INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES BULLETIN
ISSN: (E) 3007-1917 (P) 3007-1909
Volume 4, Issue 2, 2026

FEMINISM IN IMTIAZ DHARKER'S POETRY

Muhammad Bilal Makan[*1], Ahtasham Ashraf[2], Aasia Altaf[3], Muhammad Mohsin[4]

[*1]*M Phil Scholar Muslim Youth University Islamabad*
[2,3,4]*M Phil Scholar Muslim Youth University, Islamabad, MPhil English*

Corresponding Author: *
Muhammad Bilal Makan
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18617407

Received	Accepted	Published
11 December 2025	26 January 2026	11 February 2026

ABSTRACT
In this study, we will examine how Imtiaz Dharker depicts a revolt against kyriarchy in "A Century Later" which is one of her famous poems. Global feminists hold the view that gender violence is the manifestation of centuries of women struggling defensively against profound power structures. The poem will be analysed utilising qualitative research method incorporating textual and critical analysis of the poem. In the poem, kyriarchy is used to limit access to education for women. This includes reports on harassment faced by women, divorce statistics, domestic abuse and honour killings. Readers are made aware of this particular study at the hurdles the females face in the pursuit of knowledge. The results of this study confirmed that women's right to education should be omnipresent and that they cannot be subjugated or deprived of their basic right.
Keywords: *Women's education, Kyriarchy, Patriarchy, Feminism, Freedom*

INTRODUCTION

Imtiaz Dharker, a poetess, filmmaker, and an artist of Pakistani descent with Indian and Scottish roots, showcases a deep understanding of diverse cultures and the prevalent social inequalities that are associated with them. Her poetry is the reflection of her rich cultural background, giving her poems a unique transcultural quality, Darker's work often delves into the struggles faced by women, shedding light on the marginalized status they hold in a society. Through her poems, she addresses issues such as identify crisis, gender inequalities, and harassment that women, especially in Indo-Pak, grapple with. Despite the challenges, women continue their struggle to get basic rights, including access to education and equal social and political standing. By examining Dharker's poetry through a feminist lens, as suggested by Das (2017), one can appreciate her efforts in shaping women's identities.

1.1 Statement of The Problem

This research article aims at analyzing A Century Later, a poem written by the poetess Imtiaz Dharker through feminist perspective. The main problem will be to explore the concept of kyriarchy and the rise of women against violence and oppression.

1.2 Research Objectives

The main objectives of this are as follows:

1. To highlight the elements of feminism in A Century Later
2. To discuss the concept of kyriarchy
3. Textual and critical analysis of the poem

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the concept of kyriarchy and how it is demonstrated in the works of Imtiaz Dharker?
2. What is the struggle of women against oppression?

1.4 Significance of Research

Imtiaz Dharker was born in Lahore, Pakistan who got married in Wales and then moved to India. She is a poet, filmmaker and artist who has a substantial understanding of diverse cultures highlighting the social issues faced by women like gender discrimination, domestic

violence, inequality, deprivation of basic human rights like that of education and the problems of minorities within a country and outside the country as well. This research article analyzes her poem A Century Later through the lens of feminism, particularly focusing on the concept of kyriarchy and consequent struggle and rise of women against it.

1.5 Delimitation

The purpose of this study is to analyze the concept of feminism in the works of Imtiaz Dharker with the special focus on the concept of kyriarchy in her poems. The study is delimited to the textual analysis of one of her famous poems titled 'A Century Later'.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

E.S.Fiorenza (1992) introduced the notion of kyriarchy as a means to address various aspects within feminist theories. The term kyriarchy is from kyrios & archie meaning master and to rule respectively. This concept takes into account racism, trans-misogyny and classism. It represents an evolved form of patriarchy, recognizing that gender alone does not solely determine one`s power. Instead, it acknowledges the oppression of elite, not necessarily a father or patriarch (Abrahams, 2005:26-7; Fiorenza, 1992:8,117). In this article, we shall explore elements of kyriarchy to deprive female students of their basic right to education. Dharker portrays women in different societies (I Speak for the Devil) both in the East and the West (Shoukat Ali, 2017). The education of women is viewed as unconventional and contradictory to societal norms. Kyriarchy serves as a bridge that connects different waves of feminism, addressing varying perspectives and faiths of different generations (Bruns, 2010, p.33). Women have historically faced discrimination due to the exercise of power by men (Day, 2002). Throughout various stages of life, women are dependent on men, starting from childhood where they rely on their fathers or brothers, then as adult they depend on their husbands, and later in life on their male children (Begum, 2018)

'A Century Later` underscores the struggle of women in challenging kyriarchal structures, particularly in dismantling societal norms that restrict their access to education. Dharker as evidenced in her other volume of poetry, denounces the subjugation of women. Additionally, Dharker portrays the enduring struggles and unwavering resilience of women as they strive to overcome oppression and marginalization. Women have historically been confined within a framework of cultural alienation, gender biases, and submission. Wasim (2019) states that Baba Bulleh Shah vehemently criticizes the subjugation of women in his verses, shedding light on the elevated status of women often overlooked in a predominantly male-centric society. Throughout Pakistan, women have long endured the brunt of violence inside and outside home, including acid attacks, and killing in the name of honor & shame. This unfortunate reality extends beyond national borders, as women are often perceived as belonging to marginalized groups on a global scale. The societies under scrutiny have been shaped by a lack of literacy, awareness, and moral sensibility, resulting in emergence of racist, dominant, and kyriarchal practices. Within these societies, women are often treated as possessions of men, whose every action, from sleeping to eating, is dictated by their male counterparts. Numerous restrictions are imposed upon women, including limitations on their right to education. This study aims to delve into the struggles faced by women against the kyriarchal system and explore the themes presented in A Century Later through the perspective of Feminism. Furthermore, this could be perceived as a research gap, there is a scarcity of studies carried out on this poem and its core concept.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a qualitative methodology, incorporating textual and critical analysis of the poem "The Century Later". Qualitative methods are primarily utilized to delve deep into the understanding of a particular subject (Patton, 2002). This type of research aims to scrutinize and encapsulate the essence of a specific phenomenon, process or style that is prevalent in everyday life, attributing significance to it (Wodak&Busch, 2004). The original text of the poem serves as the main source to substantiate the objectives of the paper. Through the critical analysis of the text, the poem showcases the powerful portrayal of women by Dharker,

shedding light on challenges faced by them in their struggle against kyriarchy.

3.1 Research Design

This research study is done by utilizing qualitative research design which involves the textual and critical analysis of the text of the poem.

3.2 Research Method

The study will involve the exploration of the concept of feminism & kyriarchy in Imtiaz Dharker's poem A Century Later.

3.3 Research Material/ Research Tool

The original text of the poem "A Century Later" will be utilized as research material or tool.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

Feminism is one of the most popular themes in literature which interests not only women but also men. The history has seen various waves/eras of this theoretical framework. This study has tried to examine the elements of feminism in the works of Imtiaz Dharkar poetry. What may interest the reader more is the concept of kyriarchy which may be a new notion for many readers and the subsequent struggle of women against it.

Data Analysis

Title

Title A Century Later is very significant, Dharker wrote it in 2014, a century after first World War. It depicts lack of progress in hundred years and that the poor plight of the women remains the same as ever.

1-2 'The school-bell is a call to battle, /every step to class, a step into firing-line'

The poetess Imtiaz Dharker eloquently illustrates the challenges faced by females within schools. The first line is also a reference to one of the famous war poem by Wilfred Owen Anthem For Doomed Youth ,*"what passing-bells for these who die as cattle"*. The comparison of school bell to call to battle is particularly striking. While 'school bell' typically evokes positive associations like the end of class, recess, or break time, linking it to a call to battle introduces a sense of urgency and chaos. Attending school can be likened to entering a battlefield for girls and women. This systematic marginalization contributes to the disadvantaged social status of women in various regions across the globe. This also depicts the plight of the children who live in the dangerous and war stricken countries.

3-6 'Here is the target, fine skin at the temple, /cheek still rounded from being fifteen/ surrendered, surrounded, she/ takes the bullet in the head'

Dharker portrays females as vulnerable target of terrorists, both male and female, who oppose women's education. The act of seeking education is depicted as a battle that women must courageously face. The phrase 'surrendered.....head', shows helplessness of women and is also a poignant reference to the tragic event involving Malala Yousufzai ,Malala, a member of the Pushtoon family, was a prominent female student within her community who was shot to stop her from attending the school by Taliban. The Taliban symbolize conservatism, imposition of restrictions on women, embodying an extreme kyriarchal mind-set.

In Pakistan, women in society, especially in rural areas, face degradation. They receive little consideration and are subjected to mistreatment. International human rights law prohibits discrimination against women to get education and Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights gives equal to everyone to receive education (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2010). Despite this official/ universal recognition, there persists a disparity in the treatment of women's rights, primarily due to male dominance. The poem 'A Century Later' effectively addresses this issue by highlighting the struggles women face in overcoming societal norms. Radicalized religious ideologies often hinder the progress of democracy within a state, as seen in instances where extremist elements in Swat viewed the education as anti-religious and targeted women's education. This systematic oppression leads to violence, objectification and restrictions becoming routine.

7-10 'and walks on. The missile cuts/ a pathway in her mind, to an orchard/ in full bloom, a

field humming under the sun,/ its lap open and full of poppies.'

The poetess Imtiaz Dharker emphasizes the resilience of women in the face of adversity, symbolized by words like orchard, bloom and sun juxtaposed against the imagery of missiles, bullets and battlefields representing patriarchal and kyriarchy mentalities that seek to suppress women's empowerment. Here we observe that the poetess uses present tense while portraying a recent incident. She uses the word orchard as a metaphor to represent the mind of the young child which can find peace through education.

"The missile .... mind" suggests a traumatic effect which is long lasting and which altogether changes the mental landscape of innocent children. At the same time we observe a contrast between outer or physical violence and inner peace when the poetess makes use of the words missile and orchard. Lap open and full of copies is a symbol of hope as poppies symbolize tranquility. This also represents the ability of human mind which can find refuge in most trying situations.

11-12 'This girl has won/ the right to be ordinary',

The poetess portrays the embodiment of courage and resilience against violence and oppression towards females. The phrase 'this girl .... be ordinary', signifies the triumph of women who defy societal norms that restrict access to education. It is crucial to highlight the significance of the lines that emphasize her attainment of the right to lead an ordinary life. The term 'ORDINARY' denotes something commonplace or regular, and education is considered ordinary for men. However, women are compelled to struggle for the same level of normalcy as men in terms of education. Throughout history, women have been subjected to subjugation and confinement due to a subaltern mind-set rooted in the social hierarchy of power. According to Altinova et.al. (2016), women's rights are an integral part of universal human rights.

13-16 "wear bangles to a wedding, paint her fingernails, /go to school. Bullet, she says, you are stupid. /You have failed. You cannot kill a book /or the buzzing in it'.

In her poem, Dharker highlights the bravery of a woman who lives a normal life while challenging violence. Dharker's mention of wearing bangles and painting nails may serve as a reminder of the restrictions imposed on women. Society often frowns upon women expressing themselves through such actions, denying them the freedom to live a joyful life. The poem sheds light on the determination of women who defy barriers to education. The line 'you...failed .... buzzing in it', suggests that it is not easy to stop women from their pursuit of education.

It alludes to Malala Yousufzai, who continued her education despite facing adversity. The poem represents not just the enthusiasm of one woman, but the collective spirit of women. The issue of kyriarchy extends beyond Pakistan and encompasses women from various backgrounds. Dharker's metaphorical use of the phrase 'you cannot kill a book', emphasizes that a woman's knowledge and independence cannot be easily destroyed.

Bangles and nail paint are simple joys which young girls can partake in after suffering and struggling to live a normal life, something which is taken for granted by others in normal circumstances. "Go to school" signifies the importance of education particularly for women empowerment to achieve a bright future. We see that the poetess personifies "bullet" when she calls it "stupid" and "you have failed" alludes towards the failure of violence which failed to silence their voices and hinder their struggle. Here book symbolizes knowledge and a hope for girls' education. It can also be a holy book/scripture which is usually misinterpreted and abused by religious scholars to be used in their own interest and to oppress others particularly women.

17-19 "A murmur, a swarm. Behind her, one by one, /the schoolgirls are standing up/ to take their places on the front line".

Activists within the feminist movement dedicated their efforts to ensuring that girls had greater access to education and worked towards eliminating discriminatory practices. Consequently, significant progress was achieved in enhancing girls 'educational opportunities during this period. This is evident in the poem's

depiction of an increasing number of girls attending school, as portrayed in the last lines:
In these last lines, the poetess has used very strong imagery when she uses words like "murmur" and "swarm", she compares the young girls to bees or insects which on one hand hints towards their inferiority in the eyes of the world, but on the other hand, it also represents their strength and unity. "Behind her one by one" suggests that Malala and other females like her become a role model for women across the globe and by getting inspiration from such role models they gather courage and follow their footsteps. The phrase "one by one" also suggests discipline along with determination. "Schoolgirls ..... front line" means they stand against oppression and now they are ready to take the leadership role which brings with itself a lot of responsibility. This also indicates that they join hands because they have a common goal and that is women liberation from all forms of violence & societal oppression.

Poem's Form Structure & Language

This one is written as a free verse representing the rights of women to have free thoughts. It has an irregular rhyme scheme, consists of 5 stanzas including quadrants, couplets, and a final tercet. There are few devices utilized by the poetess in the poem which are discussed as follows:

Caesurae: It presents students defiance when the poetess says, "you have failed.... a book."

Enjambment: conveys students resilience as she says "she/..... walks on"

Onomatopoeia" poetess has used words like "humming, buzzing and murmur" to create vocal effect

Oxymoron: Darker uses contrasting imagery "school-bell ..... battle"

Metaphor: presents school as battlefield, students as soldiers

Imagery from nature: Buzzing, murmur, orchard, bloom, sun, field, poppies, etc.

Personification: The narrator personifies bullet as a murderer and the book is someone which cannot be killed

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researchers' qualitative analysis of "A Century Later" reveals that a woman's freedom, liberty and educational rights remain inseparable from her, despite the presence of patriarchy and kyriarchy. The efforts of men appear to diminish in the face of women's empowerment. Additionally, Dharker's portrayal of women as soldiers align with the notion to stand against patriarchy. As typically we expect soldiers to emerge victorious, here women are. The line "One By One.... Front Line" further emphasizes women's defiance against any form of discrimination. As noted by King (2001), Imtiaz Dharker employs poetic language to effectively convey social issues by contextualizing her own experiences. Given Dharker's first-hand experience, this piece of poetry effectively highlight the issues faced by females.

Contrarily, it is important to acknowledge that she has proposed methods to combat this societal ailment. A woman must exhibit resilience and harness her inner strength, much like Malala. Despite the hindrance of a terrorist attack, she remained steadfast in her pursuit of her aspirations. As a result, she now serves as a global and international symbol for women empowerment. Dharker's ideology presents a hopeful vision for women in a male-dominated society, despite the numerous challenges they face.

According to Wadhwa's (2018) analysis of Dharker's poem 'Purdah' women are depicted as being confined and controlled by society, which deprives them of their rights and freedom to make choices. However, our research indicates that through education and inner strength, women can break free from these societal constraints. The poem dismisses any fears women may have about the challenges of the societal system, as Dharker's perspectives are both inspiring and optimistic, resonating with the empowerment and advancement of women. By actively opposing kyriarchy, women can strive for education, career success, and personal growth.

5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this poem delves into the challenges faced by women, shedding light on the underlying discourse of how dominant forces have perpetuated false consciousness and normalized certain beliefs and behaviours within society. This resistance towards literature and education among women stems from the threat it poses to the established system. This resistance

is evident in the daily lives of women across various spheres. The marginalization of women in a society has long been a prevalent reality, creating barriers for self-awareness. However, as women challenge the status quo and defy societal norms, equality becomes a norm rather than an exception. The pervasive influence of hegemony compels women to endure all injustices. Consequently, women's collective identity has been reduced to inferiority, vulnerability, and objectification, subject to misuse and mistreatment.

'A Century Later' raises pertinent questions regarding the plight of women and their efforts to rise against oppression. The concept of kyriarchy highlights the suppression of the basic right to education for women, juxtaposed with the assignment of domestic roles such as caregiving and cooking. Education, as a tool for empowerment, is indispensable for both men and women. By analysing this poem and examining contemporary instances of gender-based oppression, it is evident that women's resilience which can never be stifled by the kyriarchal approach. This poem serves as a powerful symbol of women's empowerment, defying all odds and challenging social discrimination.

The battle/war which is mentioned in the beginning and throughout the poem is actually the war waged against women education and their rights. At the same time it provides a testimony to women's strength despite the fact that they are usually considered intellectually inferior. Dharker proves to be a powerful spokesperson for women's rights presenting their ability to be vulnerable and strong at the same time. Numerous females in the world still do not have the liberty and opportunity to get education, they are not supposed to struggle to achieve their basic human right , they should not withstand bullets and missiles and they should not be made to feel ashamed of their identity. The poetess has made use of war jargon to portray violence against women with the help of the most powerful and harmful weapons by they still cannot truly destroy the innate strength of a female and in the end we see girls emerging victorious and ready to continue their pursuit of knowledge and learning.

REFERENCES

Day, L., & Langan, M.(Eds.).(2002).Women, oppression and social work: Issues in anti-discriminatory practice, Routledge.

Hadi, A, (2017).Patriarchy and gender-based violence in Pakistan. European Journal of Social Science Education and Research, 4(4), 297-304).

King, B. (2001). Modern Indian Poetry in English. New Delhi, Oxford University Press.

Martin, Dianne. (1998). Retribution Revisited: Reconsideration of Feminist Criminal Law Reform Strategies, Osgoode Hall Law Journal, 36, 151-88.

Ozaydinlik, K. (2014). Women in Turkey on the basis of gender and education. Journal pf social policy studies, 14, 93-112.

Abraham, L.A.-L. (2005). A critical comparison of Elizabeth schussler Fiorenza's notion of Christian ministry as a 'Discipleship of Equals' and Mercy Amba Oduyoye's notion as a partnership of both men and women'. Magister Theologae, University of Western Cape, Cape Town, South Africa.

Baig,S. (2017). Realism Vs Magical Realism in Mohammad Hanif's our lady of Alice Bhatti. Linguistics and Literature Review, 3(2), 87-102.

Bali,S.(2015) women as Subalterns in Imtiaz Dharker's poetry. International journal of English language, literature and humanities, 3(4)274-284.

Begum, H. (2018). Possession to Person: the journey of women in Imtiaz Dharker poetry. International journal of English language, literature and Translation studies.5, 34-38.

Bruns, Cindy M. (1010), Feminism and Feminist Therapy Across Generations. Women & Therapy, 34:1-2. Pp. 19-37.

Celic, O, (2012). Women's human rights movement. Journal of Ghazi University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, 14,149-170.

Das, S. (2017). Voices of dissent in the poetry of Imtiaz Dharker, International Journal for intersectional Feminist Studies, 31, pp. 39-55.

Quinn Patton, M (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation methods, Sage.

Schussler Fiorenza (1992), But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation.

Wasim, A. (2009). Discovering the voice of women through Archetypes in Baba Bullay shah's verses.

Wadhwa,P. (2018). Veil- a state of mind: Imtiaz Dharker's Purdah-1 and Purdah-2.

IEER