

**Representation of Prostitution in the novels *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawwal el Saadawi
and *Nights at the Circus* by Angela Carter**

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

Most of us tend to associate the word 'prostitute' with negative connotations. Synonyms of the word are used as a slang term against women we want to label as 'characterless'. When we hear stories of prostitutes in fiction, films and news, most of us are either sympathetic towards them for taking this profession because of difficult circumstances, or we judge them for falling so low as to sell their bodies for money. *Women at Point Zero* by Nawwal el Saadawi shows us the world from the perspective of a prostitute, a woman who willingly chose this profession and was unregretful and proud to do so. *Nights at the Circus* by Angela Carter is another novel where women were happy as prostitutes. This thesis explores, compares and contrasts the representation of prostitution in the two novels, along with the characters and themes. It takes a look into the culture inside brothels and the relationship of the prostitutes with each other, their superiors and their customers. It explores the social, cultural and religious background in the novel that drove the women into prostitution. This thesis also tries to connect prostitution with feminism and tries to explore prostitution from a feminist point of view.

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Introduction

Prostitution has always been portrayed under a negative light by society as well as the media. The activities that revolve around prostitution, such as kidnapping and human trafficking make it appear like a crime. Sex slavery and sex trafficking is “attaching the right of ownership over one or more persons with the intent of coercing or otherwise forcing them to engage in sexual activities” (Jones et al. 203). However, prostitution alone should not be labelled as a crime. When cases of prostitution are portrayed or represented in the news or movies, we see stories of women or girls who have been kidnapped and sold into the profession or stories of women or girls where she unwillingly offers herself for sex in exchange for money to meet her or her family’s financial needs. The fact that prostitution can also be a type of work like any other is impossible to comprehend by our society, which is why women who willingly engage in sex work fall under a marginalised category. While we condemn prostitution for being a profession that puts a woman to shame, the minority of women for whom prostitution has been a reliable source of income must not be left behind. The number of fiction where prostitutes are seen to be proud of their work is very few.

In this thesis, I am going to explore how prostitution is represented in the books- *Nights at the Circus* by Angela Carter and *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal el Saadawi, and how feminism is related to prostitution. The two books are based on two different geographical areas- England and Egypt respectively, during two different times- 1899 and 1974, and in two different social and religious cultures. The social and religious background during Victorian England in

1899 was similar to that of Egypt during 1974. What is common in these two books is that they portray the stories of women who are boldly proud and unapologetic about their work as prostitutes. The way their stories are narrated makes the reader sympathise and stand with the characters instead of despising them. We are commonly made to look at prostitution as something nasty and disgraceful, and having used the slang synonyms of the word 'prostitute' negatively myself, reading these two books changed my perception towards the practice and motivated me to look at it from a different lens, it also made me rethink the ways in which I previously perceived prostitution. It opened my eyes to the fact that sex work should be treated like any other kind of work, and that prostitutes should be given basic rights and security. Thus, I believe that the profession of prostitution must be treated like any other profession, such as modelling, cleaning or sewing, and the people who are willingly involved with this profession must not be chastised or criticised.

Legalising prostitution in most parts of the world may sound too radical although doing so may prove to be a good decision in alleviating many problems such as human trafficking and kidnapping. However, only legalising prostitution will not put an end to all problems as many social factors like abortion and contraception are present in the background. Contraception has been made common even in Bangladesh, yet many people, especially in the rural areas are not aware about contraceptive methods and their proper use, and even if they are, they are not willing to use it. Abortion is not legal in most of the countries in the world, and there is still a debate as to whether it should be legalised or not. Sex workers become victims of unwanted pregnancies because of lack of knowledge and awareness about contraceptive methods, as a result they become mothers of children who they cannot care for. As we move forward step by

step, I hope that as contraception has been normalised today, one day safe abortion and sex work will be legalised and normalised too. Doing so will make it easier to educate sex workers about contraceptive methods, thereby reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortion.

Methodology

In my dissertation, I explored how prostitution was represented in the novels *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal el Saadawi and *Nights at the Circus* by Angela Carter. The times during which the two novels are based are about one hundred years apart. *Nights at the Circus* is based on 1899 in England while *Woman at Point Zero* is based on the life of a woman the writer interviewed in 1972 in Egypt. The religious background of the novels is different- one has a conservative Christian background while the other has a conservative Muslim background. In spite of all these differences, I chose these two books because the socio-religious culture during the late Victorian era was similar to the socio-religious culture in Egypt during the 1970s. During both these times, we witness a strong presence of conservative religious norms and rules within the society, and I read the two novels on this ground.

With the help of close reading, I compared and contrasted the two novels and their themes and I looked for similarities and differences. Doing so gave me an insight into how the social and religious factors affected the lives of women, how religion was used as a tool to establish dominance on women, how money was used to raise one's status in society and how sex was used as a tool to gain control over men.

One of the main words in the title of this thesis is 'prostitution'. As I looked deep into why society looks down upon prostitutes and brand them as 'characterless' and other such

words, I discovered that the reason behind this is because women have always been seen as ‘a womb, an ovum’ (Beauvoir, 41), or a reproductive organ whose sole job is to produce her husband’s children. It is the idea of a woman having sex for pleasure that bothers society. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoire indicates that she supported the type of prostitution in which girls willingly sold sex, and under the condition that they are legally recognised and protected by the state. Her words, ‘Giving herself to many men, she belongs to none’ (Beauvoir, 694) echoes that of Firdous, because Firdous too believed that being a prostitute, she did not belong to anybody and was independent. Virginia Woolf, in her essay *A Room of One’s Own*, talks about how important it is for a woman to have her own money. Although she says this in the context of women writing fiction, the concept of women earning her own money is important for every woman because money plays a very important role in one’s economic empowerment. The absence of the same can give other people, such as the husband, a chance to establish dominance over her, as we saw in the case of Firdous.

Etymology

The word ‘prostitute’ is a combination of two Latin words, ‘pro’ which means upfront and ‘stituere’, which means ‘to offer up for sale’, so the literal translation of the word ‘prostitute’ is ‘to put in front for sale’ (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). The idea of women offering sexual favours in exchange for money is not present in the literal translation of the word but still understood. According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, prostitution is a noun that means ‘the practice or occupation of engaging in sexual activity with someone for payment’. In majority of the cases, prostitutes are females and their clients are males, however, their clients can be females too. Men can also sell sex for money. Majority of the male prostitutes have male clients, but they may

have female clients too. The terms that are used for male prostitutes are- gigolo and male escorts. An article by *Dhaka Tribune* shows that transgender people also get involved in sex work because of the discrimination they face in their families, society and at job sectors.

The word ‘prostitute’ carries a negative connotation which is why the term ‘sex worker’ is more preferred by some feminists, critics and social activists. The latter term implies that sex work is another form of work and is devoid of any sort of hostile implication. The word ‘sex worker’ was first coined in 1978 by a sex worker activist known as Carol Leigh (bayswan.org). In the English translation of the novel *Woman at Point Zero*, originally written in Arabic, the protagonist uses the term ‘prostitute’ very proudly. She says, ‘For after all, I was only a successful prostitute’ (Saadawi 11). Fevvers, in *Nights at the Circus* uses the slang synonyms of the word like ‘whore’ (Carter, 50) and ‘harlot’ (Carter, 50) to describe the girls proudly, she says, “But, as for Jenny, although was the prettiest and best-hearted harlot as ever trod Picadilly, she has no special talent to put to work for her and never saved a penny but give it all to beggars” (Carter 50). It is interesting to wonder that if the term ‘sex worker’ was present when the books were written, whether the authors would use the more respectable term, or would use the original terms of ‘whore’ and ‘prostitute’ to refer to the nature of work of the characters in the novel. I chose to use the word ‘prostitute’ and ‘prostitution’ in my dissertation instead of ‘sex work’ and ‘sex workers’ because that is the word that was proudly used by the characters in the book. Also, the former term was not yet introduced to the English Language when they were being written.

Literary Representation

There are very few novels that glorify sex work. Two of them are *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* by Daniel Defoe and *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* by John Cleland. Roxana, a poor widow with five children climbs the social strata by mastering the art of seduction with men of high ranks in exchange for gifts and wealth. Some of her partners include a German prince and a wealthy Dutch merchant. Her wealth enables her to become a wealthy hostess in England, famous for hosting extravagant parties. Having been the mistress and partner of kings, princes and merchants, she earns herself the reputation of a famous whore. If it wasn't by the means of sleeping with wealthy men, she would probably end up living as a beggar or destitute in one of the slums in England. Similarly, in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Fanny, a girl who was orphaned at the age of fourteen, gradually acquires a huge amount of wealth with the help of prostitution. Living as a prostitute is much better than living as a destitute, as that is when someone has to work beyond their capacity to make ends meet.

Mrs. Warren's Profession, a play by George Bernard Shaw is another piece of literature that portrays prostitution as a reliable source of income for a woman. It does not directly glorify sex work. The purpose of the play was to criticise the economic condition of Victorian society, the limited employment opportunities available to women, and the pattern of minimum wages for maximum work, a practice which pushed poor women to take extreme decisions such as selling themselves as prostitutes. Mrs. Warren, a single mother decides to become a prostitute for the sake of providing for her daughter. Her daughter, Vivie graduates from the University of Cambridge with a degree in Mathematics. When she hears the truth about her mother, she first feels upset and ashamed, but later applauds her for her sacrifice. However, later when she learns that her mother is still involved with prostitution even after having acquired a large amount of

wealth, she disowns her. The fact that Mrs. Kitty Warren, continued with her profession even after having acquired a large amount of money gives us an idea that even if it was just because of the money, she enjoyed the job.

Through this thesis, I attempt to look at the practice of prostitution not only in Victorian and Egyptian societies, but across different cultures across the globe as well. *Geisha, a Life* by Mineko Iwasaki is another book about prostitution from Japan. It is an autobiography, and a response to the book *Memoirs of Geisha* by Arthur Golden. Golden writes the book from an American perspective, misrepresenting Japanese culture to a great extent. In her response, Iwasaki writes her autobiography, *Geisha, a Life* where she shows that a Geisha is not just about being 'a fancy whore', but much more than that. In her book she focuses more on the beauty of Japanese culture and tradition, its art, music, dance and literature, from which we can understand that prostitution formed a very important part of Japanese tradition, and that they were respected. Unlike the scenario in sex trafficking, Geishas in Japan had the liberty to retire when they wanted to. Iwasaki writes that she retired at the age of 29.

In order to take a look at prostitution in contemporary cultures, I have taken the help of an Indian film named *Chandni Bar*. Here, the main character gets involved into prostitution after her village is burnt down by political extremists and her family is killed. Within the thesis, I also look at a novel written by a Nigerian writer, Chika Unigwe, called *On Black Sisters Street* to see how black women were sexually exploited in Europe. Other books that I bring into my thesis are Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.

The Novels

Introduction to the novel- *Nights at the Circus*

Nights at the Circus by Angela Carter is a postmodern novel that is divided into three books- Book One, Book Two and Book Three, which are based on three different geographic locations- London, Petersburg and Siberia, respectively. The novel is based on the year 1899, which was the time when women in England fought for their right to vote. The women in this novel symbolically represent the suffragettes. This is a fiction that deals with Victorian problems from a postmodern point of view. Victorian women were burdened with social norms of etiquettes on how to sit, eat, dress and talk. Sophie Fevvers, the protagonist, breaks all these norms and defies all etiquettes by sitting in a careless way, eating in a vulgar manner and using slang while she spoke. Even her structure was different from what was the idea of a 'well bred woman'. She was six feet tall with broad shoulders and voluptuous features.

Sophie Fevvers, a woman over six feet tall claims that she hatched from an egg and does not know about her parents. She was left in front of the doors of a brothel by unknown people. She grew up in that brothel, and later joins a circus as an aerialist and becomes very famous all over England. There were even rumours according to which she was secretly engaged to the Prince of Wales. We later learn that these rumours were created by the owner of the circus to gain popularity and hype.

The novel begins with a journalist, Walser, coming to interview Fevvers. In the interview, Fevvers gives Walser a lot of details about her life, and relates a lot of incidents. I have chosen to focus on Chapter Two from Book One for my thesis because in this chapter, Fevvers tells the journalist about her life in the brothel. The madam and helper of the brothel, Ma Nelson and Lizzie treat Fevvers like their own child and never force her to get involved with prostitution even after she reaches her teens. We should not be blind to the fact that child prostitution is a hidden reality in many brothels. She also gives details about the other girls in the brothel. She did not criticise anybody or belittle them for their jobs. She was respectful towards all.

This chapter gave us a picture of prostitution compared to low wage labour. Fevves makes a statement where she says that none of these girls would have to become prostitutes if they had a well paid job. This gives us an insight at the faulty social structure that was there at that time as, and exists even today. George Bernard Shaw, in *Mrs Warren's Profession* reflects the same faulty Victorian social and economic structure where it is extremely difficult for a woman with little or no education to get a decent paying job, but the same woman can earn a handsome amount of money if she engages in prostitution. Two girls in the brothel save an amount of money so that they can retire soon and start a business with that money. A woman would not get this chance to save money for the future if she had a job where she got minimum payment for maximum work.

Nights at the Circus, being a feminist novel shows that a woman can lead her life without the guardianship of a man. Fevvers claims to have hatched from an egg has neither father or mother. She was brought up by two women in the brothel- Ma Nelson and Lizzie who were like

mothers to her. After Ma Nelson's death, her brother comes with the intention of claiming her property and turning the brothel into a house for fallen women. However, the girls refuse and go to settle their lives in their own ways after burning down the brothel.

Prostitution in the Victorian Society

Prostitution has been in existence in every society no matter how conservative. Brothels were prevalent in England during the 17th and 18th centuries. The laws against prostitution were made stronger during Victorian times, denouncing men and women involved with the practice as 'sinners'. However, no one has ever been able to eradicate it completely. Intense labour and lack of work opportunities for women pushed them towards prostitution. There are very few novels from the Victorian times that portray its practice, but this does not mean that it was not common. At a time when people held extreme conservative views, a few background characters and indirect references in novels gives us an idea about its discreet presence. Prostitutes, in the 19th century were referred to as 'fallen women' because the Victorians believed that a woman who has lost her virginity outside wedlock has lost her innocence and chastity and has fallen from the grace of God. The presence of 'fallen women' in Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* tells us about the existence of brothels during Victorian times.

Victorian Britain has seen the establishment of various institutions aimed at correcting behaviors and actions that was considered problematic, disturbing and immoral for the Victorian society. Prostitution was one of many such 'evils' and the Victorians believed that it was their responsibility to save prostitutes or 'fallen women' from sinning and bring them towards the path of God, to transform them from sinners to penitents, to make them repent and turn them into

respectable women. Charles Dickens, with similar beliefs, founded a home called 'Urania Cottage' with the help of his wealthy friend Angela Burdett-Coutts. *Nights at the Circus*, having been written in 1984, deals with Victorian problems in a postmodern way, challenging the idea of a house for fallen women being supervised by an authoritative man. When Ma Nelson's brother, after her death, decides that her property will now be used to house fallen women, not a single girl agrees to stay. All of them decide to go on their own ways independently after burning down the brothel. They stick to their identity of a self-dependant prostitute proudly and leave to live an independent life where they could live with pride and dignity, rather than staying under the supervision of a man.

A few girls from the brothel decide to retire after saving a decent amount of money so that they can start another business. Fevvers says, "Louisa and Emily [...] had decided between them to retire entirely, after having saved sufficient to set themselves up in a little boarding-house in Brighton" (Carter 49). She further says, "Annie and Grace had also set by a little store between them and now elected to pool it in order to start up a small agency for typing and office work" (Carter 50). We see that prostitution has enabled them to save a decent amount of money to help them make a long-term future plan for themselves. Else they would have to become someone's wife and live on the husband's money or work as a domestic worker or seamstress, overworked and underpaid. We can assume that the money that they would have earned from those jobs would compel them to live hand-to-mouth, not giving them a chance of building a better and independent financial future. Ma Nelson's brother tells the girls that they could stay as wardresses in the house if they repented, but none of them accepts the offer.

An unmarried girl who have had sex is often called a 'harlot' which means 'prostitute', a word associated with the terms 'unchaste' and 'impure'. In fact, in the Victorian times as soon as a young girl is known to be having an affair, her family begins to worry about their honour. The same is not the case when a boy has an affair. We witness this scenario in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* where Lydia, the youngest of five sisters develops an affair with the clever, charming but evil Wickham, a man who only thought of different ways to acquire money. One of his ways was to pretend to fall in love with Darcy's sister so that he could lay his hands on her wealthy inheritance. It was a failed attempt, yet his character was not sabotaged. He later eloped with Lydia with the intention of earning her dowry, not to marry her. At this point the only thing that was in question was her family's honour, not Wickham's. In fact Darcy had to pay a sum of money to Wickham to make sure he married Lydia and preserve the family's respect.

In the above scenario Lydia's only fault was that she eloped with the man she loved so that she could marry him, on the other hand Wickham's intention was to acquire money. Yet it was Lydia whose character was in question and not Wickham's. It is a sad but true fact that it is always the woman whose character is sabotaged while no one points a finger at the man. If there was a world where men has to face what women used to face in the Victorian times, then Wickham would be classified by a term which is the male equivalent of 'prostitute' because of what his actions reflected as he used to pretend romance with wealthy women with the intention of getting his hands on their wealth. In fact, prostitutes like Firdous and the girls at Ma Nelson's brothel are better and honest because they never pretended to love anyone, nor did they cheat on anyone. They were straightforward about the nature of their jobs.

Introduction to the novel- *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal el Saadawi

Woman at Point Zero by Nawwal el Sadaawi is a biography of a woman named Firdous. The author interviewed her in jail on the day she was to be executed for killing a man. This novel is based in Egypt and was originally written in Arabic. The original accounts of Firdous went through two steps before reaching the hands of the English reader. First, the author transcribed it from oral to written. It is possible that she had omitted some of the original details and added some of her own opinions and interpretations within the text. Due to social, cultural, religious and political restrictions, I believe she chose to skip some important details as well. Secondly, a lot of meaning gets lost in translation. It is possible that the English readers of this book have missed some amount of details which the Arabic readers have enjoyed.

What Firdous says to Saadawi are true incidents from her life, which also gives us an insight into the real social and political scenario of that time. Many novels and films that are based on prostitution show that at some point, the prostitutes get married and have children. Even in *Nights at the Circus*, which is fiction, one of the girls get married to a wealthy man. However, in real life, it is extremely rare for a prostitute to get married. Although it is common for them to have children from unknown fathers.

Prostitution has a very close relationship to poverty. Most women engage in this secret profession for the need and want of money. There are cases where the families of young girls sell them away in exchange for money. We see this scenario in the 2006 novel *Sold* by Patricia McCormick. Lakshmi, a thirteen year old girl who lived in extreme poverty on the mountains of Nepal, was sold by her step father to a stranger. She was told that she will be working as a housemaid for a wealthy woman in India. After arriving to India she realises that she has been sold into prostitution. In the case of Firdous, her family i.e. her uncle gives her away for marriage to a wealthy retired man expecting to receive a large amount of bride price in exchange. Her family did not even ask Firdous whether she was ready for marriage, or agreed to be married. The literal term 'selling' may not apply here, but symbolically, she was sold to a man for money in the same way girls are sold into prostitution, as we see in the novel *Sold*.

Prostitution in the Egyptian Society/ Modern Egypt

According to most societies including the Victorian society and Muslim society in Egypt, if a woman engages in sexual intercourse or has an affair before marriage, she brings shame and disgrace to the family. The main aim is to make sure that her virginity is not lost, for which full precautions are taken so that her lawful husband enjoys good sex with her. Every step is taken to keep her hymen intact, this includes controlling her dress-up so that she does not get harassed by men, restricting her movements so that she may not develop an affair. Firdous' uncle restricts her from pursuing further studies stating that a respected Sheikh like him couldn't be sending his niece off for 'sitting side by side with men' (Saadawi, 36). Yet he marries her off to an old man without asking her. Whatever restrictions are imposed upon a woman is directly or indirectly intended to make sure her husband, the man, enjoys good sex. This makes virginity and purity an absolutely patriarchal concept.

Egypt is a Muslim country where prostitution is illegal yet sex trafficking of women and children takes place on a wide scale. In *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus willingly becomes a prostitute after being domestically and sexually abused in the hands of her husband. Her uncle and aunt with whom she lived with before getting married crashes her confidence and self-esteem by talking ill about her physical appearance behind her back. Her aunt says "Why

should she refuse him? This is her best chance to get married. Do not forget what a nose she has. It's big and ugly like a tin mug" (Saadawi 37). After getting married, her husband had the habit of beating her for no reason. She reports "One day he discovered some scraps of food, and started yelling at me so loudly that all the neighbours could hear. After this incident, he got into the habit of beating me whether he has a reason for it or not" (Saadawi 44). After successfully running away from that home, and getting abused by men again, she comes across Sharifa who is a 'madam', which means she had prostitutes who worked under her. Sharifa fills Firdaus with confidence like no one did before, and she is perhaps the first person in the book who makes her realise that she is beautiful. After meeting with Sharifa, she says, "She probed with a searching light revealing obscure areas in myself, unseen features of my face and body, making me become aware of them, understand them, see them for the first time" (Saadawi 54). Previously Firdaus was not able to eat properly, but after earning money through prostitution, we learn that she can eat properly, buy whatever she wants and climb the ladders of social class. She reports "I realized this was the first time in my life I was eating without being watched by two eyes gazing into my plate to see how much food I took" (Saadawi 66).

With the help of *Nights at the Circus*, we can picture the contrast between prostitution and low wage labour. *Woman at Point Zero* gives us a clear picture of the contrast between a housewife and a prostitute. In both the cases, it was prostitution that gave them empowerment in all aspects. Under this light, I feel that prostitution should be made legal and proper rights and security must be ensured to them by legal authorities. Prostitution is not a crime but sex trafficking is, and the state authority must take the responsibility to learn and know how to differentiate between the two so that the group of women who willingly wants to take the

profession should not suffer. Legalising prostitution would make it easier to regulate laws that surround the practice. It would prevent women and girls from being trafficked into the trade, and make it easier for women who are willing to sell themselves as prostitutes to get into the profession. Women who are kidnapped are forced to spend their life in captivity until they turn old. Legalising prostitution would enable them to 'resign' whenever they want to just like Louisa and Emily in *Nights at the Circus*. Prostitutes are also subject to different types of violence like rape and physical attacks, but they cannot report their cases or get justice because of the nature of their profession. Legalising prostitution will give them protection from violence as well.

Thematic Analysis

Sisterhood

The first difference between both the books that caught my attention was the prevalence of sisterhood in *Nights at the Circus*, and the absence of the same in *Woman at Point Zero*.

Sisterhood refers to the feeling of love, care and affection of one woman towards another, such that they feel like they have an invisible bond towards each other making them feel like sisters, regardless of the fact whether they are related by blood or not. This bond is usually present among a group of sisters as we see in *Little Women* and *Pride and Prejudice*, and also among women who share a common interest. The presence of some friends or companions is very important for any girl regardless of her age or profession. A brothel, for prostitutes, become a place not only for selling sex and earning money but also a place where those prostitutes could find other women who have had similar past experiences and common aims for earning money. Far away from a world which is burdened with meaningless law, social norms, constraints and unnecessary criticism, these women in a brothel can share everything about their lives with each other without ever worrying of being chastised by the society.

Chandni Bar is an Indian Hindi film directed by Madhur Bhandarkar, starring the famous actress Tabu. It depicts the life of a woman, Mumtaz, played by Tabu, who becomes a prostitute

because of extreme poverty. Her village gets destroyed due to communal riots and her family gets killed. She later comes to the metropolitan city, Mumbai, to live with her uncle. Her uncle convinces her to work at a bar as a dancer until he gets a job. Her uncle, however, lives on her earnings, spends it off by drinking and gambling, and does not bother to look for a job. One night he rapes Mumtaz. Broken down emotionally and mentally, she talks about this to the other girls at the brothel only to discover that those girls have faced similar cases of violence and abuse as well. In a world where there is no way for the poverty-stricken outcast living in the marginalised edges of the society to find justice, confiding in women who have gone through similar phases is the only way to feel stronger. Hearing the stories of the other girls at the bar, Mumtaz manages to pull herself together and carry on with her work. The movie *Chandni Bar* shows us how abuses faced by one woman in her life enables her to express solidarity with another woman.

Nights at the Circus shows us the bonding of both sisterhood and motherhood among prostitutes. The girls at the brothel are not related to each other by blood, yet they have a sister or mother-daughter relationship with each other. Fevvers was left in front of the brothel inside a basket as soon as she was born. She knows nothing about her parents. She proudly tells Walser that she was brought up 'by these kind women as if I (Fevvers, 23) was the common daughter of half a dozen mothers' (Carter, 48). Fevvers was brought up by Ma Nelson and Lizzie and with lots of love and pampering. Suppose if Fevvers was left in front of an orphanage instead of a brothel, it is less likely that she would have the liberty that she had in the brothel. We can compare her life to that of another famous orphan of Victorian literature, Jane Eye. Jane was orphaned at the age of ten. She lived with her cruel aunt who continuously scolded and punished her for minor offences. She was later sent to a school where the teachers were extremely strict

and subjected her to harsh punishments. Fevvers, on the other hand, lead a happy life of freedom inside the brothel, where she was treated kindly, no one imposed any sort of rule or restrictions on her. In fact, Ma Nelson, being the madame of the brothel did not even force her to sleep with anyone for money. Her choice was respected, the same way she respected the choice of the other girls to work as prostitutes to earn money. It is a strange that an orphan who grew up in a brothel was much happier than another orphan who grew up with her aunt and later at a school.

The female Victorian characters like Jane Eyre from the novel of the same name, and Hester from *The Scarlett Letter* are alone during the difficult phases of their lives. They are truly appreciated for their strength to be able to face the difficult situations of their lives alone, but having a friend would have made their lives a little better. The novels *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott and *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, portray stories of sisters living together under the same roof. These novels show us that life becomes easier for people when they have someone around. *On Black Sisters Street* is a novel by a Nigerian writer called Chika Unigwe where we see the bond of friendship between four prostitutes. When one of the prostitutes among them die, the four of them come together to tell each other their stories of fear, displacement and love. Similarly, in Ma Nelson's brothel, the presence of women for each other gave them a feeling of togetherness and belongingness, a feeling that they could not have found anywhere else, perhaps not even in their own homes.

Firdous from *Woman at Point Zero* was not lucky enough to have any companionship. In her accounts to Sadaawi she does not talk about any person that she has been close to. She has been alone and friendless ever since her childhood. She explains that when she was in hostel, she would see the parents of every other student taking their children away for the weekend

while she was left alone with no one to take her home. She had no one to confide into ever since her childhood. Her father doesn't let her eat properly, her uncle abuses her, her aunt ridicules her, her husband, who was an old man forces himself on her and hits her. Everything together forces her to take refuge in the streets which don't prove to be safe either. All the men she has ever come across take advantage of her. The owner of a coffee shop who she meets on the street offers her an abode but later calls in some of his friends to rape her. When she works in an office, she starts to like someone of a higher rank called Ibrahim. Later Ibrahim gets engaged to the chairman's daughter, and she realises that all that he did with Firdous was just to exploit her. At a point, the reader wants to sympathise with Firdous, but she doesn't want our sympathy. She has been alone throughout all the hardships of her life but she has been extremely strong. Even when she is a few hours away from walking towards the gallows she does not flinch or look for help. She even rejects the offer of writing to the President to gain the possibility of being pardoned. Firdous was alone, but she was a strong and independent woman who did not need anyone. She begins her journey as a prostitute in a brothel, however, she does not mention any other woman from the brothel except her madam, Shareefa. She does not talk about any encounter that she might have had with any other prostitute in spite of the fact that she lived there for quite some time. It would have been interesting to know what her attitude would be like towards other girls who have gone through a similar experience like her.

We see Firdous' kindness towards the servant girl when she used to live with her uncle. Firdous slept on the bed while the servant girl slept on the floor as it is the practice followed in many households in the middle-east as well as the Indian subcontinent. One cold night she lets the girl sleep with her on the bed, later to be beaten by her aunty. Her tiny act of kindness shows

us that she was a kind-hearted human being who had love and respect for everyone around her. Fevvers had a similar attitude to help those in misery around her. Mignon was abandoned by her husband. She was in a miserable condition when brought in front of Fevvers. Fevvers orders her servants to bathe her, have her cleaned and dress her. She later discovers that Mignon has a beautiful voice, then links her to the Princess of Abyssinia with the intention of her giving her a job. This way we see how one woman can become the rescuer of another woman.

Brothel

In countries where prostitution is illegal, brothels operate in the names of massage parlours, strip clubs or studios. They also exist in these countries as 'red light areas' because its prevalence is not only difficult but impossible to control by authorities. In most cases, the prostitution business is controlled by heavyweight criminals who have a major influence on political people and decision makers. Al Jazeera has documented the world's largest brothel which is located in Bangladesh. This brothel is not located in a flat, a building, or chain of buildings, but the entire town known as Daulatia is a brothel. This town, according to the documentary, is home to more than 1500 prostitutes. Girls as young as 10 years old to the age of 50 years old are available for sale here between the ranges of 50tk to 5000tk. The women who live here are either daughter of former prostitutes or have been brought here after being kidnapped and trafficked. This brothel town exists in the form of slums. It consists of groups of tin houses and shops clustered together in an unplanned manner with no proper drainage, garbage disposal or any other hygienic facilities.

The beauty of a brothel serves as an indicator for the standard of a prostitute. In both the books *Nights at the Circus* and *Woman at Point Zero* we find beautiful descriptions of the house

and their rooms. Fevvers describes, 'As for the drawing-room, in which I played the living statue all my girlhood, it was on the first floor and you reached by a mighty marble staircase that went up with a flourish like, pardon me, a whore's bum,' (Carter, 26). Firdaus describes her brothel, she reports, 'the next moment I stepped into a spotless apartment with carpeted floors overlooking the Nile. She took me to the bathroom, showed me how to turn the hot and cold water taps on and off, so I could have a bath,' (Saadawi, 53). The only difference between the opinion of the two is that Fevvers enjoys being a part of the brothel while Firdaus despises it. The luxurious beauty of the home that was located near the river Nile initially astonishes her as she came from a poor background. She took deep breathes so fill her lungs with pure air. But as soon as she realises that her madame has been exploiting her, she leaves the place immediately.

Madam

A madam is a woman who keeps other women, who are prostitutes, under her supervision and receives clients for engaging in sexual activity with those women in exchange for money. This act is known as procuring or pandering. When done by a woman she is known as a madame, and when done by a man he is called a pimp. The madame or pimp collects part of the sex worker's income. In most cases, especially in places where prostitution chains are illegally run, the procurers exploit the prostitutes by collecting a major portion of the girls' income, turning the profession into a nasty and inhuman act of sexual slavery. In the novel *Nights at the Circus*, we do not find any account of the girls being exploited by their madame Ma Nelson, in fact, all the girls express their love and affection towards her. Fevvers even reports that she was like a mother to her, hence the name 'Ma Nelson'. However, in *Woman at Point Zero*, there is an indirect account of Firdous' exploitation as a prostitute by her madame Shareefa.

Procurers can get girls through various means to engage them in sexual acts. In the 2006 novel *Sold*, by Patricia McCormick, a middleman takes advantage of a family's poverty and sells a thirteen-year-old girl, Lakshmi, from Nepal to a brothel in India. The brothel, known as 'Happy House' is owned by a cruel madame, Mumtaz, who tells Lakshmi that she cannot leave until she pays off her debts, which is the money that was used to purchase her. However, she was not provided with enough money by her madame so she cannot escape. In most cases, this is the way in which young girls are exploited by their pimp or madame. They are used as sex slaves and not allowed to leave the brothel until they turn old. In *Women at Point Zero*, however, Firdous was not forced into prostitution. Shareefa, the madame, very smartly convinces and manipulates her into believing that sex work will help her gain more respect. After finding more respect as a prostitute than that of a housewife or an employee, she lives the rest of her life as a proud prostitute.

Ever since her childhood, Firdous was disrespected and taken advantage of. She never had the courage to stand up or fight for herself in front of her uncle, aunt, husband, colleague or the strangers who raped her. She was totally hopeless with her life but then she met Shareefa. Her use of the right words and speech at the right time tells us that she was a skilled procurer adept in the art of convincing. Just by seeing Firdous sitting on a bench, she rightly assumed that she was taken advantage of by some man. In a short time Firdous found it comfortable to share all her life's details with her and agreed to go with her to her home. When she asked who she was, Sharifa replied, "Your mother" (Saadawi, 53), in an attempt to establish an emotional relationship. Sharifa counsels her with strong words of wisdom about life, she says, "Life is a snake. [...] If the snake realises you are not a snake, it will bite you. And if life knows you have

no sting, it will devour you” (Saadawi, 53). The same Firdous, who was always made to believe that she was ugly and had a large nose, after meeting Sharifa believed that she was beautiful, she says:

I discovered I had black eyes, with a sparkle that attracted other eyes like a magnet, and that my nose was neither big, nor rounded, but full smooth with the fullness of strong passion which could turn to lust. My body was slender, my thighs tense, alive with muscle, ready at any moment to grow even tauter. (Saadawi, 53)

Firdous later discovers that Sharifa was living off her money, just like most of the procurers. When she discovers this, she runs away from the brothel. In the novel, we don't have a detailed account of the brothel except its decoration, location and the visiting men. Most brothels make it impossible for the sex workers to leave once they get in, but in this case, Firdous was able to run away immediately. There is no information on whether she faced any kind of obstacles in her attempt to escape. Although Sharifa exploits her, the fact that Sharifa played a very important role in filling her with confidence and self-love that she would otherwise not find cannot be denied. Firdous later becomes bold enough to reject men whose nails she found to be dirty, choose her own clients and quote her own price.

We have a posthumous account of Madame Ma Nelson from *Nights at the Circus* by Fevvers where we don't come across a single negative act. Fevvers tell us that under Ma Nelson's care the girls lived like sisters and best friends and had love and respect towards each other. There is no description of violence or force. Four of the girls were planning to switch to other jobs after saving a decent amount of money, which tells us that Ma Nelson did not keep the girls forcefully trapped in her brothel, as is the case we see in most novels that deal with

prostitution and in real life. Procurers make a living by taking a part of the prostitutes' income for themselves. However, in the book, we do not find any description of Ma Nelson exploiting the girls. This indicates that she perhaps took a reasonable amount for herself that did not make the girl's financial life difficult.

Marriage

“Wives are young men's mistresses, companions for middle age, and old men's nurses.”

Francis Bacon

Women have always been treated like a man's subject rather than an individual being. According to the Oxford Dictionary, marriage is ‘The legally or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal relationship’. In most cases, marriage turns out to be a socially acceptable patriarchal institution where the man takes the right and responsibility to take all decisions for his wife whether she likes it or not. Theoretically, it is supposed to be the consensual union of two persons, but unfortunately, in many cases, girls are married off when their families think there is a suitable match, regardless of whether the girl is ready for marriage or not. Most girls in rural and conservative areas are married off before they are eighteen. Firdous' aunt decides that she must get married to Sheikh Mahmoud, one of her distant relative because ‘he had a big pension and no children,’ (Sadaawi, 36). He later ends up forcefully having sex with her and beating her. Lizzie, from *Nights at the Circus* quotes, “What is marriage but prostitution to one man instead of many?” (Carter, 21) Marriage requires a woman to submit her whole life to a man. In exchange, the man provides her with a home and all financial expenditures. If the woman is lucky enough, she gets a man who is wealthy, well behaved and treats his wife like a lady, as we see in *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *Jane Eyre* by

Charlotte Bronte. But otherwise, she is reduced to a means for a man to express his sexual desire, and to procreate. She does not have ownership of her own body, and she does not have financial independence. Every time a married woman who does not have a source of income needs something, she has to ask her husband. Voluntary prostitution frees a woman from letting any man claim ownership over her. The story of Firdous proves that a prostitute has more independence than a wife. She writes, "The lowest paid body is that of a wife. [...] I was intelligent (so) I preferred to be a free prostitute, rather than an enslaved wife." (Saadawi, 91)

Firdous discovered her independence after exploring her opportunities as a prostitute. When she was young, she was under the guardianship of her uncle and aunt who took her decisions without asking for her consent. As soon as Firdous finished her schooling, they decide to marry her off to an old man instead of going to a university so that she doesn't 'mix in the company of men' (Saadawi, 36). After her marriage, her husband, Sheikh Mahmoud claims her ownership. She doesn't feel free at her husband's home, she has two eyes lounging on her when she eats and when she cooks. She reports, "If I dropped the packet of soap powder and spilt a few grains on the floor, he would jump up from his chair and complain at me for being careless" (Saadawi, 44). Firdous later runs away from that home, only to become another young man's mistress who does not let her work. It is when she becomes a prostitute that no one gets the authority to decide anything for her. She decides for herself, buys herself her own home, chooses her own clients and eats without having two eyes hovering over her food. Marriage gives the right of one's body to a man, whereas, with prostitution, a woman has a complete right over her own body. Firdous was conscious of cleanliness. She was utterly disgusted at her husband's deformity on his face which often leaked with pus and felt helpless when he pushed that face on

hers during forced sex. As soon as she discovers that she has full authority over her own body, she feels proud to reject men whose nails she found dirty, and accept men who impressed her. Amnesty International says, “Being able to make our own decisions about our health, body and sexual life is a basic human right”, but marriage to a cruel man derives a woman from this basic right.

Prostitution did not only give her ownership over her body but ownership over her money too. However, working under her procurer, Shareefa did not give her that freedom, she had to struggle for it. Once Firdous frees herself from the corrupted abode of the brothel, she becomes financially independent. She reports that her aunt and her husband used to hide their notes as soon as they saw Firdous nearby. When her customer hands her ten dollars, that was the first money that she had ever held in her hands after growing up. She uses that to go to a restaurant and eat roasted chicken. She tells how free she felt when she held that note in her hand that was her own, and when she had full right to choose what she wants to eat.

Firdous possessed utter hate towards men and never expressed the desire to get married. However, some of the prostitutes from *Nights at the Circus* were looking forward to getting married after they retired from prostitution. Prostitutes are known as ‘geishas’ in Japan, and they formed a very important part of Japanese culture. In her autobiography, Mineko Iwasaki, a former geisha, writes that she retired at the age of 29 to settle for marriage. This detail tells us that getting married to a geisha was not a matter of controversy in those cultures. However, getting married to someone who has had sex with multiple men for money was considered scandalous and controversial in Victorian societies, and is still considered disgraceful in many modern societies.

Financial Independence and Money

Financial independence refers to one's ability to make expenses with her own money, without having to ask or take permission from anyone. In most societies, the traditional norm is that the woman's father, and after her marriage, her husband provide for her. This puts her in an inferior position in the family, turning her into a dependant where she has to ask her father or husband for even the simplest things, like food and clothes. This situation gives man advantage over a woman, allowing him to rule over her, order her to fulfil his demands and even beat her. Firdous was married to a retired man who, according to her aunt, had 'a big pension' (Saadawi, 36), and later raped her and subjected her to do all household chores. With only a secondary school certificate and no permission to work, she had just two options- to either stay with her husband and quietly bear his abuses, or to run away from home and see what happens next. She chose the latter. She ran away from home and found a way to earn her own money, but not before getting raped by a coffee shop owner. Nevertheless, she had to take the risk of stepping out of four walls of home into an unknown world. She finally got rid of a lifetime of confinement with the man she was forced to marry.

Bremner writes in *The Financial Dependence of Woman*, "It is a matter of common observation that the married woman with means of her own income has more chance of consideration than the dowerless woman,' (Bremner, 382). He also writes that if there is no amount of money or property written under her name, the most 'intimate relationships rest on an insecure foundation,' (Bremner, 382). Women's ownership of money puts her in a more secure

position and gives her the confidence not to depend on anyone to provide for her in case her husband dies, leaves her or divorces her. Earning her own money gives her the confidence to stand on her own feet. Firdous' uncle married a woman who came from a respectable lineage, was the daughter of his university teacher and belonged to a higher social class than himself. He treated her very politely and never spoke loudly with her. According to Firdous, 'his feelings for her was more of fear than love,' (Saadawi, 23). This type of fear generates respect and is necessary for every marital relationship no matter how intimate. Financial independence of a woman is key to a happy married life, making sure that both the partners are equally happy and get equal respect from each other. Without any source of income, husbands reduce their wives to the status of a slave. Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own* writes "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf, 5). None of the characters in the two novels wrote fiction, yet they needed their own money and their own space for living their basic day to day life. Firdous never felt the touch of money in her own hands before she earned it from sex work. Her husband hid his money from her and kept questioning and charging her repeatedly for the home's ration. With the money she earned from sex work, she bought herself a luxurious home, her own space, which she beautifully decorated.

Everybody respects a woman who has money and/or belong to a high social status. When Firdaus reaches the position of one of the most successful prostitutes in Egypt, 'a very important personality from a foreign state' (Saadawi, 89), calls for her but she rejects his invitation. Firdous possessed an extreme hatred towards men and found pleasure in rejecting them. According to Ferdous, when a man gets rejected, his self esteem gets attacked and in order to retain that self esteem, he offers to pay her even more. Firdous was more empowered as a prostitute than as a

housewife. The power of money gave her the independence and right to choose, but as a wife of a rich man with no money of her own, she had to live a life of subjugation, torture and rape. People need money to buy the basic things in life. They want money so that they could buy more than just the basic things of life. The first time Firdous holds money (a 'piastre') is when she was little. Her father gives her that money which she uses to buy a sweet. She describes that it was her 'piastre', 'mine to do what I wanted, to buy what I wanted, to eat whatever I desired,' (Saadawi, 65). The next money she holds was that which a man gave after having sex with her- a ten-pound note. Previously, she never had the liberty to eat peacefully without having two eyes prying over her food to see how much she ate. After she receives the money that was her own, for the first time she eats peacefully. Earning her own money gave her the peace and liberty to choose whatever she wanted to eat, and then eat it without being watched or restricted.

Georgi Markow in his journal titled 'Prostitution', writes down about an interview he takes with some former prostitutes in The People's Headquarters in Sofia. Those former prostitutes were said to be 'rescued' by the police. However, their responses didn't seem like they were happy to be 'rescued'. The colonel dragged one of those women in front of the writer who yelled, "My private life is none of your business! How I feel is my concern. Do I ask you who you're banging and who your lovers are?" (4) When told by the colonel that they want to help her, she said sarcastically, "You helped me a lot when you exiled me from Sofia didn't you? Then you robbed me by sending me to slave away in the mines of Bobovdol. So the miners could reform me!" (4) The accounts of this woman suggest that she was better off as a prostitute, and is currently not happy with her work as a miner which according to her is equivalent to slavery.

One of the main reasons why some women voluntarily choose to become a sex worker is, firstly because it gets very difficult for a woman with a low educational qualification to get a well-paid job, and secondly, because prostitution is a job which is very well paid. Prostitution can pay a young woman higher than any other work that is suitable for her age. There were a lot of women in the Victorian times who had to go through tough struggles to get a job in London as a result of the Industrial Revolution and population explosion. The jobs that were available for women who belonged to poor backgrounds were those of- domestic workers or seamstresses. The economic balance was disrupted as extremely hard and laborious work was dealt with minimum wages. In such a scenario, prostitution seemed to be a better option to earn money as it was well-paid. Without condemning prostitution, Fevvers blames the imbalanced economy for pushing women into prostitution, mentioning ‘No woman would turn her belly to the trade unless pricked by economic necessity, sir,’ (Carter, 42). Unlike most of the brothels in real life where pimps keep the women captive until they turn old, Ma Nelson’s brothel allowed the girls to retire whenever they wanted to. Two girls, Louisa and Emily had plans to retire early after having made sufficient savings. They wouldn’t get the chance of saving a decent amount of money if they had a minimum wage labour. Minimum wage work compel a person to live from hand to mouth. The kind of financial independence that prostitution can provide to a woman is extremely empowering.

Representation of Men

The two novels represent men in different ways. Fevvers’ representation, treatment and attitude towards men in the novel is neutral and respectful. She treats Walser respectfully, while condemns the men like Ma Nelson’s brother and Mignon’s husband. However, Firdous possesses

extreme hate for men. She does not intentionally or manipulatively portray them under a negative light, but gives a real picture of the incidents that have happened to her. It must be pointed out that the situations where Firdous found herself brought out the true nature of men. The men who took advantage of her were the same men who were otherwise well reputed in homes and offices among their families and colleagues. We see a similar scenario in the play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Stanley rapes his wife's sister, Blanche, when his wife, Stella was delivering a baby in the hospital. When Blanche, who later gets mentally disturbed, reports the incident of rape to Stella, she does not believe her. The reason behind this is that most men portray a decent image in front of their families which makes it impossible for them to believe that the same men could commit such a heinous crime like rape. The true sexual nature of men are revealed when they are alone with a woman. Unfortunately, this duplex nature of men is one of the many factors which is responsible for putting blame on the victim when such shameful incidents happen. There was an incident in *Nights at the Circus* as well where Walser finds a girl, Mignon in a sorry state in an isolated corner of the street. However, he takes her to safe place so that she could be helped by Fevvers.

Firdous' didn't have a single man in her life who did something good to her, not even her father. Her father was not sympathetic or caring like a father should be. He was the kind of man who would satisfy his own hunger, but snatched his plate away when his little daughter would reach out at his food. However, her father is the only man who does not take sexual advantage of her. Incidents of fathers sexually assaulting their daughters are present in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. At one point of extreme distress and

helplessness, Firdous suddenly realises that she misses her father, and remembers the time when he gave her a piastre to spend on whatever she liked.

At a stage right before sexual feelings begin to develop, Firdous tells that a boy who was almost her age put his hand on her body in a sexual manner which she did not resist. In this case, both the boy and the girl were innocents, and the incident was mere experimentation of a pre adolescent's sexual feelings and experience of each others' bodies. The next man was her own uncle at his teens. In most cases when a child is abused, the perpetrator is none other than a close family member. Firdous' uncle continued to take advantage of her until he got married. Firdous was unaware, or perhaps confused to understand and realise that her uncle was taking wrong advantage of her. This is the reason why educating small children about private parts and good touches and bad touches are important. She says, "His lips would touch my face and press down on my mouth, and his trembling fingers would feel their way slowly upwards over my thighs." (Saadawi, 22)

The next man had the legal right to sexually abuse her since there is no law in Egypt that criminalises the rape of a wife by her husband. Firdous was married off young to an old man who had recently retired, and who later tortures her sexually, physically, financially and mentally. Firdous runs away to be helped by a coffee shop owner who initially looks like a gentleman. He treats her kindly, lets her stay at his home and promises to find her a job. But no matter how well-dressed or high profile a man is, his true sexual nature is revealed when he is alone with a woman. The coffee shop owner does not attack her in the beginning, he even keeps her in a separate room to respect her privacy. The same man later brings in his friends to rape her. We do not know what his initial intention was. Did he really want to help her but later

changed his mind? Or was it his initial intention to rape her? He could have raped her on the first day if it was his intention. However, if the former was the case, then it gives us an insight into the male psychology. In William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, we see that when human beings are removed from the bounds of civil rules, regulations and law, they begin to behave differently and primitively. In the absence of parents and teachers who are responsible for instilling manners and proper codes of conduct within a child, the English boys gradually transform from young gentlemen into jungle savages. Similarly, in *Woman at Point Zero*, we see a sudden behaviour change in the coffee shop owner after he realises that there will be no one to punish him for his actions within four walls of his home.

The pride and power of a man reside in his penis. The men in the novel express their domination over Firdous with the help of sex and strength. Later, after Firdous learns how to deal with the ugliness of life, she uses her intelligence to bring men to their knees. Using sex as a tool, she manipulates men and tramples on their pride. She often denied sex to men no matter how much money they offered and enjoyed watching them get defeated under the weight of their arrogance. Rejecting sex to a man is like an abstract attack on his private parts. She writes, "My refusal made him even more intent on gaining victory over me." (Saadawi, 90)

Religion

Both *Nights at the Circus* and *Woman at Point Zero* take place in very conservative societies, one in Victorian society and the other in a Muslim society. In 1899 in England, women were struggling to break out from their societies' patriarchal and conservative norms. The book clearly states the hypocrisy of so-called Christian leaders through Ma Nelson's brother who wants to take away her property. She writes "he intended to make of his inheritance a hostel for

fallen girls and he thought a repentant harlot or two would come in handy about the place, poacher turned gamekeeper, you might say” (Carter 49). However, we do not come across any religious views on prostitution in the *Woman at Point Zero* which is quite expected since it is based on an Islamic society. Perhaps, even if she made any religious comment, the writer, Saadawi might have had chosen to omit that detail due to the controversy it might create because of the conservativeness of the Egyptian society. One religious comment is seen in the book where Firdaus’ aunt says “It was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives,” (Saadawi 44) on the subject of men beating their wives.

Conclusion

Prostitution has been in existence in societies ever since history in different forms and with different terms. They formed an important part of Japanese as well as Indian culture. In Japan they were known as 'geishas' while in the Mughal Empire they were known as 'tawaifs'. The nature of work of a geisha, tawaif and prostitute is the same, yet it would be denotatively wrong to use the word 'prostitute' or 'sex worker' as a synonym for the words geisha or tawaif. It is ironical how historical times were more modern than the modern times itself. In today's world, prostitution is connotated to something nasty and immoral, and there is a divide and debate among third wave feminists regarding the fact whether sex work should be legalised or not, and whether sex work is empowering or subjugating. The two novels that I have used in this dissertation- *Woman at Point Zero* and *Nights at the Circus* sheds light on how sex work can empower a woman by providing her with financial support.

In today's corrupted world where poverty and injustice is on the rise, it is very difficult for women to earn a decent wage with right and legal means. Fevvers mentions that a woman chooses to take this profession only when her circumstances force her to do so. Firdous finds pleasure in the large amount of money that she earned from sex work after her bad experience at an office job where her wage was low and she was treated like a sex object by a superior

colleague. In such social and financial circumstances it will be injustice to arrest someone for their choice to earn money by willingly selling their bodies.

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