Power Dynamics and Societal Relegation in Handke's *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*

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Abstract

Background: Peter Handke's A Sorrow Beyond Dreams (1972) is an evocative exploration of power dynamics and Maria's relegation in patriarchal Austrian society. The narrative recounts the suicide of the narrator's mother and is an account of his mother's memoir. Handke's novella blends autobiography with metafiction, which can create a narrative that is both intimate and reflective of the sociocultural notion of creating an atmosphere for social relegation due to the male-centered power structure.

Method: This study is a qualitative analysis with logical textual analysis of the novel using a feminist approach. It examines existing power structures and societal oppression of females through feminist critical discourse analysis. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) and Julia Kristeva's (1942) gender theories related to social power have been applied to validate the idea that the power dynamics of society compel females to be mentally depressed.

Results: By stating Handke's work within a broader feminist discourse, the paper explores the themes of gender-based oppression of the narrator's mother Maria, her emotional isolation, and the erasure of female autonomy. The mother struggles for identity, but it ultimately leads to her demise due to her inability to dismantle the boundary of power dynamics. The structure of narration, which moves between personal reflection and detached points, underscores the tension between women's suffering and societal constraints.

Conclusion: The paper proclaims that A Sorrow Beyond Dream is the epitome of a typical relegate woman, rendering Maria's struggles as a representative representation. Such struggle is invisible until she comes up with public resistance. Female identity is shaped by male-controlled social expectations. Those who fail either to resist or to endure are bound to commit suicide.
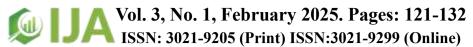
Novelty: Power distresses the autonomy of the people in the society as it does to the narrator's mother in the novel. The mental breakdown of the female in the novel is the result of family and social relegation.

Keywords: Female identity, power dynamics, social relegation, suicide

Introduction

Peter Handke's *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* (1972) explores the writer's mother's relegated life experiences and their consequences. The experiences share the account of the life story of the narrator's mother Maria who is bound with the patriarchal society in the Austrian context. The narratives from the account of her son resemble a memoir of her mother, her two major shifts in her life, life under the male domination system, and the dismantled phase of her life. As a result, she committed suicide. Though it is shown to be the personal exploration of loss, grief, and memory, this is a typical example. The novella is a tribute to the struggles of a woman in a male-dominated context and, at the same time, reveals the power of the feminine that is resistant, crosses boundaries, and can take a stand for herself. After the news of his mother's death, the writer decides to write her story to pay tribute. The decision is a way of coping mechanism for intolerable grief for a writer.

This study explores the dual personality of the woman who is strong and independent, submissive and voiceless and ultimately defeated. A female's life does not fall for only a time but is torn into many pieces. The novella narrates the incident of the mother's suicide in the initial part with the overdose of the pills, the writer's mother committed suicide. Halsall (2005) articulates the mother's mental conflict as the main idea of the novel: "In *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*, the narrator's unresolved mental conflict regarding his homeland is reflected in his depiction of his mother's life" (p.23). The depiction indicates the marginalized position of Maria in the family and society. The reason for suicide is the dismantling phase of her life, the loss of memory, and being a patient of depression and anxiety. Then, the story moves into the mother's childhood experiences and family background. His mother was born in a village in Austria and after fifty years she died in the same place. The society where she grew up was mostly artisans or peasants. The writer's grandfather was an illegitimate child and a carpenter. The grandfather and grandmother worked in a few acres of rented farm and pasture land. Grandfather's mother is a well-to-do peasant's daughter, and she has inherited the money and property. After the death of her mother, the inheritance goes to his grandfather. Grandfather is the winner of the family and takes care of his family. So, he needs to save for their marriage. However, he never thought of saving for his children's education. On the other hand, the women born in this context are makers and under the control of the men. Habib (2011)
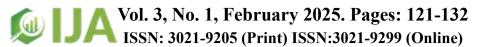
intertwines social situation with the context of the time, "connection of gender with class and race, power structure, the semiotic codes through which ideology operates the constructions of subjectivity itself" (p.254). But his mother wants to learn something. So, she asked his grandfather, and when it was not approved, she ran away from her home to Germany. She started to work there, met a guy, and had a child. Her marriage was not a happy and successful one. She was the victim of violence from male members. She held the situation and raised her child. As time passes, she slowly gets anxiety and depression. In the end, she committed suicide. Her suicide was the result of the male-guided powerful society. Peter Handke is the narrator of the story who reflects on the mother's struggle and societal oppression. He has presented the account of his mother's life experiences and journeys that have ups and downs. The novel captures the way societal parameters lead a healthy female, Maria, to a suicidal phase through constant oppression.

Review of Literature

Societal visible and invisible constraints lead to isolation in the initial phase, anxiety in the end depression in the middle, and relegation at the end. Isolation separates the individual from the surroundings. When it goes to the deeper level, then it is not possible to come back to the same phase of life. As a result, a person decides to quit life. In the novel, the writer's mother has experienced the same phase where she goes far beyond her surroundings in her mental state and emotional well-being. So as a result, she committed suicide. So, the novel represents the story of dismantling and homicide. Junejo (2022) mentions the novel as a memoir, A Sorrow Beyond Dreams, in which he represents his own mother's life and death story through the character of an old woman who at the age of 51 commits suicide (p.146). Suicide is the ultimate event, but the social constraints that led to committing suicide at the age of fifty-one are the main concerns of the novel.

Narration is the technique for expression and coping mechanism for any issues or life experiences. Writing as a form of expression or coping mechanism is the Freudian technique where mourning is surpassed through writing. Demir (2019) analyses the novel from an autobiographical lens: "*A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*, as an autobiographical narrative, garners a unique place in this project since it embodies Handke's endeavor to transform his voice into an impersonal one" (p.3). The novella represents the autobiographical approach through which the writer has expressed his grief by expressing an autobiographical notion of his mother. Through this expression, his grief and tone become impersonal, and the writer can position himself in his mother's footsteps.

The sense of forceful detachment from the homeland is portrayed in the novella. The detachment is not only from the person but also from the homeland. In the novella, the writer shows his detachment and internal conflict through his mother's portrayal. Eventually, it becomes an external force to shape his mother's life. The narrator's mother's story is an anecdote of detachment from society. Framing the identity refers to the external forces that contribute to shaping her mother's life. Such external contributions are the sociocultural factors of his mother's homeland.
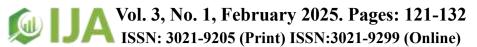
Critics have asserted it as a metafiction since the narrative incorporates the other story, the story of the mother. The writer incorporates his understanding of history, the notion of autobiography, and biography. In this regard, Varsava (1985) poses a question: "After all, what biography, autobiography, and history in general, to do with imaginative literature? The response Handke fashions to these questions will be the subject of the present inquiries" (p.1). Telling a story through her mother's voice is the act of departing from the novelistic convention or traditional notion of narration. Handke begins the novella with news coverage of her mother's suicide. Peter (1972) mentions, "In the village of A. (G. township) a housewife, aged fifty-one, committed suicide on Friday night by taking an overdose of sleeping pills" (p.9). The statement shows the way of narration of the incident in which the writer has used the third person narration to start the story. Furthermore, he (1972) explains, "My mother has been dead for almost seven weeks" (p.9). This is the way the writer breaks the narrative convention in terms of attachment and detachment.

In the same way, critics have remarked that the novel is a memoir with a cause-and-effect relationship. The novella recalls the personal account of the writer's mother's story. But not in a chronological manner but linking the relation of cause and effect. Halsall (2005) critically remarks and reasons how the writer "Illustrate the importance of place in Handke's work from two different perspectives; utopian dreams of the narrator and life of the writer's mother. The novel has been acclaimed as the narration of the facts of his mother's experiences that are embedded with the psychological trauma.

The sorrow and pain depicted in the novella resemble the grief and the feeling of uncanny. The term 'uncanny' refers to a situation where one resembles a familiar and unfamiliar situation. In the line of Tony, "uncanny image of mother as someone intimate and far, familiar and unfamiliar" (p.5). The novel shows the stage of uncanny where, for the writer, the image of the mother is familiar; her pain, trauma, and issues are familiar and, at the same time, not familiar. This state of familiarity and unfamiliarity is the representation of the uncanny state. The term unfamiliar room to one's castle refers to the hidden emotions and feelings that are not aware or revealed to the self.

Critic's attention has also been inclined to the autobiographical presentation of the writer. Esmailzadeh (2023) states the novel from the autobiographical point, "Peter Handke's filial autobiography "*A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* traces the life of the mother. Furthermore, the image that Peter presents of Maria remains blurring" (p.327). He places importance on identity crisis along with autobiography.

Research scholars have presented *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* from the perspective of memoir, autobiographical note, mental conflict, grief and loss, trauma, and cause and effect story, However, this paper analyses the novel from the way that the society and social expectations form female identity. She is the byproduct of societal expectations. The female's effort to cross the societal power dynamics leads her out of the mainstream and forces her to have a mental breakdown. The male-dominated society completely rejects female autonomy—the effort for resistance and ultimately results in social relegation.
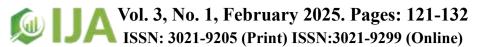
Theoretical Framework: Feminist Critical Discourse

Feminist criticism results from women's awareness about revisiting and crafting existing practices related to power structure and societal practices. Naples (2020) explains the origin and development of mainstream literature in which females are not the subject of critical discourse analysis: "Women's studies began with the recognition of women's absence in canonical texts, research strategies, interpretation of findings and many classrooms" (p.3). This is a form of othering. Fester (2016) advocates strengthening the power of females by "appealing for the return to its origins to strengthen the academic/activist links" (p.3). Academic activities for creating mainstream academic thought empower women. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) elaborate the way women have been excluded from mainstream literature, "In disciplines such as English literature, women had begun to contest the hegemony of a canon of great works of literature which excluded women writers" (p.x). Exclusion from literature is the power dynamics that construct the social psychology of power structure. Along with this, they have to be activists to introduce them in the policy intervention. Social relegation leads them out of the decision-making circle in society. Consequently, they are weakened and bound to be othered. Beauvoir (1949) critically remarks on the point that male chauvinist society creates othering in the society, "It is thus true that woman is other than man… but the real relation is one of reciprocity" (p.1214). Society forms an invisible social pattern in which males are primarily placed in the center and other women. Beauvoir (1949) further asserts the way a large part of literature is under male control, "we see that myths are explained in large part by the use man makes of them" (p.1219). The mythical pieces of evidence show males as powerful and females as weak. This is the invisible power dynamics of the myths.

Men get joy from the beauty of the woman's body, but they do not accept the female's natural cycle. Beauvoir (1949) elaborates on societal connotation for power structure, "Wonder at the feminine body and disgust for menstrual blood are apprehensions of a concrete reality" (p.1216). Along with social power, the use of language works in the same line of thought. Kristeva (1942) links subjectivity to verbal usage to strengthen the power dynamics, "All these various processes and relations, anterior to sign and syntax, have just been identified from a genetic perspective as previous and necessary to the acquisition of language, but not identical to language (p.1947). Linking the body of the females with the power relation, Butler (1990) says, "This body often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as external to that body" (p.2378). She further asserts (1990) "the body as a construct of suspect generality when it is figured as passive and before discourse. (2378) Patriarchal convention opposes gender equity in the society because it endows autonomy for females. Graff and Korolczuk (2022) assert that "Conservatives oppose gender on three levels: as a concept, as an ideology/theory, and as a social practice and political project" (p.16). The rejection of females' power and position is the underlying motto of men. Francis et al. (2003) assert the system under which males have privilege and power, "Not only does the system of the gender divide the human race into two categories, it privileges the male over the female" (p.1). Therefore, power subjugates potentiality and creativity.
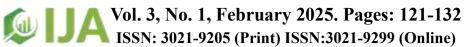
Feminist discourse advocates for the mainstreaming of females in terms of social equity, financial autonomy, and canonical inclusion in literature. The power is privileged to males, excluding the females. Patriarchal society links body structure with power and inscribes certain authority only to females. Mythical stories have shown that females are weaker than males. These different aspects designate females for social, and political exclusion.

Analysis and Interpretation

Gendered Power Dynamics in A Sorrow Beyond Dreams

The power dynamics of society relegate females to the margins and draw males to the center of every sphere of society. Not only the pillar but he has autonomy and sovereignty to control over the life of his family and especially in the lives of women. Such women are the daughter, sister, and wife in the context of the men controlling society. In *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*, the writer's grandfather is the symbolic representation of the misogynist, and he generates the income, controls it, uses it, and dreams about a better life. Peter (1972) states that "his wife, being a woman, never so much as dreamed as any other life was possible" (p.14). The line refers to his grandmother being a woman who hardly dreams about 'other life' or the option to live her life differently. It indicates that there is no option at all for women in the context of a male-oriented society. Dreaming for a better life than the existing one is only for men rather than women. They are bound to stay in their current situation, accepting the visible and invisible constraints that society allows. Handke as a memoir writer narrates about his mother, "At home, of course, she was alone, with the four walls" (p.34). So, they have to function more or less as an object or non-human being in the already fixed location. Consequently, "She became nothing" (p..35). Furthermore, their desire and dreams are not asked, understood, or recognized by the man or even by the husband. In most cases, in the traditional male-oriented society women are treated only for begetting. So, dreaming is crossing one's comfort zone, and it is very exceptional in a male-dominated society.

The male-dominated society has a clear-cut division of roles and responsibilities between men and women. Men are breadwinners and agents of income, whereas women are submissive and responsible for in-house work. Additionally, the characteristics of the women presented in that society are typical women-oriented features, such as catching up, giving birth, inner monologues, and distortion of physical health. Peter (1972) asserts that "The girl in our town used to play a game based on the situation in a woman's life: Tired/Exhausted/Sick/Dying/ and Death"(p.16). The patterns of the life of women in the Austrian context were widely imbedded in the girl's or women's talks and way of living standards, which is generated as a game for fun. The term 'game' not only represents entertainment and time pass. Rather, it is a platform where everyone can have fun. To get such a glimpse, the quoted term such as 'tired', sick and death depicts the real status of women in the male society. Women are tired due to endless housework, get sick because no one is taking care of them, and are not able to take care of themselves since they are obliged to take responsibility for others. Eventually, due to various diseases, they die before their age.
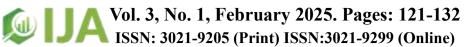
Women are nature and nurturers because they give life and take care of it. In that sense, women are the protectors of their lives and their surroundings. Without them, the household and inner circle would not flourish. So, women should be more capable and oriented towards household work and inside four-wall boundaries. The external world matters less to them. Peter (1972) explains that "After that a girl stayed home, getting used to the staying at home that would be her future" (p.16). Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) depict the way females are domesticated as shown in the novel, "the ongoing maintenance of a domestic home and of the people who live in it" (p.32). They envision their future inside the house that power assigns. Getting an education even though the woman is good at it matters less to the male-oriented society. In the case of the writer's mother, she is very good at her schooling. Once she completes her compulsory education, then further education is no longer needed and no one allows her to pursue further education. Education is the secondary priority for females. Because the belief system of the society is that women are bound to live inside the home. On the contrary, if they want to leave the house, once they have children, they are not able to. She is not able to leave the children and dream about her freedom. In the novel, during the time of violence, the writer's mother never left the house of her husband. She (1972) reacts, "I am only waiting for children to grow up" (p.46). The role relation is centralized in domestication. Plumwood (1993) elaborates that "Men with culture and women with nature" (p.20) is the means for oppression. They are not allowed to cross the boundary of social structure. Children are the reason to tolerate unfaithful and undeserving husbands. The only reason to stay is for the betterment of her children. Because she is aware of her responsibility and needs, and her value in her children's life.

Women's feelings, growing physical tendencies, and changes are not recognized and are undermined by society. As the weather changes outside its impact can be witnessed inside. Like that, the changes in women's lives bring changes to both their external appearances and internal ways. External changes provoke a woman to cross the boundaries and live their life the way they want. However, the internal system kept them inside their room. Handke (1972) asserts that "'outside' is seldom allowed to mean anything but the yard and 'inside' was invariably the house, without a room of one's own" (p.17). Outside refers to the freedom and space for women, whereas inside refers to the control and lack of privacy in the case of them. Outside provides women the opportunity to spread their wings, whereas inside controls or can cut off their wings. In the case of the writer's mother, she felt that the outside world was flourishing and she could grow into it. It supports her to dream and think for the future. Where inside is the house where even the self is not recognized. There is no room at all for the one. The room indicates the space of the self where she can invest her time, effort, and energy for herself. Learning and development are fundamental human rights of every person in society. So, everyone should have access to it without anyone's consent. Women need to consent to do anything except house-making. If they want to go beyond their zones, then they have to get permission from the male figures of their family. In addition to that, women do not have the right to make decisions for themselves. Fathers or brothers and husbands make decisions for themselves. In A Sorrow Beyond Dreams, Peter (1972) describes her mother's situation when
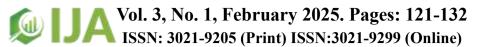
she felt that she wanted to make the change, but she was not able to decide solely. She seeks the approval of her father. According to Handke (1972), her mother "begged" (p.18). her father to learn something. The word 'begged' shows the status of the women's voice and rights in the patriarchal society. This is the process of othering. The idea of othering was introduced by Beauvoir. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) remind Beauvoir's thought that females are othered, "We are seen by them as the Other" (p.90). Othering is the result of power dynamics that in turn leads to anxiety for the marginalized.

Females do not have the right to decide for them as being in the center. They are obliged to get permission and convince their male figures of the family. On the contrary, her brother has not followed such patterns, just being a male. The work status of women is very low in a male-dominated society since they are bound to only do household work. So, they only know how to cook and clean. Such works are great achievements inside the house, but outside, they are not considered professional work. Even though it is considered that women get low pay in comparison to men. While men have higher incomes and high-status jobs in society. In the novel, when Peter's mother runs away from the house, she doesn't have many options for work. Peter (1972) depicts that "No other course was open to her; scullery maid, chambermaid, assistant cook, head cook" (p.18). So, the women are open only to the jobs that they are doing in their house as a regular chore. Except that they do not know how to do other jobs. In the case of Peter's mother, she had limited options when she left her home to learn something. She is bound only with 'typical' woman work that is assigned to her by society. As a result, she started to work as either a cook or as a maid because she was good at those jobs.

In a misogynistic society, men have more rights and privileges than women in every aspect. Women should be loyal and bound with the man in terms of their responsibilities. On the other hand, a man has the freedom to choose a life partner, have an affair, or have extra material affairs. Society accepts such acts of men, but in the case of women, it is hardly acceptable. Peter's mother fell in love with the married man and he also considered it. Despite being married, he was okay with his relationship with his mother. Handke (1972) mentions that "he was married, and she loved him dearly; anything he said was all right with her" (p.23). Married men have more rights than unmarried women. Moreover, emotional variability leads his mother to fall for the married guy. Not questioning him or the situation shows a lack of decision-making and critical thinking regarding the particular situation of the woman. The mind and the emotions are controlled by the man in the case of the woman. As a result, women are token rather than human. Along with that, Peter (1972) illustrates that they "was living with a girlfriend in Berlin, after all there had been a war" (p.28). Men are allowed to have multiple partners. War is the only excuse or cause, for males but in reality, when men have more power than women, it poses for privileges. Such privileges made women victims. In the novel, due to war, his mother was in other places with children. But the father is on the war spot with another woman, which is an act of misogyny.

The representation of males in the war and females in the household work simultaneously represents the invisible myth and visible power structure of the society. Males are for war,
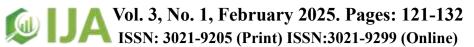
whereas females are for the kitchen as maid, chambermaid, and cook. Therefore, power generates anxiety and ultimately leads to depression.

Social Relegation in A Sorrow Beyond Dreams

Social relegation results in humiliation that, in turn, breaks the inner peace and charm of the female. When women are loyal and emotionally dependent on their men, their autonomy gets smashed. Once it breaks, they do not talk, communicate, or respond. They function as a body without the soul. After the cheating and neglect by the husband, the writer's mother faces a similar situation. Handke (1972) asserts that he "told her he loved her, she gave him a merciful look, pitying smile. By then, she has no illusion about it" (p.28). Breaking the illusion of love and affection in the relationship leads the writer's mother to accept the reality that she is living in an unwanted and undesired one-sided conjugal relationship where she has less affection with her husband. Her husband deals with her as if she is an object without life. Furthermore, after being decisive and fragile from her husband, she completely forgets herself, her presence, and her essence to herself. She is only breathing but not living life. According to Peter (1972), "she never had any desire for an affair" (p.30). Her arms are not open for any love and warmth. "She never let anyone come close, and she became sexless" (p.31). The term sexless means that there is no more desire to live life in a full manner and person without any feeling. She did not allow any man to come near her. Eventually, she felt that she was fine with her isolation, even though it was not easy to be in that phase. Relegation leads to complete isolation.

Freedom and autonomy are not the desired concept of males for females because these are the signs of freedom. Thinking freely, independently, and without fear is not the usual and common way of living. In addition to that, to laugh freely is considered shameful because there is the belief that women should not be loud and open their mouths wider. It is because opening the mouth is a sign of autonomy. When women laugh freely, they are questioned. Peter Handke (1972) poses a question, "Aren't you ashamed?" or "You ought to be ashamed" (p.26). The rhetorical question imposes on women that, they should not be as loud and free. This is the death of freedom that in turn makes a path for social outcasts. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004), "Androcentric practices are those whereby the experiences of men are assumed to be generalizable and are seen to provide the objective criteria through which women's experience can be organized and evaluated" (p.1). The judging parameters of society are the male activities.

Opening mouth is the loss of decency and the ideal status quo designed by the social structure. Furthermore, it is not only about the matter of shame when women laugh, it is also a matter of shame when women feel joyous. Women blush during joyful moments, which is completely denied for them. Blushing is not appropriate for women since it shows the filtering and characterless side of women. This is the way visible rules and invisible constraints relegate females from the mainstream of society. In the novel, the mother recalls this notion of her youth, she recalled that "even in a joy, a 'woman's blush', because joy was something to be ashamed of" (p.27). The woman is born to live with social stigma, taking its burden, holding it, and living it within her life for a lifetime. She is the pain holder and pain bearer. So, joy is not their cup of tea, and if they accidentally become happy, then they should not feel about it
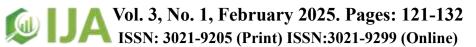
but rather should be ashamed of it. Society does not allow females to be happy because happiness is a sign of freedom. Allowing freedom means autonomy. Male-centered society does not allow freedom and psychologically leads them to the margin for downgrading. Women become victims of physical and emotional well-being in a male-oriented society. So, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and physical abuse are common in that context. Drinking alcohol and beating the wife are common matters in such a society. Peter (1972) states that "when he was drunk… then he would beat her because she had nothing to say to him" (p.28). It resembles the notion of a male power-oriented society where the male has autonomy over women's bodies and distorts their physical essence, beauty, and inner peace. Moreover, men are not able to recognize women's pain, suffering, and bodily changes. Whether it's about the monthly cycle or reproductive health. Beauvoir asserts (1949) the way men express "disgust for menstrual blood" (p.1216). Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) "The body as nature, the body as socially constructed, and embodiment" (p.6). Disgust for the natural cycle is the social perception designated by males.

Such irresponsible behavior adds an extra burden on women. As a result, women do not share crucial decisions that they make about their bodies and families. Handke (1972) asserts that "without his knowledge, she gave herself an abortion with a knitting needle" (p.28). Killing a fetus is killing a life. Being a mother is not an easy decision at all. Nonetheless, when she is surrounded by too many obstacles to sustaining her and her children's lives, such circumstances give power to women to take control of their bodies. Deciding to abort her child represents her feminine side, which can make a bold decision to remove another growing life from the inside of her body. The act of removing resembles her autonomy towards her body. Rapture breaks the base and traditional patterns and generates new forms. When women hold too much or intensely, then it will burst at some point. Such bursts create a new context for women. The writer's mother experienced the same. After the long suffocation, she burst. The rupture inside her was so strong that it built a new form of herself. The narrator's mother started to say, "Actually, he was not my type" (p.33). The rupture transforms her from a loyal, decent housewife to a bold and assertive woman who can make her choices and remarks to her husband. Moreover, later on, she started to enjoy her room. Handke (1972) mentions that "Today I won't think of anything; today I'll enjoy myself" (p.33). The woman who grew up under the control of her father and lived inside the premises of her husband's rules cannot say that is not something simple statement. The statement reveals the break through the cycle of the old, repetitive forms of her life and creates a space for herself.

Female's achievements are always compared to those of men and treated accordingly. So, the system never allowed women to take over positions and rewarded them based on their work, effort, and dedication. They can manage both inside and outside the household or maybe even their performance is better outside the house. No matter how good they are, they are inferior. Peter (1972) elaborates that "outside the victor type; inside: the weaker half, the eternal loser! What a life!"(p.34). Even though the world has recognized the potentiality of women, the home and family hardly accept it. So, no matter what they have achieved, ultimately, they become losers inside. So, the life of the writer's mother stands at the double sword and is full of paradox.
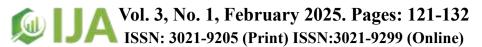
In addition to that, due to such a tendency, life, rebellious acts, and entire achievements go in vain. Handke (1972) asserts that "She was; she became; she became nothing" (p.35). Francis et al (2003), "Modern society makes the masculine half of the equation positive and the feminine negative" (p.2). The negativity is the result of the social relegation. The lines reflect the downfall of her mother's status and achievements as a woman. She was a submissive woman before, then she became something, but it did not last for long, and in the end, she became nothing, meaning she did not have anything to preserve. It is not because of her. She tried hard to change the situation, but it is the whole social structure that is responsible for her identity crisis.

The identity crisis of women is another crucial issue women face in male supremacy. The woman has names but they are not called by their names. Either they are recognized by someone's daughter or mother. Peter narrates the story by saying my grandfather's daughter' and 'my mother," which objectifies the identity of her mother to show the identity crisis of women in a male-dominated society. He asserts that "At home, she was 'Mother'; even her husband addressed her as 'Mother' more often than by her first name" (p.43). The word mother is a respectable word for a woman. At the same time, her name is replaced by that term, and later, the term mother becomes her identity. Eventually, even repetitive action made her forget her name and identity. Which is the act of identity crisis for the women. On the contrary, men are often called by their names rather than constantly with the term fathers. The woman is a victim of the blaming game, even though they are right and has done the right things for the others. If something goes wrong, then it is because of the woman. The writer's mother has witnessed the same experience in the novel where her husband victimized her. When her husband becomes ill and if he feels alone, then she is responsible for that. Peter (1972) says, "Cold, hunger, unfriendly people: and it was all her fault" (53). So, the suffering of her husband is because of her. She is responsible for it. It's not only the blame of society; rather, being a woman, she holds that baggage too where she feels that if she leaves him alone, or he feels alone, then that's her fault.

A Sorrow Beyond Dreams stands as a social commentary on male-oriented power dynamics and social exclusion. It underscores the need for greater awareness of the emotional and psychological toll that patriarchal oppression exerts on women. Patriarchy hardly recognizes the empowerment of women. It does not matter how much women are bold, capable, and strong.

Conclusion

Peter Handke's *A Sorrow Beyond Dreams* is a powerful literary reflection on the systematic forces that shape and constrain women's lives. Through its deeply personal yet experimental narrative, the novella captures the complexity of female oppression, identity crisis, and loss of self-esteem within a patriarchal society. Handke's mother's life, as depicted in the text, follows a trajectory familiar to many women: one of limited agency, social subjugation, and emotional suffocation. The constrained social system reflects broader societal issues in which women of Austria are victims and suffering. The text critiques the rigid gender roles that confine women

to domestic spheres, the economic and social disparities that limit their independence, and the psychological burden imposed by a culture that devalues female autonomy. Handke's portrayal of his mother's resistance, however, briefly offers a glimpse into the strength and resilience of women, even in the face of overwhelming adversity. The novella calls for a re-evaluation of gender norms, advocating for a world where women are not confined to the roles of daughters, wives, and mothers but are recognized as individuals with their dreams, desires, and agency.

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