

Sin and Punishment in *The Scarlet Letter*: A Feminist Perspective

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Abstract

In this article, Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, which is set in the Puritan society of Boston in the middle of the seventeenth century, is subjected to a close and in-depth analysis. Within the realm of feminist studies, one of the most important topics to discuss is the way in which female characters are portrayed in works of fiction. The female protagonist of the novel is Hester Prynne whose sin and receiving punishment and, therefore, her self-development without being reliant on her male counterparts for livelihood, with ups and downs in the patriarchal society and being ostracized are taken into account for this study. The objective of this study is to demonstrate that the narrative does not adhere to the antiquated norms of patriarchal heritage in its depiction of women; rather, it is a protest against the constraints that society places on women at the time it was written. A qualitative content analysis method is adopted to investigate the representation of female characters in this narrative. The portrayal of Hester Prynne and Pearl is explored through the lens of feminist stance for the possibility that it challenges conventional practices. It clarifies the author's stance in the patriarchal setting. Thus, this study conducts a rigorous analysis of the traditional patriarchal and stereotypical portrayals of the woman in literature and suggests reconsideration of the long-held patriarchal practices of representing women in fiction.

Keywords: Adultery; feminism; patriarchy; punishment; sin.

1. Introduction

The psychological, social and financial perspectives of women in literature as well as in society are on the rise as described in the narrative. Nonetheless, their hard times have prevailed for a long time in the society; their miseries could not be terminated yet all over the world, especially in the western society but also in the third world countries, where the development comes much later than the first world countries. The portrayal of female characters-Hester Prynne and Pearl-by Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter* reveals all their circumstances from a feminist perspective. The sketching of women in literature is very crucial in the study of feminism and, in the text the author's intention got divulged as positive which is a departure from the traditional practice of portraying the female characters as weak, irrational, inferior in quality, destructive, demonic, docile, dependent on man, and so on. Since the setting is much earlier, during the Puritan time, envisaged by a male author, the text can be regarded as the development document of feminism; it may be seen as a protest against the existing patriarchal tradition in portraying women in literature. The novel is full of symbolic actions and objects; there are many symbolic actions based on which the feminist study gets ground to be done and in this piece of writing the same is laudably motivated. First, the existing traditional view or practice of the patriarchal authority towards women in western society as well as, in general, all over the world is tacitly stated through the creation of a micro-cosmos in this arena of text. Then the author's deviation from that set standards in portraying the central female characters along with the males as a protest is illustrated with textual evidence leading to findings that the author violated the existing patriarchal practices of presenting women in literature.

1.1. Traditional Patriarchal Practice towards Women

The presentation of women in literary pieces on the ground of patriarchal tradition forms them ignoble ones, which is historically proved, and critics outlined the issue distinctively in their writings. Social systems are formed by the patriarchy. Simply, but potentially, patriarchy means 'the rules of father', and the history of patriarchy is a primitive one. Patriarchy is defined in *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* as follows:

In its purest form, patriarchy is 'rule by males,' whether it is inside the household or in society in general, with power being transmitted down through the generations from father to son. In more contemporary use, the phrase has been used to refer to both the actual exercise of power as well as the ideologically driven system, which includes the ideas and attitudes, that are used to reinforce, legitimize, and defend this

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authority. The meaning of the term has been more prevalent in recent years. Therefore, patriarchy has political, economic, societal, and ideological aspects. (Hawthorn, 2000, p. 256)

The concept of patriarchy is mainly used in the literature from a feminist point of view, where it is used against women. Women are represented in literature with some qualities that are not sublime. The patriarchal practices of presenting women in literature and feminist arguments against those practices are well described by Nayar (2012) in the following words:

Feminist theory contends that actual social conditions, in which women lack power, are treated as sex objects or as reproductive machines, have fewer political and financial rights, and are abused, are represented as frail, meek, angelic, alluring, or irrationally sentimental. Therefore, feminism is a worldview that does not separate art from current social norms and behaviors. Through their stereotyped portrayal of women as weak/vulnerable, seductresses, obstacles, sexual objects, or procreative devices, cultural texts normalize the subjugation of women. (p. 83)

From the above description of Nayar, the evaluation of women by the patriarchal society and for such evaluation, the feminist arguments against the existing practices are raised. Nayar (2012) further explains the reason for subduing women in literature as a social practice and the feminist concern for women in the following lines:

The inequality that exists between men and women is not a result of nature but of society; it was not predetermined but rather was produced by men in order for them to keep their positions of authority. 'Social institutions' and 'culture structures' such as religion, the family, education, the arts, and knowledge systems are all elements that contribute to the unending maintenance of existing inequalities. Because they do not give off the impression of being oppressive, these institutions are an efficient technique of maintaining male dominance. They are able to maintain their authority because the institutions are so persuasive that they manage to persuade women that they are meant to serve in a submissive role. (p. 83-84)

Therefore, women's weakness is socially constructed, not biologically. The patriarchal authority tries to suppress the women with a political motive to gain its supremacy over them. But the relegation is not accepted by the feminist authors. One of the most influential writers of the 20th century on *Feminism* Simone de Beauvoir described elaborately the patriarchal process through which a woman is formed and grown in her legendary book *The Second Sex*. From the book, a reader can have a vivid picture of the dominant patriarchal tradition and the experience of the women characters, both in literature and human society. Beauvoir (1997) describes the impact of society to make a woman thus:

A woman is not something that is born but rather something that is made. It is civilization as a whole that generates this creature, which is halfway between male and eunuch and is defined as feminine. The figure that the human female portrays in society is not determined by any of the human female's biological, psychological, or economic destinies. (p. 295)

Women's devaluation "could be seen as social in origin, as neither given by nature nor an accidental feature of relations between men and women" (Jackson, 1998, p. 13). There were many obstacles in past centuries; still, some of them are existing all over the world, from the patriarchal society for flourishing the women's condition in society in terms of education, culture, writing, empowerment and so on. As Moers (1996) described the very condition of women and a comparison between male writers and women writers as their facilities and predicaments to be writers in "Literary Women" thus:

It has always been possible for male authors to study their trade in universities or coffeehouses, band together into movements or coteries, seek out predecessors for instruction or patronage, and work with or compete against their contemporaries. But for much of the nineteenth century, women were not allowed to attend colleges; they were confined to their own houses; they needed a chaperone if they traveled, and they were severely limited in their ability to form friendships. They were unable to participate in the literary life's intimate back-and-forth exchanges. Without it, they examined with an especially careful attention the works produced by members of their own sex, and as a result, they acquired a feeling of easy familiarity, bordering on rudeness, with the women who created the works. (p. 11)

The existing discrimination in patriarchal society between masculine gender and feminine gender is justly pointed out by Tyson (2006) in "Feminist Criticism" thus:

Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive. (p. 85)

The outlook towards women is not in their favor. The representation of women in literature by male authors, actually by patriarchal agents, is political. The women's stereotypical sketch is drawn by the patriarchal authors purposefully. Traditionally women are made wicked, weak, dependent on their male partners and so on.

The politics of representation of women in literature and the long-established position of women in literature as well as in society can be further evidenced by the writings of the scholars as Webster (1996) described the historical practice of presenting women in literature as well as considering them in the society, the existing position of women, in his book *Studying Literary Theory: An Introduction*: It may be argued that throughout history, literature has had a tendency to marginalize or lower the status of women, similar to how class and race have done. This has occurred in a number of different ways. It has been argued by feminists starting with Virginia Woolf that the male experience is the dominant or normative one that is represented in literature (p. 75). Obviously, there are exceptions to this rule in the works of both male and female authors, but the general consensus among feminists is that women play less significant roles in literary texts than men do.

Webster (1996) deftly described the position of women in western society and culture writing: "[...] in western society and culture the male is regarded as the norm, as the central and neutral position from which the female is a departure" (p.73-74). In this statement a clear inferior position of women in the existing patriarchal western society is depicted; the relationship between men and women in the society is of superiority and inferiority where the male is superior and the female is inferior. Women's existence is evaluated in relation to the male's point of view, the female suffers from an identity crisis as Beauvoir (1997) expressed this issue in the manner that:

Humanity is thus a male-dominated species, and man defines woman in relation to him rather than as an independent entity. She distinguished herself in relation to men, not men in relation to her; she is the inessential as opposed to the essential. She is the other; he is the subject and the absolute (p. 16). The social construction of women as inferior is argued by the feminist writers frequently all over the world and the argument is a constant practice until the actual dignity of women is achieved in literature as well as all over the world. Ryan (1999) described the western traditional view of patriarchy towards women in *Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction*:

By using binary oppositions, the western cultural heritage has contributed to ensuring hegemonic masculinity. Women are tied to the body, substance, emotions, a lack of logic and reason, and the like, while males are linked to reason, objectivity, logic, and the like. Androcentric society, in its misogynist form, equates women with death and castration. (p. 102)

The social view towards women makes more 'women' than the actual 'women' in nature. Women are not generally considered to be powerful in economy, politics and other social activities by the patriarchal society, rather, it is assumed, they fit to work at home doing the household chores. As Ryan (1999) described, with reference to feminist theory, the traditional view about the women's role in society, economy and politics in the following words:

Because of the way economies are structured, women are more likely to live in poverty than men are, and males are more likely to be wealthy. Almost all positions of political and economic power are held by men. (p. 101)

In many societies, it is considered natural for women to do tasks related to the home and the upbringing of children, while males are expected to focus on more political and social issues.

2. Methodology

This literary research employs a qualitative content analysis method to obtain its findings. The text of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* serves as the primary source for the collection of data. Relevant books, journals, articles, criticisms, and reviews on the narrative are the secondary data sources. The following methodological steps are carried out: i) reading the text of *The Scarlet Letter*; ii) Then, analyzing relevant research works, books, articles, reviews and movies to discover the representation of female characters in this narrative; iii) selecting the relevant

matches for the work; iv) After the selection, interpreting and analyzing the data and using them in the work; v) exploring and clarifying the research questions by using the qualitative method.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. The Author's Protestin Portrayal of Women Characters

In *The Scarlet Letter*, the author did not traditionally present the central female characters as stated above, rather the female characters are glorified in a grand style. The readers of the novel cannot but go in favor of Hester Prynne and Pearl in the end. Hester and Pearl turn out to be different embodiments of traditional women at the end of the novel and they set a grand example of women's strength, independence, power and success. Rightly it can be assumed that Hawthornetacitly protested against the above mentioned or existing patriarchal practice over the women in literature as well as in society. His presentation of Hester Prynne and Pearl in *The Scarlet Letter* should be celebrated by the feminist thinkers as well as all the readers as not to create the weak women, dependent on the male for development, even for survival, in life. In the next sections of this article, the author's protest is investigated through the feminist lens examining how Hester's transgression and punishment contributed to both her and Pearl's success in life.

3.2. Hester's Couragein Confessing Her Sin and Accepting Her Retribution

In works of literature, the author's representation of the characters carries with it a significant symbolic meaning, and based on that representation, the author's intent can be inferred. This is what literary critics do in order to judge the underlying meaning or purpose of the representation, and, of course, in the case of feminist studies, the representation of female characters is taken into consideration very seriously. In this paper, it is tried to explore the portrayal of Hester Prynne's character along with Pearl and other characters from a feminist perspective. In the novel, the author's description of Hester from the beginning is meaningful which clearly expresses his sympathy, affection and respect towards Hester. He did not omit any chance to glorify Hester Prynne in every possible way. The author's grand use of words to describe her personality to make her great to the reader is praiseworthy which establishes his support for Hester Prynne. The author describes Hester Prynne in the following words:

The young woman stood rather tall, and her physique had an unmistakable air of refined perfection. She had thick, dark hair that was so glossy that it reflected the light of the sun and a face that, in addition to being beautiful due to the regularity of her features and the richness of her complexion, had the impressiveness that comes from having a prominent brow and dark eyes. Her hair was so glossy that it threw off the sunlight with a gleam. She was lady-like, too, in the style of the feminine gentility of those days; distinguished by a certain state and dignity, rather than by the delicate, ephemeral, and inexplicable grace, which is today regarded as being a sign of it. She had a certain stateliness and dignity. (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 55)

Hester Prynne, being the female protagonist of the novel, appears before the public to admit her sin for trial which carries a great symbolic meaning to express her courage and strength. In the novel, Hester Prynne shows her courage to face the truth in front of the society and she struggles for development in her life against the harsh reality of being abandoned by the society carrying the blame for un-chastity with the sign of 'A' meaning the adultery by which her sin is publicly exposed and she is overtly charged for her sinful activity, adultery. Despite lots of problems- personal and social- she does not stop her life to put a full stop in her life by committing suicide, rather she advances and develops till the end of the novel and she embodies success in her life and ultimately she turns the meaning of 'A' into 'able' or 'Angel', which is a miracle. The strength of her character proves immense. She is a female protagonist and stands for the women, ultimately women's power. Hester can be taken into consideration as the representative of the women's power or female authority. There will not be any fault for a feminist to consider Hester as the rise of female greatness or female power or women's development in society.

Hester becomes an epitome of strength. Her entry to the town scaffold for the trial was nothing but heroic as the author described her style of entry in the following words:

By taking a stride into the open air as though of her own free choice, she turned away from him in a way that was defined by her innate dignity and character strength. She was holding a baby, approximately three months old, that blinked and turned away from the bright sunlight of the day since, up to recently, all it had known was the gray twilight of a dungeon or other dimly lit prison cell. (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 54-55)

At the time of her entry, all went against her; and they were demanding punishment for her sin as the society was of the Puritan setting and adultery was a big sin at that time according to their religious view. Even in that hostile situation, Hester had not been afraid of her upcoming punishment, at least her activities, as per the author's description, do not allow the readers to think that; rather her boldness before the public is shown which is praiseworthy. And from her appearance before the public under trial being helpless it can be embodied that the female is not too weak to tolerate any hard situation, on the contrary, they are also very strong to face any situation.

Hester's situation was very tough on the scaffold with the baby in her arms as all the people gathered there to see the severe punishment of Hester for her adultery. The author describes the scene of Hester's punishment at the marketplace of Boston thus:

As a final reminder of the shifting scenes, Hester Prynne's execution was held in the market place of the Puritan settlement, with the town's residents gathered around her, sternly looking at her from the scaffold of the pillory with an infant on her arm and a scarlet letter A, embroidered with gold thread, on her chest. (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 62)

However, the punishment could not affect Hester too negatively to faint on the scaffold. Being very weak mentally and physically is typical for a woman, not to be strong enough to tolerate any hard situation. By nature the women are very soft-minded and they get nervous very easily. But Hester shows a different attitude towards the punishment given to her publicly and her behavior is praiseworthy to prove that the women are not too weak to tolerate the hard situation, they also can be strong to receive any reality, though the reality can be very harsh to her. The attitude of Hester Prynne, obviously the bold one, after her punishment is finely fabricated by the omniscient author in the following words: In order to reassure herself that both the baby and the humiliation were genuine, she gripped it to her breast so tightly that the child began to wail. She then shifted her gaze lower to the scarlet letter and stroked it with her finger. Yes, without a doubt! All else had been erased from her consciousness (Hawthorne, 1850, p.62). Thus, the patriarchal thinking about women is challenged automatically by Hester's bold behavior in an antagonistic environment, and the typical representation of the women in literature gets hattered.

3.3. Hester's Kindness towards Arthur Dimmesdale

Hester's kindness becomes evident when she forgives Arthur Dimmesdale. Her decision, not to divulge the name of her partner, is so firm that she does not express the name even after much pressure in the form of a request from the clergyman and the people with futile attempts to convince her for exposing the male partner's name publicly so that he can also be punished, not only that but also her punishment will be lessened. As John Wilson, a clergyman cried harshly at Hester by saying "Woman, transgress not beyond the limits of Heaven's mercy!" (Hawthorne, 1850) and he further tries to convince her for telling the name by saying the result of that "...Speak out the name! That, and thy repentance, may avail to take the scarlet letter off thy breast" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 45). Here Hester gets a great chance to remove the mark 'A' from her bosom by uttering the name of her partner, ironically Mr. Dimmesdale, who is a clergyman and respected by all and who also asks Hester to expose the name of her partner, is the partner of the adultery. But Hester shows her mercy on the man and does not divulge the name and her activity is duly recognized by the clergyman Mr. Dimmesdale as he says "Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart! She will not speak!" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 72). From this comment, Hester's strength and generosity are manifested and recognized by the representative of the patriarchal authority, besides, Mr. Dimmesdale holds an important position in that particular Puritan society and from his recognition, Hester Prynne's supremacy in characteristics is established or accepted by the patriarchy. Symbolically, it can be said that the traditional concept about women is challenged by the novel and the supremacy of the women is established over the patriarchal authority, the men.

Hester Prynne was hated by society and her sin was most often reminded of her by the attitudes or behavior of the members of the community. If the female person or male or the clergymen met with her on the road or jungle path, their comments and looks were to defame her to remind her sin. The scarlet letter on her bosom 'endowed her with a new sense' and gives her 'a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts' (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 91). The author's logic to support Hester's sinful activity is expressed here:

What did they look like? If the murmurs aren't the evil one, who would want to convince the frightened lady, who was only half his victim, that her outer purity was a deception, and that the truth would reveal itself on many a bosom in addition to Hester Prynne's, could they be anything else? Are these vague but definite hints meant to be taken as fact, or does she need to believe them? Everything she had ever gone through was nothing compared to this feeling. (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 91)

The people's behavior and outlook towards Hester affect her multifariously leading to think herself as sinner and base in the society in comparison with others; even the women would frown at her for her sin and all looked at the letter to remind her sin and looked in a way as they got sullied by the momentary glance towards Hester. Her self-honor had been almost diminished. Society makes the situation as "Hester Prynne yet struggled to believe that no fellow-mortal was guilty like herself" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 92). The author praises Hester's strength to sustain in the hostile society. Eventually, Hester learned that she had a role to play in the wider world. In spite of the fact that it had left a mark on her, that was more painful to a woman's heart than Cain's scar on the forehead of the son; it could not completely cast her off. There was nothing in her interactions with the society that made her feel like she belonged. To those she came into touch with, every gesture, word, and even the silence indicated that she was exiled and alone, as if she belonged to another realm or interacted with the common nature via different organs and senses than the rest of humanity.

3.4. Pearl's Birth and Success

Hester gives birth to a child named Pearl who later becomes a successful person in life. In the novel the child is a girl who becomes very attractive, strong and intelligent, her strong power is described in the novel and recognized by society. The society which punishes Hester and her daughter ultimately receives them with warm wishes by recognizing their merits and qualities. Their name and fame spread all over the society and the outlook of the Puritan society changes towards good to accept them as important members of the society. Symbolically, the female power in society increases against the patriarchal societal barrier of authority. The patriarchal authority is beaten by female power. Much more obstruction cannot subvert the actual merit. A boy could have been born by Hester in place of Pearl, but Pearl is born out of her parent's sinful activity and it carries a deeper meaning conveyed by the author and can be explained by the feminist writer to prove the female power. Pearl is glorified by the author in his description not less than a boy, rather her glorification outdoes the boy's description or strength or power. Pearl as a member of women's society is not hated or demeaned in her quality than a boy, her successful life symbolically proves the strength of women.

While talking to Arthur Dimmesdale, Hester Prynne describes Pearl as more precious than the diamonds and rubies, that means Hester glorifies Pearl over all the precious jewellery; Pearl's supremacy over the invaluable things is expressed through the mother's tongue to the father and there exists an ultimate satisfaction about the child. As Hester says in Chapter 19:

Do you not find her to be an attractive woman? And look at the innate talent with which she has adorned herself with those simple flowers! Even if she had gone through the forest searching for pearls, diamonds, and rubies, those things could not have made her more desirable. She is a wonderful little girl! However, I recognize the brow that she has! (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 221)

The thing could have been described in another way, to demean the child as she is born out of a sin of her parents; rather she and her activities are praised in many ways to glorify the child. From the author's description, it can be said that the birth of the child, Pearl, as a baby girl, is a great symbol to show the development of feminism. The female condition is upgraded here by the girl and for her mother's activities, later the issue is clarified fully. There is none but accept the issue that the author's description and the character's comments about Pearl will attract anybody's mind to the supremacy of the female child, Pearl, being the emblem of the women or feminine community. The feminine triumph is manifested here through the description of Pearl.

Pearl's characteristics are described by the author clearly and by that description, the high quality of the girl is assumed easily by all the readers and the qualities are recognized by the Boston community. The community accepts the merits of Pearl. As a girl, she leads the social position and ultimately at the end of the novel it is seen that Pearl becomes a successful female as she gets married to a European successful person. Pearl's life becomes successful leaving all the obstacles behind her present time. Pearl and Hester leave Boston after the death of Arthur Dimmesdale. Hester returns to Boston and after her death, she is buried beside Arthur Dimmesdale's grave and they both share the same tombstone that proves her recognition as the partner of Dimmesdale and at the same time, Pearl's father is acknowledged by giving her birth identity, which is a very crucial issue of a person's life. Through Pearl's success in life, though started with sheer misery and ignoble situation, it can be forecast that the improvement of the women's condition in the society is marked very clearly. The radical change in women's condition in society already started. The text of *The Scarlet Letter* is great evidence of symbolizing feminine development in society. From the text, it is proved that the development of the feminine condition through literature

is not a new one, rather it started much earlier as according to this text, from the Puritan society or the 17th century the writings for the women's development already started. Though especially the 1960s and 1970s are considered the more effective time for the feminist movement, the deep-rooted feminism is evidenced by this text.

The economic phenomenon of a person is very important which is waged to help the women deprived mostly throughout the historical development of the world's femininity quest. In the author's words: "So Pearl – the elf-child,-- the demon offspring, as some people, up to that epoch, persisted in considering her—became the richest heiress of her day, in the New World" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 280). Pearl gains economic solvency at the end of the novel and she is endowed with a lot of riches by Roger Chillingworth. Her success carries symbolic meaning to the readers as proof of becoming strong.

3.5. Presentation of Roger Chillingworth by the Author

The portrayal of Roger Chillingworth by the author is crucial to justify the women characters' success where he is presented as a villain and an irresponsible character towards his family, his wife, Hester Prynne, is a representative of the patriarchal authority. He is Hester's husband but for a long time he does not take care of his wife and after a long time he appears in the novel and since then he always stays against Hester's happiness. His activities and ill intentions prove him to be the villain or anti-hero of this novel. His disguise to hide his actual identity is mischievous by nature and he always wants to take revenge upon Mr. Dimmesdale for making love affairs with Hester. On the whole, the total characterization of him by the author as a villain is symbolic which can be explained as to demean the power of male supremacy over the women whereas Hester possesses several great qualities of the inner and outer self, where the traditional patriarchal supremacy is broken.

Another important issue should not be omitted that Hester commits a great sin by doing adultery undoubtedly, but why she did such a heinous thing deserves an explanation. She is a woman of youth and enticing beauty. She must have some physical, biological demand that was fulfilled by her husband, but when she comes to the new place, her husband is missed and it is heard that he died in the sea. And he does not contact her for a long time. Another thing is clear that she committed the sin with a clergyman, holding a high position in the patriarchal society, and such a mistake is not very unusual for such a lady as her husband was missing for a long time; maybe, she had a good plan to marry him someday. Her beauty and personality are so strong that she becomes successful to commit sin with a noble person and there is no such indication that she entrapped him for adultery. However, her sinful activity can be regarded as to make the patriarchal society liable for her sin by the author. She could have been certainly blamed vehemently if she had committed the adultery despite her husband's living with her.

3.6. Hester's Success in Earning

Hester becomes successful in earning livelihood for herself and her daughter Pearl, who is her companion in struggling life, on her own and in her that struggling life her needlework becomes her income source. She serves the community through her needlework which is well accepted by the Puritan society, though the society ostracizes her as punishment for adultery. She returns the good activities to society in lieu of harsh behavior to her. The success of her work is stated by the author: "Her needle-work was seen on the ruff of the Governor; military men wore it on their scarfs, and the minister on his band; it decked the baby's little cap; it was shut up, to be mildewed and molder away, in the coffins of the dead" (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 87). The society's outlook towards her is severe and very agonizing for her survival. The society makes her feel as alien to the society and such a situation was very caustic to her.

However, despite the many interactions she had with many members of society, she never had the sense that she really belonged to any of them. Every action, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came into contact all suggested, and frequently expressed, that she was exiled, and that she was as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere, or communicated with the common nature by other organs and senses than the rest of humankind. This was because every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came into contact all suggested, and frequently expressed, that she was exiled (Hawthorne, 1850, p. 88). In such a situation, her courage to struggle was alive. She continues with vigor to work on needle very hard to be successful in life. She ultimately attracts the society's outlook as praise of her activities. She is praised not only for earning but also for her good deeds.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, the narrative is an eminent document that's showcases the development of women in society and the preeminence of the feminine agency over the masculine supremacy. Hester Prynne gets sufficient scopes to prove her strength, patience, generosity and supremacy after committing the sin of adultery in that Puritan society which is the most rigid religious and social condition, and for the sin, she is ostracized from the mainstream society as the punishment. If she had not been punished by society, she could not have proved her strength and good deeds living in society peacefully with her husband and children. Her struggle makes her strong and she becomes the icon for the womenfolk not to be defeated in any circumstances. A woman can establish her own identity in society even living in a hostile environment being independent of other's pity. The women can hold the equal dignity in the society; sometimes they can show pity on the male individuals to save them, as Hester takes pity on Mr. Dimmesdale to save him from public shame, and she takes double burden upon her shoulder publicly. The traditional concepts about the women are not applicable in this narrative to evaluate Hester Prynne, rather she is endowed with lots of good qualities as well as manly activities, therefore, the outlook towards the women must be changed. It seems that the novelist tried to exhibit the same thing by portraying Hester Prynne's mesmerizing character, whose name can be exchanged with success. Her brilliant accomplishment sets an outstanding specimen to the women to change their views towards themselves and to the patriarchal society not to demean the women's power. The fiction seems to convey the message that once injustice to women ends, no power can subdue them anymore. Whatever is the situation, they will rise against all odds to flourish using their aptitude, and intellectual power. If the situation is in their favor, they can do more with their strength and potency. Therefore, the findings reveal that the outmoded portrayal of women is not practiced by Nathaniel Hawthorne in his narrative; rather a protest is set up technically against the set rules of patriarchal tradition to break the conventional representation of women folk in literature. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on women in fiction as well as provides fresh interpretations of Hawthorne and his narrative *The Scarlet Letter*.

Author's contribution

S.S. Ahmed made a significant contribution to the article's concept, design, intellectual and theoretical analysis, and interpretation of findings and K. I. Hossain did the initial draft work, as well as the final proofreading and editing.

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Conflict of interest

There is no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work, as declared by the authors. In addition, the authors have witnessed all ethical concerns, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publishing and/or submission, and redundancy.

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