

---

Javed Iqbal\*  
Shamim Ali\*\*

---

## **Feminist Analysis of Twinkle Khanna's Short Story *the Legend of Lakshmi Prasad***

### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper conducts a socialist feminist analysis of Twinkle Khanna's "The Legend of Lakshmi Prasad." By examining the protagonist's experiences within a patriarchal Indian society, the study explores themes of economic inequality, domestic labor, and the intersectionality of gender and class. Drawing on Zillah R. Eisenstein's theory of feminism, the analysis investigates how Lakshmi Prasad's lack of financial independence and excessive domestic burdens contribute to her marginalized status. A qualitative close-reading approach was employed to analyze the text and its portrayal of gender dynamics. The paper proposes practical solutions, such as promoting women's economic empowerment and challenging traditional gender roles, to address these issues and create a more equitable society. Women in the subcontinent, since 19<sup>th</sup> century, have been facing a systemic marginalization and domestic abuse due to deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities within a patriarchal society. The Indian English literature, with its rich tradition of exploring social and cultural issues, provides a powerful platform for examining these experiences. This research aims not only to shed light on the ongoing struggles faced by women in a male-dominated society but also to propose practical solutions that could empower them and elevate their social status.*

**Keywords:** *Female Exploitation, Patriarchy, women empowerment, social feminism*

---

\* Lecturer, Riphah International University

\*\* Associate Professor, Riphah International University

## **Introduction**

For centuries, women have been seen as less important than men in societies worldwide. This prejudice is deeply ingrained in many cultures and religions. Even in supposedly progressive societies like China, Confucianism has historically marginalized women. Confucius believed that women were naturally arrogant and rebellious, requiring strict obedience. Girls in China were taught to be polite and submissive, while boys were educated in subjects like reading, writing, poetry, and math.

This serious marginalization of women throughout the world gave rise to the first feminist movement in 1960s. Although, that movement is considered to be the landmark of the contemporary post-modernist era but the fact is that the struggle for women rights started centuries before the feminist movement of 1960s. However, it cannot be denied that without the feminist movement of 1960s, women would not have been able to gain the place and rights that they are enjoying right now in the patriarchal society. Women representation in literature was also quite oppressed before the first ever feminist movement. The females were not allowed to express their views through writing and even the male writers used to represent them as nothing more than a “domestic chattel”. However, things started to change after the feminist criticism of 1970s when male writers started portraying females in strong and influential characters (Yosifon & Hanson, 2003). Gradually, females from different parts of the world also gained their place as acclaimed writers and the overall perception of feminism started to evolve.

Socialist feminism came around in order to highlight the issues that women experience while dwelling in a capitalist society. Regardless of whether a woman works outside the home or not, she often faces challenges due to financial dependence and household responsibilities. Barbara Ehrenreich (2005) argues that throughout history and across cultures, women have been marginalized by patriarchal societies, objectified as property, and burdened with domestic labor like childbirth, child-rearing, and personal services for their male partners. This social injustice is rooted in the belief that men are physically superior and have the power to control women's reproductive abilities.

The idea of socialist feminism basically emerged from the Marxism that represents the class division in a capitalist society. Marxist view of the capitalist society represents the economic inequality that arises as a result of unequal distribution of the resources. Marxism has divided the society into two different classes where the minority of people is included in the capitalist class which means that they own all the wealth, whereas the other class, the

lower class is dependent on this upper class. Due to their dependency on the upper class, the lower class tends to indulge in different types of labor in order to make the living. The social injustice arises where the upper class sets all the rules and makes huge profits by paying lesser wages to the labor class. Socialist feminism also holds the similar notion where the men are considered to be the capitalist class and women are suffering as labor class (Ehrenreich, 2005).

This paper focuses at exploring the socialist feminist aspect of Twinkle Khanna's short story *The Legend of Lakshmi Prasad*. This study is aimed at addressing the issues that women are experiencing in the capitalist society due to the gender stereotypes. Men, like always, assume the position of capitalist rulers, whereas women suffer the consequences of being included in the labor class. For the purpose of this study, we have used a traditional Indian short story written by Twinkle Khanna. The short story "*The Legend of the Lakshmi Prasad*" is the story about a girl who challenges the way women are treated in her village by presenting a practically applicable solution for their empowerment. The story provides a deep depiction of how the women are being marginalized in the patriarchal society. However, this story is different from all the other contemporary fiction of its time because it also suggests a solution that could help women attain financial and social empowerment.

The story also highlights the issues experienced by women in Indian patriarchal society. In today's world, women who are educated and possess professional skills are able to lead financially independent lives but the women who are completely illiterate have to lead domestic lives. The story portrays a village where people are dwelling in poverty so they marry off their daughters as soon they reach the age of puberty. Where this early marriage reduces the burden of the father, it increases burden of responsibilities for the young girl. She not only has to bear the hardships of her in-laws but she also remains financially dependent on her husband for the rest of her life. Even though his story is based in a small village of India but it highlights the issues that are experienced by women living in different parts of the world. The major themes of this story are the financial dependence of women on men, the exploitation of women in the patriarchal society and woman empowerment.

### **Problem Statement**

Since the colonial era, women in India have faced systemic marginalization and domestic abuse due to deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities within a patriarchal society. Indian English literature, with its rich tradition of

exploring social and cultural issues, offers a powerful platform for examining these experiences. This research aims not only to shed light on the ongoing struggles faced by women in a male-dominated society but also to propose practical solutions that could empower them and elevate their social status.

Although, a large number of short stories are available on feminist issues but due to time constraints this research focuses only on one short story. Due to time constraints, only one theory has been selected for this research i.e. the socialist feminist theory. As the research has been conducted on a single short story, I have not applied all the principles of socialist feminist theory.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does Twinkle Khanna's "The Legend of Lakshmi Prasad" challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes within a patriarchal society?
2. In what ways does the protagonist, Lakshmi Prasad, exhibit agency and resistance against patriarchal norms and expectations?
3. How does Khanna's portrayal of male characters contribute to the overall exploration of gender dynamics and power imbalances in the story?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is aimed at presenting the exploitation and lack of financial independence of women in patriarchal society as presented in the short story of Twinkle Khanna. The research focuses on the issues and reasons that lead women towards exploitation and the social and psychological pressures she has to endure as a result of that exploitation. The present study makes a helpful contribution to the literature by presenting ways through which not only the academically and professionally skilled but also completely illiterate women could lead an empowered life in the society. In the poverty-infested countries such as India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, the birth of the daughter is considered to be a grave sin because she increases financial responsibilities of the father instead of promising him a financially secure future. However, this research not only highlights all the possible reasons to celebrate the birth of a daughter but it also suggests as to how a female child can bring financial security to her parents.

### **Literature Review**

Twinkle Khanna was born to actor parents Rajesh Khanna and Dimple Kapadia and made her acting debut in 1995 from a Bollywood movie Barsaat. Due to best performance in her first movie, she was awarded with "Filmfare

Award for Best Female Debut". She left the acting profession after getting married to another film actor Akshay Kumar and pursued different businesses. She opened her own chain of interior designing stores in Mumbai called "White Window". She also founded her own production house called "Grazing Goat Pictures". Gradually, she resorted to writing and won Crossword Book Award 2016 for Mrs. Funnybones, the very first book she wrote ("Twinkle Khanna"). Her second book, *The Legend of Lakshmi Prasad* also gained great acclaim as the book highlights sensitive issues like feminism and women empowerment but in a light manner (Yosifon & Hanson, 2003).

Female exploitation in the patriarchal society is a common issue due to which various researches have been done on this topic over the last few decades. For this purpose, we have selected some of the researchers conducted during the last the last ten years. The literature discussed within this section has been collected with the help of Google and Google Scholar.

During this research, it became evident that female exploitation is obviously happening to Indo-Pak subcontinent. Research conducted by Haj-Yahia (2005) on the oppressive behavior that women belonging to Palestinian society experience in Israel. He states that due to the patriarchal structure of the society, Palestinian men tend to enjoy superior treatment of the society and also have superiority over the resources. Palestinian society holds the general perception that skills like intelligence, wisdom, knowledge and professional prestige are only held by men so they are better than women in all aspects. Due to their sense of superiority, men tend to hold patriarchal beliefs towards women such as negative attitudes, treating her with disrespect, and considering her to be a sex object. According to Dr. Abeda Sultana (2011), the concept of patriarchy is commonly used to imply the rule of the father but it significantly stands for a family system when male holds the dominant position over rest of the members of the family.

It is generally perceived that women after gaining education and professional skills could lead financially independent lives. However, this is not the case in patriarchal society where men are considered to be the breadwinners of the family and women are expected to stay at home and rear the children. In most of the cases, they also have to take care of their in-laws. So even if a woman is working at a reputable position, she is forced to leave after marriage due to the pressure of her domestic responsibilities. A study conducted by Ravindran and Baral (2014), during which both of the researchers ponder over the factors that compel a woman to leave her job after getting married. Although some of the women resume their jobs but the number of women leaving their jobs is comparatively higher. The major reason behind this issue is the societal burden on a woman due to which she has to fulfill her responsibilities as wife, sister,

mother, daughter and daughter-in-law. On the other hand, men only have to fulfill one responsibility and that is to bear the financial expenses of their family (Ravindran, Baral, & Rupashree, 2014). The research provides suggestions for the financial independence of illiterate women as well as literate women of the society.

## **Research Methodology**

Keeping in view the significance of literary text, the qualitative research method has been used. The most common style of qualitative research is the description of literary text which has been followed in the analysis of this study. Literary text has been analyzed with the lens of social feminist theory for the purpose of social constructivism. The themes of the story have been discussed along with the actions of the characters in the story. However, the plot of the story plays major part in this study as it not only highlights the issues experienced by women in a patriarchal society but it also provides the solution through which women could lead strong lives.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In order to find out the practical ways through which women could be provided with financial independence and their status in the society could be elevated so the lens of feminism with Zillah Eisenstein's socialist feminist theory has been used. This theory has been used because of its direct link with the capitalist patriarchy. Zillah has used this term "capitalist patriarchy" in her theoretical framework because she strongly believes that financial power lies solely in the hands of men when it comes to the patriarchal society. She has conducted the political analysis of socialist feminism by understanding the relation between capitalism and patriarchy. She has discussed about the historical women exploitation by expressing her thoughts over the division of labor. Although, her idea of "division of labor" has been derived from Marx and Engels's discussion regarding the division of labor during the pre-capitalist era but she relates it with socialist feminism by describing it as the domestic work that is imposed on the women (Eisenstein, 2004).

Eisenstein is of the opinion that for women, the responsibilities imposed by her family are considered to be natural actions for which she does not receive any sort of financial compensation. Eisenstein regards this entire idea against the norms of the economic society and considers it to be grave injustice. Secondly, the idea of sex also creates a distinction between the positions of male and female in the society. Marx and Engels claim that when

woman reproduces as a result of the sex, she and her child become slaves to the man as they become his property. Marx and Engels not only discuss the difference between man and woman on the basis of their sexes and the woman's responsibility for child breeding but they also discuss these differences according to the class conflict on the basis of economic power. Engels is of the opinion that economic elements play an important part in the structuring of a family due to which man is considered to be a bourgeoisie within the family, whereas the woman is considered to be the proletariat within the family (Eisenstein, 2004).

Engels has argued in the article that even though oppression equals to the exploitation but women oppression is much more complex than just being linked to exploitation. He claims that if women are being oppressed on the basis of domestic work then men are also oppressed on the basis of their professional work. He suggested that this issue could only be resolved if the responsibility of private housework is shifted to the public industry. However, Engels state that this issue will still prevail as woman will have to deal with the private housework in that case too (Eisenstein, 2004). Eisenstein has disagreed with Marx and Engels's arguments and claimed that oppression and exploitation are not equal concepts in any way.

Eisenstein has regarded oppression as the power with respect to the capitalist and patriarchal relations. According to her, the concept of exploitation is included in the oppression however; it does not mean that oppression is based on exploitation only. Women will be considered oppressed if she is working in the labor force in the capitalist society but is exploited on the basis of her status in the patriarchal sexual hierarchy due to which she has to fulfill multiple responsibilities as mother, a housewife, and a laborer (Eisenstein, 2004). Eisenstein has claimed that most of the female issues arise because of the fact that patriarchy and capitalism are considered two separate terms. However, she has emphasized that both of these concepts are interlinked as they incur a clear impact on the sexual division of labor and society within the family. Eisenstein claims that capitalism uses patriarchy and patriarchy could only be supported with the help of capital (Eisenstein, 2004).

## **Discussion and Recommendations**

In *The Legend of Lakshmi Prasad*, oppressive women society is presented by the author where girls are married at quite early age. The story revolves around a young girl Lakshmi Prasad who is leading an innocent life. In Lakshmi's village, the girls are considered a burden so her village is symbolizing a patriarchal region where even female babies are not only detested but are drowned in the river in some of the cases. Just like all the

other young girls of the village, Lakshmi's elder sister Sukriti also gets married at early age. However, the actual issues start after Sukriti's marriage when she returns home after getting tortured by her husband and in-laws. In the meanwhile, Lakshmi had matured despite her young age as she had to fulfill the responsibilities that were previously fulfilled by her elder sister.

Even though, Lakshmi's father Bijendra Prasad is very fond of his daughters and is showed as a hardworking farmer who is content with his life but one day, he reveals his inner-most desires in front of his daughter when he tells her that sons are important. He tells her about a person Shravan Kumar, who takes care of his blind parents. His words clearly demonstrate the ideology of a patriarchal society. *"That is why a son is so important, for his old parents to lean on. With daughters, all our life savings go away in giving and giving"* (Khanna 9). Lakshmi, who by that time has reached the age of sixteen, is a mature observer so she clearly understands what her father means by those words. Right after Lakshmi's elder sister's marriage, instead of feeling relieved, her father remains tense whenever Sukriti comes to visit them because her in-laws always send her back with demands for more gifts and dowry. Despite the fact that Bijendra Prasad knows his daughter is suffering, he keeps a blind eye to the entire situation and states that *"Sukriti is all right"* (Khanna 9).

However, things become quite difficult for them when Sukriti is sent back to her parent's house permanently. After a few days, her parents realize the Sukriti is pregnant and even though, the in-laws are informed of the latest development, they receive no reaction from them. During her pregnancy, just like her father Sukriti also expresses her inner-most desires in front of Lakshmi and claims that she hopes her baby is a boy. *"Lakshmi, I hope this baby is a boy. Life is easier for them. We girls have nothing. We go to live in other people's houses and they treat us like slaves"* (Khanna 10). She also tells her sister about the misbehavior that she experienced at her in-laws house. Like traditional patriarchal society, she was also deprived of all the financial rights and was ordered to bear the heavy burden of domestic chores despite her frail health. While listening to her sister, Lakshmi starts gazing at the mangoes and asks her sister that why she cannot collect all the mangoes on the tree and sell them in the market. This way she could earn more money for her family. Sukriti tells her that this is because the mango tree does not belong to Lakshmi.

Months later, Sukriti gives birth to a baby girl due to which all the women helping her during the labor fall silent and express grief. When Sukriti has given birth, her mother decides to send her back to her husband's house. But before she leaves her parental house, her husband sends her the divorce papers claiming that Sukriti gave birth to an illegitimate child. Few days later when Lakshmi's sister and her parents are still grieving the divorce and destruction of two innocent lives, Lakshmi provides them and the entire



village with a practical solution to empower every single girl of the village. With the help of Shankar Singh (the oldest man in the village), Lakshmi starts a tradition according to which, ten mango seeds will be planted on the birth of every single girl in the village. The entire village will take care of those trees until the girl grows up and assumes the hold of those trees. The mango trees in the story symbolized the financial independence of women.

Women are not able to escape this exploitation because they are financially dependent on men. However, if women are able to empower themselves by becoming financially independent then they can easily fight back the exploitation they encounter in the patriarchal society. Also, there is the need to free her from the burden of domestic burden that she bears alone at home. In the Indian society, most of the women have to live in joint family system after marriage due to which they experience serious burden of domestic chores and insufficient financial support. Such issues could only be resolved if women are provided with their due rights of property, education and are provided the resources to start their own business so that they could stand on their own.

## **References**

- Barry, Peter J. *Beginning Theory*. Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2007. Print.
- Eisenstein, Z. (2004). *Constructing a theory of capitalist patriarchy and socialist feminism*. Brill.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. "What Is Socialist Feminism?" *Monthly Review* 57.3 (2005): 70. Web.
- Guisso, Richard. "Thunder Over the Lake: The Five Classics and The Perception of Woman in Early China". *WOMEN IN CHINA: Current Directions in Historical Scholarship*, Vol 8, No. 3, 1981, pp. 47–61., Accessed 1 Feb 2019
- Khanna, Twinkle. *The Legend of Lakshmi Prasad*. New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2016. Print.
- Muhammad M, H.-Y. (2005). On the characteristics of patriarchal societies, gender inequality, and wife abuse: The case of Palestinian society. *Adalah's Newsletter*, 20(1), 1–6.
- Ravindran, Baral, B., & Rupashree. (2014). Factors affecting the work attitudes of Indian re-entry women in the IT sector. *Vikalpa*, 39(2), 31–42.
- "Review: The Legend of Lakshmi Prasad - Times of India." *The Times of India*. N.p., 2019. Web. 16 May 2019.
- Sultana, Abeda. "Patriarchy and Women'S Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis." *The Arts Faculty Journal* (2011): n. pag. Web. 14 May 2019.
- "The Legend of Lakshmi Prasad." *Goodreads.com*. N.p., 2019. Web. 16 May 2019.
- "Twinkle Khanna." *Timesofindia.indiatimes.com*. N.p., 2019. Web. 14 May 2019.