

# Voices on the Margins: An Intersectional Study of Women Oppression and Agency in Jasmin Darznik's Memoir *The Good Daughter*

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**Abstract**—This study employs intersectionality theory to analyse Jasmin Darznik's memoir *The Good Daughter: A Memoir of My Mother's Hidden Life* (2012), focusing on the multifaceted oppression of Iranian women shaped by the intertwined forces of patriarchy, religion, culture, and class. This topic is significant as it illuminates the complex sociopolitical structures that marginalise Muslim women in Iranian society, where gender identity and agency are constrained by overlapping systems of power. Women's personal histories are often erased in rigid patriarchal societies. Darznik's memoir serves as a vital narrative that challenges these oppressive frameworks by giving voice to the silenced histories of her mother and her grandmother. Through storytelling as an act of feminist resistance, the memoir confronts the secrecy and shame imposed by societal norms that suppress women's autonomy and their agency. The memoir exposes the multilayered violence endured by women, including forced marriage and honour codes, while highlighting subtle and overt forms of resilience such as education, self-expression, emotional endurance, and intergenerational solidarity. By critically engaging with Darznik's text, this paper highlights the importance of reclaiming marginalised voices and histories to foster an understanding of gendered experiences under intersectional oppression. It challenges the dominant sociopolitical frameworks confining women and affirms their right to autonomy, dignity, and voice. This research contributes to feminist scholarship by illuminating the transformative potential of personal narratives in advancing the understanding of Iranian women's lived realities and challenging dominant discourses.

**Index Terms**—intersectionality, patriarchy, Iranian women, feminist resistance, gendered oppression

## I. INTRODUCTION

Feminism originated from the perception that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women. (Tuttle, 1987). The movement seeks equal political and social rights for women and men. The main common theoretical assumption shared by all branches of the movement is that there has been a historical tradition of male exploitation of women (Robertson, 1993). Porter (1991) adopts a general definition of feminism that sees it as a perspective that seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities, and injustices women suffer because of their sex.

Throughout history, women have endured various forms of oppression, including gender-based violence. The governance of a nation is influenced by its religious beliefs, cultural norms, patriarchal systems, and political frameworks, all of which intersect with factors such as class, gender, and religion. This complex interplay often results in women experiencing unique forms of discrimination, particularly when they belong to multiple marginalised groups, a phenomenon that traditional research often overlooks by isolating individual identities (Chakrabarti, 2023).

Gender identity often becomes a rubric for discrimination, restraining women's roles within the four walls of the house. Except for women with class privilege, most women are left without a choice but to leave education early and marry young which becomes an obstacle to their growth and development. In the modern world, where women advance based on their merit, patriarchy creates obstacles for women to progress in society. Walby defines "patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby, 1989, p. 20). Oppression can be understood as the abuse of power that systematically restricts freedom and undermines individual agency.

This subjugation extends across political, economic, social, and cultural domains, reinforcing a societal structure in which men are perceived as inherently superior (Sultana, 2010). This hierarchical organisation often manifests in the imposition of rigid masculinity and femininity character stereotypes, further entrenching unequal power dynamics between genders. Such pervasive systems of control and exploitation significantly impede women's advancement and development by limiting their opportunities and autonomy within the public and private spheres (Sultana, 2010).

When women are subjected to domestication and their intellectual autonomy is constrained through the regulation of sexuality, their rights are correspondingly restricted. In response, women pursue emancipation and resist oppressive

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practices as culturally embedded forms of agency. Male violence is often condoned and legitimised within the marriage institution. This structural imbalance denies women the freedom to exercise their own agency and make choices, frequently confining them to domestic roles and impeding their pursuit of education or professional development (Sharma & Tyagi, 2025). The intertwining of religious and cultural norms has perpetuated male domination over women.

This oppressive environment shaped the lives of the author's mother and grandmother, both raised in Iran, in comparison to its influence on the author, Jasmin Darznik, who moved to the US at the age of three during the Iranian Revolution. This geopolitical upheaval, coupled with prevailing cultural norms and religious interpretations, profoundly shaped the familial dynamics and individual experiences of women within their community, as it often does in societies undergoing significant societal transformations (Rasheed, 2023).

The term 'female autonomy' refers to the ability of women to make informed decisions about their lives, free from coercion or constraint. By promoting female autonomy, women can exercise their agency and make choices in their best interests. Gender equality is essential for promoting female agency, as it creates a society in which women are valued and respected and can make autonomous choices. Intersectional feminist theory is a critical framework that examines how different forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism, intersect and compound to lead to unique experiences of marginalisation. This paper explores the impact of various forms of oppression on the lives of Iranian women and examines how they assert agency and navigate the constraints imposed by a patriarchal society using Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectional framework. Numerous writers from the diaspora have crafted memoirs that delve into their personal experiences and the silence and trauma passed down through generations, utilising their writing as a tool for narrative resistance against a patriarchal setup.

As Butler (1990) points out in relation to gender identity, it is problematic to discuss women in general because "gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained (p. 3). It is crucial to address the subjugation of women within the framework of cultural patriarchy and the intricate identities it is associated with.

Jasmin Darznik is an acclaimed Iranian-born American writer and professor who intricately explores the themes of intersecting gendered and cultural oppression in her debut memoir *The Good Daughter* (2012). Born in Tehran in 1973 and partly raised in the United States, Darznik's life bridges cultures, and her narrative style blends intimate family history with the broader socio-political contexts of Iran before the 1949 revolution. Jasmin Darznik addresses the sociocultural oppression of women, the quest for identity and the struggle for agency, the reclamation of narrative through storytelling, and the small acts of rebellion that assert autonomy within the intersecting frameworks of gender, class, and religion. Hooks argues that speaking from the margin is itself an act of power. Breaking the silence on racism, sexism, and violence is a central act of agency. At a time when there is increasing debate on women's liberation and oppression among many Muslim nations, this memoir invites a nuanced understanding of the traditional, religious, and cultural prohibitions that women face with respect to their gender and how they resist, adapt, or reconstruct their identities through narrative. Female agency appears in constant struggle with "social structures, social institutions, cultural norms and specific groups" (Charrad, 2010) throughout the memoir.

This study also reveals that early Muslim women resisted a religious system that reinforced male domination. In fact, Prophet Muhammed was more emancipated with respect to women than most men of his time. "Islam doesn't make any difference between man and women in the journey from this world towards al-Haqq (the truth towards God)" (p. 172). However, interpretations of Islamic texts and cultural practices have often led to patriarchal systems that subjugate women, necessitating a critical examination of how these traditions are understood and applied (Zubair & Zubair, 2017). Despite these interpretations, many Muslim women actively challenge dominant narratives by reclaiming their agency and engaging in acts of resistance, frequently through creative expression and scholarly work. This active resistance often involves navigating complex intersectional identities, as Muslim women occupy multiple positions influenced by gender, class, ethnicity, and religion, further complicating their bids for selfhood and challenging the established norms (Hussain, 2019). Common forms of injustice and oppression experienced by Muslim women in South Asia include the denial of inheritance rights, the rejection of women's opinions in marriage and divorce, the dissuasion of women from pursuing higher education, and the disregard of women's opinions in social and family matters, all of which are related to agency and self-expression (Ahmed, 2025). Women's entry into the public world is often denied. They need freedom from the bonds of custom and gender stereotypes to be free of societal constraints. In most families, girls are married around thirteen or fourteen before they can complete their education. Iranian diasporic women writers explore these themes in their memoirs and novels.

According to Uchem (2007), gender is a society's expectation of how boys and girls, men and women, in a given culture, ought to feel, look, or behave. Gender inequality occurs through negative attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that devalue, denigrate, stigmatize, or restrict females in comparison with their male counterpart, resulting in chronic identity trauma among females (Kira et al., 2015). It justifies the objectification of women and the male gaze and women being perceived as instruments of male gratification (Rawat, 2014). In their book *The Self We Live By*, Holstein and Gubrium (2000) argue that identity is not fixed or essential but constructed through narrative practices in everyday life. They emphasize that the "self" is formed through the stories people tell about themselves. These narratives are shaped by social institutions, cultural scripts, and power relations. Understanding the various intersecting factors that influence women is

crucial for comprehending their impact on shaping women's identities. This paper seeks to find a balanced approach to fostering an inclusive society that promotes women's wellbeing by contrasting the conditions in which women thrive and contribute equally to the community with those where women deteriorate and experience mental and physical unhappiness.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review synthesises existing scholarship on women's oppression and agency, particularly within intersectional frameworks, to contextualise Jasmin Darznik's memoir, *The Good Daughter: My Mother's Hidden Life*. Numerous studies have identified the multifaceted nature of women's oppression and agency, often highlighting the complex interplay of social, cultural, and political factors. This body of work frequently examines the marginalisation of women in patriarchal societies and the constraints on their agency and identity.

Research on women's empowerment consistently points to various factors hindering it while identifying successful strategies, such as education, access to resources, and political participation (Reshi & Sudha, 2022). Scholarly findings also show that women's engagement with Western feminist thinking is often complex, with many women wishing to distance themselves from traditional images of subservient women while also harbouring reservations about certain aspects of white feminisms (Zubair & Zubair, 2017).

From an intersectional perspective, research emphasises that social categories such as gender, race/ethnicity/immigrant background, and social class are interwoven, forming a "social location" that shapes lived experience at the individual level (Keller et al., 2023). Intersectionality, a theoretical framework originating from Black feminist theory and activism, named by Kimberlé Crenshaw, investigates how interlocking systems of power and oppression at the societal level influence the lived experiences of historically and socially marginalised groups (Guan et al., 2021; Hanson & Fletcher, 2021). It argues that identities such as gender, race, sexuality, and other markers of difference intersect and reflect larger social structures of oppression and privilege, such as sexism, racism, and heteronormativity (Rice et al., 2019). This framework posits that multiple social categories are not independent but rather interact and mutually shape each other, producing "qualitatively different meanings and experiences". Consequently, intersectionality allows for a complex analysis of people's lived experiences that considers not only various marginalizations but also how these "marginalizations and positionalities intersect in order to create unique situations" (Jorba & López de Sa, 2024).

Feminist theorists argue that feminism, while defying a single fixed definition, generally concerns itself with the identity of women, both philosophically and socially, and with achieving political, legal, and economic equality not only for women but also for all minority and marginalised groups. Feminist theory is understood as a "set of ideas critical of the situation confronting women and offering solutions for improving, if not revolutionising, their situation" (Oyeleye, 2022). It also functions as "a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement for sociopolitical change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within any given society" (Oyeleye, 2022).

Abla (2020), in her paper *Diasporic Iranian Women's Life Writing: An Analysis Using a Transnational Feminist Lens*, posits that authors like Darznik reclaim women's agency by giving them a voice through writing. Abla (2020) states that "When women become the narrators of their own stories it becomes an act of resistance towards patriarchal narrative and help in reclaiming their agency in both private and public spheres". Her analysis examines the themes of resistance, marginalisation, and intersectionality in narratives, portraying the struggles of Muslim women in Iran and their experiences of liberation in Western countries. Iranian-American women life writers, despite facing xenophobia and pressure to argue against widespread stereotypes about Iran, portray themselves as both suffering and strong, resisting the demonization of their homeland (Naghbi, 2016). Gondal and Hatta (2024) in *Religion and Gender Studies*, argue that the relationship between religion and gender is complex, shaped by social, historical, and cultural factors, with significant overlap between religious borders, institutions, and various identities like sexuality, race, and gender. Shami, Ijaz, and Akhtar note that women in patriarchal settings face repressive situations and are expected to conform to male-dominated societal norms. They highlight women's desire to "re-think the social structures that deepen their otherness and revitalize male dominance," leading to opposition against prevailing social structures when women pursue agency (Shami et al., 2023). Sara Salem, in "Feminist Critique and Islamic Feminism," offers a critical analysis of Western feminism and its tendency to overlook diverse experiences, advocating for a nuanced understanding where religion and autonomy can coexist through Islamic feminism.

Intersectional research underscores the role of analysing how multiple grounds of identity interact to construct the social world, especially in understanding layered discrimination (Ndobo et al., 2022; Nielsen et al., 2025). Singh (2019) in *Gender and Middle East: An Intersectionality Perspective*, emphasises the need to adapt traditional intersectional methodologies to capture the unique experiences of women in the Middle East, particularly concerning gender roles and societal expectations. Nisa et al.'s (2024) work similarly uses intersectionality to explore how women navigate "layered discrimination at the intersections of various identities, such as gender and religion, within dominant patriarchal power structures".

Memoir or life writing has often been used as a medium to explore and critique, providing a powerful platform for marginalised voices. For instance, Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* provides an account of her lived experience as a literature professor in Iran during the Islamic Revolution, using literature as a metaphor for the oppression of women and as a means of escape, resistance, and empowerment, Nafisi recounts personal experiences of suppression by institutional and phallogocentric oppressive elements, including forced veiling and curriculum control (Shami et al., 2023).

This genre allows for the expression of diverse multicultural identities and serves as a medium for writers to share their experiences both in their home country and in the West. As Cixous suggests, "Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history--by her own movement," an encouragement that inspires the writing of memoirs as an "expression of our movement from object to subject –the liberated voice" (Shami et al., 2023). Diasporic/transnational memoir reflects diverse multicultural identities, and these life narratives allow the voices of Middle Eastern women to be heard, challenging their legitimacy (Shahbazi, 2019).

Previous research has examined themes such as exile, cultural alienation, broad intersectional analysis, gender and religion, or feminist critique within specific memoirs or socio-political contexts. Studies have explored how authors like Darznik reclaim women's agency by giving them voice through writing, framing it as an act of resistance to patriarchal narratives. Shahbazi's thesis on Iranian and Iraqi women's life writing adopts a decolonial approach to memoir, viewing it as a site of critical and political inquiry into lived experience and the multiplicity of selves, focusing on multiple transnational memoirs. However, a discernible gap persists in research specifically exploring how women strategically employ agency to pursue educational aspirations, particularly within memoir writing, where the interplay between claiming agency and confronting suppressive social structures remains under-investigated.

This study fills this gap by offering a comprehensive and in-depth examination of how Jasmin Darznik navigates identity, agency, and resistance amid the intersecting factors of gender, class, race, religion, and migration in *The Good Daughter* (2012). While the existing literature has addressed the rethinking of societal structures of dominance, there remains a critical gap in research concerning the explicit, textual relationship between intersectionality, identity, and the act of writing within this memoir as a performative and empowering form of agency and reclamation of voice. This study addresses this key gap by applying an integrated intersectional framework and close reading of *The Good Daughter*, shifting focus from general identity politics to a detailed textual analysis of how the characters' resistance strategies are articulated and how the memoir itself functions as a tool for reclaiming narratives and asserting autonomy. This work broadens the critical conversation around Darznik's memoir using intersectionality theory and positions it within a more inclusive framework of resistance, identity, and belonging.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology to examine the lived experiences of women in a memoir through the lens of Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectionality Theory. This approach offers a detailed investigation into how the experiences of Iranian women and the identity of characters in the memoir are shaped by the complex interactions of gender, cultural background, class, and patriarchy, moving beyond a singular perspective to capture the intricacies of their quest for agency and self-reclamation through the medium of storytelling. This research involves a close reading of the text to uncover various forms of oppression impacting women's identities and how they challenge societal constraints to assert their agency and reshape dominant narratives.

Coined by African American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s, intersectionality challenges mainstream feminism's universalising tendencies by centring the experiences of multiply marginalised individuals. Originating from Critical race studies and Black feminist thought, intersectionality, has garnered significant prominence across diverse academic fields, including women and gender studies, sociology, and race studies (Salem, 2013). Crenshaw's seminal articles, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989) and "Mapping the Margins" (1991), introduced intersectionality into the academic discourse. A fundamental tenet of intersectionality is that "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (Crenshaw, 1989). This means that multiple intersecting identities, such as gender, race, sexuality, and other markers of difference, produce unique experiences of oppression and privilege that cannot be understood by examining categories in isolation.

As a methodology, intersectionality mandates that research be conducted "from the perspective of the marginalized, as their view of society is more comprehensive" (Salem, 2013). This approach challenges the assumptions of neutrality and objectivity, particularly in legal and social systems, by revealing how systems of power operate through the intersection of various social categories. To effectively implement intersectionality as a methodology, researchers should deconstruct single-axis frameworks and actively replace analytical approaches that isolate categories like race or gender with a framework that demonstrates their dynamic interaction (Salem, 2013).

Intersectionality helps centre marginalized experiences and prioritize the lived experiences of individuals who face compounded oppressions, recognizing that their unique perspectives offer profound insights into systemic inequalities. This includes understanding how women of colour "could see, feel, and experience how the treatment of their bodies as simultaneously raced and gendered shaped the contours of their subordination" (Kelly et al., 2021). Intersectionality as a theory helps to analyse power dynamics and critically examine how intersecting identities reflect and reproduce larger social structures of oppression and privilege, ensuring the inclusivity of varying experiences, realities, and identities.

For my qualitative study of Jasmin Darznik's memoir, *The Good Daughter* (2012), employing an intersectional methodology allows a nuanced exploration and multidimensional perspective of how Iranian women's experiences are shaped by the intricate interplay of gender, cultural heritage, class, and diasporic identity, moving beyond a singular focus to capture the layered complexity of women's struggles for agency and self-reclamation, demonstrating how storytelling functions as a means to challenge dominant narratives and assert marginalised voices.

## IV. DISCUSSION

*A. Layers of Oppression in The Good Daughter*

The label or trope of the 'Good Daughter' signifies an individual who does not challenge societal oppression and quietly conforms to the norms established by culture and authority, lacking independent thought. It involves adhering to societal expectations without questioning or resisting them.

The various facets of women's identities intersect to shape their lived experiences, primarily through race, class, religion, and tradition. A significant challenge confronting contemporary feminism is the need to address the exclusion of the experiences of women from marginalised groups within the broader female community. This memoir highlights the mistreatment of women, particularly those belonging to the middle class or those without a male head to provide them with support. Women who lack financial resources are often subjected to ridicule and physical abuse by their husbands. Intersectionality refers to the notion that social relations are characterised by multiple overlapping layers of discrimination.

Patriarchy is a deeply entrenched system that regulates power within society. Families seem to be pushing their daughters into firepits through early marriage and trading their lives for money, as Kobra's brother traded her to his opponent in gambling because he had no money to repay. Women count on the love of their husbands as early marriage limits their access to the world, while men take a new wife when they get bored with one. In Sohrab's case, his father abandoned his mother and subsequently entered marriages with other wives, whom he later abandoned to marry other women. This practice is not regarded as prostitution within their cultural framework. However, if women engaged in multiple marriages, it was deemed adultery. In this context, women often resort to witchcraft and consult fortune tellers to maintain their husbands' affection. These women experience profound insecurity as they rely heavily on their husbands and feel compelled to employ various strategies and manipulations to prevent their husbands from engaging in infidelity. Ultimately, both Kobra and Lili attain autonomy and overcome their co-dependency upon realizing that men are unlikely to alter their inherent nature. Kobra reconciles with her marital situation until her husband's demise, whereas her daughter, Lili, insists on pursuing a divorce to reclaim her agency before succumbing to insanity or potential harm. The strategies employed to exert excessive control involved curtailing women's education at an early age, thereby rendering them powerless and reliant on their husbands, and marrying them off before they matured and discovered their identities and desires. Post-marriage, women were isolated from all except their husbands and his family, and any independent outings required their husbands' permission. This isolation from the external world was intended to prevent them from escaping the control and achieve autonomy. Women were subjected to continuous surveillance and monitoring by their family members and faced punishment for non-compliance with established standards, a practice intended to deter resistance and maintain familial dominance over women.

Upon Lili's relocation to Germany for her studies and the commencement of a new chapter in her life, she attains a renewed sense of independence. However, she also encounters instances of racial discrimination, including derogatory remarks and hostile stares while navigating public spaces. Although migration has facilitated her aspiration to be addressed as Madame doctor and to become a respected professional woman with an international qualification, she simultaneously faces discriminatory challenges in foreign land. For Lili, migration to US also does not offer complete emancipation. Though she gains more legal and social freedoms in the U.S., her internalized patriarchy and cultural trauma continue to affect how she raises Jasmin and there also she faces some form of racism while she speaks in English as part of the Iranian diaspora. Some customers come to stay in her hotel and doesn't pay and cause trouble.

Patriarchy is normalised in domestic spheres under the guise of tradition and honour. In the memoir, women in Sohrab's house rarely left the house unless it was for a family event or pilgrimage to preserve family honour. "The large colony of sisters and aunts and mothers and grandmothers within never left except to attend a wedding or funeral close by or else to make a pilgrimage to a martyr's shrine. And for that they always travelled with their men" (Darznik, 2012, p. 9). Women travelling alone and unaccompanied by men were seen as vulnerable targets.

One evening, Kobra's brother, Ali Ahmed, who was known for his gambling habits, made a proposal that would change Darznik's grandmother's life forever. After suffering his largest financial loss in what would become a notorious gambling career, Ali Ahmed turned to his opponent and offered, "You can marry my sister." He didn't mention her name, only referring to her as "the youngest one" (Darznik, 2012, p. 13). Darznik's grandmother Kobra was sold by her brother to his friend and opponent to settle his gambling debts. He did not even consider her opinion or ask for it. He announced her marriage and informed the family.

Darznik writes about married women's predicament under the authority and control of their husbands. Most evenings, Sohrab joined his friends at gatherings where the women were very slim, dressed in Western attire, and far more attractive than Kobra. When she expressed a desire to accompany him, he remarked that she appeared aged and untidy in her chador, and he would feel ashamed to bring her along. She even suggested going without her veil or just a simple headscarf, despite this being almost as uncomfortable for her as walking the streets unclothed. Nevertheless, he continued to go out by himself (Darznik, 2012, p. 18).

Women from elite social strata were subjected to differential treatment. Sohrab is associated with women who are modern, educated, and sophisticated, yet he feels ashamed to introduce his wife at gatherings of the affluent. Despite Kobra's youth, her husband neglects her because of her modest background. Even when she compromises her principles to please him, she is met with rejection. She was relegated to the traditional role of a domestic servant, attending to his daily needs and assisting his mother and aunts with the household chores. He did not provide her with the financial means

to groom herself or purchase new clothing, yet he criticised her as unkempt and shabby. Furthermore, he treated her with disrespect, resorted to physical violence, and confined her to the house while parading himself like a peacock outside. She is impregnated at fourteen, and before she recovers from childbirth, she is already pregnant for the second term. This shows her husband's double standards and lack of concern for his wife. Whether it is Kobra's brother or her husband, their attitude towards her reflects the lack of agency experienced by women in their culture.

"During that time, a young bride was not referred to by her own name. She was simply called the aroos, or "the bride," and she only adopted her husband's name after her mother-in-law passed away" (Darznik, 2012, p. 14). The entire system was unjust. Once a woman married, she had no status beyond being referred to as the bride until her mother-in-law passed away, at which point she could take her husband's name. The invisibility of women is common in their culture. In *The Good Daughter*, Darznik's narrative reveals how the institution of marriage operates as a site where male authority is normalised and, at times, shields forms of male violence through cultural expectations of obedience, endurance, and familial honour. Such legitimisation constrains women's agency, compelling silence and compliance while rendering resistance socially transgressive.

### *B. Religion, State and Gender: Interlocking Systems of Control*

Modern feminist writer Nawal El Sa'adawi said the political and ideological use of religion is wrong and she sees writing as a weapon of carrying this message across because writing to her "draws its authority from the autocratic power exercised by the ruler of the state, and that of the father or the husband in the family ... [and it thus] became an act of rebellion against injustice exercised in the name of religion, or morals, or love (Shukri & Owoyemi, 2016, p. 11).

Sohrab's mother was a generous and astute woman. Despite her husband being a womanizer who married three wives and then left her without any financial support, she managed the entire household on her own and raised Sohrab and his sisters. By the time Sohrab turned two, his father had already left their home on Avenue Moniriyeh and taken three more wives. When these three women, who had also been abandoned by her husband, showed up at her door one by one, she graciously took them in. They lived together like sisters and worked alongside her (Darznik, 2012, p. 14). For Sohrab too, his first marriage was merely an agreement. He later lived with Simin, a twice-divorced barren woman, as his second wife, although he continued to send money home.

As the Muslim world transitioned into the modern era, the struggle for the rights of Muslim women took a new direction. Following the example set by the modern Western world, Muslim women began to unite, forming associations and movements to demand their rights from society, particularly from their spouses, fathers, brothers, and uncles. Women are not criminals that should be confined in women's quarters. In her book "Veiling and Unveiling," Nazira Zayn al-Din examines the comparative progress of veiled women in Muslim nations and their unveiled counterparts in more advanced nations. She argues that unveiled women are more progressive, educated, and responsible compared to veiled women, who are often illiterate and non-progressive, confined and segregated within society. Al-Din contends that the practice of veiling was historically imposed by Muslim men who failed to adhere to the Qur'anic injunctions regarding modesty, which apply to both men and women. Due to the patriarchal nature of Muslim society, women were disproportionately burdened with the requirement to wear the veil, which she interprets as a symbol of oppression. Furthermore, al-Din asserts that women are more qualified than men to interpret Qur'anic verses concerning women's affairs, as these verses directly address women. Islamic verses are characterized by their fluidity and openness to interpretation, as many of them are inherently ambiguous. This ambiguity allows for diverse interpretations to be applied across various contexts, cultures, times, and situations (Hamdeh, 2020).

The way they treat women tells a lot about society. When a society cancels women, it becomes a barbaric society. If a man commits a sin against women, it's still considered women's fault, and they push women to the periphery without any choice. Sohrab ended his marriage to Kobra impulsively, bypassing any official process. During the time of Sohrab and Kobra's union, a woman who resided away from her husband's home could be reclaimed within three and a half months, effectively cancelling the divorce. This rule was ostensibly to confirm she wasn't leaving while pregnant with his child—an act considered akin to theft—but in Kobra's situation, the rule would serve a different function (Darznik, 2012, p. 26). Women were always asked to silently accommodate no matter what her husband did. Several times, Kobra would be cast out by her husband after a fight, and her mother-in-law and Sohrab's sisters would pick her up from her mother Pargol's house before the three-month period was over so that she could come back and take care of the children. In their culture, only the father held the legal parental right to custody of the children.

Raday (2016) posits that Islamic cultural practices, such as the requirement of modesty through the hijab, can be perceived as mechanisms for exerting patriarchal control over women's behaviour and bodies (p. 306). Similarly, the conduct and appearance of women are shaped by religious traditions that adhere to ideals of modesty and preserving family honour, which frequently mirror entrenched patriarchal power structures within religious institutions. In Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Iran, women are required to wear veils upon reaching puberty. In Iranian culture, women without veils have historically been stigmatised as immoral. Wearing headscarves has been culturally mandated from the age of ten. However, during the reign of Reza Shah, reforms were introduced, including the promotion of women's education, the prohibition of the veil, and the adjustment of the legal minimum age for marriage from nine to sixteen. Despite these reforms, families frequently circumvented the law or restricted girls from leaving their homes. Lili, for instance, was married at the age of thirteen to avoid spending another year unveiled in public. Her aunts and grandmother, who were deeply religious, chose not to leave their homes when the veil was outlawed in 1936 (p. 43).

### C. *Silenced Voices and Reclamation of Agency*

“A divorcee, it was said, surrendered to seduction as easily as a ripe peach slid down the throat. Sohrab predicted that any young man who discovered Lili’s status would make advances on her- or much worse- and since she was no longer a virgin, there would be no recourse for such actions. The only way to protect Lili now would be to keep her at home” (p. 114). According to Iranian standards, divorced women are considered damaged goods. Anyone could eye her, make sexual advances towards her, and exploit her on the street since she was no longer a virgin or the property of her husband. Nobody would come to her defense if anything evil occurred to her. As a result, her father had to either keep her at home, send her to a place where her past was unknown for education, or send her abroad. “The rest of the plan went like this: If he could not restore her to the status of a respectable women, then Sohrab was certain that a high school diploma, followed by some kind of occupational training, would shield her from the curses and insults that would trail a divorcee through the rest of her life” (p. 118). Being a divorcee implied a lifetime of neglect and disrespect; to protect his daughter’s reputation after numerous pleas from her male cousin, Lili’s father Sohrab decides to further her education and transform her into a professional woman. Eventually, he sends her abroad to earn a foreign degree. This decision alters Lili’s destiny, unlike the other women in her family. Upon her return to Iran following her father’s death, as she begins her job search, her aunts seek another marriage proposal for her and urge her to remain at home. In her country, only women who had no other options worked. Her aunts viewed it as akin to selling oneself on the streets. In their eyes, a divorced woman can only be redeemed through marriage.

“When Lili returned from Europe to become a bride in the early sixties, she did so by force of her own considerable ambitions, brandishing a foreign diploma that compelled everyone to call her Madame Doctor- the first of the family and the first for many years yet. To the even greater astonishment of her cousins, aunts, and stepmothers, she also brought with her a handsome, well-mannered, blue-eyed farangi eager to live in the country and also to convert to Islam in order to marry her” (Darznik, 2012, p. 197). Lili takes charge of her life and goes back to Germany, resumes her education, becomes a professional midwife, and gets engaged to a German engineer, bringing him back to the country. When one woman takes control of her life, she empowers other women to do so. One person’s stand against injustice can eventually move an entire nation. Women who follow the rules and marry into families at a young age are treated with contempt after their divorce. In 1962, it was a very bold move for a woman from native Iran to marry a foreigner, but she successfully crosses all the ordeals.

“Why do you insist on wearing white?” her aunts and stepmothers had asked her with varying degrees of approbation. “It isn’t done for a second marriage; you will only call attention to yourself by wearing a white dress.” As these were the very relatives who’d hastened her marriage to Kazem, Lili suppressed the urge to scream, curse and strike. She did, however, go so far as to remind them that her first wedding dress, the one Kazem’s relatives had chosen for her, had not even been white but pale blue. Besides, Lili told them, the marriage was Johann’s first, and on his account, she would consider nothing but white” (Darznik, 2012, p. 204).

Despite her family’s attempts to dissuade her from wearing white for her second wedding, she remained resolute. This is her first marriage of her choice, and the previous one nearly cost her life.

### D. *Writing as Mode of Resistance*

Bell Hooks often says speaking from the margin is itself an act of power. Breaking silence about racism, sexism, and violence is central towards agency. Through writing the stories of three women in their generation, she regains their voice and reclaims the agency. Jasmin was unaware of her mother Lili’s first marriage and her half-sister Sara living in Iran until she stumbled upon a photograph of Lili’s wedding to Kazem after her German father passed away. After a period of silence, Lili chose to share the story of her grandmother, her mother, and herself, highlighting how these three women, in their unique ways, challenged stereotypes and refused to succumb to their destinies. They took charge of their lives by resisting oppression, despite cultural pressures to silence them, limit their freedom, and dictate their choices. Documenting their stories served as a means to recognize their lives and voices, empowering them through the written word. Darznik reconstructs her mother Lili’s hidden life, revealing a past that had been buried under layers of cultural shame and family secrecy. Lili’s story is shaped by gendered oppression within Iranian patriarchy, where her girlhood was regulated through honor, obedience, and early marriage. Yet she fights back and refuses to blend in and get the life she wants. By writing this memoir, Darznik reclaims her narrative as well along with histories of other women in her family. The memoir shows how diasporic women are not automatically liberated by migration but instead must wrestle with inherited burdens and culturally embedded silence.

For Jasmin, understanding her mother’s past becomes an act of self-discovery. She reclaims her mother’s silenced narrative enabling a dialogic healing between past and present. Both Lili and her mother Kobra prove through the latter half of their lives that given freedom and the right training, these women can be fiercely independent yet run their homes well even if their husbands lack the responsibility of running the household or dies. Its Lili who does odd jobs and sends money to her brother abroad for his studies when her father dies and Kobra who also does what she knows best to sustain her household. These women more autonomous and freer only after the death of the only patriarchal figure in their family. Storytelling here emerges as an act of feminine resistance to societal constraints and asserting the autonomy of self.

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper elaborates how patriarchy is entrenched in societies and how women's identity is shaped by intersection of multiple factors such as gender, class, tradition, and religion. Feminist writing has been crucial in opposing institutional injustice and supporting social change. Feminist writers have given voice to women who don't have much by telling critical stories that show how legal, economic, or educational barriers affect women. This has led to resistance and empowerment at the same time (Sharama, 2020, p. 103). Through writing the marginalised voices reclaim their agency. Jasmin Darznik advocates for a social change in this context, through a change in the treatment of women through education, empowerment, support systems, political and religious reforms and assertion of female identity as equal in status to men. Women should have the freedom to pursue what they want without restraints and feelings of shame towards making their own choices. Through her memoir, she demonstrates how storytelling functions as an ultimate act of liberation in challenging dominant narratives and asserting silenced and marginalized voices to reclaim their agency. The study has shown that oppression operates through a combination of multiple factors rather than a single problem such as domestic, religious and socio-legal forces. The identity is a fragmentation of cultural construct and acts of resistance. It proves that agency can be reclaimed through literacy, migration, and storytelling. Future research could explore comparative analyses of feminist resistance across different religious and cultural contexts, investigate the impact of digital media on the reclamation of agency among marginalized women, and further examine the role of intersectionality in shaping contemporary feminist movements. Such studies would deepen insights into the evolving dynamics of gender, identity, and power in diverse socio-political landscapes.

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