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**THE POLITICS OF MARRIAGE AND AUTONOMY: AN
INTERSECTIONAL STUDY OF WOMEN IN CUSHMAN'S
NOVEL *CATHERINE, CALLED BIRDY***



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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate how Cushman's work "Catherine, Called Birdy" depicts women's struggle for independence, identity, and autonomy in a patriarchal society. The study focuses on the symbolic meaning of "Birdy" as the symbol of Catherine's desire to be free of social constraints, forced marriage, and male dominance. Also concerns the issue like abusive patriarchal systems, illusionary freedom for women, internalized inherent rules, and assigned distinct roles based on gender. This research aims to look at how Catherine's resistance and individualism undermine accepted gender norms and imbalance power dynamics in family and society. Karen Cushman's novel "Catherine, Called Birdy" explores the male-dominated system of medieval society, in which women's independence, consent, and individuality have boundaries by familial requirements and marriage pressures. Femininity is constructed by narrowly minded and old traditional concepts in a patriarchal society. This research depicts marriage as a social and economic tool ruled by men, emphasizing unequal power relations, different ethical standards, and the illusion of female independence. The study explores feminism, intersectionality, female authority, and the fight for independence in a patriarchal world through Catherine's protest in opposition to oppressive marriage and social pressures.

Keywords: *Intersectionality, Power dynamics, Freedom, Gender roles, Patriarchy, Feminism.*

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The study examines the concept of gender inequality and related social discriminations by exploring the Cushman's novel, "Catherine, Called Birdy," in which Catherine, is a bright and determined young girl, and central character of the story, but her problems are driven by her father, Lord Rollo, who symbolizes patriarchal and power control and financial demands. Her father is more than just a rude and selfish personality; he represents a societal reality in which daughters are considered as beneficial resources like qualitative items to be traded for financial empowering and positioning themselves, making his concentration on arranging Catherine's marriage for both personal and social demands. This study adopted the guiding principle that gender is a socially constructed concept, shaped by cultural norms (Ramzan et al., 2025, 2023, 2020) educational insights (Akram & Yang, 2021; Akram, 2020), and societal expectations regarding appropriate behaviors (Ahmad et al., 2022; Amjad et al., 2021), activities, and characteristics assigned to men and women.

Feagin (2000) stated that race is no longer understood as a matter of white people's perception or cultural values; rather, race has become a shared and structural component of societal organization, particularly among communities of color. As a result, it is viewed as a fundamental kind of framework for society. Feagin's statement was true, but in some important cases of women's agency, gender inequality is still alive in the whole world, and females are still confronting the crises of intersectionality and sacrificing their dreams because of multiple

discriminations; even the social expectations from males and females are supposed to be different.

1.2 Power Imbalance and Gender Inequality

The concept of power imbalance is mainly expressed by Michel Foucault, who analyzed power as a social power that performs acts that are socially constructed standards about male and female and daily life relations and contacts between opposite genders. In societal life system, familial rules and regulations, and cultural factors, male dominantly govern decision-making, authority, and power dynamics.

Gender inequality is strongly interconnected with intersectionality, as it points out that women's life experiences and socially constructed demands with gender inequality are categorized according to the multiple discriminations between race and other social role.

1.3 Marriage and Autonomy

This research aims to focus on the stereotypical concept of males and society, who want dominance and female dependency, as in the current study, the novel represents main character, Catherine, faced inequality, as her brothers were allowed to get educated and have the social respect and were allowed to get higher ranks in the community, but Catherine was not allowed to do all those tasks because of being a female; she was supposed to marry the rich and famous man as a family business trading that was the trend and tradition of the medieval ages (13th century).

1.4 Intersectionality

Intersectionality also enabled as an investigation of how patriarchal power, social demands, and familial rules interact to impact women's lives. Furthermore, it emphasizes how women navigate, reject, or negotiate these overlapping limits. It highlights the both, boundaries imposed by social systems and the actual female rights and opportunities for women's agency to live with freedom and equality.

1.5 Problem Statement

The study demonstrates how the novel "*Catherine, Called Birdy*" addresses the discourse of gender rights, specifically focusing upon the problems and limitations faced by women. The text not only mirrors the condition of medieval England but also serves as an overall representation of the universal oppression of gender rights around the world that is the result of large-scale illiteracy and a lack of social consciousness. Though favoritism and bias against gender have not been completely abolished to date, there is a visible reduction of such actions that could be seen because of the effects of education and the greater consciousness of the youth. This study, while offering abundant insights, at the same time provides multiple unanswered queries as well as ambiguities for scholars of the coming time to study in order to perpetuate as well as broaden the existing scholarly discourse. In this regard, the researcher has specifically highlighted certain issues that are of paramount importance for scholars of the coming time.

For instance, both the novel and its cinematic version raise crucial queries such as, "If women are acknowledged to be weaker than men, then why do all the social, religious, and communal demands lie so heavily upon them?" In analyzing the present-day applicability of the present study, we realize that men are still given greater preference over women across numerous areas of life. This sustained inequality is substantially rooted in the prevailing stereotypical way of thinking that is widespread in society, sustaining the belief that "men are the primary figures who are able to handle households economically." Such deeply rooted presumptions only work towards reinforcing chauvinistic thought processes, narcissistic organizational structures, and institutionalized gender bias.

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1.6 Research Objectives

1. To explore how familial and societal rules contribute to the discrimination toward both genders in Cushman's work "*Catherine, Called Birdy*."
2. To analyze how marriage and consent are represented as power dynamics in Cushman's "*Catherine, Called Birdy*."
3. To investigate how the main protagonist, "Catherine," struggles for her freedom from marriage and was determined to fight against intersectional discrimination.

1.7 Research Questions

1. How are power dynamics within the institution of marriage portrayed in Cushman's work "*Catherine, Called Birdy*?"
2. What ethical expectations do families, men and society have from females by considering men's behavior/roles as the norm?
3. What does the name "Birdy" mean for Catharine's character, and how does it represent women's identity and place in the family and social hierarchy?

1.8 Significance of the Study

Current study indicates multiple academic and social benefits. This research is significant since it examines "*Catherine, Called Birdy*" as a text that illuminates the historical background of problems still present in contemporary gender debate. The novel takes place during (13th-century) England and graphically depicts how institutional patriarchal values circumscribed women's liberty, particularly through Catherine's father's constant proposals to marry her off for economic and social gain. These events demonstrate that marriage was a transactional practice in which women were employed as instruments of family advantage, commodified, and denied agency.

Beyond being counter to dominant social norms, Catherine's resistance to adhering to these gendered prescriptions demonstrates how patriarchal domination represses speech and individuality. Significantly, her journal becomes a center of resistance, providing her with voice and insight at a point in time when literacy for women was rare. By employing writing to reclaim her freedom, Catherine indicates the potential of language to counteract patriarchal domination.

By situating these conflicts in the medieval period and noting their parallels with today's controversies regarding forced marriage, restricted gender roles, and the silence of women, Consequently, by drawing attention to the intersectional dynamics of power, agency, and resistance within both historical and modern contexts, this research joins the wider conversation regarding gender justice. This research is beneficiary because it highlighted how the novel reveals deeply ingrained gendered expectations that required women to remain silent, submissive, and confined to domestic roles by highlighting the power dynamics of marriage and consent.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Framework of this research study mainly underlies on Intersectional Theory that seeks to analyze broader implications of gender-based relations and also investigates it in the way of Catherine's perspective and relevance of struggling for gendered based discriminations and power relations.

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2.1.1 Intersectional Theory

Intersectional theory first introduced by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, emphasizes how overlapping power structures—such as gender, class, and familial authority—influence women’s life experiences. Catherine, *Called Birdy* reveals these intersections through the dynamics of marriage and consent, as Catherine’s lack of choice is anchored not only in patriarchal conventions but also in economic and social expectations.

Gottman, J. M., & Notarius, C. I. (2002) explained their investigations conducted during the 1980s and 1990s uncovered many religious changes in domestic life in the US, including the evolving role of women and the findings of social behavioral science regarding violence and abuse within families. He stated that cultural differences in marriages and the evolution in the concept of forced marriage affect complications that lead to marital disconnect and a weak homicide system.

This article demonstrates the stereotypical concept of males and society, who want dominance and female dependency, as in the current study, the researcher references the novel in which the main character, Catherine, faced inequality, as her brothers were allowed to get educated and have the social respect and were allowed to get higher ranks in the community, but Catherine was not allowed to do all those tasks because of being a female; she was supposed to marry the rich and famous man as a family business trading that was the trend and tradition of the medieval ages (13th century). Thus, marriage is regarded in this research not just as a social or legal agreement, but also as a dominant place where authority takes place, is limited, or is refused, and where women’s agency is influenced by intersecting gender, age, and authority systems.

The novel depicts marriage as a means of control, with consent overwhelmed by paternal authority. The novel emphasizes women’s agency by highlighting Catherine’s resistance—her humor, defiance, and refusal to be silenced—demonstrating that female voices negotiate and contest authority even within limited medieval frameworks. This theory deeply explores the Catherine’s struggle for women’s rights and highly aims to uncover the women’s position and value in the society.

2.1.2 Power Dynamic Theory

Power Dynamics is the concept of how human relations get involve in sharing, utilizing, and also contesting of Power in the Society. This theory was proposed by different researchers including Karl Marx who used to investigate about the concept of the race of rich and poor in the society that relates to the present study. In Marx’s views, power held in the hands of those, who holds the control on economic power and carries dominant authority in multiple social laws and cultural norms. This theory should be considered as central concept of this study as it explores not only protagonist’s fight for freedom and self-determination but also explains her internal thoughts about female resistance and patriarchal power and control.

Catherine mentioned, “My father thinks only of land and money when he speaks of marriage,” expressed power dynamics in medieval times were centered on male authority and female fulfillment. In Cushman’s “*Catherine, Called Birdy*,” this power imbalance brings Catherine under her father’s control, but she never gave up in front of the privileged thinking of the society. Power dynamics continue evolving when decisions concerning Catherine’s life, including marriage, are made without her involvement.

As a seminal inquiry, present research states that, even after centuries, child marriage is still legal in this world. Currently, 117 countries allow child marriage, and now it can be proudly said that Pakistan is not included in their counts, because recently a law was signed in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) in 2025 that the minimum legal marriage age for both male and female should be 18 years, and also other documentations are necessary.

2.1.3 Feminist Theory

This theory was proposed by Mary Wollstonecraft in (1792), who explored gender discrimination and male dominance that have proper relevance on this study as it criticizes the power imbalance between male and female and talks about the female empowerment and have the clear relevance with the novel as the whole story depends on the main female protagonist's fight for her freedom and equality. Mary was considered as the first writer who focuses on global gender justice in her writings. Feminist Theory is significant for the present study as it clarifies the truth of human's history and through literature this theory highlights historical-Traditional structures of gender justice, empowerment (Ramzan & Khan, 2024).

The main concern of the present study also relates to gender justice, feminist issues and also speaks for human rights. Catherine quoted, "Why is a lady too gentle to climb a tree or throw stones into the river when it is lady's work to pick maggots from the salt meat?" portrayed that daily base tasks are limited for women, they are not allowed to feel free. After centuries of injustice, discrimination, and silencing, women are still struggling for their rights. Equality can't feel like a threat, it can feel like the bare minimum. Feminism is not about revenge or making women superior than men, it's about fairness and equality.

2.1.4 Patriarchal Theory

This theory is concerned with Kate Millet in her book, *Sexual Politics* (1970) which emphasizes the concept of male dominance and females are also accept this dominance and surrender as Catherine's mother who was also got married her husband as the business trading. Cushman's "*Catherine, Called Birdy*," shows women may challenge male-dominant authorities even in traditional societies. She confidently claims, "I will not be a bride!" Catherine's resisted confirmation against patriarchy displays her strong desire for independence and autonomy. This statement underlying the approach that when a female stands up for her rights and demand justice, changes will happen.

This notion is still applicable today in Pakistan, as many females are experiencing social oppression for marriage and absence of authority in personal decision-making. Education, honoring woman's consent, and offering equal opportunity can all help to create a better society in which the woman is regarded as a decision-maker in her personal life. Only when women's voices are valued can true social progress take place, turning resistance into lasting social change.

The theory provides relevancy according to the study that male enforcement and marriage consents will get restricted for women's self-determination and to achieve freedom in the society.

2.1.5 Gender role theory

This theory is proposed by Alice Eagly, during the time period of 1980s-90s. This theory follows the concept of socially constructed roles for both male and female, to do different tasks for presenting themselves as a good gender. Gender role theory closely has resemblance with the research objectives as is directly explores distinct gender-based expectations and rules that creates unequal power relations.

This theory can also relate with the concept that if the opposite gender tries to accomplish each other's task they get considered unethical as catherine was also called by her father and society. According to the theoretical study, society expects good behave, being caring and zipped mouth from a woman. On the other hand, the same society expects strong and controlling behaviors from men

Lorber, J. (2001) explained his thoughts by stating that men are also experiencing gender

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inequality as well. Men are required to serve in the army and are frequently assigned to battle in numerous nations. Additionally, men work in high-risk areas like firefighting and law enforcement. Traditionally gender roles still require women to take care of the home and children, and men are viewed as protectors and financial providers. Both men's and women's independence are restricted by these expectations, which are created by uneducated small communities or rooted by inheritance.

2.2 Relevant Researches

As the present piece of work has conducted the several perspectives from different literary works to analyze gender inequality in society and different tasks are being expected from different genders e.g.: Male, female and transgender all have specific roles and social expectations.

Shastri, A (n.d) added that gender, therefore, extends beyond biological differences to encompass the social and cultural dimensions of identity. Although both men and women have totally distinct biological tasks as well as responsibilities. Its consequence is that women struggle to fully acknowledge their rights and independence. Shastri said, "They are not free in this so-called "SOCIETY." Discrimination negatively impacts both women's and the country's future progress.

Gradowicz-Pancer, N. (2002) studied the topic of female violence in the Early Middle Ages, which has received little attention, due to a feminist sense that rightfully clarifies women as victims. The traditional gendered dividing line appears when female violence, like male dominant behavior, is viewed as an inherent feature or natural behavior, and when female activities may be interpreted as a code of behavior shared by both men and women.

The study on gender rights highlighted direct relevance with the concept of accepting all those discriminating situations created and expected from the socio-cultural world, as clearly shown in Cushan's book "*Catherine, Called Birdy*," in which the character "*Ethelfritha Rose*" was an old and rich widow but wanted to marry a young and physically strong man for the construction of social power.

This Character highlights the concept of acceptance that men have dominance in society and women need their support. Ethelfritha was the woman who knew the psychology of the society; she was rich, and even then, she married the young man unwillingly to maintain the social power. She wanted to live her life alone with freedom and explore the world like a bird from the depths of her heart, but it was against the culture and the society of the medieval ages for a widow. These limitations from men and society were the reason for her thoughts, like, "Men are like owls; just feed them and hold them in your cages."

The concept of Narcissism proposed by Grijalva et al, (2015) investigated deep research of data collection on the concept of gender inequality and narcissism that was based on the information This gender gap kept happening in U.S. college student group members across time (from 1990 to 2013) and across different age groups. Their 1st study as well looked at gender differences in three aspects of the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) to discover a narcissistic gender difference. They also looked into a less-studied form of narcissism called vulnerable narcissism—which is marked by low self-esteem, neuroticism, and introversion—and found that (in contrast to the more commonly studied form of narcissism found in the DSM and the NPI) men and women did not differ on vulnerable narcissism. Vulnerable Narcissism is a type of personality disorder in which the person wants all the social attentions, appreciations and raises from society, friends and family because that's all is preferred for a narcissist for boosting his/her self-esteem. As the current research is focusing the same concept from the novel where the Catherine's father is suffering from narcissist personality disorder and have a financial burden of looking wealthy in front of society but in the end of the novel Love for the daughter wins.

Gail P. Kelly, Ann S. Nihlen (1983) wrote about the concept of patriarchy that nature of the

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female and male role division of labor in the United States, both in public and private life. This discussion aims to talk about new methods of thinking about women's education and the implications for future study. According to reproduction theorists, schools build up the social division of labor by perpetuating class, based on race, and gender inequities. Research on women's schooling identifies a clear link between women's education and women's status, and seeks to improve school procedures in an effort that schools might be used to encourage gender equality. School knowledge includes both official and informal education programs.

Another study written by (Bennett, 2006; Einspahr, 2010; Enloe, 2017; Hearn, 2015; Hunnicutt, 2009) confirms the concept that patriarchy is also supposed as Power relates from society and Political rigidity, dominance on the uneducated was very easy in the history but time is trying to change and women crises are coming slow today. But somehow the infection of inequality and want of dominance and patriarchy is in the air still in the 21st century. The study represented the novel as Catherine's father wanted to be stay wealthy and shown as wealthy toward the society that sows the concept that money and wealth is more important than family. She indicated her imprisonment by stating, "Every day I pray for freedom." This study pore over the history pages about the feminine suffering in social, cultural, communicational expectations and their fightings for freedom, it was very common from the start of the centuries but with the passage time, education and literacy did quite changes but sadly saying that in 21st century of generations, humans are exploring universe but still having the stereotypical thinkings such as Boy-girl favouritism, Men have all rights on women but women don't have it.

Additionally, another specific study deals with the same concept of women were gradually removed from their traditional roles of social control over food and sex. The fundamental building up of money moved quickly the development of male leadership, at first as father family, and then as a male leader in God-cities, God-states, and monarchical system.

Deep psychoanalyses on acceptance of gender discrimination was first contributed by Talcott Parsons (1950), his theory suggested that men are expected as instrumental role or bread winners and women are expected as expressive role like a caretakers, so many expectations from the women and male dominance on female as clearly shown in the novel the character "Ethelritha Rose" who was an old and rich widow but wanted to marry a young powerful man for the construction of social power. This reflected the concept of her acceptance that male have dominance in society and female needs a male support but Catherine wanted to live alone with freedom like a bird from her depth of the heart. She also had the thoughts like men are like owls just feed them and hold them in your cages.

A study by St. Thomas Aquinas (n.d) "Woman is defective and misbegotten, because the active force in the male seed produces a perfect likeness in the male gender sex, while the production of a woman comes from a defect in the active force or material indisposition," conveys the representation of the current study that female are imperfect and less-powerful so men should take dominance but Catherine fought against this concept and never kneeled in front of stereotypical thinking.

The manner in which patriarchal systems-controlled women's bodies and decisions is illustrated acutely through Catherine's lack of agency, as evidenced by her father's consistent attempts to sell her out through an arranged marriage with an aged wealthy person. This argument about voice in her writings serves as an example of how language can be used as a weapon against silencing and to empower people. Beyond its historical setting, the novel's examination of forced marriage, restrictive gender roles, and denial of autonomy reflects global efforts to promote gender equality today.

A study by Dastidar, R. G. (2018) stated that According to the 2015 Global Gender Gap Report, closing the economic gender gap would take to the amount of 118 years of time. A future century

with gender inequality would be horrible nightmare, as global states would miss out on the positive impacts of gender equality in politics and economic activity. This contributes to issues related to gender inequity.

Baig, F. Z., & Ahmed, N. (2019) highlighted their survey that Pakistani culture today sees patriarchy continuing to exist when considered in relation to literacy and letter-writing practices. Their study examined ideologies and identities surrounding femininities and masculinities. From a sociolinguistic point of view, these gender ideologies can be seen as both naturalized and socially constructed.

Therefore, this analytical framework allows the research to build scholarly connections with the Pakistani social conditions on same context, where research investigations and social observations show familial control and authority, cultural and traditional norms and values, and socio-economic conditions continue to impact on women's decision-making power in marriage and other life issues.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

This research employs an existing theoretical framework to provide a broad interpretation of how gender policies and traditionally created norms impact female identity and self-governance, both in the novel and in the modern Pakistani context. The study offers unique insights into the chosen topics from an intersectional feminist theory.

This research study has deep analysis on gender equality and crises facing by female because of patriarchy thinking and want of dominance by the male in the whole world. Simply considering that the main purpose of data analysis is to employ the model of intersectional study, autonomy, power dynamics and marriage consent.

3.1 Delimitation of the Study

The study has been delimited to Cushman's novel "*Catherine, Called Birdy*," which concentrates on relevant themes such as intersectional discrimination, power dynamics, feminism, patriarchal control, and gender role expectations in society.

This research is based on qualitative methodology that focuses on Birdy's disobedience of gender stereotypes and longing for freedom, calling into question the limiting roles that women are assigned, stressing the larger topic of resistance to patriarchal rule. Birdy's usage of a personal diary also reflects the powerful role of knowledge and self-expression in combating inequity. This work highlighted multiple sufferings and fights against societal and cultural norms for the freedom of every gender, especially women. The whole research is based on patriarchal authority theme that provides a deep insight to thought about equal rights, social freedom, and respect. The study also delimited the illusionary concept of power dynamics, and acceptance of gender roles highlights the restricted life of a woman in society.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Intersectional Analysis

Analysis of the central data have been conducted from the perspectives of intersectionality, women's agency and resistance, and consent and gender inequality within the information in categories serves as an analytical technique, improving the study's focus, logic in research, and depth. It demonstrates intersectionality, women's agency and resistance, and consent and inequality categorize as central data analytical sources that analyzes the whole study from these theoretical lenses. Catherine expressed, "I do not want to be bought and sold like a sack of wool," these expressions highlights the concept of stereotype in males and society who wants dominance and female dependency, as in the current study the researcher referencing the novel that main

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character “catherine” faced inequality as her brother was getting educated and have the social respect and good rank but catherine was not allowed for all those tasks because of being a female she supposed for marry the rich and famous man as a family business trading that was the trend and tradition of medieval ages (13-Century).

4.1.1 Consent and Inequality

Catherine’s sadly remarks, “I am bit by fleas and plagued by my family,” demonstrated that inequality and dependence is like a disease and also highlighted the connection of physical misery and emotional restrictions that expresses her personal experiences. By describing Catherine’s family, primarily her father’s dominance, as bothering and irritating Catherine like a parasite. Catherine demonstrates how domestic life, which is supposed to be a place of comfort, protection, and mental peace, and physical safety, instead becomes a source of suffering. On the surface, the association between parasites and family members appears like comic humor, even exaggerated, but its reality, it portrays a deeper critique and irony of the restrictive systems that govern her world.

Catherine stated, “Would I choose to die rather than be forced to marry? I do not think either option appealing, or fair,” this remark also disclosed her youthful innocence, as she presents her pain in a lighthearted, almost funny and ironic tone, without clearly outlining the systematic nature of her imprisonment. She clarified that death is better than marrying someone without her approval. However, behind her visual simplicity and hidden acts of resistance arises to achieve freedom: Catherine applies ironic language to challenge the authority of familial control, demonstrating her knowledge that her autonomy is continually being violated.

McNulty, M. H. (n.d) added beneficial information on medieval concepts about women’s roles and discriminations they faced for decision-making for daily purposes and have limited authorities for their own matters. He also addressed that medieval noble young women married in their teens, typically to a man much older than them. Females of that time were just a tool of political deals in a patriarchal culture; they had no choice in making decisions for their marriages or raising their voices for any other women’s rights against power dynamics, their worth measured by the dowry they would bring and the kids they would generate. Although medieval society did not grant them much independence, young women from the lower classes often had a greater say in their world; upper-class women, despite facing more economical and social hardships, had to maintain the dignity of their families in society.

Current research not only mirrors the conditions of medieval England but also served as an overall representation of the widespread injustice of gender rights around the world that is the result of large-scale illiteracy and lack of social consciousness. This work explored how Cushman’s publishing represents permissions, resistance, and female autonomy in a patriarchal medieval culture using analytical and conceptual lenses like feminism and intersectionality. This thesis builds on multiple scholarly works that critically analyzed unequal division of authorities and masculine power dominance over women using previous related studies. This study concerned with analytical perspectives to examine the power dynamics of marriage and consent in Cushman’s masterpiece, “*Catherine, Called Birdy*”. This section of research work covers fundamental feminist and gender research themes such as patriarchy, women’s agency, and marital power, as well as related studies that built on these ideas over time.

Catherine’s discourse reflects internal resistance against patriarchal social norms as she states, “I am tired of being a lady, and I long to be wild and free like the birds in the sky,” express an obvious conflict between traditional gender norms and her ambition for freedom and independence within the limited patriarchal structure expressed in Cushman’s work “*Catherine, Called Birdy*.” The expression “being a lady” symbolizes the socially developed concept of

femininity, which bounds her to obedience, domestic responsibilities, and organized behavior. In comparison, the picture of the “bird in the sky” represents unlimited movement, self-government, and individual choice, portraying freedom as already present but limited to her.

Catherine stated, “Men may choose their paths, but girls must wait to be chosen,” this category captures the conflict between self-imposed choice and real-life empowerment, displaying that women’s decisions are often formed by controlled situations rather than actual autonomy, a reality that moves beyond the medieval settings into nowadays gender interactions, including those encountered in Pakistani society, where familial pressure and societal standards continue to shape women’s, marriage choices. Catherine’s opposition to arranged marriages demonstrates the lack of realistic consent, especially considering that her father views her as a transactional asset, mirroring the materialization of women in the system of hierarchical rule. The present study portrays Catherine’s struggle. Cushman not only represents medieval gender norms but also invites modern readers to reflect on the current issues of forced marriages, consent, and women’s autonomy.

4.1.2 Women’s Agency and Resistance

This study has analyzed women’s agency and resistance in Cushman’s “*Catherine, Called Birdy*,” that power authorization depends on marriage systems and how Catherine expressed her thoughts, criticized imposed marriage concepts, and fought through her situation.

Catherine challenged her father’s authority and refused to being treated like a valuable property or object to be sold. She stated in her dairy, “I hate being treated as if only purpose is marriage,” These expressions indicates that Catherine’s restricted autonomy is impacted not only by her gender but also by her social status under a layered patriarchal society, where protest, even have boundaries of dependence. The data have been analyzed in this study through systematic approach in analyzing and interpretation of textual sources from the novel “*Catherine, Called Birdy*.” The purpose is to investigate issues of power relations, marriage, authorization, and women’s empowerment.

The book “*Catherine, Called Birdy*” written by renowned English author Karen Cushman, offers an intriguing portrayal of social limitations put upon women in medieval times. As Catherine wrote in her journal, “I think God made girls and boys equal, through people do not,” through the eyes of a fourteen-year-old heroine, the world can see the restrictive gender roles given to girls reflect time-honed inequality patterns. Though contemporary culture is often described as more advanced or free, women all over the world still struggle with obtaining full freedom. Conversely, men continue to hold disproportionate leadership over public authority as well as domestic decision-making, thus pointing out this enduring inequality between genders.

Catherine mentioned, “A lady must obey, smile, and suffer in silence,” It explored not only Protagonist, “*Catherine*,” struggle for her freedom from marriage and other familial women rights but also investigated societal discriminations imposed on females. Undoubtedly, language has also become the source of knowing different historical stories, as one is presented in this study named “*Catherine, Called Birdy*” by Cushman that explored the fight for becoming an independent identity and free rights for girlhood in a male-dominant society and an intersectional analysis on women in the medieval time period (13th century) in England.

5. Findings and Conclusions

The findings of the research reveal that gender inequality is profoundly ingrained in patriarchal governing systems that have historically favored male control over female autonomy. Karen Cushman's “*Catherine, Called Birdy*” powerfully symbolized as a young girl's battle against the strict expectations imposed by a male-dominated culture. Catherine's offence to a planned

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marriage and longing for freedom pointed out the personal expenses associated with patriarchal dominance imposed on women by men as they thought they are dictators. The men around her, particularly her father, clearly exhibit narcissism, viewing women that they are posed for accepting orders or possessions rather than having personal life. Catherine's playful, childish, lighthearted and explorative personality becomes a type of quiet revolution, which shows how internal power and personal disobedience can address societal injustice. Her story is not simply a historical narrative but also a reflection of present society, where patriarchal beliefs and self-important power structures keep blocking progress toward gender equality. Future research should be on equal literacy in men and women and the end of selective gender birth preference.

The study concluded that Cushman's study "*Catherine, Called Birdy*," uncovered patriarchal authorities that control women's freedom, decision-making authority, and identification through familial pressure and arranged marriages. Furthermore, "Birdy" symbolizes women's journeys for freedom, personal identity, and release from suppressive societal conventions. According to the study, Catherine's resistance calls into question traditional gender norms and shows the illusion of female authorization in a society where men rule.

Numerous research studies have been conducted on gender inequality confronting by women, but the present investigation shows a different concept of seeking individual rights by referencing Cushman's novel "*Catherine, Called Birdy*," which emphasized her courage to stand in front of society and even her father for freedom, but the end of the novel is completely tragic and unexpected when Catherine surrenders and accepts to get sold to the rich old man with a shaggy beard, then her father fights to bring her back to get rid of his guilt and as a sense of apology. This research analyzed that gender discrimination is still a widespread issue with historical roots, as clearly shown in Karen Cushman's work "*Catherine, Called Birdy*." Set in medieval England, the plot revolved around a young girl's defiance of cultural rules that restricted women's autonomy and agency.

Mostly females in a common society struggle; their lives are shaped by control, possessed by men, and expected quiet tasking, but Catherine fought against all constraints imposed by domestic and societal life. Domestic women are not the last generation of "good" mothers. These silent mothers are the last generation of women who will accept the suffering. Women refused inherited silence, refused to normalize oppression, and demand self-honor to glorify their endurance, but by breaking the cycle, society forced them to survive because of less awareness and less education in society about feminism. The novel emphasized women's lack of autonomy in research study such as marriage, where they were frequently targeted as commodities for social and financial advantage. Birdy's usage of a personal diary also reflects the powerful role of knowledge and self-expression in combating inequity. As she wrote in her diary, "I write this to keep my mind from wandering."

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