

# OIL AS A PATRIARCHAL FORCE ON WOMAN IN NAWAL EL SAADAWI'S "LOVE IN THE KINGDOM OF OIL"

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**Abstract:** This paper analyses Nawal El Saadawi's *Love in the Kingdom of Oil* from a feministic point of view, arguing how oil is used as a tool by men to control the lives of women. The power of oil exceeds to such an extent that it takes the place of patriarchy.

**Keywords:** Archaeology, Man, Oil, Woman.

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**Introduction:** Nawal El Saadawi is one of the most powerful voices that have emerged from the Arab world on behalf of women who were marginalized and conditioned by the hegemonic conditions. She brings up the question of religion, clan, family and other issue with woman as focal point. Her fictional world is created from a woman's perspective, is peopled by woman and argues here the women's cause. Like any patriarchal society, Saadawi's experience, through her fiction depicts men and women moulded and conditioned by various institutions in the society. She challenges the preoccupied notions of the people on the subjects like politics of sex, Third World Development, the Arab World, and writing. Women's oppression under Islam, the sexual politics of development initiatives, women in African literature, the nature of cultural identity, the problems faced by women's movement in international arena, and the legal status of Arab women are her major areas of interest. She being a psychiatrist and a physician blends her subjects with common day to day issues concerned to women with psycho analysis and psychic mood of characters.

*Love in the Kingdom of Oil* was published in the year 1993 in Arabic language. It was translated into English by Basil Hatim and Malcolm Williams and was published in the year 2001.

The novel is about a woman who runs away from her home and does not return. She is an archaeologist working in the department of archaeology. Her boss and her other colleagues believe that the goddesses do not exist. She attempts to fight against this belief to prove it wrong. She runs away from her home in search of goddesses buried down the earth. She carries a chisel along with her to dig the earth. She reaches a village which is a dense kingdom of oil and tries to run away from there, but she never succeeds.

In the entire novel memory plays a major role and one of the important things that allows the memory to flow freely is the absence of time. It is not a time bound text. Oil symbolises memory. Just like oil memory bears all the characteristics of oil. As the novel has no definite pattern of narration, the voices from different settings penetrate her ear. The thick particles which took the form of black wax in her ear enabled her to take a mental flight very often.

The woman protagonist in the novel is not given a name. She is a motherless child brought up by her aunt. "She bore you in her stomach for a whole year. She gave you her life and died" (71-72) are the words that echo very often in her ear. She wanted to be a prophetess like the Lady of Purity in her childhood. And the anxiety to see and meet her mother, who was resting in the bowel of the earth, search for the Lady of Purity and above all search for her own self was the greater goal she wanted to accomplish. The act of digging is a metaphor referring to her search for her own self, search for the history of goddesses.

In her archaeological department she discovers the signs of forgery, of goddesses being changed into gods. The goddesses excavated from beneath were changed to gods. Breasts were removed and a beard was added, this manipulation in the statues of goddesses in archaeology department made her a staunch researcher. She often recollects the image of her husband sitting and reading the newspaper. There is no such accurate information describing the physical appearance of her husband. Her relation to her husband and boss was too ambiguous. In her view all men were same and alike. She doesn't find any demarcation between her husband and boss.

When she runs away “the newspapers publish her picture and her full name and address. Her room also appeared in the picture, the wooden bed with its collapsing board, the dilapidated lamp on the desk covered with dust, and an open book with the head of a mummy peering out, and a desk drawer with some coins in it. A savings account book without any money in it. Then there was that rope hanging from the ceiling, as if prepared to be put around someone’s neck, dead flies sticking to it, and at the end of it a burnt-out light bulb” (184-185). She becomes an open secret in the kingdom of oil.

In the kingdom of oil she meets another man who pushes her into the business of oil. He forces her to carry the heavy jars of oil. He pretended to be her husband. He ordered her to cook food. She lived in a pathetic condition there without food and without a single drop of water. She was also beaten by the man everyday and every night. She tries to escape the oppression in all possible ways. When she suffered the hardship under this man, she curled up like a foetus and tried to remember the face of her mother calling out “Mummy!”

The weather conditions in this new place were hard. The intense heat dissolved her brain. She was not able to make sense of things. It was as if the oil was in her head and it allowed her to float from one place to another. The storms, gushing oil, black particles piercing her eyelids brought her to reality. She often recollected her office room and her boss smoking his pipe. The man in the kingdom of oil too covered his face with newspaper and ordered her to cook the food just like her husband. She is not able to recognize the voice of her husband, her boss and the person in kingdom of oil.

When she runs away, her husband and boss are interrogated by an interrogator. According to the psychiatrist who was consulted during this interrogation “a woman involved in matters outside the home is abnormal” (15). He calls this woman abnormal.

When the woman ran away a royal decree was issued ‘forbidding women to take leave and, if a woman did go on leave, it was forbidden to give her shelter or to conceal her’.(20) According to the law in the kingdom of oil women got only two drops of liquid which quenched their thirst. The liquid is a sort of oil drops, which quenches the thirst more than water, and cleanses the intestines.

She was deprived of wages for the hard work she used to. She motivated other women to demand the wages for their hard labour.

The novel also hints at neocolonization. The person she meets in the kingdom of oil worked in the company. The company boss, who had a light skin, was a big-hearted man. He exchanged jars with the sole ruler of the kingdom “His Majesty” as a sign of affection. The man who was filling the jars worked in the Company and ruined the life of his own people for a foreign master. All the women of the kingdom carried jars to the Company and it became harder when the storm rose.

For any misfortunes in the lives of men, woman was the cause and if something good happened it was because of himself. Among the other laws, there were some laws like women should not smoke. Any women found with pen and paper shall be prosecuted. The woman was beaten by bamboo on her rump and was made to bow before His Majesty and was also taught to sit like camel to carry jar on her head.

The natural physical setting in the novel is its heart and soul. The desert ecosystem is the driving force behind the actions of men and women in the novel. The conscious and unconscious mind, memory, imagination, and dream are devised through the natural ecosystem. The novel describes the desert type of vegetation hugely which is major source of oil on earth. The Kingdom is completely drenched in oil with pungent smell, small black oil particles, the endless black sea and the disappearing men and women which was experienced by the lady too for the first time.

Old men and women raised their eyes to heaven every now and then to breathe in oxygen. The place was suffocating. Air mixed with the pungent smell of oil, smoke and gas made their existence difficult. The oil seeping through the ceiling, pouring down with a sound like waterfall. Her feet once again “sank into the black water up to her knees. Movement seemed impossible.” (85)

Oil being the controlling force on the woman everything changed around her with the movement of oil. The oil dominated everything and it made its way to every place. In the end of the text the man prays “O Oil! If you don’t submerge her totally until she’s dead, nothing will be left in this world of the pride of man.”(358) The

statement asserts the unending power of oil which is not just replacing the patriarchy but is also used as a tool by men to control the lives of women.

**Conclusion:** Woman being the victim of patriarchy is something which is observed in many novels but this novel uses the external natural force to control the lives of woman. When the power of oil is used to control woman, oil becomes an alternative for patriarchy. Though nature never distinguishes between men and women, the natural force like oil is used as a tool by man to control the lives of woman.

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