



**Cultural Libertarianism and Personal Autonomy: A Liberal Feminist Analysis of *Dancing in the Mosque* by Homeira Qaderi**

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**Abstract**

The present study explores the struggle and resistance of female figures against coercive powers and highlights the importance of gender equality in Homeira Qaderi's *Dancing in the Mosque* (2020). Homeira Qaderi is a well-reputed and well-known Afghani fictional writer. Her early childhood was a struggle against the Soviet invasion and the Taliban's dispute with Soviets. Her well-known work *Dancing in the Mosque* (2020) is a memoir about a female's struggle and love for her child. Using the close reading method of analysis, the study employs Friedman's (2003) ideology of cultural libertarianism and personal autonomy that correspond to liberal feminism. Liberal Feminism is a struggle against patriarchy and social inequalities. According to Friedman (2003), Cultural libertarianism is a liberal view of society that stresses the freedom of individuals from cultural norms. In this way, cultural liberals believe that society should not impose any specific code of behavior; rather it should promote personal autonomy to their individuals. The findings of the study reveal that gender equality encourages women's empowerment and rejects coercive powers which restrict women to four walls.

**Keywords:** Liberal Feminism, Personal Autonomy, Cultural libertarianism, *Dancing in the Mosque*

**1. Introduction**

Feminism, one of the most recent ideologies to emerge, attempts to analyze the social position of women, explains their apparent subsidiary role in history and offers the basis for reform and the advancement of women in all areas of society. Feminists believe that there is a fundamental power struggle between men and women. This, like the struggles around class and race, is potentially revolutionary. Indeed, it is the oldest power struggle, the least public in its manifestations of conflict and the most fundamental in its implications for society. Feminist movements have different waves, schools of thoughts and multiple perspectives to address the issues of women.

Feminism has different schools of thoughts: Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Marxist feminism, Post-structuralism feminism etc. Liberal feminism dominated the 'first wave' of feminism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with intellectuals such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Taylor and J. S. Mill, all making contributions. Liberal feminism focuses on the full extension of civil and legal rights to women by legislation. This form of feminism is essentially liberalism, stressing the importance of the individual, with the emphatic assertion of female equality. It demands a 'level playing field', secured by law so that women may earn and aspire the same jobs as men. It accepts the competition of the marketplace and assumes that women can, and should compete equally with men. British feminists took up this cause, and later, so did the politicians. A series of acts assigned greater rights to women, among which were the Abortion Act (1967), the Equal Pay Act (1970) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975). Such legislation gives women rights that enable them as individuals to have greater choices about their lives. Liberal feminism remains a very important element in the West today. Most women in developed societies have individual choices and freedoms that are now almost taken for granted, but they owe much to the liberal feminist struggle for equal civil and political rights over the last two centuries.

Feminist movements though have brought revolutions in the lives of women and worked wonders in bringing equality among men and women but still their suffrage has no end and they are still facing discrimination and oppression around the globe especially in Afghanistan. Homeira Qaderi's *Dancing in the Mosque* published in 2020, highlights the issues faced by Afghani women. Homeira Qaderi is a women's rights activist originally from Afghanistan, who later on moved to California. *Dancing in the Mosque* is her memoir that pulls at our heartstrings and fills our eyes with tears when as a mother, she shares with her son why she left him and Afghanistan for California. Her story is punctuated by letters to her son, Siawash who was snatched out of her arms when he was 19 months old. Her autobiographical narration projects the life history and situation of Afghan girls under the reign of the Afghan Taliban. She experiences several hardships and shows resistance against these hardships. Her life's struggle is not just limited to her own life but also to the other Afghan girls as well. The present study explores this struggle and resistance of female figures as presented through her work *Dancing in the Mosque* (2020) using the liberal feminist perspective.

**1.1. Research Objectives**

- To find out the role of coercive powers that take the form of violence and deprive individuals of their self-determination and individuality
- To explore the element of gender equity that encourages women's empowerment and controls coercive powers

**1.2. Research Questions**

- How do the coercive powers take different forms to restrict women's liberty as delineated in the *Dancing in the Mosque*?

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- How does gender equity encourage women's empowerment and put an end to coercive control?

## 2. Literature Review

Afghani English literature has an emerging range of publications of English novels, short stories and translated works by several writers, especially women. Afghani writers expressed their emotions for independence and recognition against patriarchal social structures. Female fiction writers of Afghanistan show that despite the fact of low education trends, Afghan women are persistently informing about their subjugation of rights, segregation, and gender issues in their fictional and poetical works (Bezhan, 2008). Saira Shah covered reporting on the Russian invasion of Afghanistan and informed about her experience with the Taliban. While doing this she also wrote her famous work *The Storyteller's Daughter: One Woman's Return to Her Lost Homeland* (2004). Atia Abawi is another prominent writer of Afghanistan. She served Kabul for many years as a reporter for CNN. Her famous work *The Secret Sky: A Novel of Forbidden Love in Afghanistan* (2014) is a story that informs about the forbidden love and the courage of a woman.

Feminism explains the overall rights for women but so far as liberal feminism is concerned, it is closely related to the liberty of women in every field of life. This phenomenon occurs when in the same society emerges two different statuses, imposed by the members of the society. This leads to gender discrimination in society. Primary status is almost always enjoyed by the patriarch or male members of the society, whereas; the secondary status for women in the public eye depends on inconsistent freedoms and isolation from men (Baehr, 2017). Bryson (1999) explains that liberal feminism is a struggle for sexual equality and social rights. It also demands political and legal rights as well as reforms for women. Liberal feminism demands equal job opportunities and pay according to another member of the society. He further explains liberal feminism by saying that women are not a subordinate to any male or state. They should be treated as the equal member of society and should be given the same privilege.

Okin (1998) discusses that the word culture is a multi-dimensional word, at one point it argues about literature, music, the art of painting and drama but on the other hand it is also associated with the beliefs, norms and relational practices in a society. It is also associated with certain traditions and religions as well. Culture shapes every individual while living in a society and also imposes certain restrictions on people. Women are also part of every society and their liberty is also a primary value, so cultural libertarianism seeks power and God-given individual rights. A person who is a member of a society either male or female must have the same liberty, right of private property, freedom of traditional practices, equality under the law and ethical autonomy.

Potter (2003) claims that government is responsible for the protection of the cultural liberty of individuals. He defines that cultural libertarianism is a political philosophy that aims to protect the fundamental rights of every individual. He further argues that government should utilize its power to allow each person as much cultural liberty as it can. Thus, people should be culturally liberal and behave freely as they see fit, as their actions do not interfere or overstep on other's cultural liberty. A review of related studies informs the researchers to delimit the present study keeping in view the theoretical framework. The subsequent section has been detailed to highlight the notions of cultural libertarianism and personal autonomy, the tenets of liberal feminism.

Fagan (2004) examines the importance of personal autonomy in communities that are multicultural and complicated. The people of those societies reflect their respective wills and autonomies with reference to their particular religion but unfortunately, societies do not value their personal autonomy which creates issues for the social and professional services. He further discusses that the issue of autonomy has not been fully exercised in any society because of social restrictions and limitations imposed by a particular society for its individuals.

Hassim (2004) propounds that women's autonomy is actually the capacity to achieve their role in decision making and overall well-being. He further expresses his views that women's autonomy can be measured in several ways including their freedom in education, political activities, jobs and social interactions. Libertarianism is an individual's freedom and protection of his/her rights. It also means that a person is free to live without any restriction posed by any large group of society. Libertarianism is a conventional understanding of the difference between values and culture with basic human sentiments. It is a kind of expression of the body and passion relationship of an individual. Mack (2015) expresses that libertarianism is also about self-ownership. It is an idea that libertarians recognize about the sovereignty of the individual and the use of rights with his/her consent. Bhutto, J. and Ramzan, M. (2021) have illuminated that rape and murder of innocent children and ladies, like Zainab presents a very ugly and obnoxious image of Pakistani Muslim nation.

Jewell (2005) discussed that in the recent multicultural world, people must have to find how they can maintain stability and tolerance in a multicultural society. There are so many cultures that never permit an individual to enjoy individual autonomy that is why individual encounters a dilemma. The situation rises either they have to enjoy the autonomy in their life or they have to follow the designed path and submit their will and autonomy to others. He discussed this issue of personal autonomy with the reference to teachers and students. The study argues that a facilitator or educator must inform their pupils about their autonomy and ability to decide with their own autonomous power in order to face the modern and complex world.

Carter (2007) discusses that autonomy in literature is an inchoate desire of a person for freedom. He also associates autonomy with a person's self-governance. He argues that autonomy has three dimensions including moral, political and personal autonomy. Moral autonomy provides an individual moral law, on the other hand, political autonomy is about freedom in a political context including respect for an individual's decisions and honor in society. Personal autonomy is the ability to decide one's own actions in life. He further explains personal autonomy by saying that it is an ability of an individual in decision making. A person can live in his/her own way, participating in political matters or moral conduct as per his/her own desires.

Carlita (2009) informed about the finding of the idea related to liberal feminism by keen observation of the characters in *The Valkyries*. She studied two major characters named Cristina and Valhalla in order to justify the idea of liberal feminism. She evaluates that liberal feminism is actually associated to gender equality. It is a situation where a woman is free to choose her own way of life without being affected by any other individual. This equality should be everywhere in society including education, job opportunity or even in wages. Every woman must have the liberty to choose their own options and they can decide whatever they want.

Alemeneh (2018) using the lens of liberal feminism observed the film *Maleficent* and found several elements of female oppression by males and also evaluated men try to oppress and control the women. They want complete control over women and also drive them according to their own will. The researcher employed Tong's liberal feminist theory for his study. The findings of the study reveal that women suffer in the hands of men and they also try to control their actions.

Ahmad (2020) explores cultural libertarianism and the socio-political struggle of female in Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed*. He also informed about the conflict of personal autonomy as shown by the female gender and further elaborated that expressed liberal feminist views are a threat to a patriarchal society. His work reveals the female struggle against the monopoly of males and the empowerment of women in every matter of their life. Afghani people are rigged in their traditions and they consider women as their pride and honor. He expressed certain misconceptions of the patriarchal society of Afghanistan by saying that male members believe that full autonomy and cultural liberty of a woman would damage their honor and reputation in front of other male members of the society. A liberal female character named Nila challenges the typical perception of woman and their fragility. She even opposes the traditional conservative ideology about women as they are often considered entities only prone to sex. Ahmad (2020) employs Jefferies' (2010) notions based on liberal feminism, conflict in gender differences and personal autonomy.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Liberalism is a set of allied doctrines that emphasize the value of freedom and hold that the state should ensure freedom for its individuals. Liberal feminists embrace this value and role for the state and insist on freedom for women as well. How freedom should be understood divides liberals into two different groups: Some liberals consider freedom as freedom from coercive interference and followers of this trend may be termed as *Classical liberals*. Another group of liberals understands freedom as personal autonomy—living a life of one's own choosing—and political autonomy—being co-author of the conditions under which one lives. This category of liberals may be termed as *New Liberals or Egalitarian Liberals*. Classical-liberal feminism or egalitarian-liberal feminism, both deal with the issues of women in general and the question of freedom in particular. Egalitarian-liberal feminists hold that women should enjoy personal autonomy. That is, they hold that women should live lives of their own choosing, whereas; Cultural libertarianism is a form of classical liberalism that concerns about constraints on individual freedom from government as well as from traditionalist familial, religious, and community institutions—the same civil institutions that conservatives see as necessary for ordered liberty to thrive.

The present study has employed a critical lens of cultural libertarianism and personal autonomy as laid down by Marilyn Friedman in her work *Autonomy, Gender and Politics* published in 2003. According to Friedman (2003), Cultural liberalism is a liberal view of society that stresses the freedom of individuals from cultural norms. In this way, cultural liberals believe that society should not impose any specific code of behavior. Cultural liberalism informs about two different disagreements including cultural progressives and cultural conservatives. The cultural progressives believe that the structure of the family, nature of marriage, lifestyle, acceptance and rejection of any cultural value should be left up to individual's decision and as long as one does not harm to others, no lifestyle is inherently better than any other while conservatives impose sanctions and bans on such choices.

Friedman (2003) has also discussed personal autonomy in her work. According to her, autonomy is an individual's capacity for self-determination or self-governance. She further explains that a woman is autonomous to the extent that she directs her actions in accordance with her own values, desires, and inclinations. An autonomous woman formulates certain goals, as relevant to the direction of her life, and is able to pursue these goals and make them effective in action. Moreover, she formulates these goals according to values, desires, and convictions that have developed in an un-coerced and conscious fashion. Such values can be described as the agent's own even while they reflect the influence of factors external to her. Additionally, an autonomous person is able to meet his/her goals without depending upon the judgments of others as to their validity and importance.

#### 4. Textual Analysis

*Dancing in the Mosque* is a memoir by Qadri and it is in the form of an open letter to her only son. *Dancing in the Mosque* opens with folk lore. A mother who is now living in California expresses poverty and heartache situation of her country. She is forbidden to see her only child and she is facing an exile from her own country. *Dancing in the Mosque* moves with the story of Qadri's wedding to a more liberal businessman, with whom she left the country and settled in Tehran, a comfortable and a bit liberal place for her. Qadri adopted the teaching profession and also starts to write books. Her husband, for political career, comes back to Afghanistan and also decides to do second marriage but Qadri refuses her role as a second woman in his life. With this, her husband divorces her and she cannot visit and even see her own child because of the state and its laws. The setting of the memoir is Herat, a city in Afghanistan. The whole story revolves around several characters including: Nanah-jan, baba jan, her son, Saiwash, Homeira's uncle Basheer, Homeira's mother, Moulvi Rasheed, Homeira's younger brother (Mushtaq), and Sharifah, a woman who bore eight girls.

The title of the memoir *Dancing in the Mosque* is highly symbolic. 'Dancing' represents celebration, joy and display of freedom for which Muslim women carve out a space within the confines of their religious faith, whereas; a mosque symbolizes a space where women are often relegated to the margins but now they find solace, strength and freedom to be seen and heard without being silenced by reconciling their faith with desires.

##### 4.1. Role of Coercive Powers and Women Autonomy

*Dancing in the Mosque* is an autobiographical memoir that informs about the harsh realities of Afghanistan and its culture. Homeira portrayed herself as a rebellious girl who stood against patriarchal culture. She stood against the false notion of the society. "It wasn't long before the Taliban implemented sharia law in Kandahar. They closed all the girls' schools. Women were forbidden to leave their houses. Women accused of adultery were to be stoned or shot" (Qaderi, 2020, p. 42). Different forms of coercive power which restricted women's liberty are expressed by Homeira in her narration named *Dancing in the Mosque* (2020). Among different forms of coercive powers, the Taliban and their rule were the most dangerous and cruel for a female in the Afghanistan. They implemented several restrictions especially on women. They restricted them from education, closed their schools, and forbade them to leave their residences without male members of their family and *burqa* (veil) became mandatory for every girl. Any sort of autonomy is out of question for female gender. Friedman (2003) also justifies the same that "autonomy has not been idealized for everyone. It has been emphasized much more for certain groups of men than for any women". (p. 8)

*Dancing in the Mosque* is a narration that informed about different coercive power which took different forms to restrict women's liberty and subjugated their fundamental rights. The character Nanah-jan pointed out that women had to stay at home because the family's honor and shame stick to woman's autonomy. According to Afghani men, a woman should be chained so that she would not go outside the house and become a source of shame for her family. "Nanah-jan said, in ancient times they would chain a girl's feet together so that she wouldn't stride wider and wouldn't become a source of shame for her family" (Qaderi, 2020, p. 17). Homeira highlighted several coercive powers and their different forms that restricted women to particular position in a society. She says that in Afghan society, shame of a family is stuck to woman only. She could not live her life independently and she had to live according to patriarchal rules. These were the forms of coercive powers that snatched liberty from women.

"Mushtaq called me the frightening creeper climber. You have a thousand feet, but you won't be able to step outside of the four walls of this house, he would say" (Qaderi, 2020, p. 18). Homeira pointed out another form of coercive power by comparing her life with her brother. She expresses that the Taliban forcibly exert their ideology over the Afghan community where every man treated women in the same way. She used to play outside her house and like to climb on trees. Her brother cleared the situation that this desire of climbing is limited for her because in their culture no woman was allowed to go against their cultural norms and she always feels the need for the support of her brother. Friedman (2003) also expresses the same that, "according to traditional gender norms, women are relatively weak and defenseless and need men to protect them" (p. 159).

"Nanah-jan is right, Homeira. You are fourteen now, Madar said. Don't bring scandal down on our heads" (Qaderi, 2020, p. 38). Such patriarchal behavior was not just limited to one girl but it was the practice of the whole Afghan society. Homeira faced such issues in her life. She was turned fourteen and her physical appearance was going to change. Such a thing was considered taboo for her family to visit outside her house and get education because she became adult. For them, girls having an adult age must be kept inside house otherwise there would be shame waiting for them. Girls were mostly considered an icon of shame for the family.

Homeira in her memoir *Dancing in the Mosque* presented another female character who faced patriarchal norms and false notions. Sharifah, a woman who bore eight girls was rejected by her husband. Her husband wished to have male babies but she had been gifted with potential to bear female babies. It was shame for him to be a father of girls. Among his daughters, he announces that one is a boy and disguised her with boy's clothes. He made her wear boy's clothes and to play with boys so his relatives and people of the society would think that at last God had given him a son. "This was all my father's idea. He made me wear boys' clothes, so our relatives would think that God had given them a boy. My father demanded a boy to remove the shame of a family of girls" (Qaderi, 2020, p. 37). These lines from *Dancing in the Mosque*

showed the bitter reality of Afghan society which preferred only males and rejected females. This mentality is another form of coercive power that restricts female existence. According to Friedman (2003), “a cultural group (men) that subordinates some of its members (women) is treating those subordinates as *prima facie* incapable of grasping how to live their lives” (Friedman, 2003, p. 216).

Homeira discusses the issue of their cultural liberty and personal autonomy in her novel *Dancing in the Mosque*. She projects her life and sufferings. She elaborates her life story and the way she achieved her dreams of being a novelist. She got married to a person, named Jaber. After marriage, they went to Tehran and Homeira enjoyed cultural liberty and personal autonomy there. She got permission from her husband for education. She received her education and became a professor but soon she realized that all this liberty was a bone of contention between Jaber and her. Her husband warns her that, she is a woman and she has to follow the norms of the society. “Jaber was believed that what people say matters. He would say, “A woman is a woman, and it isn’t right for a woman to get ahead of society’s norms” (Qaderi, 2020, p. 39). Friedman (2003) also argues that, “adult women—of whatever class, race, or group remained morally (and politically) subordinated to male power and authority” (p. 79).

Homeira wanted to be a story writer but in Afghanistan it was a taboo. She soon realized that if she remained under the pressure of different coercive powers, she would never achieve her aim in her life. Homeira expressed her struggle against different forms of coercive powers, yet again she was informed about the issue of woman’s name. The name of any woman must not be written or spoken publically because it was considered a sinful act. Any woman who tried may face consequences or even be whipped in the public. The issue Homeira faced when her first story was published in a magazine, the people of Afghanistan received a woman’s name as a sinful act. The office of information and culture decided to burn all newspapers and magazines where the name of Homeira was written. The authority destroyed all newspapers and magazines containing her name. “The Office of Information and Culture has ordered that every one of this edition of the newspaper must be destroyed or the sinful girl who wrote the story will be whipped in public” (Qaderi, 2020, p. 93). Friedman’s (2003) notion also justifies Homeira’s condition when she says, “most human societies today still fall short to some degree in both acknowledging women’s full moral equality with men” (p. 79).

Apart from these powers, Homeira also highlights the most important element which restricts women’s liberty and that was domestic restrictions. The family system in Afghanistan never lets their women to enjoy their personal autonomy and freedom of choice even in the confines of four walls. Her husband expects her to be so simple and coy not be garlanded and embroidered in any way. “Why are you trying to become a man? Put on a floral embroidered scarf. Put on red lipstick and wait for your husband to come home at night. Men prefer women like that” (Qaderi, 2020, p. 118).

#### **4.2. Role of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment**

Homeira discussed gender inequality and restriction on women but at the same time she also highlighted gender equality which encouraged women’s empowerment and put an end to coercive powers.

Homeira informs how gender equality encourages women empowerment and put an end to coercive power. She narrated personal experience, when she was deprived of getting education. Girls’ schools were closed and even women cannot read anything in their houses. Her family decided to set home-schooling for her and they initiated such a challenging and risky task only to empower her daughter and the girls of their locality. They provided the opportunity for their daughter and girls of Herat, so they could get education and grow up as a literate person. Such behavior of gender equality from Homeira’s parents showed their efforts to empower both men and women of their country so they can help each other. Family opines “This will help you pass your days more easily and it will also benefit our neighborhood girls. Without our help, they will grow up illiterate” (Qaderi, 2020, p. 44). Friedman (2003) encourages women autonomy and gender equality. She says that, “an ideal of personal autonomy is based on the presumption that there is value in a life lived in accord with the perspective of the one who lives it. It starts with individual’s own wants and desires, cares, concerns, values, and commitments” (p. 56).

“Smiling, Madar ran her fingers through my hair. You are not a teacher; you are just the girl from the neighborhood. But you can become a teacher” (Qaderi, 2020, p. 44). Homeira expressed that her parents encouraged her in this situation and they converted their kitchen into a classroom. Her mother encouraged her that, she could become a teacher and would help other girls. Such notions of gender equality were expressed by the narrator in her writing which empowered women so they could do what they want in their life. By providing such opportunity, her parents put an end to coercive power that restricted women’s education. Friedman (2003) expressed that, “a culture is likely either to regulate their lives excessively or subordinate them to other persons close to them who are regarded as capable of directing women’s lives for them” (Friedman, 2003, p. 83).

Homeira received gender equality not only from her mother but her grandfather also allowed her for her passion. She called her grandfather Baba-jan and always perceived her as a biased nature person. But as soon as she started teaching at home, her Baba-jan allowed her and even cleared her position that he was not against educating girls rather he was in the favor. She says “Baba-jan scratched his beard. Finally, he pointed his finger at me. You speak to me as if I am opposed to educating girls. I am not” (Qaderi, 2020, p.45). It was not just Homeira’s mother and grandfather who helped her in her

ambition but it was his father who took the leading role. He provided the same right and equality as he provided to his son. In this way, he paved the way and set an example for her daughter.

Her self-ownership was a source of encouragement and also a leading path for the well-being of another female in Afghanistan. But soon she realized that it was dangerous to teach these students in her house. She went to the refugee camp and a mosque selected for this cause. Her father carried the heavy blackboard on his back every day to the mosque. He avoided the Taliban checkpoint, located close to the encampment, and reached to the mosque where Homeira used to teach students. "I'll never forget the first day. Agha strapped the heavy blackboard on his back. He took a circuitous route to the mosque to avoid a Taliban checkpoint located close to the encampment" (Qaderi, 2020, p. 48). Friedman (2003) highlights that, "once women admit that autonomy might be a value for us, it would be difficult to deny its value for persons in general" (p. 126).

Homeira persistently dreamt for the free land and personal autonomy not only for herself but for the rest of the people in her country. The novel, *Dancing in the Mosque* (2020), presented historical development in Afghanistan. The country was occupied by Russians and then captured by the Taliban and with this all fundamental rights were put under the fence of cultural norms. Homeira's father dumped all his books underground. He was afraid of the Taliban because it was considered a sinful act to read or teach anything liberal. Homeira was fond of reading and wanted to be an educated person. She spent her time in teaching and learning how to write stories. When her father was dumping his books, she hid some of them and read at night when the streets became barren of people. She used to hide these books in her cellar. When the truth was revealed in front of her family, her father allowed her to read books and stated that, the girl who wanted to be a story writer must read first about stories. The notions of gender equality were presented by Homeira in her narration which encouraged women of the locality and empowered them so they could put to end these coercive powers and restrictions. "Smiling, Agha looked over at his father. The girl who writes must read stories. I will hide the books in the cellar" (Qaderi, 2020, p. 80). As Friedman (2003) has also expresses that, "the capacity for autonomy seems instrumentally valuable as a means for resisting oppression" (p. 126)

Homeira's family promoted her and encouraged her in education. She encountered people like Moulvi Rashid, who tried to get advantage of her physical appearance. She wanted to be a story writer and her father said that she should read more novels. By reading more novels, she would become more creative and understand people and their behavior in different situations. Homeira compared different male characters e.g. her father, Omar and Jebar and their behavior towards gender equality. "Agha encouraged me, saying, by reading more novels, Homeira, you will become more creative. You will know more people" (Qaderi, 2020, p. 80).

Omar was Sharifa's husband, who rejected her wife because she bore girls for her. Jebar restricted Homeira because he made her realize that a woman's sacred duty was to provide pleasure to her husband. But Homeira's father, Agha, facilitated her daughter on equal basis. He ignited belief in her daughter that she could write a story. Such notions of gender equality empowered women and rejected coercive powers which restricted women's liberty. Friedman (2003) argues that, "women autonomy gives them a normative standpoint for critically assessing oppressive social conditions" (p. 34).

Homeira highlighted Iran and its environment for women. They moved to Tehran, the capital of Iran, where she saw that women were walking on the streets without any males. There were swimming pools for women on every street. Women were doing jobs and were going to schools and colleges. She projected an environment of gender equality. "In Tehran, almost on every street, there were swimming pools for women. Women could work; they could study" (Qaderi, 2020, p. 112). She compared both Iran and Afghanistan by showing that women were restricted in the house in Afghanistan but in Iran, they were walking independently. In Afghanistan, no woman could go outside her house but in Iran, women were walking in the bazaars and streets. No woman could get education or read any liberal book. But in Iran, "Streets were full of cars driven by women. In rush-hour traffic congestion, women were honking angrily. For a girl from Afghanistan, this was a dream" (Qaderi, 2020, p. 112). Iran provided rights to the women that any woman could read any liberal art with her desire. No woman was restricted under any cultural law. They were free to go to any school, university or could do jobs if they desire. They could go to salons and dye their hair in any color. In short, Women could enjoy their personal autonomy and cultural liberty while living in Iran but all this was not possible for the woman in Afghanistan. Homeira highlighted gender equality that encouraged women empowerment and rejected coercive powers which restricted women into four walls.

## 5. Conclusion

The study concludes that the personal autonomy and cultural liberty of women in Afghanistan were restricted by patriarchal society. The study has highlighted the role of coercive powers that restricted women into four walls along with the struggle for personal autonomy and resilience against the Taliban, the oppressors. Homeira rejected the restrictions on women and tried to discover her self-ownership that made her autonomous in decisions and practices. She tried for the self-ownership, which leads her to discover several things that were restricted for the woman in Afghanistan. She rebelled against the Taliban and stood against their leader, she decided to protest against them to reopen girls' schools. She wrote a story with her name on it which showed her courage for freedom of choice in all matters. Her quest for self-ownership promoted her



personal autonomy and well-being. She became an advisor and professor with her brave decisions and a financial contributor to her family. Homeira's mother, her grandfather and her father helped her, encouraged her and empowered her so that she could facilitate other girls as well. These were the elements of gender equality where female were awarded equal rights and honor. The study further highlights that Muslim women have the agency to reinterpret their faith and carve out a space for joy and celebration within the confines of their religion.

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