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Attaining Women's Agency: A Study of Women's Repression in Women's Memoir Writing

ABSTRACT

This research project explores various strategies of claiming women's agency in diversified backgrounds. It accounts ways of repression that certain social and cultural forces adopt to hamper claims of women's agency. It examines repressive and ideological state apparatuses operating in different socio-political and cultural scenarios. Similarly, it focuses on the contribution of such apparatuses that hinder the women to claim their agency. Theoretical framings of Louis Althusser's theory of repression seem plausible for content analysis of the selected texts. Althusser foregrounds the role of repressive and ideological and forces that restrict aspirations and freedom of the women in the society. Content analysis of this study is based on two memoirs that include Reading Lolita in Tehran (2003) by Azar Nafisi and I Am Malala (2013) by Malala Yousafzai. The study finds that religion and family function as ideological state apparatuses in Nafisi's memoir and the Taliban enact as Repressive state apparatuses in latter's memoir.

Keywords: Agency, Repressive State Apparatuses, Ideological State Apparatuses, Patriarchy, Repression

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Introduction

This research study expatiates upon the ways of claiming agency by dominated women of a couple of heterogenous socio-political and economic contexts. Likewise, it examines how various repressive agencies operate to constrain the individuals, specifically the women, from achieving their ambitions. For this purpose, it draws an analogy between Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) and Malala Yousafzai's *I Am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (2013). This study is inclined to analyse the functionality of such repressive structures by applying the critical formulations of Althusser's ideology and state apparatuses.

Generically, the individuals are perceived to lead their lives in line with their own dreams and ambitions. They endeavor to accomplish their aspirations while relying on their strengths and energies. However, there exist certain social and cultural elements that hamper their aspirations. The situation results from the clash of interests of aspiring individuals with the ones who restrict their ambitions. At times, such aspirations are positioned contradictory with social values, principles of some institutions, a particular group or with authority of the State. Such state of conflict provides them an opportunity to mobilize their inner strength, prioritize available choices and take action accordingly.

Specifically, the women have to face such situations while living in the patriarchal settings. They are supposed to lead their lives in line with the conventions established by the male-dominated society. Oppression of women appears to be a normality of societies where male dominates. Hooks (2015) unfolds a privilege of the man to dominate over woman in these words, "Men should have greater authority than women and should rule over them" (45). Throughout history, 'conventional man' (Cixous, 1976) has tried to maintain this domination over the woman. Masculinity envisages strategies to 'keep [women] in the dark' (Cixous, 876). Realisation of this dominance inspires the women to challenge those notions of dominance crafted by phallogocentric imagination. They want to re-think the social structures that deepen their otherness and revitalize male dominance. As they demonstrate their desire to live according to their own wishes, it positions them against the prevailing social structures and patriarchal dominance.

As a counter to women's schemes of gaining agency, dominant forces devise schemes to restrict them from achieving their freedom whereas the women oppose such constraints and appropriate available choices and take action accordingly. Feminist scholarship recognizes women's utilization of choices to achieve their purpose, against the will of men, as agency. This study is intended to analyse the claims of agency of the protagonists of the selected memoirs and other female characters in them. Feminist critical

thinkers theorise female agency in different perspectives. They include Helen Cixous, Judith Butler, bell hooks, Sidony Smith and Julia Watson. Their critical understanding of female agency is likely to be discussed in theoretical framework of this study.

Critical reading of autobiographies reveals that agency or claim of agency is the constitutive element of the process of autobiographical writing. Claim of agency motivates an autobiographer to accomplish the task of writing an autobiography since he/she faces certain ethical, religious and socio-political restrictions. So much so, all autobiographical texts are characterized by claims of agency of their authors. In this connection, hooks (2015) perception of writing/speaking carries pertinence. She states the art of writing as, "it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination" (27). This research study is inclined to encompass the cultural and social stipulations that the authors of the selected texts face in claiming their agency. In Nafisi's memoir (2003), the protagonist is in confrontation with the religio-political restrictions of the State in which she lives. As well, five young girls students of the author encounter similar cultural and social confines that compel them to employ their agency. In a similar manner, Malala's memoir (2013) unearths heterogeneous cultural strictures in action to hamper the author from getting education and raising her voice for the education of all girls.

Overview of the Memoirs

Reading Lolita in Tehran (2003)

Reading Lolita in Tehran (2003) is a memoir produced by Azar Nafisi, an Iranian author and professor of literature. It provides an account of Nafisi's lived experience as a literature professor in Iran during Islamic Revolution and the subsequent establishment of an oppressive regime. Nafisi structures her memoir around the formation of a secret book club that she establishes with a group of female students. They meet in her home which functions as a space for discussions and exploration of prohibited Western literature. Through the lens of literature, Nafisi delves into the lives of her students and her own, she brings to the fore struggles and challenges they face while living in a repressive regime.

A significant trait of Nafisi's memoir is that it focuses on the impact of Vladimir Nabokov's controversial novel, "Lolita," on the lives of young girls in the book club. Nafisi uses "Lolita" as a metaphor for the oppression of women and draws parallels between the experiences of the characters in the novel and the oppressive realities faced by Iranian women. She delivers a powerful commentary on the power of literature as a means of escape, resistance, and empowerment. She demonstrates how the act of reading and discussing literature becomes a form of resistance against the oppressive

regime. This action of reading allows the women to reclaim their agency and challenge societal norms.

Nafisi accounts her personal experiences of suppression at the hands of institutional and phallogocentric oppressive elements. She is forced to wear veil in the University campus and teach the contents in the classes that have been recognized by syllabus committee of the University. Instead, she teaches Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). She refuses to comply with the rubrics of the University administration. Besides, Nafisi participates in the protest organized against the imposition of veil on the women. As a result of all this, she is rusticated from the University and she loses her job forever.

Through her personal anecdotes and reflections, Nafisi unfolds the complexities of life in Tehran during a long period. She sheds light on the struggles of maintaining personal freedoms, the challenges faced by women, the stifling of intellectual discourse, and the constant debate between personal desires and societal expectations. The memoir is a thought-provoking narrative that weaves together literature, personal narratives, and sociopolitical commentary. It serves as a testament to the resilience and power of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Moreover, it highlights the transformative potential of literature to challenging oppressive cultural and social structures.

I Am Malala (2013)

The memoir unfolds the story of Malala Yousafzai's life, her initiatives to get education, advocacy for girls' education and the events leading up to her murder-attempt by the Taliban. The memoir delineates Malala's childhood in Swat Valley, located in Northern areas of Pakistan. In the same valley, her father runs a private school with an intention to educate the children of the valley. Her father inculcates dedication towards education in Malala. As she grows into a school going young girl, Taliban gain power in the region. They impose strict rules and regulations and place a ban on girls' education in the schools situated in the vicinity of Swat valley.

Despite the threats and dangers, Malala continues to attend school and becomes an outspoken advocate for the right to education for all children. Simultaneously, Malala is able to achieve international recognition through her nameless blogs for BBC Urdu. Through such blogs, she is able to disseminate her dedication towards getting education, her life struggle and threats to her life under Taliban rule to the international community. As a result of her activism, she wins both appreciation and life-threats from Taliban. In the wake of numerous warnings, they target her for challenging their authority. At the age of 15, Malala is shot in the head by a Taliban gunman when she is riding a school bus towards her home. The attack leaves her in critical condition, however fortunately, she survives the miraculously.

In addition, the memoir unpacks the story of Malala's shift to England for treatment, her recovery and her development as a global advocate for girls' education and human rights. It explores her relationships with her family, her determination to continue her education and the challenges she had to face as she becomes a prominent figure on the international stage. Malala's memoir also delves into the cultural life of the Pushtoons in different parts of the country. It appears to unpack historical and political developments in Pakistan. Besides, it provides compelling insights into the struggles for women's rights in different parts of the country. Throughout the memoir, Malala emphasizes the power of education and the significance of standing up for one's beliefs, irrespective of the risks involved. "*I Am Malala*" (2013) is not only a personal account of one girl's supplanted journey but also an indication of agency of the human spirit. As well, it inculcates the power of education in creating and bringing social change for the betterment of the society and the world.

Statement of the Problem

Patriarchal social structures envisage heterogeneous strategies to perpetuate their dominance over the women. They utilise diversified ideologies and social institutions to reinforce their authority. Schemes of masculinity to naturalise this gender inequality appear to be repressive in nature. Realisation of being dominated generates sense of equality in social and gender terms. Women devise various schemes to achieve their aspirations to be considered parallel to the men. For this purpose, they employ available choices and take actions accordingly. Dominant social elements try to restrict the women to their conventional status as the women attempt to claim their agency. This research study is set to examine the struggle between the women who claim their agency and phallogentric oppressive forces of the society. It explores women's strategies of claiming agency and schemes of the patriarchal structures to constrain such efforts of agency. For this purpose, this study is limited to the critical analysis of memoirs that include Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) and Malala Yousafzai's *I Am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* (2013). The study uses critical framings of feminist theory of agency and Althusser's frames of ideology to investigate the problems of women's agency and repression of women.

Research Questions

Following are research questions for this study;

- 1) What are socio political and cultural structures that hinder the ways of attaining women agency as discussed in the selected texts?
- 2) What strategies are adopted by women to attain their agency in the selected texts?
- 3) How do socio political and cultural structures suppress women agency as depicted in the selected texts?

Significance of the Study

The present study is significant as it unfolds the socio-political and cultural structures that oppress the women in every male-dominated social setting. It presents a realistic picture of a patriarchal society and demonstrates how young girls are restricted from getting education. It provides an insight to the women and inspires them to envisage diversified strategies to get education and combat masculine domination. In addition, the study is significant in the sense that it presents a plethora of lived experiences of marginalized women to the readership as it analyses memoirs produced by marginalized women. Memoirs, as a form of autobiography, are packed with personal experiences of agency and repression specifically in patriarchal landscapes. Hence, analysis of the selected memoirs is likely to enlighten the oppressed women of Pakistan and the rest of the world. Likewise, its significance lies in the fact it motivating and emboldens the women to attain their agency. As it provides instances of claiming agency from Iranian and Pakistani socio-political contexts, it carries a degree of potential to incite young girls to materialize their dreams of getting an education. Further, it seems significant as it draws parallels between socio-cultural formations depicted in the selected memoirs and existing socio-cultural scenarios in Pakistani society.

Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted on the topic of the attainment of agency by women in different socio-political contexts. Conducted studies bring to the fore the resistance of women against their oppression. Further, they demonstrate the strategies of women to attain their agency for multiple purposes. Their findings contribute to a broader understanding of the restrictions on female agency and shed light on the transformative power of women's narratives and experiences. Nevertheless, there exist quite a few research studies that encompass schemes of the women to achieve their agency for the purpose of getting education. Research scholarship seems to have forsaken the issue of claiming agency of women for the sake of getting education. Issues of claiming agency and its suppression by the dominant social structures, as a joint research project, seem the least investigated problems specifically with reference to the memoirs. So much so, this research study expatiates upon the examination of issues of claiming female agency and its suppression with its focus on the memoirs, a sub-genre of autobiography writing. The analysis of this study is premised on Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) and Malala's *I Am Malala* (2013).

In this connection, a study conducted by Syamsiah (2016) uses a qualitative design and the critical perspective (Genre of Critical Theory), to explain the narrative of gender-based violence (violence against women) in the novel *I am Malala*. The result of the study illustrated the violence and gender-based injustice or inequality of women produced in the novel "*I Am*

Malala". Likewise, Bigdeli & Marzban (2018) analyze the themes of feminism, agency, and resistance in *"Reading Lolita in Tehran"*. It examines how literature acts as a medium through which female characters in Nafisi's memoir seek agency, challenge societal norms, and assert their identities in a repressive environment. Moreover, Durrani (2018), emphasizes education's empowering role in *"I Am Malala."* Malala's pursuit of education and activism for girls' education demonstrate how knowledge can transform lives and empower individuals to challenge patriarchal oppression.

Refaat (2018) conducted a comparative study of *"I Am Malala"* and *"Reading Lolita in Tehran"* and explored feminism, education, and empowerment as themes in *"I Am Malala"* and analyzed the strategies employed by Malala to attain agency and challenge the repressive norms in her society. It highlights how education becomes a means of resistance and empowerment for Malala and other girls facing similar challenges. Similarly, Makki (2019), explored the strategies employed by Nafisi's students to claim their agency through acts of resistance and emphasized the transformative power of literature in their lives. Likewise, a study by Hussain & Mukhtar (2020) explores the representation of Pakistani women in *"I Am Malala"*, from A Feminist Perspective. It highlights the various dimensions of female agency and the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies. Another study conducted by Nejad (2020) explored the role of literature in fostering empathy and understanding among diverse groups of women in *"Reading Lolita in Tehran"*. This study emphasized the potential of literature to bridge cultural and social strictures. Likewise, Moallem (2021) on the other hand analyzed the memoir within the framework of "critical nostalgia", and explored how Nafisi's use of literature allowed women to resist the oppressive social and cultural environment. In the same manner, Nasir & Haryanti (2022) used an analytical descriptive study and a sociological approach to draw upon the fight of Malala Yousafzai for the education of women in her country. The authors analyzed the socio-cultural and political context of Swat Valley, shedding light on the challenges faced by women in this region. They discussed the suppression of women's rights and the ideological motivations of the Taliban, emphasizing how education becomes a powerful tool in clamming the agency. The finding indicated the role of women and the oppression of women still exist in our societies.

Theoretical Framework

This research project is premised on the struggles of female characters to attain their agency while living in male-dominated settings. It brings to the fore those patriarchal schemes that obstruct the efforts to claim female agency. Such patriarchal system operates in the form of certain ideologies that strengthen patriarchal domination in the society. In this context, theorization of agency by various feminist scholars and Louis Althusser's

theoretical understanding of ideology seem plausible for this study. Application of critical assumptions of feminist theory of agency and ideology is likely to surface the struggles of the protagonists and other female characters to claim their agency. As well, it is instrumental in investigating and foregrounding the role of ideological and repressive state apparatuses in suppressing the female agency. Feminist thinkers have defined agency differently keeping in mind its certain aspects. To put it in simple terms, agency is an ability of an individual to make individualized choices and follow through with corresponding actions to achieve his aspirations. Trites (1997) defines agency as, "it relates to the protagonist's ability to affirm her personality while making her own decisions and acting on those decisions" (1997,06). Likewise, Charrad (2010) comes up with a definition of agency as, "a capacity to act, insofar as individuals are able to act, they exert some form of agency" (517). Moreover, Charrad states that agency is claimed in "specific social structures in given times and places" that vary in different social settings. This study, specifically, focuses on the relationship between the structures and agency.

In a similar vein, Butler (1993) presents her views on agency and brings forth a variant dimension of agency. She puts it as, "agency is a reiterative or re-articulatory practice, immanent to power" (Butler, xxiii). Butler's notion of agency appears distinct since she concentrates more on the internal motivation of the individuals rather than the external oppositional forces. For her, immanent motivation, which she names Power, becomes the source of agency of an individual. She puts it as, "Agency of a subject manifests when power is assumed by an individual" (Butler, 13). Such definitions and theorization of agency suggest that social structures, around an individual, are the forces that compel him/her to make choices, take decisions, and claim his/her agency to materialise his/her ambitions. These are the social moralities that keep hindering the individual from attaining his aspirations. Smith and Watson (2001) spotlight these social structures and name them "Cultural Strictures". They state this fact as, "They [individuals] are governed by cultural strictures about self-presentation in public" (42). These social structures operate in a variety of manners in different societies. In some cases, they demonstrate such a strong hold that they deny any female agency. In some other instances, their grip, over the women, is so relaxing that "power of subordination evaporates" (Fraser, 1992). Foucault (1980), in this respect, contends that there exist social structures that might be restricting female agency and, simultaneously, enabling it to take place.

Althusser (1970) theorises such cultural strictures and social structures that function to restrict the individuals from attaining their agency. He divides them into two distinct typologies: Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). Furthermore, he enlists the institutions functioning under these two categories. He explains that Repressive State

Apparatuses (RSAs) includes, "the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc" (14). According to Althusser, the ultimate objective of such apparatuses is to "maintain the power of the ruling class through the exploitation of the labor power of the working class" (143). Margison and Leonard (2012) express the mechanisms through which Repressive State Apparatuses operate as, [they are] designed to protect ruling class interests by forcefully suppressing popular dissent (06). Likewise, Althusser (1970) presents major components of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) as, "the religious ISA, the educational ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the trade-union ISA, the communications ISAs, the cultural ISA" (14). Along with, Althusser specifically brings into focus the functionality of such apparatuses. For him, the former groups "functions by violence" (1970) whereas the latter ones exploit ideology to restrict the individuals from materializing their aspirations and claiming their agency.

Like Althusser, Brennen (2000) brings to the fore the purpose of employing Ideological State Apparatuses that is to control the thoughts of working classes and to direct them in a particular direction. For Brennen, such institutions are exploited to "reinforce the status quo" and pacify the individuals in such a way that they do not challenge their exploitation and existing position in society (04). Moreover, these ideologies help elite classes inculcate specific images and memories in the minds of individuals and help them erase certain images from society. Such institutions impose a specific situation as the "correct" one in society. Margison and Leonard (2012) foreground the same objective of these institutions that is to "manipulate public opinion in a manner conducive to protecting hegemonic interests" (06). Though, there might be a difference between the ways both types of apparatuses function. However, their ultimate expectations appear to be identical. Most of the time, both these forms of apparatuses cooperate with each other and function as a joint force to accomplish their ends. Brennen (2000) reveals this reality that the Ideological State Apparatuses work with the Repressive State Apparatuses, recognized as, "machines of repression" (05). In a similar manner, Ekin (2011) theorizes such restrictions slightly differently and recognizes them as "Determinative Forces" (120).

Research Methodology

The research design used for the present qualitative study is content analysis that utilises a comparative approach to examine the themes of women's repression and attainment of agency in the autobiographical works "*I Am Malala*" (2013) and "*Reading Lolita in Tehran*"(2003). This research uses content analysis. Which is a qualitative approach used to describe the themes and patterns underlying the content of selected text. This type of research typically involves examining forms of documents such as text,

images, symbols, and similar sources. Since the study is qualitative in nature, so the data is analyzed using thematic analysis. For this purpose, the analysis of recurring themes and subthemes related to the attainment of women agency in the selected texts is conducted. Moreover, it applies critical frames of Althusser's ideology (1970) to examine the role of ideological state apparatuses and repressive state apparatuses in the selected texts. It engages various feminist critical approaches to explore the agency of the women in the selected texts.

Analysis of the Texts

Both the selected texts have been produced by women from different socio-political and historical landscapes. Both the authors face heterogeneous repressive elements that hamper them from claiming their agency. Though seemingly located in different contexts, these forces share certain traits for which they might be analysed comparatively. One of the striking similarities is that oppressive forces, in both the texts, belong to the same religious background. They declare to implement a specific version of Islamic principles in their respective jurisdiction, Iran and Swat valley. Likewise, they try to restrict the young girls from getting education. They impose various laws to distance the young women from educational institutions and specific contents which they consider unethical or anti-religion. Nevertheless, female characters of both the texts struggle to attain their agency despite the threats and restrictions of phallogocentric elements of the society. Attempts of patriarchal elements to keep the women ignorant carry connections with the "dark" envisioned by Cixous in *The Laugh of Medusa* (1976). Cixous contends that conventional masculinity makes utmost efforts to confine the women to the ignorance that she establishes as 'dark'. She defines it as, "that dark which people have been trying to make them [women] accept as their attribute" (876). Additionally, the very act of writing these memoirs by female authors suggests the claim of female agency. While living in male-dominated society, Nafisi and Malala have challenged the traditions of representation of women by their counterparts. By writing about themselves, the authors make an effort to claim their agency in spite of the constraints of oppositional forces. In this regard, Cixous seems to encourage the women to write about themselves. She puts it as, "Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement" (875). Writing of the memoirs seems to be an inspiration from the encouragement of Helen Cixous. In a similar way, hooks (2015) regards this act of writing as an "expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice" (29).

Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (2003) seems to be packed with demonstrations of female agency and functioning of cultural strictures. One might find the protagonist and five leading female characters

struggling to attain their agency. Along with, cultural strictures in the form of Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses are seen operating rigorously in the wake of the Iranian Revolution. Specifically, religion and family operate on the parameters of Ideological State Apparatuses. Nafisi delineates the decade following the revolution in Iran along with certain images from the pre-revolution Iran as well. She draws a comparison between pre and post revolution Iran to unearth the nature of restrictions on women's agency imposed by religion and family. Both these institutions operate to strengthen patriarchal forces of the society. Wearing veil for women in public places and in educational institutions becomes mandatory in post-revolution Iran. Nafisi narrates the situation as, "the revolution that imposed the scarf" (09). Iranian regime utilizes religion as an ideological apparatus to ensure "culture of silence" (Young, 2004). Brennen (2000) establishes that the objective of ideological state apparatuses is to restrict the agency of resisting masses and to steer them to a particular direction. Imposition of veil regulates agency of Mahshid, a student of Nafisi, who has been wearing veil before revolution. It takes away her identity and tarnishes her effort to individualise herself. Nafisi notes it as, "When the revolution forced the scarf on others, her action became meaningless" (09). According to Margison and Leonard (2012), the purpose of such kind of imposition is to safeguard the "hegemonic interests".

Likewise, family acts like an ideological state apparatus in Nafisi's memoir (2003) as it places restrictions on female agency. Young ladies are restricted to go outside without the permission and company of their close relatives. Nafisi describes familial patriarchal attitudes faced by all her female students. Family background of all girls bears witness to the fact that family institution functions to check female agency and strengthens the hegemonic regime. Nafisi mentions Yassi's family as, "To her family's strict religious background" (20). Sanaz's situation seems not much different from Yassi's who is continuously facing gender discrimination on the part of her brother and family. Likewise, Nassrin's father is too strict to allow her to attend literature class. In this case, family functions as an ideological state apparatus that utilizes certain ideologies to control the young girls and prevent them from materializing their aspirations. Hooks (2015) notes an identical role of her family when she decides to adopt writing as an instrument against the established social structures. She puts it as, "While punishing me, my parents often spoke about the necessity of breaking my spirit" (26). Likewise, Althusser (1970) seems to establish the same function of ideological state apparatuses that they perform by constructing and propagating specific ideas.

Like ideological state apparatuses, repressive state apparatuses are seen operating rigorously in Nafisi's memoir (2003). These institutions oppress the people so much that they consider themselves as "Figments of someone else's dreams" (19). They are engaged in inflicting violence on people as they are characterized by violence (Althusser, 1970). To implement all the newly

launched laws of Ayatullaah Khomeini, enforcement agencies are there to punish people and put them in prison in case of non-compliance. Institutions of the State are out to give a new identity to the women. Nafisi narrates it as, "The regime that ruled them had tried to make their of the regime's definition of them as Muslim women" (19). These institutions operate in such a way that they "deny any female agency" (Fraser, 1992). However, Nafisi's students and many others become determined to claim their agency by protesting against the imposition of veil. They gather to protest against the ordinance of the veil in the capital of the country. It suggests that such institutions reinforce the ruling classes as they are instrumental in inter pelleting the individuals.

Besides, *Reading Lolitta in Tehran* (2003) is replete with glaring manifestations of female agency. In the first place, Nafisi has the ambition to impart the literary knowledge that she gained from America. There are objections to the contents she is teaching and her not wearing a veil. Cultural forces and state institutions intend to give her a different identity. However, she is determined to claim her agency by refusing to observe the veil and follow the curriculum of the university. To achieve her aspiration, she organizes a literature class of seven female students from various socio-political backgrounds at her home. In addition, she claims her agency in the case of the veil. Such barriers have been placed on Nafisi's agency by the state institutions and its policies. In this connection, Puri (2005) argues that policies of any state are responsibilities for "women's lives and agency". Nevertheless, she considers the wearing of the veil as the suppression of her freedom and her rights. She cancels her class to attend the protests against the imposition of the veil and challenges University authorities. Similar to Nafisi, her students claim agency as they desire to furnish themselves with literary knowledge. To attain their ambition, they organize a literary class with Azar Nafisi as their teacher. They claim their agency that leads them towards the achievement of their ambition going against the restrictions of their families. Nafisi and her students attain their agency in such a manner that the power of subordination evaporates" (Fraser, 17).

I Am Malala (2013) forms a unique ambiance of suppression of women's agency by cultural structures and, in turn, attainment of agency. Female agency appears in constant struggle with "social structures, social institutions, cultural norms and specific groups" (Charrad, 2010) throughout the memoir. Malala traces the lineage of her name in her female-ancestors and reveals that she has been named on "Malalai of Maiwand" who was very vibrant and vocal lady of Yousafzai tribe of Afghanistan. By drawing this comparison, Malala looks determined to claim her agency and challenge oppositional elements. Her action of tracing her name is analogous with bell hooks adopting her name from her maternal lineage. Hooks describes that woman as, "A strong woman was someone able to make her own way, a woman

who possessed traits often associated with only men, she would do whatever was necessary to survive" (270). Since her childhood, Malala yearns to learn education and become a politician in the future. Nevertheless, she has to claim her agency to materialize her aspiration of getting education as certain cultural forces and social institutions hamper her agency.

Repressive State Apparatuses operate in the form of Taliban movement in Swat Valley as they oppose the education of girls in schools. Although, Talibans are not recognized regimes, they exercise power in the vicinity of Swat like a regime. They are operating like Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) as they implement specific ideologies "to control the masses" (Brennan, 2000) and strengthen the hegemony of Talibans. Despite such threats, Malala rises up to claim her agency and challenges prevailing cultural and social structures. She opposes and speaks against the illegitimacy of Taliban. Consequently, she is attacked and then shifted to England where she avails a chance to get higher education. She participates in educational conferences held to promote education for the girls around the globe where. While living in England, educational institutions and television channels invite her to speak on the education of the girls worldwide. In this case, Talibans, acting as repressive state apparatuses, constrain the young girl from claiming her agency on the one hand. On the contrary, they provide her an opportunity to materialize her aspirations. Giddens (1979) notes the same feature of the social structures as, "same structures can be at the same time constraining and enabling" (1979). As a sum up, Malala's memoir unpacks a significant synergy between different typologies of state apparatuses and women's strategies of claiming their agency. Moreover, it provides insights for the understanding of challenges faced by women in claiming their agency while living in a patriarchal society.

Conclusion

Discussion of both the selected memoirs proposes that the agency of the subject emerges through the immanent motivation to achieve his ambition. It is this internal motivation that prompts the individual to function, in his capacity, to attain his aspiration. As well, the intervention of the cultural and social strictures triggers claims of agency in the subject. It enables the individual to resist against the external forces in action to constrain his agency. Both memoirs emphasize the importance of individual agency in the face of repression. Malala's refusal to be silenced and Nafisi's secret book club express the persistence and strength of women who seek to reclaim their rights and identities. These stories serve as a powerful prompt that education, knowledge, and collective actions prove instrumental in challenging oppressive systems and achieving gender equality and attaining agency. Besides, repressive forces in both the memoirs appear as manifestations of

Ideological State Apparatuses and Repressive State Apparatuses critically understood by Althusser (1970). *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) and *I Am Malala* (2013) inspire readers to reflect on the universal struggle for agency against oppression of women perpetuated by patriarchal conventions. These memoirs remind us of the ongoing fight for women's rights and the necessity of supporting and raising women's voices worldwide. As well, the discussion suggests that these cultural restraints provide the individual with the energy to combat them as the protagonists of these memoirs have done. Nevertheless, such cultural and social strictures possess the power to give a new identity to the individuals.

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