

VOL. XI ISSUE I, WINTER (MARCH-2026)

GSR

GLOBAL SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW
HEC-RECOGNIZED CATEGORY-Y

GLOBAL SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW (GSR)

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Keywords: Radical Feminism, Selected Novels, Qualitative Research, Content Analysis

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Pages: 22-27

DOI:10.31703/gsr.2026(XI-I).03

DOI link: [https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2026\(XI-I\).03](https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2026(XI-I).03)

Article link: <https://gsrjournal.com/article/radical-feminist-reflections-in-the-selected-works-of-marlyn-french-khaled-hosseini-and-margaret-atwood>

Full-text Link: <https://gsrjournal.com/article/radical-feminist-reflections-in-the-selected-works-of-marlyn-french-khaled-hosseini-and-margaret-atwood>

Pdf link: <https://www.gsrjournal.com/jadmin/Auther/31rvIolA2.pdf>

Global Sociological Review

p-ISSN: [2708-2091](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2026(XI-I).03) **e-ISSN:** [2708-3586](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2026(XI-I).03)

DOI(journal):10.31703/gsr

Volume: XI (2026)

DOI (volume):10.31703/gsr.2026(XI)

Issue: I Winter (March-2026)

DOI(Issue):10.31703/gsr.2026(XI-I)

Home Page

www.gsrjournal.com

Volume: XI (2026)

<https://www.gsrjournal.com/Current-issue>

Issue: I-Winter (March 2026)

<https://www.gsrjournal.com/issue/11/1/2026>

Scope

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<https://humaglobe.com/index.php/gsr/submissions>

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Article Serial	03
Article Title	Radical Feminist Reflections in the selected works of Marlyn French, Khaled Hosseini and Margaret Atwood
Authors	Saman Salah Khair un Nisa Azeem Durdana Rafique
DOI	10.31703/gsr.2026(XI-I).03
Pages	22–27
Year	2026
Volume	XI
Issue	I

Referencing & Citing Styles

APA	Salah, S., Azeem, K. u. N., & Rafique, D. (2026). Radical Feminist Reflections in the selected works of Marlyn French, Khaled Hosseini and Margaret Atwood. <i>Global Sociological Review</i> , XI(1), 22-27. https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2026(XI-I).03
CHICAGO	Salah, Saman, Khair un Nisa Azeem, and Durdana Rafique. 2026. "Radical Feminist Reflections in the selected works of Marlyn French, Khaled Hosseini and Margaret Atwood." <i>Global Sociological Review</i> XI (1):22-27. doi: 10.31703/gsr.2026(XI-I).03.
HARVARD	SALAH, S., AZEEM, K. U. N. & RAFIQUE, D. 2026. Radical Feminist Reflections in the selected works of Marlyn French, Khaled Hosseini and Margaret Atwood. <i>Global Sociological Review</i> , XI, 22-27.
MHRA	Salah, Saman, Khair un Nisa Azeem, and Durdana Rafique. 2026. 'Radical Feminist Reflections in the selected works of Marlyn French, Khaled Hosseini and Margaret Atwood', <i>Global Sociological Review</i> , XI: 22-27.
MLA	Salah, Saman, Khair un Nisa Azeem, and Durdana Rafique. "Radical Feminist Reflections in the Selected Works of Marlyn French, Khaled Hosseini and Margaret Atwood." <i>Global Sociological Review</i> XI.I (2026): 22-27. Print.
OXFORD	Salah, Saman, Azeem, Khair un Nisa, and Rafique, Durdana (2026), 'Radical Feminist Reflections in the selected works of Marlyn French, Khaled Hosseini and Margaret Atwood', <i>Global Sociological Review</i> , XI (1), 22-27.
TURABIAN	Salah, Saman, Khair un Nisa Azeem, and Durdana Rafique. "Radical Feminist Reflections in the Selected Works of Marlyn French, Khaled Hosseini and Margaret Atwood." <i>Global Sociological Review</i> XI, no. I (2026): 22-27. https://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2026(XI-I).03 .

Radical Feminist Reflections in the selected works of Marlyn French, Khaled Hosseini and Margaret Atwood



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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the questions of radical feminism against women oppression and stereotype patriarchal roles in the selected novels of Marlyn French, Khaled Hosseini and Margaret Atwood. Drawing upon Shulamith's theoretical perspectives on radical feminism (1970), this paper throws reflections on the challenges faced by the women in the selected novels and their resistance towards oppression based on biological creation. The selected novels are analyzed with a qualitative research design (Wellek & Warren, 1977) since it provides space to the researcher for deep analysis. Using content analysis, the paper extracts and interprets resistance as a continuous pattern in the selected novels though written under different social and political backgrounds, due to different types of oppression caused by the patriarchal system. Thus, oppression becomes a global issue which needs to be direly readdressed in the 21st century modern world.

Keywords: *Radical Feminism, Selected Novels, Qualitative Research, Content Analysis*

Introduction

Patriarchy has always been a debate in various literary texts. It has been portrayed in various forms including male dominance either through the role of a father, brother, uncle or a husband (Chandio, 2025; Kalsoom, 2025; Abbas, 2025). In this paper the researcher takes into consideration three novels by the authors from different backgrounds to dive deep into oppression and radical feminism. The selected authors are prominent radical feminist literary critics on who have written about women oppression and identity crises in patriarchal institutions. As radical feminist these writers explore the woman's struggles and challenges in a patriarchal society. The selected novels expose marriage as a system, draining woman's self-worth, identity and freedom. Further the novels showcase how female sexuality is controlled, suppressed and judged contrasting to the male's. The texts also explore self-identification and consciousness of woman in a radical feminist context.

Besides the selected texts expose the patriarchal obsession with controlling woman's bodies, identities and sexuality, showcasing how systemic oppression is held by politics, religion and culture in male dominance. Despite the oppression, the novels highlight the woman's endeavors' towards resistance, which reflects radical feminist ideas of collective solidarity and defiance.

Problem Statement

As an academic, philosophical and exceedingly societal spreading phenomenon, radical feminism focuses on oppression of woman primarily caused by patriarchal system and woman's endeavors to overcome from suppression of male domination (Tripathi, 2025; Fatima et.al, 2025; Khan, 2025). Many a great examination and work has been done on the concept of radical feminism, however the works limit and do not depict the



prodigious concept of radical feminism in multicultural societies (Western intertwined with South Asian). Thus, the study explores the profound implications of patriarchal attitudes towards woman all around the globe, including Western and South Asian woman, and their attempts to overcome social, cultural and religious male influences from the selected novels.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate oppression, marginalization and endeavors of women in the selected novels.
2. To examine the patriarchal system consuming the woman's identity and controlling woman's body in a radical feminist perspective.
3. To explore the woman's consciousness of their self-worth, identify and struggles in the framework of radical feminism in the selected novels.
4. To highlight the patriarchal system profoundly immersed in the oppression and subjugation of women.

Research Questions

1. How do the selected novels highlight women's struggle in opposition to patriarchal institutions like marriage and family?
2. In what ways the nominated novels represented feminist consciousness through radical feminism in relation to oppression?
3. How is the female body portrayed as a figure of control from the radical feminist perspective in the chosen novels?
4. In what ways the novels differ in their portrayal of the oppression of women?

Significance of the Study

The previous studies focus only on one angle, that is oppression of women. However, this study also shows the transformation of women from silence to awareness. Besides, the study contributes to the feminist literary theory by exploring the three selected novels by different authors with different social political and cultural backgrounds thus increasing the scope of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Shulamith (1970) argued that genuine liberation for women required a complete restructuring of reproductive roles. She proposed that technological advances should be used to release women from the biological limitations of childbirth. Kate Millett, an American thinker, is often recognized as the pioneer of the Radical Feminism through her influential book *Sexual politics* (1970). In her book she illustrates how patriarchy reinforce control over women through cultural norms, family dynamics, and sexuality. Dworkin's works, including *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1981), concentrated on the ways pornography and sexual exploitation institutionalize male dominance.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework offers the structure through which a research study uses its chosen theoretical lens to the selected texts. The conceptual framework of this research is grounded in feminist literary criticism, with Radical Feminism as the central lens of analysis. In other words, the conceptual framework functions as a connection between theory and analysis. It translates abstract Radical Feminist concepts into instruments for understanding the oppression, resistance, and transformation of women in different milieu. This study utilizes feminist Literary Criticism with its major branch Radical Feminism focuses on patriarchy as the root cause of oppression, as its main theoretical foundation and specifically draws upon several central concepts. Patriarchy is understood as the basic system of oppression that perpetuate male dominance.

Analysis and Discussion

Women are portrayed as Objects in the selected novels and often treated as things, with their value fixed on or set on by their relationships with men. For instance, in one of the selected novels, the character of Maryam

reflects objectification of women. Her forced marriage to Rasheed and Laila's forced marriage to him shows how women are objectified and commodified. Lack of Agency in the novel shows how women's lack of agency and autonomy leads to their objectification and commodification. Maryam's inability to make right choices about her own life and body reduction to reproductive roles. In another selected novel, women especially the Handmaids, are seen not as full human beings but as vessels for reproduction or as an object to produce babies. Offered and others are identified not by their names but by their monarchs or commanders (e.g., "Of-Fred"), showing ownership rather than individuality. Loss of identity in Handmaids are forbidden to read, write, so they didn't have personal freedom. Their clothes red dresses and white bonnets mark for them as reproductive objects, stripping away personality and emphasizing their "function." Language as objectification, the most use of biblical and ritualistic language objectifies women, turning them into symbols of purity, fertility and a sin. The Ceremony itself reduces the Handmaid to a passive participant in state where sanctioned sexual exploitation is high. Woman is treated as state or property as in the novel the Handmaids are treated like object or state resources or for growing their family tree. Infertility is blamed on women, so their value is measured entirely by reproductive ability. They are "assigned" to support the households rather than individuals with agency. The Women's bodies become difficult to survive. Commanders gain social prestige and advantage through the Handmaid's fertility, until Wives can tolerate the arrangement as long as it ensures offspring for their secure position.

Besides, women as property of men is shown from the beginning of the novel "The Thousand Splendid Suns", Maryam the protagonist of the novel is treated not as a person but as a (illegitimate child), and as an object with no heart and feelings and a social label that objectifies her existence. Her own father was not ready to accept and own her publically. Her marriage to Rasheed further reinforces her status as property as he started controlling her, how she is going to dress is all decided by his husband, how she is going to move or sit and how she is going to speak is all controlled by his husband, As well as Physical objectification as in Rasheed views women through their bodies. He constantly mocks on Maryam's and later Laila's appearances, and when Maryam cannot give birth to his son, he sees her as defective and worthless piece that is placed at the corner of the house, not as a human being with feelings. Denial of individuality as Women in Afghan society (particularly under Taliban rule) lost their names and identities, hidden behind abaya. The abaya itself is symbolic it erases the woman as an individual and turns her into a faceless object in public spaces. Women as tools of reproduction, like in *The Handmaid's Tale*, women's worth is linked to their ability to bear children. Rasheed values Mariam only if she gives him a son, and when she cannot, he becomes abusive and dismissive. Laila's pregnancies are treated as a means to fulfill his desire for a male heir. Their role is minimized to that of obedient wives and mothers, essential only in relation to men to grow their family tree. Women's public value is tied to family "honor." This notion commodified their sexuality any deviation (real or perceived) is punished with violence, showing that their bodies are treated as carriers of male pride rather than as their own. Resistance and Reclamation, While Hosseini exposes objectification and commodification, he also shows resistance, Maryam's claims agency when she kills Rasheed to save Laila, so that she goes with her daughter, breaking out of the cycle of being treated as an object. Laila, after Rasheed's death, chooses to build a life of dignity and education for her children, showing how women can move from commodified roles to autonomous identities after coming out from forced relationship, Laila started realizing her worth. Mira, the protagonist, marries Norm not because she desires him but because society tells her this is her only legitimate role. Wives as property, Husbands view wives as extensions of themselves, not as an independent being. A wife's duty is to cook, clean, raise children, and provide sex functions that commodity her as a household servant and sexual partner to grow their family tree. Objectification through male gaze. Mira and her friends constantly feel judged by societal standards of beauty, reinforcing that their bodies are commodities for male approval and attraction. Children as proof of worth and value, As Mira's motherhood defines her social value. Her ability to take care of and reproduce becomes her "currency" in the patriarchal order. She is consumed by domestic labor, unpaid and unacknowledged, treated as a machine that produces and sustains life without recognition. Mira's personal dreams and intellectual ambitions and hope are removed in favor of her "function."

Feminist Awakening and Resistance

Despite the oppressive systems, women in the following novels find ways to resist and defy patriarchal norms for their survival, Maryam decision to kill Rasheed is a powerful example of resistance, while Laila's

determination to protect her family and assert her agency demonstrates her feminist awakening. By recalling her past life when she had a job, family, and freedom she recognizes the magnitude of what Gilead has stolen. This memory work is part of her feminist awakening, because it reminds her that her oppression is constructed and its not something natural. The regime erases women's names and voices, but Offred's narration itself is an act of resistance. Her inner monologue allows her to reclaim subjectivity, refusing to let her identity dissolve entirely. Encounters with other women Mira, who openly admits resists, who belongs to the resistance network Mayday; and even the shared whispers of other Handmaids push Offred to recognize the collective dimensions of oppression by the commander and his wife. Awakening to hypocrisy was also a turning point for Offred's when she visits to Jezebel's exposes the hypocrisy of Gilead, while enforcing puritanical laws publicly, the male elite secretly indulge in sexual exploitation. This awakens her to the contradictions that sustain patriarchal control on her. Small acts of defiance offer resists by refusing to internalize Gilead's values. She plays with forbidden language, secretly reads, and maintains her memories of love and desire. Even these private acts undermine the regime's attempt to erase individuality. Mira as symbol of rebellion shows Mira defiance her escape attempts and refusal to submit makes her a feminist icon within the novel and her power was remarkable. For Offred and others, she symbolizes the possibility of resistance even under brutal oppression. Broader feminist implications Atwood suggests that feminist awakening comes from awareness of oppression, solidarity, and reclaiming subjectivity. Resistance is both everyday survival (small acts) and organized rebellion (collective struggle).

This is both an assertion of agency and a sacrificial, politicized act Maryam knowingly accepts the consequences, thereby converting private rage into a public, irreversible stand against male brutality. Scholars argue that Maryam sacrifice reframes her from passive victim into moral agent: the act is an insurgent, feminist closure to her arc. Mariam's martyrdom enables Laila's next phase, escape, rebuilding family, commitment to her children's education and a future in which women can be independent. Laila's later choices raising her children, returning to Kabul to help rebuild are forms of constructive resistance: creating structures that deny the next generation the same powerlessness. Academic readings frame this as the novel's argument that individual courage must be followed by social repair and female agency-building. Symbols and devices that reinforce awakening resistance. The abaya is shown as public invisibility shows enforced erasure; resisting it small gestures of identity is political. Khalid Hosseini stages feminist awakening as a process sometimes slowly, sometimes abrupt that depends on memory, education, and human bonds. Resistance is both everyday memory, small refusals, survival strategies) and decisive Mariam's lethal intervention. The book argues that solidarity between women transforms private suffering into political force, and that sacrifice can produce new possibilities for female agency and social repair. Mira Adams, the protagonist, initially accepts the conventional role of wife and mother. She offerings her education, wishes, and individuality to serve her husband Norm and raise their children, Disappointment in Marriage Over time, Mira discerns her marriage is a trap. Norm treats her as an accessory appraisal her domestic labor, sexual availability, and social status, but not her inner life. This disappointment her first real awakening she sees how marriage productizes and silences women.

Education as Awakening after divorce, Mira goes back to university, engaged in study and revealed to feminist ideas, she awakens logically to the systemic nature of her oppression. She sees that her hardships are not personal failings but products of patriarchal structures. Mutual awareness of Mira's feminist awakening deepens when she joins a group of women who openly discuss sexism, household violence, inequality, and objectification. Mira feels anger, sorrow, and isolation as she awakens realizing how much of her life has been ingested by patriarchy. Opposition often comes with loss: divorce, social stigma, and estranged family. Yet these costs are necessary steps in regaining control.

Moving towards Marilyn French (1929- 2009) was an American novelist, critic, and feminist writer, who made a long lasting impact on literature and society, her works became very famous for the depiction of women struggle against patriarchy, forced marriage, motherhood and in search of her own identity. She was also a serious scholar with a Ph. D from Harvard and wrote book like *Ariel: The Life of Shelley* (1972) and *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (1981), where she studied gender in literature, she got famous by her other most important works, her works were translated worldwide.

The selected novel "The Women's Room" depicts domestic violence as an integral part of heterosexual relations. The aim of this study is to demonstrate that Marilyn French reflects her radical feminist ideas on the text, which generates the opposite effect to the intended purpose of the novel. The author wants to raise

awareness of the violence that dominates intimate relationships in order to change the world in a positive manner. Nevertheless, her drastic stance is exceptionally prone to create the contrary result. Consequently, this essay focuses on a study of Marilyn French's portrayal of the behaviour of people of both sexes towards people of the other gender. This analysis will be carried out by observing the different types of violence that the author represents as part of the dysfunctional bonds that link the characters in the novel and the different reactions that are caused in other characters. To examine such demeanour, this study draws on several sources, including feminist theory texts and studies on domestic violence, as well as a non-fiction work written by Marilyn French. Marilyn French's second novel, "The Bleeding Heart" (1980), shifts from exploring the lives of many women to focusing on two characters, Dolores and Victor. Over the course of one year, their secret relationship forces both to confront truths about themselves and the society around them. She returned to fiction in *Our Father* (1993), which tells the story of four sisters coming to terms with their abusive and controlling father. As they reunite during his final illness, the sisters bond with each other, showing how women can resist illegitimate male power through love and solidarity. These literary texts not only illuminate the extensive impact of male-centered social, political, and cultural institutions on women's lived experiences but also illustrate the transformative capacity of feminist resistance. Accordingly, literature functions simultaneously as a vehicle for critical interrogation of gendered power relations and as an instrument for endorsing social and gender equity (French, 1977; Atwood, 1985; Saadawi, 1975).

Thus, Mira's character is a pure depiction of oppression. Since her upbringing, she is restricted by her parents. They consistently try to transform Mira's behavior in accordance with what they believe a "good girl" should be in society. She does not own the same freedom as her brother due to these expectations. Mira is reminded again and again that she must be a reputable lady, as her family's honor depends on her social behavior. This highlights the social oppression faced by women in the 20th century America where women like Mira were not allowed to develop her own identity and personality.

Another major form of oppression, that is psychological (Irshad, 2025), can be observed in the aforementioned novel of Marilyn French through the character of Mira. During her college life, Mira becomes more anxious about losing her freedom. She tries to escape sexual relationship with men due to her fear of pregnancy. It is because she is well aware of the fact that if she becomes pregnant, she will lose her chance to study, work, and live on her own terms. Through these findings, it becomes evident that Chris reaction is not unique in the novel. Instead, it reflects the real-world impacts of physical oppression in societies that expects women to remain silent (Fikri, 2025). Another form of oppression that can be observed in Marilyn French's novel is the emotional oppression of women within patriarchal society. In the novel, women are emotionally oppressed because they are not free to express themselves openly.

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Conclusion

The selected novels are a real depiction of women subjugation and radical feminism. The characters and events in the selected novels challenge stereotype patriarchal system where women are objectified as source of temporary pleasure based on her biological creation. Whereas in some cases women are portrayed as weak based on her social status. Thus, the three novelists reflect upon the role of family, society and certain institutes in shaping women life. While her resistance becomes a continuous pattern due to the repeated subjugation by the specific societies which is a dilemma even in the 21st century modern world.

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