

2

A sociological study of how women are socially victimized on the basis of gender discrimination through; The Stoning of Soraya M. movie

Rathnayake R.M.V.S.

Abstract

Gender discrimination persists as a noteworthy global concern, affecting women throughout diverse domains. Women and girls are more prone to suffer the negative consequences of gender discrimination. It could entail having less flexibility to make decisions about their personal and family lives, having less access to education, and having a lower social status. The majority of movies today are on gender inequality as it appears in society. This research article explores the sociological dimensions of gender-based victimization through an in-depth analysis of the film "The Stoning of Soraya M." The film provides as a lens through which we can study the social dynamics that result in women being victimized, illuminating the wider ramifications for gender equality and women's rights. Accordingly, how women are socially victimized on the basis of gender discrimination? was the main problem of this research. The main objective of this study is to better understand the various ways that gender discrimination causes women to be socially victimized, with an emphasis on the influence of cultural and societal norms. For this research

article, secondary data were collected through qualitative research method, which was gathered from published research papers, journals, e-books and relevant websites. Accordingly, it has revealed that, "The Stoning of Soraya M." movie resembles a morality a story about misogyny, religious extremism, and the overwhelming power of inaction. It portrays Iran's Islamic culture as being highly rigid. Sadly, the extreme religious beliefs and cultural norms of the primary character of Soraya led to her being found guilty and receiving a death by stoning sentence despite her innocence. The film misinterprets women and restricts their ability to express themselves. In this true story of Muslim society, the female characters are denigrated, and it seems that the Quran is the sole book that restricts gender roles. Women are not treated similarly to males, despite the Quran's assertion that men and women are on an equal footing. Accordingly, the movie offers a striking indictment of the injustices and atrocities experienced by women in cultures where gender inequality is pervasive and emphasizes the pressing need for gender equality and justice.

Keywords: Women, Discrimination, Islamic Culture, Religion, Gender Inequality

INTRODUCTION

According to Ridgeway, C. L. (2011), "Framed by Gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World" book examines that, how gender influences social interactions and continues to be a structural and behavioral source of inequality. In their quest to become recognized as vital members of society, women have overcome a great deal of difficulty, hindrance, and impediment. Women have historically suffered because they lack rights and because the patriarchal system isolates, ignores, and mistreats them. The unfair or unfavorable treatment of a person on the basis of their gender is known as "Gender discrimination". The adverse effects of gender discrimination are particularly likely to affect women and girls. Several studies have demonstrated the widespread existence of gender-based disparities and the numerous ways that women are systematically disadvantaged across a range of countries. Scholars (Kabeer, 2005; Sen, 2001) have emphasized the significance of comprehending gender discrimination as deeply embedded structural and cultural factors that sustain social inequalities, rather than just as isolated instances of bias. The language around gender discrimination has been significantly shaped by feminist ideas, which highlight the importance of closely examining the power dynamics and social norms that support the subjugation of women (Hooks, 1984; Collins, 1990). Simone de Beauvoir (1949) emphasized that, a person does not become a woman by birth. The human female's social persona is not determined by her biological, psychological, or economic circumstances; rather, it is the result of civilization as a whole that creates this entity, which is characterized as feminine and lies halfway between male and eunuch.

Harapriya Mohapatra (2015) elucidates, women are submissive to men in the family since they must work to support the men who provide the majority of the family's income. Due to their lack of autonomy, women must ask the males in their household for permission before acting on their desires. Women thus follow an unbroken, daily routine that is tedious and repetitive. In recent years, gender inequality as it manifests in society is the subject of the majority of films. The movie "**The Stoning of Soraya M**" is more than just a movie; it is a biting reflection on gender-based discrimination and the systemic inequities women experience in some areas of the world. It is a sobering reminder that more work needs to be done to combat gender inequity. "The Stoning of Soraya M." is a 2008, Persian language Iranian movie directed by Cyrus Nowrasteh, based on the true story of Soraya Manutchehri, an Iranian woman who was falsely accused of adultery and stoned to death in a tiny town in southwest Iran on August 15, 1986. The best-selling book "La Femme Lapidée" by French journalist Freidoune Sahebjam was adapted for the world in 1990, which was translated into English in

1994. It portrays some of the outstanding gender issues in the movie include the inferiority of women, injustices, overreliance on men, and the contribution of women to the escalation of their troubles. In this movie, Mozhan Marnò as (**Soraya Manutchehri**) plays the title character and the Oscar-nominated Shohreh Aghdashloo portrays (**Zahra**), Soraya's aunt, who tells Jim Caviezel's journalist character (**Freidoune Sahebjam**), what happened to her niece. Other actors in the film include Navid Negahban as (**Ali**), Soraya's husband and the plot's main antagonist who devises a scheme to get rid of his wife. Moreover, Parviz Sayyad plays the character of mechanic (**Hashem**) in the movie and gives a tremendous performance.

The movie included a number of excruciating and agonizing scenes, notably the climax, which in just a few minutes conveyed a plethora of intolerable emotional states, including terror, treachery, anguish, brutality, subjugation, unfairness, vulnerability, and maternity among many others. Especially, the inequality against women in Islamic society is made clear in the movie. The research problem of this study is to investigate and understand the multifaceted ways in which women experience social victimization due to gender discrimination, with a specific focus on the impact of cultural and societal norms as depicted in "The Stoning of Soraya M." movie. The research aims to investigate the sociological dimensions of women's social victimization rooted in gender discrimination as portrayed in "The Stoning of Soraya M." movie, exploring the multifaceted ways in which societal norms, cultural practices, and power structures contribute to the perpetuation of gender-based injustices and the impact of such victimization on the individual and the community.

PLOT OVERVIEW

When consider the plot summery of the movie, the French-Iranian journalist (Freidoune Sahebjam) travels across a desolate mountainous area of Iran towards the beginning of the movie. When his vehicle breaks down, it is transported to a small community where Hashem (Parviz Sayyad) promises to try to fix the radiator. After a local woman named Zahra (Shohreh Aghdashloo) tries to chat with the reporter, the village mayor (David Diaan) and the mullah (religious leader) in the area (Ali Pourtash) push her away and offer to buy him lunch, but he declines and walks to the café to eat alone because he has work to do. Zahra leaves him a message with a map to her home there, which he finds. There, when he first encounters her, he finds out that she has a tale to tell the world, which he should record.

It is based on a real-life incident in which a woman's abusive husband, Ali, requests a divorce so that he can wed a fourteen-year-old daughter. His four children's mother, Soraya, is aware that they would starve to death without the financial support of their father. Ali is not granted a divorce by her. Ali manages to escape the union in another means. He claims that Soraya had an affair with the neighborhood mechanic and was an unfaithful wife. Legally, adultery is a crime that carries a death by stoning sentence. In order to get the mechanic to support him, Ali blackmails the local mullah. Finally, Soraya was sentenced to death by stoning despite being innocent due of her own rigid religious beliefs. However, she appears to be quite bold and fearless to face the stoning and does so without difficulty. The injustice of the circumstances and the brutality of the punishment in the story elicit a strong negative emotion of terror, disgust, and indignation. Zahra requests Sahebjam to represent her since she claims that women's voices are not heard outside of Iran. The only chance they have for justice is in his report. Then she claims that other nations are unaware of Iran's culture of stoning. It is exposed how unfairly female characters have been treated in her nation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research explored the social facets of gender-based victimization as shown in "The Stoning of Soraya M." through a qualitative case study design. In order to conduct this research, a methodical content analysis of a few chosen scenarios was undertaken. The focus was on the conversations, character interactions, and surrounding details that depicted social violence and gender discrimination. In order to investigate how gendered victimization is portrayed in the plot, a narrative analysis of the movie was done.

This study examines the methodological framework of a sociological investigation of the social victimization of women in "The Stoning of Soraya M." as a result of gender discrimination. The study employs a secondary data, which was gathered from published research papers, journals, e-books and relevant websites that were relevant to the research purpose. There were a number of study results cited from online sources that were presented as secondary data. In order to perform a sociological analysis of how women are socially victimized in "The Stoning of Soraya M." due to gender discrimination, this secondary data attempts to fully utilize the sources that are already available.

The cornerstone of this process is a thorough evaluation of the relevant literature. The study develops a theoretical framework by examining scholarly works on gender discrimination, social victimization, and films depicting women. By adding depth to the analysis of the film within its larger context, the literature review advances the sociological knowledge of gender dynamics. This technique highlights

the depth and complexity that secondary data sources contribute to academic research by using a secondary data methodology for the sociological study of women's social victimization in "The Stoning of Soraya M."

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In this movie, there were plenty many scenes that highlighted the unfavorable interactions between men and women. Women should be fully covered from head to toe, as seen by the manner they wear. This movie also demonstrates how Iranian society abuses women in the name of tradition. Women are required to endure the harsh sanctions whether or not they make mistakes. The film depicts an extremely rigid Islamic culture in Iran. Women endure significant suffering as a result of male hegemony. Women are required to take punishment at all costs. It all has to do with how Iranian culture views women.

Women are restricted to home duties and particular areas in Muslim societies, making it impossible for them to participate in decision-making processes. Males have a superhuman sense of self-worth and believe they have the power to dominate women. Despite having equal roles and duties in society, men and women do not get the chance they deserve. But they must succumb to male rule, becoming its victims. Sheikh Hassan (Mullah) and the mayor (Ebrahim) label Zahra as insane when she speaks to the journalist at the beginning of the film. The mayor asserts, **"Ignore her. She is old and insane."**(8:18 sec-8:22 sec). The mayor and the mullah believe that peeking with a stranger is improper. Speaking with a male while a woman in the Muslim community is not always welcomed. The mayor says, **"Worthless woman. Talking to strange men now?"** (8:22 sec-8:28 sec). The extent of women's restrictions in Muslim patriarchal society is made obvious in this debate. They are not allowed to converse with outsiders and are treated poorly if they do. The provided picture shows the best proof that only the actions of male characters are determined.



Figure 1: Mullah and Ebrahim are shown interrupting the conversation between Zahra and the journalist

Characters for women rarely have any rights. Women are limited in these activities as a result of male superiority. Soraya's aunt “Zahra” appears to be a very brash and strong woman. She is helpful to Soraya and fights for all of her rights. Zahra is the narrator and a participant in the story. She tells the whole story to Freidoune Sahebjam, the French journalist. Despite being a woman, she appears to accomplish all of a man's tasks. She is shown in the film as a passionate, courageous, and incredibly helpful woman. In addition to being a woman with a broad perspective on life, Zahra is portrayed as being intelligent, independent, and unafraid of expressing her mind or defying any authority figures. Zahra consistently speaks out against gender inequality and is not afraid to engage with masculine characters. Always standing up for her niece and other female characters, Zahra.

The journalist gets a chance to visit Sahara's house, where Sahara narrates to him what happened a day ago. She starts narrating; **“Today. I am old, a hundred year older than yesterday, but I know what is right and what is wrong. What happened here yesterday was wrong Start your machine, voices of women do not matter here, I want you to take my voice with you. There are men in this town who are wild dogs. There hunt began not long ago with Soraya's husband, Ali.”** Zahra's utterances creates a very clear imagery of patriarchal rule over the village. She mentions it quite clearly, that voice of a woman does not make any sense and are silenced by men. Her use of the words **“wild dogs”**, for men is in itself a full picture of the patriarchal system. The use of such harsh words actually reveal how brutal the men are towards women Zahra is a woman who cannot completely challenge patriarchy and at the same time, does not fully submit to it too. Her decision of raising her voice against the men in the village itself is an evidence, which exhibits her denial of patriarchy.

The main figure of Soraya (Mozhan Marno) is a capable and devoted wife who has produced two sons and two girls for her authoritarian and physically abusive husband Ali (Navid Nagahban). In order to obscure Soraya's pains, men's perspectives are also used to explain women's experiences in the film. There is the dominance of men over women. Males are perceived as controlling every action taken by women. In order for the fundamental concept to emerge, female experiences and sufferings should be defined by females themselves. Male characters in the film perceive their own world as superior because they believe in their own superiority. They only portray female characters incorrectly. Sheikh Hassan (Mullah) abuses Soraya and her aunt Zahra when Soraya refuses to grant her husband a simple divorce. Mullah says, **“You witches, your venom will come back to poison you...You both will see”** (20:30sec-20:35sec). Women are misrepresented and dominated in society as a result of male hegemony. Because

Soraya refuses to grant a divorce, Mullah views Soraya and Zahra as witches. This suggests that the movie has a male-dominated culture.

For Soraya, home has also turned into a very dangerous or unsecure environment. She has experienced assault from her own husband inside of her own home. She can no longer feel safe in her own home, thus it has turned into a very dangerous place for her. After she refuses to grant him a divorce, she is assaulted by her own husband. Mullah once recommended that Soraya become a temporary wife after asking her to obtain a divorce but she declined since she was frightened about her kids. The patriarchy is so powerful that Ali even neglects his duties to his daughters. They are not even acknowledged as his children. Patriarchy is also evident in the way Soraya's kid shuts her up by telling her that she shouldn't speak to his father in that way. Even boys who see their mother's suffering and give their assent in favor of their father fall to control.

While the male population gets away with anything, their religion somehow conveys the concept that women should be disciplined and should not disagree with their husbands or any other men. In the film, there is a male power or superiority. Ali says his sons, **“This is a man’s world. Never forget that, boys”**. Ali says this, because Soraya refuses to give a divorce to him. Since Soraya's two sons have abandoned their mother and turned to their father, Ali does not support her. He pays his wife and girls no heed. Males exert authority over females. He chastises her in front of everyone, calling his wife, **“My wife is a whore! A bitch!”** (56:23 sec.-56:30 sec.). Soraya is consistently mistreated and abused by her husband. Despite the fact that she has not broken any laws, she is punished as a result of her husband's actions in trying to acquire what he wants. Soraya and her girls were unable to live in a home where they could feel at peace. While Soraya questions his accountability and decency, he yells at her. She was forced to leave her house as a result of his mistreatment and requested assistance for her aunt Zahra.



Figure 2: Soraya’s wound beaten by her husband, Ali

The provided picture make it quite evident that Soraya is a victim of domestic abuse. The main character's wound, which alludes to her husband's torture, is the focus of the side-on camera perspective. After Soraya rejected Ali's offer of a divorce, this picture was shot. He had severely battered her. This scene illustrates the hardships women endured in their own homes for cultural reasons.

The emphasis placed on the girls' ages in the story is another crucial feature of the film. At the age of 13, Soraya is rumoured to have wed her first husband. Ali compelled his wife to get married to him when she was only 13 years old, proving that she was still a child. After successfully divorcing Soraya, he plans to marry a girl who is 14 years old, another minor. The agreement is arranged by the mother of the girl, who accepts Ali's proposal to marry the daughter in return for the release of their imprisoned father for unspecified reasons. In the film, males are shown as the primary providers while women are devalued as helpless dependents. This character's behavior brings to the forefront the crucial issues of moral hypocrisy and patriarchy in the movie.

Moreover, this movie portrays an unsettlingly biased justice system. All power is held by men. A little boy even has more influence than his mother. It was revolting to see how Soraya's husband Ali turned the boys against their own mother and how the young boys treated her with contempt. Nothing Soraya said was important. Nobody paid attention to her important points, despite them. She had no one to speak for her and no one would listen to her. Her aunt tried to defend her, but neither they nor anybody else would take her side. Only men had the ability to communicate and make decisions. In this movie, religious law is fanatically applied and it highlights how women faced systemic discrimination in the legal sphere, making it nearly impossible for them to defend themselves against false accusations. However, as was evident in the movie, many individuals were aware of Ali's liaison with other women, yet no one came out or harassed him. The trial scene highlights how inadequate women are in society. The fact that Soraya is never given the chance to establish her innocence illustrates how unfair the male-dominated culture is. Women must unquestionably respect the decisions made by men, who make all decisions.

When addressing Soraya's betrayal of Ali and closeness to Hashem, Ebrahim states, **“When a man accuses his wife...she must prove her innocence. That is the law. On the other hand, if a wife accuses her husband, she must prove his guilt”** (1hr: 2min-1hr: 3min). It is evident from this that women are the ones who would face legal sanctions even if they have not committed any crimes. Additionally, they

must demonstrate their innocence if they are charged by her husband. In addition, a wife who charges her husband must show that he is guilty.

Soraya was sentenced to death by stoning despite being innocent due of her own rigid religious beliefs. However, she appears to be quite bold and fearless to face the stoning and does so without difficulty. Due to the rigid rules of the patriarchal society, Soraya, a Muslim woman, must endure hardships. She cannot defy the rules and ideals or speak out against oppression. Because stoning is written in the “Quran”, which is the holy book of Muslims, Muslim women must accept it regardless, and because they are unable to defend their religion, Soraya must therefore endure the punishment.



Figure 3: As the Soraya prepares to face the death penalty (stoning), she is surrounded by men who make her uncomfortable.

In the film, a woman is seen rejoicing when Ali hits Soraya in the head with a large stone. This section exemplifies how insensitive females are when one of their own is in need. The women in society are oppressed, but instead of banding together to fight this tyranny, they appear to take delight in seeing their fellow women suffer from cruel treatment. Soraya's difficulties are significantly influenced by the rumors that some of the women in the film disseminate. The women are seen chatting among themselves about Soraya's suspected liaison with the widower. Even though the allegations are false, they significantly contribute to the killing of Soraya, an innocent woman. The movie *Stoning of Soraya M.* provides a vivid depiction of the cultural dominance well. Whether they had committed a crime or not, female characters had to submit to the punishment due to tradition or the law. The moment her husband Ali strikes her with a stone is captured in this photograph. Stones are hurled at her while she is covered in dirt up to her waist. Therefore, this image shows the main character in a really pitiful circumstance.



Figure 4: Stoning incident of Soraya at the beginning from her husband Ali

The movie's characters portray society's actual state of affairs. The stoning episode in the film can be understood through Zahra because she is the narrator. After the stoning of Soraya, Zahra tells Ebrahim: **What are you afraid of? Justice was served wasn't it? The God that I love is great. Wasn't our village...going to be an example for the rest of the country? Now the whole world will know. Yes! The world will know what happened here! Yes! The world will know!!**(1hr:49 min-1hr:50 min). Here, Zahra claims that other nations are unaware of Iran's culture of stoning. Zahra wants to expose the global practice of stoning through this conversation. It is exposed how unfairly female characters have been treated in her nation. She musters the fortitude to share the untold and obscure tale with the world. Iran, where she is from, will serve as a role model for other nations. The entire world will be aware that Iran still practices stoning. She gains the ability to tell the journalist the entire tale and provide him the original cassette recorder. This scene was shot using a medium close-up shot method in cinematography.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the sociological study of how gender inequality causes women to be socially victimized, as portrayed in "The Stoning of Soraya M.," illuminates the widespread and deeply ingrained problems that continue to exist in many communities. With its stark depiction of the negative effects of patriarchal systems and gender-based discrimination, the movie serves as a powerful reminder of the structural struggles women confront. It depicts an extremely rigid Islamic culture in Iran. Unfortunately, in the end the main character of the Soraya was sentenced to death by stoning despite being innocent due of her own rigid religious beliefs and culture values. The movie misinterprets women and limits their ability to voice

their opinions. The female characters in this real-life tale from Muslim society are denigrated and the Quran appears to be the only place where gender roles are limited. Even though men and women are stated as being equal in the Quran, women are not treated equally to men. Despite having equal roles and duties in society, men and women do not get the chance they deserve. But, they must succumb to male rule, becoming its victims. In the movie, domestic abuse is one of the forms this takes, but violence and discrimination against women occurs all throughout the world. This is still a widely used custom in Middle Eastern Islamic communities, information towards the film's conclusion indicates.

It is clear from the story of Soraya's terrible end that society needs to reflect and change immediately. It leads to a critical analysis of cultural norms and behaviours that support women's subordination by depriving them of their basic rights and exposing them to horrific acts of violence. In order to build a more just and equitable society, it is crucial to demolish the power structures that allow such victimization to continue, as revealed by the film as a sociological lens. The study ultimately highlights our shared need to build an environment of equality, justice, and dignity for everyone by eradicating gender-based violence and discrimination against women.

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