Analytical Essay

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This analytical essay focuses on the graphic autobiography of an Iranian girl, Marjane Satrapi. This book is the focus of this essay because the novel is a true demonstration of the major changes in gender roles before and after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, acting as the precursor of this masterpiece. The main accounts of the novel chiefly draw the attention of readers towards the prevalent precarity in Iran during the Islamic Revolution in the 1970s. The backdrop of the novel depicts the imposition of strict rules in Iran, ranging from the segregation of male and females students in the schools and colleges and the infliction of strict orders upon women to cover their faces at all times (Gurel, 2019). Satrapi losing her innocence in the wake of unfortunate events taking place in her country has been uniquely explored in the novel and deeply reflects on her transition from an unimpeachable child to a resilient young adult.

The opening of the novel indicates that time in Iranian history when the educational institutions were forced to become sequestered by gender and women were strictly ordered to cover their faces at all times. Although the Revolution was multi-faceted regarding the changes it brought in the country but the major mutations which were relevant can be traced to the relegation of gender roles. The expected appearance of men and women by the extremist authorities and other restrictions especially made the narrator realize that a woman in her society is doomed to be subjugated to an inferior role than her male counterpart or the one she had envisioned in her childhood. Imagining herself to be a prophet or a liberated, educated woman, the author of this memoir finally comes to terms with the understanding that her predestination as a female is entirely dependent on the degree of freedom which the state allows or does not allow.

 In the wake of the Islamic Revolution, Iran which was earlier a progressive state, now demands that women follow the discriminatory and oppressive rules. Satrapi sees many things that other people in many other countries take for granted but are now obligatory in her state and are causing problems for women.

 The first instance of this grave reality is the wearing of the veil, which for most of the women and younger girls is not a voluntary choice. The primary role of the veil, as implied by the novel, is to not distract men which posed as a restrictive danger and caused harm to many young women living in Iran under the fundamentalist regime.

Before the revolution, Satrapi’s life in her country was liberating for women which is portrayed by the style of the author's conversation with her family and friends. When the state tries to control women, Marjane somehow succeeds to depict her rebellious side. This is evident from many instances in the book e.g. Satrapi showing her hair off, wearing Michael Jackson pins, buying and listening to music tapes which was essentially illegal at that time. During the course of this regime, women are not perceived as equal to their male counterparts. This novel provides a narrative for a secretly ambushed world which many of the readers have only heard about or viewed in the news. Women were scared to speak up against this new regime and were instructed about manners and appropriate behavior in the presence of men. This was because women in the Iranian society who were aware of their intelligence and frequently manifested it was largely ignored and snubbed by their peers or elders. Strict moral codes were set by the governmental authorities, specifically for women.

Even though Satrapi’s family was very modern, providing her with all the necessary information and books to seek the truth, the new governing body instigates a never-ending battle in Satrapi’s brain between the woman she aspires to become, and the capacity she is being relegated to (Gilmore, 2010). This book tries to probe into the possible escape of women from the gender constructs that they have to face under the Islamic Revolution.

The three scenes that have been chosen from the book to be central for this analysis exude violence, oppression and the false hope propagated among youth by permeating heroic nationalism and the rewards of martyrdom. The first and third scenes allude to the oppression experienced by boys and men in the novel when they are forced to go to war and sacrifice their precious lives in the military. At the tender age of 14, the warmongering and negative indoctrination among boys begins to start. Satrapi soon realizes that these young boys being sent to war and essentially being brain-washed and their lives are given no value. To serve the spirit of nationalism, the country adopts a stubborn and warmongering foreign policy which leads to adverse effects of great magnitude (Friedman, 2013). In this particular scene, one of the family's maid attempts to explain while sobbing that her son was given a key in school which was plastic in material but was painted gold and it was symbolic of the idea that this key would get her son to heaven if he was lucky enough to die in war. This led to the maid's inability to believe in religion or anything, in general. The boys are also told about the fantasies of heaven which excited the boys and made them choose the wrong paths in their lives. This scene explains that during the fundamentalist regime in Iran, the experiences of Satrapi in an all-girls schools were strikingly different from the experiences of boys in their school. The boys were promised beautiful women, treasures of diamonds and gold in heaven, but were not being informed about the real and grave consequences of war.

The second scene delineates Satrapi’s mother’s assault by two fundamentalist men. They targeted her because she was not wearing a veil and threatened to rape and throw her in the garbage. This traumatic incident conspicuously shakes Satrapi’s mother and she does not feel well for several days. This scene has been chosen because it highlights the detrimental effects of the veil policy and marks one of those initial instances where the private matters of an individual began to merge with the public affairs. This attitude of the fundamentalist men only indicates mistrust with their own self which is disguised in their policing acts on the street. This scene also implies another socially constructed, false fabricating of the Iranian society that the terrible behavior of men is a result of women’s fault and their choice of clothing.

The dominant discourses that shape the character's understanding of their gender are patriarchal and misogynist in nature. Additionally, this book scrutinizes an extensive range of topics including trans-cultural identity, selective historical traditions, war and expectations from gender roles (Kamble, 2019). These discourses reflect the radical political and religious beliefs of the Islamic extremists as power dynamics between the liberal and the conservative. These discourses also inform the readers about the difference between Satrapi’s modern family and the prevalent Western perception of fundamentalist Muslims. The sexist and misogynistic discourses lead to the character's absolute refutation of the traditional ways of subjugation (Rizzuto, 2008). The narrator of this book chooses to be rebellious against these power dynamics through her choice in music, clothing and enters the practical world with her own ideas and values about the world.

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