passive victims but also strong and resistant, subverting yet remaining entrapped within male-dominated structures. The findings revealed that the women characters in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) depict muted groups whose attempts at resistance were both courageous and paradoxically constrained by patriarchal discourse. Secondly, the portrayal of oppressive factors ranged from physical violence to institutional forms of control. While acts of resistance were observed, they frequently occur within boundaries established by the dominant male society, thereby questioning the efficacy of such resistance. This investigation contributes masterfully to the discourse on gender inequity and social oppression, employing meticulous textual analysis supported by influential theoretical paradigms.

### Introduction

Muteness means “unable to speak lacking the power of speech or the condition of being unable to speak whether from physical, functional, or psychological cause.” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Merriam-Webster defines Oppression as “unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). These terms indicate a range of abusive practices and systemic inequalities. Not merely confined to authoritarian regimes or overt discrimination oppression and muteness shapes societal dynamics and individual experiences.

Ifechelobi (2014) suggests that patriarchal structures exploit silence and the muting of voices as mechanisms to sustain control over women and continue gender disparities and difficulties. As a matter of women studies, the scholar posits that silence can represent a type of oppression, especially when women are quietened, or their voices are marginalized in public discussions. This can manifest in diverse manners, for instance, through the omission of women’s historical contributions, the barring of women from political or societal decision-making procedures, or the quieting of women’s voices within media outlets. MGT posits that power structures in a society are reflected in its language, with those in positions of power being more capable of expressing their thoughts and experiences in the dominant discourse (Berkebile and Lane, 2023). In crux, MGT explains that societal values and language donate to

many groups' muting. Feminism finds Muted Group Theory to be an influential tool in decoding and questioning the male-controlled (patriarchal) system that often control social structures, along with language and interaction. In a feminist setting, Muted Group Theory is used to understand how voices of women are muted frequently, misrepresented, or discharged in support of the overriding male account.

In literature, Muted Group Theory finds its efficacy in understanding how muted groups re-claim their power of speech. Additionally, Matzke-Fawcett (2021) writes at the issue of trafficking of human. The trafficking's sufferer is a silenced and repressed group, is run-down of their capability to pen their involvements in their own words, their narratives are told on their account by others. The work examines how language and communication can be harnessed to empower such victims, granting them agency and making their voices heard. This extends the scope of MGT beyond gender, proving its applicability in a wide range of societal issues. Egrikavuk (2021) considers this intersection in her study on belly dance in Istanbul. The dance form, often perceived through a Western, orientalist lens, is a medium through which women are observed and objectified. However, the paper argues that belly dance could also be a tool for expressing agency and feminist resistance. This stance aligns with MGT as it showcases how a muted group can reclaim an activity or a form of expression that was initially used to silence or marginalize them. Feminism has used MGT to shed light on how patriarchal norms mute women's voices, and literature has proven to be a rich field for exploring these dynamics. Though the examples above show MGT's wide-ranging applications, it is crucial to remember that all muted group's experiences are unique, and the ways in which they are muted and can reclaim their voices are equally diverse. Therefore, it is essential to approach MGT with an open and flexible mind, ready to adapt its principles to the specific context at hand (Berkebile and Lane, 2023).

In the context of communication, MGT scrutinizes not merely overarching structures but also zeroes in on details concerning human communication. On a quotidian basis, MGT principles conspicuously materialize, particularly for women who often find their narratives either subdued or misrepresented. This muting unfolds in multifarious manners: for instance, in 'mansplaining,' where condescension replaces genuine discourse.

MGT paves a path for an effectual approach to deciphering how certain groups face challenges in voicing themselves within a particular dominated culture and language. According to Applin et al. (2023), patriarchy is portrayed as a created system socially, where male is considered powerful predominantly. The dynamic of power suppressed the power of speech as well as the women's experiences. In nutshell, MGT explains why perspectives of women go unheard frequently or ignored in dominant culture and language.

### **Problem Statement**

The woman is treated unequally across the globe in general, and in Afghanistan in specific. Despite some focus on the oppression of women in Afghanistan, a comprehensive dissection of the ingrained themes of silence and suppression impacting women in this context remains lacking. This research is aimed at addressing this deficiency by employing Muted Group Theory and Patriarchy Theory to scrutinize Nadeem Aslam's novel, *The Wasted Vigil* (2008). The present research is carried out to probe into the elements of social oppression depicted in the narrative and examine the portrayal of female characters, underscoring the urgency of elevating women's voices.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To research the depiction of women's muteness within a male-dominant society in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008).
2. To probe into the social oppression's elements epitomized in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008).

### **Research Questions**

1. How is women's muteness depicted within a male-dominant context in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008)?
2. Why and how women's characters are portrayed to be oppressed in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008)?

### **Delimitation of the Study**

The present research concentration is on analyzing the concept of muteness and oppression as represented in the novel, *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) via the lens of Muted Group Theory and Patriarchy Theory. However, the current study delimits its focus on the novel and does not extend to a broader examination of the topic.

### **Literature Review**

In the study conducted by Belkhiri and Siham (2019), they analyzed the concept of patriarchy in Khalid Hussein's novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). The authors elucidate that dominance and marginalization function inversely to each other with one intensifying as the other diminishes. According to the scholars, in Pashtun society, men are considered the dominating force, while women are relegated to the margins. The researchers investigate sundry tool, i.e., customs, commanding attitude, language, and religion, fabricated by men to overpower and control women. In the light of MGT, the research pursues to understand the exact materialization of domination and sidelining within a community or society. It also researches the role of these tools play in the sidelining and disregarding of women as portrayed in the novel.

According to Ardener (2008), the Muted Group Theory is a useful tool for examining and researching oppressed social classes in order to address the issue of gender imbalance in the public sphere. As a matter of voices, the more powerful social group not only communicates their views without restraint but also dictates the thoughts and speech patterns of the less influential and often overlooked group, in this case, women. Muted Group Theory (MGT) looks at the gender-based communication structure, the unique phenomena surrounding gender linguistics, and the various dimensions of gender inequality that set apart the male and female classes. The way society splits itself into ruling and subordinate groups influences how the public perceives gender roles and norms. Kramarae (2011) opines that those at the top of a culture's hierarchical structure have the privilege of shaping how social class impacts women or other members of the culture.

In the study conducted by Belkhiri and Siham (2019), they analyzed the concept of patriarchy in Khalid Hussein's novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007). The authors elucidate that dominance and marginalization function inversely to each other with one intensifying as the other diminishes. According to the scholars, in Pashtun society, men are considered the dominating force, while women are relegated to the margins. The authors scrutinize the different instruments, such as traditional norms, language, authoritative behavior and religion, wielded by men to suppress and control women. Using Muted Group Theory as a foundation, the study seeks to comprehend the precise implications of dominance and marginalization within society. It also investigates the role these instruments play in the marginalization of women as depicted in the novel.

Gender discrimination and patriarchal oppression is researched in the Alice's selected novels by Abar, Mazlini, and Waham (2019). This research is qualitative in nature along with textual analysis in order to comprehend Walker's ways to address issues of misogyny and patriarchy. Notably, the work excavates the underlying issues concerning gender politics and inequality. The authors employ multiple works from Walker, creating an expansive field for their analysis, a choice that permits them to offer a thematic understanding of Walker's literary aims. It is particularly poignant in how it unravels the multifarious mechanisms of oppression that stem from deeply embedded patriarchal systems. Nonetheless, the study might have profited from a comparative approach, which could have contextualized Walker's novels within a broader literary or even sociopolitical landscape. In essence, the study serves as a robust springboard for further scholarship in examining not just Walker's works but also the dynamics of gender disparity and patriarchal control in literature more broadly.

### **Research Methodology**

This nature of this research is qualitative; and a lens, Muted Group Theory (MGT) and Theory of Patriarchy models, is chosen for the analysis of the novel's contents. The researcher applies a descriptive review of the work and the data's analysis is based on the close reading of the novel's original text.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is based on theories, i.e., Muted Group Theory (MGT) and Patriarchy Theory. The word "muted group theory" was invented by Edwin and Shirley Ardener in their 1975 book, *Belief and the Problem of Women*. MGT postulates that marginalized groups in society, particularly women, are muted and sidelined due to the dominant group within a society. This theory maintains that language reflects, shapes, and preserves power dynamics, leaving certain groups at a communicative disadvantage (Ardener and Ardener, 1975).

Originally expressed by anthropologists, Edwin Ardener and Shirley Ardener, Muted Group Theory (MGT) advocates that marginalized communities find themselves linguistically 'muted' within the parameters set by dominant groups (Ardener and Ardener, 1975). Central to MGT is the notion that language mainly serves the interests of hegemonic strata, which in numerous societies equates to men. Therefore, the lexicon and grammatical structures often inadequately capture the realities and nuances of subjugated groups, thereby effectuating their "muteness" (Kramarae, 1981).

Feminist discourse gives birth to Patriarchy Theory and theorizes that societies are structured in ways that empower men at the expense of women (Millett, 2016). It examines the web of institutionalized male dominance that permeates various societal dimensions, from familial and social roles to workplaces. The theory explains the power differences demonstrated through the arbitrary and socially constructed nature of gender roles (Connell, 1987).

By employing MGT, this study aims to dissect the modes and strategies via which female characters are portrayed as muted and oppressed entities. MGT supports highlighting the nuances of how voices of women become subjugated in the novel, from narrative spaces to dialogic and negotiative engagement. Such an investigation deeply aligns with the theory's overarching premise concerning linguistic and narrative marginalization.

Simultaneously, Patriarchy Theory assists in unearthing the socio-cultural association that perpetuates such oppression and muteness. It provides a platform to question the power structures and gender dynamics that marginalizes women to subaltern position. Subsequently, MGT and Patriarchy Theory operate in tandem to provide a comprehensive analysis that satisfies the research objectives.

Consequently, *The Wasted Vigil's* examination through the merged lens of MGT and Patriarchy Theory produces a scenario of complex and multifaceted oppressions. It offers a hermeneutic architecture for investigating both the insidious and overt strategies employed by patriarchal societies to mute and marginalize women. The study aims to conjoin these theories to strengthen their analytical strength and effectiveness.

### Data Analysis and Discussion

#### Women's Portrayal as Muted Voices and oppressed within Patriarchy in *The Wasted Vigil*

In examining the themes mentioned above in the heading, the researcher inevitably balances on the verge of two formidable theoretical frameworks: Patriarchy Theory and Muted Group Theory. Patriarchy Theory, initially, provides the social support structure wherein men reign supreme, subduing the voices of women and seizing the larger share of power (Hill and Allen, 2021). MGT, on the other hand, presents an angle to scrutinize the silencing of women, usually as a consequence of patriarchal structures (Kramarae, 2011).

Lara's struggle is a poignant reminder that even when women muster the courage to oppose, they are seldom heard and rarely escape the cycle of muteness and subordination. Consequently, Lara becomes a living testament to MGT's core assumptions that women's experiences are divergent yet stifled by an overbearing patriarchal syntax (Kramarae, 2011).

As a matter of fiction, these characters serve as conduits through which we perceive the pernicious nature of patriarchy and the muting of women's voices. Their lives, as penned in *The Wasted Vigil*, exemplify the assertion that gender-based societal roles not only muffle women's voices but also perpetuate an inequitable structure, with far-reaching implications. Both MGT and Patriarchy Theory offer prisms that deepen the story, lending analytical rigor to the complex tales of Casa, Zareen, Qatrina, Dunia, and Lara. Through them, we deconstruct a world where speaking out remains a luxury, a world rife with patriarchal aspects that deserve urgent scholarly attention.

He told her his daughter, Zameen, was no longer alive... a disrespect she was unaware of, and one of the passengers had taken it upon himself to correct and punish her. Her real mistake was to have chosen to travel swaddled up like the women from this country, thinking it would be safer. Perhaps if her face had been somewhat exposed, the colour of her hair visible, she would have been forgiven as a foreigner. Everyone, on the other hand, had the right to make an example of an unwise Afghan woman, even a boy young enough to be her son (Aslam, 2008, pp.15-16)

The characters of Zameen and other women emerge as focal points, their experiences profoundly drenched in a society beset by patriarchal constraints. While the text predominantly revolves around Zameen, her stories are illustrative context of the patriarchal society described in extant literature (Hill and Allen, 2021). Intriguingly, the text captures the essence of Muted Group Theory (MGT), wherein women experience heightened vulnerability due to their constructed silence (Kramarae, 2011).

Zameen, mentioned only through memories, epitomizes women whose voices are stifled to the point of removal. Her disappearance, her enforced motherhood, and her eventual death all occurred in a void of silence. There is an evident sense of 'disappearance' not just physically but symbolically as if her story was never supposed to emerge in the public sphere. The seminal work *Belief and the Problem of Women* by Ardener (2008) on MGT becomes relevant here, explaining how women often become secondary characters in their own life stories due to cultural and social muting. Simultaneously, the foreigner girl's experiences are horrifyingly demonstrative of the violent disciplining often sanctioned by patriarchal ideologies. She endures physical harm simply for falling asleep in a direction pointing towards Mecca, which is deemed a "disrespect" by a male passenger. Notably, her wrapping up to resemble the local women, designed to be a precaution, only renders her more susceptible to punishment (Millett, 2016). This also bears out the hypothesis laid out by Buiten (2022), stating that patriarchal culture feeds into the social acceptance of violence against women. Actually, the woman's attempt to blend in, thinking she would be safer, vividly outlines the thorough entrapments of patriarchal dictates. Kramarae's assertions on MGT illuminate the situation; the woman, in donning an Afghan attire, had hoped to silence her foreignness, but ironically, that silence invites violence. Moreover, the idea that her foreign features could have "saved" her showcases a complex intersectionality, adding another level to the discourse on patriarchy and muting (Crenshaw, 1991).

The concept of punishment for "disrespect," meted out by a boy "young enough to be her son," (p.15) signals how patriarchal norms are not merely upheld by adult men but are insidiously internalized across age groups (Hill and Allen, 2021). This scene serves as a harrowing reminder of Benstead's (2021) contention that patriarchal ideologies induce anxiety and threat, and in worst-case scenarios, they get translated into physical violence.

Moreover, the utilization of natural remedies by the male character for the woman expressing a wish for pomegranate as an antiseptic point to an embedded paternalism. Even as he seeks to provide care, there exists a disturbing undercurrent suggesting that women's bodies require male supervision, resonating with the ideas posited by scholars who argue that patriarchy often masquerades as protection (Walby, 2010).

In sum, the passage renders visible the vicious circle of patriarchy and muted voices, as expounded upon in both MGT and Patriarchy Theory. Zameen's erasure and the unnamed woman's physical punishment illuminate the



multifaceted, deeply ingrained nature of patriarchal control. Through the analytical lenses provided by Ardener, Kramarae, Hill and Allen, Buiten, Crenshaw, Benstead, and Walby, one recognizes that the women in this narrative are not merely characters in a fictional work; they are archetypes symbolizing millions of muted, subjugated lives. These deeply unsettling stories, woven into the fabric of *The Wasted Vigil*, reinforce the overarching theme: patriarchal norms continue to silence women, inculcate violence, and perpetuate inequality in a ceaseless, soul-crushing loop.

The abhorrence, passed down through years and decades and generations, began in 1865 when a woman ancestor of Gul Rasool, named Malalai, had temporarily found herself as the head of the tribe at the age of sixteen, the men around her having perished in an epidemic. The only males that remained alive were either little boys here in Usha or grown men away on the pilgrimage to Arabia, the journey taking several months in those days. Malalai's new position was regarded as sinister in Usha, people doubting if a woman could ever be counted on to take correct decisions (Aslam, 2008, p.217).

In the passage from *The Wasted Vigil*, the character Malalai emerges as a reminder of the ways in which patriarchal societies have historically sought to silence or delegitimize female voices and leadership. The text highlights Malalai's ascension to the head of the tribe at just 16, however her role is "regarded as sinister in Usha, people doubting if a woman could ever be counted on to take correct decisions" (Aslam, 2008, p.217). This account can be elucidated through various theoretical frameworks, particularly Muted Group Theory (MGT) and extant literature on patriarchal structures.

According to Kramarae's MGT, women are typically subjugated to muted, less influential roles due to male-dominated language and societal structures (Kramarae, 2011). Malalai's leadership, albeit temporary, serves as an instance of attempted 'un-muting.' However, her position remains "sinister" in the eyes of society, revealing how the unwarranted muting of women occurs even when they assume roles of authority. Such perspectives echo Ardener's (2008) insights on how cultural formulations often push women into secondary roles, even when circumstances push them to the foreground.

Moreover, the absence of adult males during this period, "either little boys here in Usha or grown men away on the pilgrimage to Arabia," amplifies the community's mistrust towards female leadership (Aslam, 2008, p. 217). This corresponds to Hill and Allen's work, which discusses how patriarchal ideologies not only regulate women's bodies but also monopolize sacred spaces and journeys as exclusively male domains (Hill and Allen, 2021).

Malalai's story functions as an antecedent of sorts for the modern-day struggles faced by the female characters like Zameen, Qatrina, and others. While Malalai had to deal with skepticism in a leadership role, later generations continue facing a myriad of constraints, from forced silences to physical violence. Benstead's recent scholarship elaborates on how this cyclical nature of patriarchy ensures its self-preservation, repeatedly engendering environments of doubt and prejudice against women (Benstead, 2021).

Importantly, the lineage aspect, "a woman ancestor of Gul Rasool," adds yet another dimension, emphasizing how patriarchal attitudes persist across generations (Aslam, 2008, p.217). Connell's notion of historical patriarchy helps contextualize this, showing how power structures are not static but continually evolve to maintain male supremacy (Connell, 2003).

An aid agency. They pay for me to be here so women from the refugee camps can come here and embroider in secret.' The work he thought might be something to do with spying. 'It's secret because we fear the fundamentalists who ... camps and have forbidden work and education to women, so much so that a woman in possession of silk thread is branded a wanton, it being the Western aid organizations that began the embroidery scheme to give war widows a chance to earn a livelihood. (Aslam, 2008, p. 127)

In the above excerpt, the manifestation of patriarchal constraints further illuminates the suppression of women. Here, the notion of embroidery as both an act of resistance and a symbol of subjugation converges around the characters of Zameen, Qatrina, and other women from refugee camps. The text provides, "An aid agency. They pay for me to be here so women from the refugee camps can come here and embroider in secret" (Aslam, 2008, p. 127). This statement, loaded with delicate details, can be understood more deeply through several scholarly perspectives, particularly Muted Group Theory (MGT) and the overarching frameworks of patriarchy.

Furthermore, it's important to consider the detail, "a woman in possession of silk thread is branded a wanton" (Aslam, 2008, p. 127). The judgment passed on women merely for possessing silk thread illuminates the misogyny deeply embedded in the societal structure, reflecting Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic violence,' where power hierarchies are legitimized and naturalized in everyday practices (Millett, 2016). Another element to scrutinize in the passage involves the Western aid organizations' role. While their initiative may be noble, it unveils a complex interplay between global power dynamics and the local patriarchal systems. Mohanty and Spivak discuss how Western interventions often unconsciously reinforce patriarchal structures while claiming to free women in the Global South (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988).

Zameen retreated after she recognised the cleric supervising the mutilation of the sacred trees. Within months he had had seven women murdered for being prostitutes. Five were in the camp but two were in the city of Peshawar itself because he was linking up with Pakistani extremists. He was arrested once and confessed to killing two sinful women but walked free after one month. His patrons had paid off the relatives of the killed women (Aslam, 2008, p. 136)

In this excerpt from *The Wasted Vigil*, the context unveils a devastating portrayal where women are subjected to horrifying violence, masterminded by a cleric who is emblematic of systemic patriarchy. The passage states, "Zameen retreated after she recognised the cleric supervising the mutilation of the sacred trees. Within months he had had seven women murdered for being prostitutes. Five were in the camp but two were in the city of Peshawar itself" (p. 136). A lens of theoretical perspectives involving Muted Group Theory (MGT) and scholarly discourses on patriarchy aids in decoding the details of this tragic narrative landscape.

Firstly, let's highlight the significance of Zameen's withdrawal after recognizing the malevolent cleric. Though Zameen's reaction is mentioned briefly, it encapsulates the omnipresent dread faced by women, rooted in power imbalances. Kramarae, a proponent of MGT, elucidates that muted groups often self-censor, realizing their words or actions hold little value in the grand power structure (Kramarae, 2005). Zameen's retreat symbolizes the muting of women's agency and voices, an insidious form of self-censorship born out of survival instinct.

Unfolding parallelly is the horrifying series of murders committed by the cleric. These crimes must be scrutinized through the prisms of patriarchy, moral absolutism, and religious extremism. Judith Butler argues that systemic violence against women often stems from societal frameworks that legitimize such actions (Butler, 2004). Women in the refugee camp and in Peshawar fall victim to an authority figure who utilizes religious and moral grounds to justify the murders, turning them into casualties of oppressive social norms.

In this horrific saga, the cleric walks free after merely a month due to the influence of "patrons" and settlements with the relatives of the murdered women. This mirrors Gayle Rubin's 'sex/gender system,' where power operates through the social and familial networks that dictate women's place in society (Rubin, 1975). That the cleric could escape justice by compensating the families' functions as a reminder of the commercialization of women's lives, viewed less as individuals than as properties.

Moreover, the text introduces the concept of these women being labeled as "prostitutes," branding that leads to their ultimate demise. The stigmatization acts as a controlling narrative, one that Michelle Foucault would consider a 'bio-power,' a form of control exercised over bodies (Foucault, 1976). Furthermore, the connection with Pakistani extremists ties the subjugation of women to larger socio-political contexts, a point elaborated by postcolonial scholars like Gayatri Spivak who speak of the intersectionality of various forms of oppression (Spivak, 1988).

Life in Usha was blasted-out and silent because of the war between Nabi Khan and Gul Rasool, but the Taliban put both of them to flight within days. And now – only hours after gaining control of Usha – they began whipping women in the streets for showing their faces (Aslam, 2008, p.182)

This passage exposes how socio-political dynamics intersect with gender, engendering an environment where social oppression and othering are institutionalized. In the text, Usha, a territory trapped in conflict between Nabi Khan and Gul Rasool, becomes subjected to Taliban rule. Alarmingly, one of their first acts involves the public whipping of women for the transgression of merely revealing their faces. Here, we can elucidate Patriarchy Theory through the lens of scholars such as Lorber (2018), who contends that patriarchal systems operate through the subjugation and control of women's bodies and lives. The act of whipping women consolidates male power and objectifies the female body as a locus of control.

As for Muted Group Theory (MGT), the public degradation of women effectively silences them, making them 'muted' in their own narrative. According to Kramarae (2011), women often become relegated to a peripheral status by male-centric narratives and discourses. In Usha, women's suffering becomes an immediate consequence, almost as if their torment had been long scheduled in the Taliban's agenda. These actions confirm Hill and Allen's (2021) claim that patriarchal norms manifest not just in personal relationships but also in socio-political structures, frequently leading to the physical abuse and silencing of women.

The swiftness with which the Taliban impose this violent gendered policy, "only hours after gaining control," amplifies the narrative of othering. As Tatum (2017) posits, othering serves to legitimize social hierarchies. In the case of Usha, the othering goes beyond mere difference; it legitimizes the use of brutal physical force as a normative practice to uphold the systemic subjugation of women. The act of whipping women for showing their faces becomes an overt, agonizing signifier of the existing gender disparity.

While Nabi Khan and Gul Rasool's battle have oppressed the community in ways unstated in this passage, the Taliban's regime rapidly shifts the nature of that oppression. It turns the public sphere, once perhaps a contested area during the earlier conflict, into a site of gendered terror. The fast transformation of Usha under Taliban control

also adds another layer to the concept of othering. The external war gave way to an internal, domestic one that subjects women to constant fear and marginalization.

Last month Gul Rasool was among the dozens of male politicians who had hurled abuse at a woman MP as she spoke in parliament, shouting threats to rape her. "Harassed and fearful she changes her address regularly and owns burkas in eight different colors to avoid being followed. (Aslam, 2008, p.171)

The above lines citing the grim experiences of a woman member of parliament, undoubtedly functions as a chilling representation of the intersectionality of social oppression and othering. Specifically, it focuses on the distressing state of affairs in parliament, where Gul Rasool leads a group of male politicians in openly harassing a female MP, a characterization of real-life parliamentarian Malalai Joya. Diving into Patriarchy Theory, the above text aptly signifies the dynamics of institutional patriarchy. According to Walby (2010), patriarchal systems perpetuate male dominance by exerting comprehensive control in public and private domains alike. The horrific threats hurled in the sacred halls of governance go beyond mere prejudice, serving to consolidate male supremacy. Additionally, the locus of this abuse is significant. It occurs in parliament, where laws are made, societal structures are debated, and the very fabric of democracy should be upheld. However, ironically, it functions as a hotbed for gender inequality.

Kramarae's Muted Group Theory (MGT) is starkly relevant here. The female MP must employ intricate survival techniques: changing residences and using a diverse range of burkas to obfuscate her identity, which inevitably muffles her presence in both the public and private spheres (Kramarae, 2011). These coping mechanisms demonstrate how women are systemically silenced, further affirming Hill and Allen's (2021) assertion that patriarchal constructs can lead to such acute levels of physical and psychological abuse.

The text's mention of the MP being "harassed and fearful" resonates strikingly with Judith Butler's ideas on the performativity of gender (1990). For Butler, gender becomes an enacted social construct, often performed under duress. Here, the victim must consistently change her residential address and disguise herself, these acts becoming involuntary performances enforced by her grim reality. Thus, her identity becomes something she must continually hide and modify, reinforcing her muteness and marginalization.

Furthermore, in some other passages taken from *The Wasted Vigil*, the harrowing depiction of Qatrina's public punishment serves as a testament to the systemic social oppression and othering perpetuated by extreme patriarchal norms. Commencing with a public spectacle after Friday prayers, Qatrina's ordeal reaches a disquieting climax, one that embodies the most inhumane aspects of the societal hierarchy she resides in.

Qatrina, a sixty-one-year-old woman, finds herself pronounced an adulteress after thirty-nine years of marriage. Her crime: being part of a ceremony conducted by a female, thus nullifying her marriage "in the eyes of the Taliban" (Aslam, 2008, p.40). The case clearly demonstrates how patriarchal norms dictate the credibility and value of women, affirming scholars like Lorber (2019) who emphasize the gender-based devaluation that underlies patriarchal systems.

Her punishment "to be stoned for living in sin" transcends mere brutality (p.41). A microphone placed near her serves to amplify her screams, making her agony a part of the public consciousness. According to Hill and Allen (2021), patriarchy seeks to use women's bodies as public spaces for male dominance. In this grim spectacle, Qatrina's body becomes a focal point for the community's violent interpretation of morality.

Regarding Muted Group Theory (MGT), Qatrina's voice becomes a literal spectacle for public consumption yet doesn't offer her any agency. Her screams, amplified for an audience, paradoxically silence her further. In MGT, Kramarae (2011) posits that women are often muted through male-centric language and practices. Here, even her cries, far from empowering her, make her more voiceless.

The pictorial description continues as Qatrina's body is treated as a disposable object, where "a man had gathered the hem of the burka and tied it into a knot and dragged her away" (p.135). The detachment with which the spectators witness her torment shows the normalization of such gruesome acts. Tatum (2017) highlights how the othering of a group can lead to acceptance of inhumanity against them, which seems manifestly evident in this crowd's grim enthusiasm.

Further amplifying the horror, Marcus later finds that Qatrina wasn't actually killed by stoning. Instead, she was subjected to unimaginable degradation. Left to rot in "a mud hovel," infested with maggots, Qatrina faces further isolation and invisibility (*The Wasted Vigil*, p.267). The spectators got their "wanted spectacle"; her suffering, however, persists beyond public view. This extends the discourse around gender oppression by introducing another dimension: the invisible suffering women endure after the visible atrocities cease.

In summary, Qatrina's appalling ordeal offers a devastating critique of the intersecting forces of patriarchy and social oppression. The severe physical, emotional, and psychological violence inflicted upon her in the name of morality uncovers the darkest recesses of human capability. Scholars specializing in Patriarchy Theory and Muted Group Theory offer crucial frameworks for unpacking this multi-layered narrative of cruelty, subjugation, and systemic marginalization.

With regard to patriarchy, it would be interesting to consider the gender dynamics among these children. Who jumps the highest? Who gets encouraged the most? If it is predominantly boys who are applauded for their leaping prowess, then even this seemingly innocent activity becomes a nursery for future patriarchal norms. As Connell (1995) notes, patriarchal relations are not just enacted through laws or overt social policies but are also embedded in everyday practices.

Furthermore, the laughter and struggle to grab “it” suggests a potentially materialistic or goal-oriented focus, another parameter often employed by patriarchal society to assess worth. The act of grabbing something, as encouraged by an elder figure, may serve as a precursor to future social values that the children internalize. As hooks (1990) puts it, patriarchal society thrives on materialism and quantifiable achievements, laying down the foundations for future systems of inequity.

The scene thus functions as a reminder that societal norms and prejudices are not just imposed through dramatic acts of violence or blatant discrimination but are often subtly encoded in everyday interactions. In summary, although the passage may appear to describe a simple, joyful scene, under scrutiny, it reveals the insidious ways in which both muted groups and patriarchal norms are reinforced from a young age. Therefore, scholars in the realm of MGT and Patriarchy offer key tools for dissecting the complexities involved in even the most seemingly innocent societal interactions.

In the gripping scene “She was screaming defiance, hurling aside a tray on which was a butcher’s knife and several glass syringes---there was a woodworker’s small saw and a rust-speckled pair of scissors” (Aslam, 2008, p.246) from *The Wasted Vigil*, an air of violence pervades. The items thrown aside symbolize distinct forms of oppression and violence. In contrast to the previous scene with leaping children, this passage indicates more strongly to the theme of factors responsible for social oppression and othering.

The “she” in this narrative, nameless and faceless, epitomizes the oppressed, perhaps a female in a male-dominated society. The objects she throws — butcher’s knife, glass syringes, small saw, and scissors — symbolize various forms of violent control or modification. The “butcher’s knife” is a metaphor for corporeal violence, the “syringes” stands for biochemical control or medical. Similarly, the “scissors” cum “small saw” portray subjugation or modification. According to Foucault (1976), control demonstrates outright violence, medicalization and normalization process.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

As the analysis revealed, *The Wasted Vigil* characters exist within a structure heavily influenced by patriarchal systems. Dilemmas of female characters like Zameen, Qatrina, Dunia, Lara, and Casa were not just individual accounts but form part of a broader portrayal, pointing a collective female experience. These experiences were bound by the chains of cultural objectification, dehumanization, and what one could describe as subjugation based on gender. However, while the narrative paints a grim portrayal, it also functions as a call for scrutinizing the multifaceted levels of patriarchy that suppress women’s agency.

At the household level, Zameen and her counterparts epitomized the objectified woman, bereft of agency and subjected to the whims of male figures like Gul Rasool and Nabi Khan. Each woman’s story, be it Qatrina’s muted suffering, Zameen’s objectification, or Lara and Dunia’s ordeals, exposes a society steeped in deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. These norms blur the lines between societal culture and individual choice, leaving women confined within an almost interwoven web of patriarchal structures.

In the larger societal sphere, women’s roles were just as troublingly delineated. Whether it was the severe sanctions against women in the workplace or the stigmatization of female education, the larger social milieu appears as an extension of the household’s patriarchal norms. Even attempts to subvert these norms, like the embroidery scheme for war widows, meet fierce resistance and are branded as heretical acts. This, in a way, reinforces the ideology that women should remain confined to spaces that society deems suitable for them, often in servile or submissive roles. Muting extends beyond the mere silencing of voices to envelop women’s economic freedom, educational rights, and personal liberties, ultimately transforming them into subordinate entities in a male-centric universe.

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*The Wasted Vigil* acts as a novel which is serving as a lesson that calls for urgent scrutiny of the levels of patriarchal systems that restrict women’s agency. From household dynamics to societal structures, religious edicts, and economic boundaries, the novel encapsulates the entangled web of restrictions that women have to navigate. Even if the narrative presents no solutions, it creates a stage where muted voices rise, if only for a brief moment, above the



cacophony to demand acknowledgment, if not change. While each character's fate varies, they collectively highlight the need for a critical reassessment of the gender roles and expectations that have been ingrained deeply within our societal fabric.

Moreover, the analysis of the factors responsible for social oppression and othering portrayed in *The Wasted Vigil* elucidates an unsettling panorama of systemic disparities. Focused predominantly on gender-based struggles, the findings unearth how public and private spheres interact to reinforce patriarchal norms. Despite evolving social consciousness, many societal elements still harbor anachronistic attitudes. Men and women often find themselves forcibly situated in their ascribed social roles, stifling their individuality. Particularly, public spaces like the parliament, which should stand as a bulwark against inequality, emerge as sites for gender-based violence and suppression.

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