

Nuruddin Farah's Women: A Challenge to Somalian Patriarchal System

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Abstract:

*Somalian society is exorbitantly patriarchal in structure, thereupon unrelentingly atrocious and unjust in its dealings with women. It is one of the hellacious places for women to live in. In Somalia women are subjected to many heinous crimes like Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), rape, and objectification. The rights and freedom of indigenous women are plundered and unjustly compromised. The rights of women are fobbed off by men in Somalia through the agency of manifold repressive institutions and exploitative ideologies like polygamy, clannish attitude, male chauvinism, and dictatorship. Somalian women are in double-bind, on the one hand, they are subjugated and suppressed by the internal patriarchy and on the other they are abused and wronged by the dictatorial governance. The most inhuman and humiliating treatment meted out to women in Somalia is forced marriage or what we call wife -barter. This is exemplified in a situation whereby a girl is coercively given out in marriage without her due consultations. In some cases women barter is likened to sales of horses, cattle or even goats; young girls are treated like capital assets or commodities and are bartered off for the worth of domestic animals. This brutal patriarchal and feudalistic code makes women chattels in their society. There is an outright resistance by women against this exploitative patriarchal social setup. Women in Somalia are now rebelling against the patriarchal power structures in order to liberate themselves and their posterity from the shackles of this patriarchal subjugation. The article proposes to show in the light of the two novels: *From a Crooked Rib* (1970) and *Sardines* (1981) how Nuruddin Farah contests the female oppression in Somalia and how*

he contrapuntally projects the resistance of women against the patriarchal codes of their society. How they out-rightly defy the patriarchal supremacy of the Somalian culture.

Key words: Patriarchal, Essentialised, Chauvinism, Polygamy, Double-bind, Power structures, Repressive, Ideologies, Exploitative, Women.

Nuruddin Farah is an acclaimed novelist of the contemporary literary world. In his narratives he is diametrically concerned with the issues of women in Somalia. He not only documents the pain of women through his novels, but also projects the rebellion and resistance of women against the unjust patriarchal codes and diktats. Both the novels, *From a Crooked Rib* (1970) and *Sardines* (1981) are considered as radical feminist narratives. These novels depict the embattled womanhood in Somalia. In these novels, the novelist vociferously decries the crimes of familial and state dictatorship that victimise women in Somalia to meet their illegal and selfish ends. Furthermore, the novels highlight how patriarchy tries to strangle and suppress the creative energies and resistance of women. *From a Crooked Rib* is the debut and promising novel of Nuruddin Farah. This novel typifies Farah as a socially engaged and engrossed novelist. It is a prototype feminist novel that ossified the station of Farah in the literary circles as a novelist who advocates and contests the condition and cause of Somali women in particular and by corollary all women in general. The novelist addresses and thereby aims to redress the very serious issues like patriarchal hegemony, female circumcision and wife bartering rituals of the Somalian society.

From a Crooked Rib revolves round the focal character Ebla – a fourteen year old girl who falls prey to the piggish patriarchy that has no qualms and compunction to barter women like cows and camels. According to Judith Cochrane,

“From a Crooked Rib reveals Farah’s concern for the women of his country who are generally treated as slaves or bartering objects by their men folk” (Judith, 1979). The novel remains testimony to the fact that the plight and fate of women in Somalia is vulnerable and how the oppressively esurient patriarchy is out to wreak every sort of cruelty and injustice on the frail and helpless beings of women in Somalia. This novel is diametrically concerned about the women predicament in Somalia. This predicament has been shown by the novelist through the character of Ebla who is a pawn in the hands of patriarchy. The feminist critic, J. Okonkwo subscribes to the view that:

From a Crooked Rib discusses the feminine plight and the general odds which weigh against the female in a traditional patriarchal cultural environment. The basic female problem, the uncomplimentary status accorded her in African society is given an emphatic treatment in the novel. (J. Okonkwo, 1984)

Somali women who are bartered into forced marriages render them helpless and susceptible to the spousal ill-treatment and abuse. They are merely thought of as the objects of sexual satiety and child-bearing machines. They are in no way considered human beings having the same needs and rights as men have. Marriage which is usually considered as a pious and congenial contract has become a prison for Somalian women that never let them enjoy the freedom of which they are legal claimants. Marriage is an oppressive agency and devilish department through the office of which men bring women under the appalling and abominable social slavery. Marriage contract smothers the instinctual resistance of women and also limits their freedom and franchise, the novelist expresses the subordinate and unfortunate position of women in marriage in the helpless words of Ebla: “A man needs a woman. A woman needs a man. Not to the same degree. A man needs a woman to

cheat, to tell lies to, to sleep with. In this way a baby is born, weak and forlorn” (Farah, 1970.p. 12).

Nuruddin Farah questions and tries to decentre all those patriarchal institutions through his archetypal feminist novel *From a Crooked Rib*. To expose the abuse and crime to which women in Somalia are subjected and to liberate them from the patriarchal yoke and ritualistic slavery seems to be the *raison d'être* of Nuruddin Farah in writing the novel, *From a Crooked Rib*. Farah projects the sorry plight of woman through the pitiful character of Ebla who is the locus of patriarchal onslaught in the novel and who is bartered without her consent to a 48 years old man namely, Giumaleh by her grisly grandfather. In order to avoid this calamity, Ebla flees from her home to reach any place that would safeguard her from the cruel clutches of patriarchy. But patriarchal abuse, maltreatment, and male jingoism dog her without break. On reaching Belte Vene, she comes across her distant cousin – Gheddi who is the typical metaphor for tendentious patriarch. He involves her (Ebla) in smuggling activities of which she was not aware at all. This blemished her immaculate character and further exposed her to the oncoming patriarchal crosscurrents. Ebla experiences here that freedom is still an elusive element. She becomes a household slave, running the household chores as well as droving and milking the cows in the yard. She also acts as a midwife when Aworalla (wife of Gheddi) went into labour. She further discovers that it is a universal notion that a woman is little less than a chattel as Gheddi turns her into a smuggling scandal.

There is a long line of chauvinistic men who alternately inflict Ebla by their jingoistic attitudes and sex thirsty selves. Gheddi surreptitiously devises to give her to a broker in exchange of money. This is the position of women in Somalia. They are bartered in exchange of money to satisfy the needs and volitions of men. Women are puppets in the hands of men. They are always subjected to the game of scapegoating by men

in order to satiate their vested interests and physical hungers. So much cruelty is meted out to women in Somalia that at times they wish death for themselves. In the novel under study, Farah with intellectual acumen and scholarly boldness through the character of Ebla attempts to show how women rebuff the patriarchal codes of subjugation. Ebla loathes the tendency of the men of her clan to hegemonise her and gainsay freedom of thought and self-determination. The novelist examines her thoughts that convey the message of how women are treated and how they are valorised:

From experience she knew that girls were materials, just like objects, or items on the shelf of a shop. They were sold and bought as shepherds sold their goats at market-places, or shop-owners sold the goods to their customers. To a shop-keeper what was the difference between a girl and his goods? Nothing, absolutely nothing.

What agony, what a revolting situation! Naturally women are born in nine months (unless the case is abnormal) just like men. What makes a woman so inferior to men? (Farah, 1970. p. 84).

The character of Ebla is a challenge to Somalian intransigent patriarchal social setup and retrogressive practices that marginalize women. Ebla is out to transgress and debunk all those patriarchal institutions and goddamn ideologies that have restricted the freedom of women and have treated them as inferior and marginal. Through the monologue of Ebla, the novelist highlights the gender inequality and discrimination in Somalia. In the monologue Ebla questions:

Why is it only the sons in the family who are counted? For sure this world is a man's – it is his dominion and is going to be his as long as women are oppressed as long as this remains the system of life. Nature is against women.

If a woman wants to argue about her fundamental rights not being fulfilled by her husband, it is always a man that she must see-at government office and every other place. Before

she has opened her mouth, she is condemned to the grave. Aren't men the law? (Farah, 1970. p.84).

Ebla's running away from her people symbolises her robust attempt to defy the patriarchal laws in order to live a life of her own according to her will and volition. She decides to govern her life herself by abandoning her grandfather and the subjugating traditions of her cruel clan. She runs away in search of freedom and life. She dreams of utopian society where women can enjoy freedom and are allowed ownership of things, especially their own bodies. Her struggle for freedom represents the struggle of an average Somali woman to rise above the surf of patriarchal imperia. Ebla's running away from the home of her grandfather who had promised her hand in marriage to an old man in exchange of camels is boldly symbolic and challenging. Ebla's refusal to yield to masculine authority and to tradition is her attempt to change the existing power structure and thereby alter the position of women in Somalian society. J.Okonkwo, a famous feminist critic and an important authority on the novels of Farah, critically opines that "Ebla's flight from home is not just a simple matter of not wanting to marry Giumaleh; it is her desire to assert her individuality, and also to be understood and appreciated as a human being" (J. Okonkwo, 1984).

As we wade through the glum episodes of the novel, we come to know that in the entire novel, Ebla finds her ivory tower in the courageous company of a widow who is an independent woman and Ebla draws inspirations from the air of freedom around this woman. The company of the widow boosts the spirit of Ebla. We see everywhere in the novel freedom and fate of Ebla is compromised by male characters in order to meet their own selfish needs. In the beginning of the novel her grandfather barter her to 48 year old man who was fit to be her father. There after her cousin -Gheddi mortgages her freedom in order to free himself from the fetters of the

police. Gheddi uses her as collateral to borrow money from his friend who is a broker. He (Gheddi) then promises her hand to the broker in marriage in exchange for the money he borrowed. At this point the widow comes to her rescue and informs her that her cousin had promised her in marriage to the broker who has tuberculosis. The widow is so moved by the sad plight of Ebla that she bewails the fate of womanhood in the following lines:

But that is what we women are- just like cattle, properties of someone or other, either your parents or your husband . . . We are human beings . . . But our people don't realise it. What is the difference between a cow and yourself now? Your hand has been sold to a broker (Farah, 1970.p.80).

As the story line of the novel moves forward we see that the vicious circle of patriarchy snowballs and does every possible attempt to ensnare Ebla and limit her liberty. After running away from her cousin's home to save herself from the broker to whom Gheddi had promised her hand on brokerage, Ebla on the advice of the widow decides to elope with the cousin of the widow, Awill who is an employee of the Italian colonial service. She elopes with him because she thinks education must have remodelled him from barbaric traditional ideology that made men look at women as mere chattels. But she finds herself stepping deeper into the thick puddles of male hegemony as Awill turns her into the punching bag at the very first night. She tries to brush-off his advances as they were not properly wed but Awill who is the chip of the same patriarchal block that demolishes the very being of women, applies his brute virility against her fragile body and deflowers her against her will and consent. Through the brute character of Awill, the novelist shows us the mean example of male sex. Ebla pleads him to let her free but he acts against her pleading. His character to Ebla is worse than an animal. The novelist depicts this in the following words:

To Ebla, Awill was a bad example of the male sex. They acted more a donkey, as far as the satisfaction of his animal desires was concerned. 'Copulation is a means of getting children,' she thought. 'But this is not the only thing that a man shares with his woman. Donkeys, and all irrational animals for that matter, get to satisfy their desires, and prefer it to anything else. But even these animals prefer some season to others. Men should consider that the existence of woman is not just a means to an end, but that she can be an indispensable companion for life (Farah, 1970.p.105).

Through this unfortunate incident, the novelist projects the character and condition of the Somalian woman in the face of oppression as; she does not fight back, but allows him to beat and rape her mercilessly. This is because in her conception, the woman was a slave. And she was willing to be what she had been reduced to; she was not rising to stop it (Farah, 1970.p.83).The novelist narrates the vexing ordeal:

Ebla wanted to get out of bed and run away... She also forgot Awill was in her way . . . but a woman never fought with man, she should be submissive and never return his blows . . . Awill stood up straight and showered hard blows upon Ebla – in the mouth, at her head, on her belly. He gave her a kick or two on the belly and tried to bite her. Ebla did not cry, she wanted to, but she knew she should not. Awill grasped her by the plaited hair and pulled her down .Now he jumped over her and sat upon her belly, her body heaving underneath his. 'You are my wife'. He unknotted her dress and she raised no objections: she only moaned. He touched her head again. 'Did I hit you hard?'(Farah, 1970.pp. 96-97).

Ebla is more sinned than against sinning. She is punished for the crime that she had not committed. Through the character of Ebla, Farah is able to show us how much pain woman undergoes in the patriarchal society. Farah tries to show us the pitiable condition of women in the Somalian society who don't have right and power enough to voice the crime to which they

are subjected since they are considered subaltern. Ebla being tortured physically and psychologically by the savage patriarchy madly interrogates and questions herself as:

‘But why is a woman, a woman? To give companionship to man? To beget him children? To do a woman’s duty? But that is only in the house. What else? She asked herself. ‘Surely a woman is indispensable to man, but do men realise it? (Farah, 1970.p.12)

Ebla poses these questions to herself in order to give vent to her pent up emotions and to tell the patriarchy with an added emphasis that men and women are equally cardinal to each other for their survival. She emphatically foregrounds the unsafe position of women in the society where men are out to hunt them for their crooked desires and imperialistic ideologies. By wading into the consciousness of Ebla, Farah is able to voice the pain women undergo in the male –dominated society. Ebla examines her predicaments and how to get out of it. She examines herself to know where she had gone wrong and also ponders on her position in the society. Ebla explains the sorry plight of women in the Somali society who do not have much liberty to express their views since they are considered inferior. She speaks in monologue:

‘Woman? ‘She asked in a grunting male voice, ‘Are you a cheat?’

‘Sometimes.’

‘But why?’

‘Because men cheat me.’

‘I take revenge upon them.’

‘Yes, but why?’

‘I don’t know, I am innocent. I don’t know what to do. I don’t know what i do sometimes. I do things; just do them without really getting myself involved. I put my faith in my man, but once I lose it, then it is hard to regain it. It is jealousy and insecurity that causes most misunderstanding. (Farah, 1970.p.166)

The above monologue symbolises Ebla's constant and insistent bids to escape from the male subjugation. She wants to be free and secure.

In the course of the novel, we see there is no let up in the unrelenting treatment to which Ebla is subjected by the edacious patriarchs. After disvirgining her, Awill flees to Italy on the excuse of employment, leaving her in the lurch. He betrays her with a false promise that he will return within a short period of time. In Italy, he involves himself with a white woman in a sexual liaison thus proves a lady –killer bent on to victimise women by putting on the facade of love, fealty and so-called truthful promises. Involvement of Awill, in the sexual affair with the white woman, notifies that not only low strata women are the prey to patriarchy but the top-notch white women are also not spared from the damaging mission of patriarchy. The novelist tries to highlight through the character of Awill, the idea that men through their craftiness and duplicity, double-deal women of any station; that the position of every woman is vulnerable and precarious in the male-dominated society.

Men subscribe to the ideology that they need woman only for that opportune moment at which they are in exigent need of feeding their hungry animal desires and appetites. Once they have achieved the orgasm by dilapidating the spiritual equanimity and physical poise of women at the altar of enjoyment they let them to dogs. Awill in the novel toes the line of this sadistic philosophy by satiating his lust on devouring the fragile bodies of the two women after that lets them down without any thought, concern and care. Nuruddin Farah deftly and boldly exposes the rank self-centredness and swinish nature of men in Somalia.

Farah tries to show us that there is an element of resistance and angst in the character of Ebla. She is not absolutely passive and unresponsive to the blows and slaps of patriarchy. On discovering that Awill was cheating on her, she

did not crumble in disillusionment. She got aggressive as she found the noose of patriarchy ensnaring and suffocating her once more. She defiantly sought for a solution in her own way. She resolved to take a firm and defiant stand against every oppressive move of male dominated society. In order to pacify her dogged soul and to revenge her first husband Awill, Ebla clandestinely went into the second marriage with a man called Tiffo. Tiffo was already married and had two daughters who were almost the same age as Elba. When Tiffo tries to exploit her in the usual egoistic manner, she boldly tells him that she was married before. Ebla declares without any restraint, "You have another wife and I have another husband. We are even: you are a man and I am a woman, so we are equal. You need me and I need you. We are equal." (Farah, 1970.p.145)

Ebla stands for the compelling image of woman in action in times and places not very much given to recognising and promoting female strengths. Ebla's migration typifies the quest of the average Somali woman in search of freedom. Ebla defies tradition and seeks emancipation as she migrates from the patriarchal tyranny of her family to the city. According to NgoziChuma-Udeh, "Ebla's escape is indicative of the march for freedom from aboriginalism to womanism, a march for a progress, new life"(Ngozi, 2013). Ebla's journey towards freedom brings her in contact with two other women from the urban setting with different ideologies about life and womanhood. It is in their company, Ebla learns to live a life of independence, besides she learns to oppose the exploitative and coercive attitude of male dominated society. At Belet Vene, she comes into contact with an anonymous widow, a moderate and free going woman who did not confine herself to the dictates and commands of tradition. The courageous company of the widow boosts her confidence and strength, besides the widow informed her about imperialistic and autocratic nature of men and prepared her to oppose the patriarchal tyranny with firmness and confidence. At Mogadiscio, Ebla meets an

urbanised woman namely, Asha who instructs her in the ways of womanhood in the city. Asha teaches her the necessary survival instincts in the absence of husband, Awill. Unlike the anonymous widow, Asha is a more urbanised and cunning woman, who lives by her witticism and cunning. She made Ebla realize that man and woman are equally important and indispensable. Farah emphasizes here the importance of both the male and female members of a society working hand in hand for optimal success. Ebla, in the company of Asha attains so much confidence and ideological shift and strength that she unhesitatingly speaks out... "Surely a woman is indispensable to man, but do men realize it? A man needs a woman. A woman needs a man" (Farah, 1970.p. 12).

Asha who revamps the ideological set up of Ebla and prepares her to oppose every patriarchal onslaught, stands for a woman of new ideological make-up always alert to resist sexist oppression, and with a mission to reconstruct the mindset of downtrodden women so that they can question and oppose the traditional constructs about them. J. I. Okonkwo opines that, "Farah creates a strong feminine independence in Asha in order to portray the potential of individual female achievement in a world dominated by me" (J. Okonkwo, 1984). Farah re-emphasizes the concomitance of man and woman through the character of Asha who is a landlady. Asha's ability to manage her house and her tenants signifies her shrewdness. Through her character, Farah tries to deconstruct the traditional notions about women as inert beings and mentally backward creation. Farah wants to emphasize the mental agility of woman through the character of Asha. Asha inculcates and indoctrinates in Ebla the notion that she is an important part of man's life and a fully fledged member of the society. Asha resolutely tells Ebla that, since a man has the right to have more than one wife then the woman also has the right to have more than one husband. Asha is a challenge to patriarchy. She has a firm stand against marginalization of women. She does not retain the slightest

belief the woman is inferior to men. Ebla sees this in her and is encouraged in her personal struggle against subjugation:

Ebla, little by little, learnt the background of Asha, who she deemed the most interesting character she had met since she left the country. Ebla could not help being fond of Asha, because she was the first person who had ever considered her equal: she made Ebla aware of what she was. (Farah, 1970.p121)

Ebla's running away from her home to escape the calamity of arranged marriage symbolises a race towards emancipation. She runs a race from the lifeless conditions of Aborginalism to the vibrancy of Womanism. Her ideological transformation regarding the notion of woman and an attainment of defiant attitude to resist and oppose male dominance is an express and manifest challenge to illegal and unjust patriarchal tendencies. Ebla's journey is a journey towards "enlightenment," "independence," "freedom," "awakening" (McDowell, 1997). Ebla attains her freedom during the process of her migration. Through migration she gets acquainted with the robust females who advise and assist her in managing her life the way she wants to live it.

Farah very dexterously and emphatically continues the theme of female oppression and resistance on their part in the novel *Sardines* (1981). According to G.H. Moore, "*Sardines* is a nice complement to Farah's first work (*From a Crooked Rib*) in which, on an obscure impulse of revolt, Ebla crept out of the nomadic encampment all those years before" (Moore, 2002, p.155). In this novel, the novelist tries to highlight the way subjugation of women within patriarchy is exploited and sustained by the state. The novel depicts the life of women under the repressive administration of Barre government and examines social barriers that try to limit the quest for individuality among Somali women. The novel revolves round the female character Medina. Medina's character has been portrayed by the novelist in a very lucid and emphatic manner

to suggest her bold resolution to resist and fight against the oppression of state dictatorship and the blows of patriarchy. In the very opening pages of the novel, the novelist gives us the clear and defined image of Medina's bold character: "Medina was as strong –minded as she was unbending in her decisions, and she guarded her secrets jealously. She was, in a manner, like her father Barkhadle .She was confident as a patriarch in the rightness of all her decisions" (Farah,1981, p.216).

In the novel, Medina is a lady who is dismissed from the government services by the state dictatorial administration run by Syed Barre. She is sacked because she does not yield and bow down to the illegal and unjust dictates of the state. This act of refusal not to yield to the unjust and selfish orders of the dictatorial government symbolises her bold and daring attitude to resist and raze those powerful and demeaning structures and institutions that have been erected and established by patriarchy. She resists the illegal dictates and orders of the autocratic government in order to find a room and space of her own in the male-dominated country. The novelist very emphatically narrates that she refused the orders of the government with a design in mind to have: "A room of one's own. A country of one's own in which one was not a guest. A country in which one was not a guest. A room in which one was not a guest . . ." (Farah, 1981, p. 4).

Not only does Medina defy state dictatorship but also the dictatorship within her own family represented by her husband, Samater and her mother-in-law, Idil. Her mother-in-law and her husband are intent to infibulate her daughter Ubox. Medina resists against this heinous ritual of infibulation liberating not only her daughter but every Somalian woman from the established atrocious crimes. She wants to put an end to this bloody ritual that victimises women. She symbolises a non-conformist element in the novel. According to Peter J. Schraeder:

Medina typifies the educated, cosmopolitan woman who wishes a better life for her daughter. Medina is concerned about the intellectual freedom of Ubx and is disgusted about traditional customs which call for the sub-ordination and circumcision of woman. (Peter, 2002).

She wants to save her daughter. She wants to have her daughter a space and autonomy. "I want to spare my daughter these and many other pains. She will not be circumcised. Over my dead body. Ubx is my daughter, not Idil's." (Farah, 1981, p.59).

This is an important step on Medina's part towards family reform. Her opposition to her mother-in-law's unjust plans to have her daughter circumcised is very daring and suggestive. Annie Gigano points out that "Medina's opposition to her mother-in-law's plans to have her daughter Ubx infibulated comes within the ambit of changing the family as a way of changing the nation within" (Annie, 2011).

Medina fights against the infibulation of her daughter because she has undergone through this cruel ritual herself. This infibulation is demeaning and pesky. It reduces a woman to a much degraded status. Female genital mutilation (FGM) in Somalia is the feminist issue touched by the novelist. The novelist sees this practice as being the part of the female suppression and criminalization. The novelist thoroughly condemns this inhuman ritual. He presents several detailed descriptions of what entails from the point of view of a woman who has been circumcised, Medina:

If they mutilate you at eight or nine, they open you up with a rusty knife the night they marry you off, then when you give birth to a baby you are cut open and re-stitched. Life for a circumcised woman is a series of deflowering pains, delivery pains and re-stitching pains. (Farah, 1981,p.59).

Medina is an enlightened woman with revolutionary spirit, commanding consciousness and anti-hegemonic ideology.

Medina in the novel is out to accomplish a mission of liberation for women. She insists to herself in the novel: "I am fighting for the survival of the woman in me-while demolishing 'families' like Idil's and regimes like the General's" (Farah, 1981, p.246). Medina's struggle for identity and space for herself and the other women represents her attempt and assay to demolish those elements in the society that marginalize and victimise women. So we can generally say, Medina's struggle for freedom and identity for herself and her daughter is her conscious attempt to change the whole exploitative cultural set-up of the society. She wants to reconstruct and rehabilitate the society that has illegally imprisoned women in the ritualistic cruelty. She works for the overall renovation of the societal set up. The novelist narrates her mission of reconstruction as:

She reconstructed the story from the beginning. She worked it into a set of pyramids which served as foundations for one another. Out of this, she erected a construction of great solidity and strength. She then built mansions on top of it all, mansions large as her imagination and with lots of chambers that led off corridors in which she lost herself but which led her finally, when she chose to follow, to a secret back door in another wing of the building .She stood at a distance; she breathed deeply and took her time. She admired the result.(Farah, 1981, p.3).

Medina who is in direct opposition to the dictatorial government of Syed Barre wants to instill in her daughter the ideology of resistance and rebellion. She wants to bring her up according to her own motives. She does not let her to join any government run school that chants the songs and praises for the despotic government. She abstains her daughter Ubox from playing with the other children of her age. At one point in the novel her daughter asks her, "why don't you let me go and play with Abucar, Omar and Sofia?" (Farah, 1981, p.15). Medina answers her admonishingly as, "When you come home, your language suffers from lack of originality. You keep repeating

yourself, saying the same thing. I want you to speak like an enlightened child.”(Farah,1981, p. 15).

For not allowing Ubx to go to school like the other children, Ubx, her daughter questions “Why don't you let me go to school like the other children then?” (Farah, 1981, p.15). Medina emphatically tells her, “Because schools teach you nothing but songs of sycophancy and the praise names of the General. And because I can teach you better than they. I can teach you things that will be of use to you later in life.”(Farah, 1981, p.15).

This reflects that Medina is a strong-minded lady with an ideology of her own. She is in direct head-on with the autocratic government and wants to inculcate and instill the sense of resistance, philosophy of independence, and an ideology of self-sufficiency in the budding mind of her daughter so that she can live her life freely and can give full rein to her creativity and liberal imagination. *Sardines* is a forceful and clear account, depicting the embattled Somalia womanhood. According to Annie Gagiano:

Sardines shows us a series of alternative ways of living within a dictatorship, embodied in a wide social spectrum of mainly female characters .In depicting these women (and some men) and their interactions, the novel suggests comparisons and contrasts between them, measuring the extent to which they comply with, passively contribute to, stoically endure, or actively resist a dictatorial regime that has their society in its grip. The dictatorship impinges on their public and private lives, for the nature of such a dictatorship, Farah shows, is that private spaces have been made the concern of the ruler and his supporters. (Annie, 2011).

Farah proves a radical and militant novelist in the *Sardines*. He shows an explicit concern and sympathy towards the women who are prey to the dictatorship and male dominance. Apart from dealing with the issue of circumcision in the novel, Farah very dashingly exposes the victimization and wrongs done to

women by the hands of state dictatorship. The novelist without any fear shows his female characters at the epicentre of every oppression and crime. Farah through this novel shows us how women are revenged and wrongly treated by the state dictatorship. He clearly and emphatically shows this in the case of Amina who is raped in the novel by the myrmidons of the dictator. The novelist tells us about the female victimization by the hands of dictatorship through the character of Amina as:

The rapists had names and she knew them, and therefore she appealed to them, begged them, 'please, no am not he, nor am I my father . . .' But what pain, what pain, what pain! She had been a virgin, she had been circumcised . . . what pain, what pain! 'We're doing this not to you but your father.'(Farah, 1981, p. 135).

Farah highlights the rape case of Amina with an added emphasis. He problematizes the rape of Amina. Through the rape case, Farah wants to highlight the political nature of this unfortunate incident. The full story of the rape is given in flashback by Amina. She is revenged because her father makes public the illegal mechanism of Barre government. The political nature of the rape is clear: the rape is undertaken as retaliation for Amina's father. Amina herself deduces from her rape the conclusion that not just this rape but every rape is political. Through this statement of Amina, Nuruddin Farah has universalised the plight of rape victims. The culprits are not punished. They have been left scot-free. Amina's father is intimidated by the dictator to shun the incident. The dictator gives him strict orders:

The case of your daughter must be treated as though it were devoid of any political significance; it must be dealt with as having no political implications whatsoever, "Her father is so much helpless at the cruel dictates of the dictator that he could not protest against the rapists and is instead of it compelled to tell her daughter to forget about it. The rapists have not been punished but are at large for there in a Somalia

is no punishment for this crime her father is made to tell her daughter: "In this country rape is not punishable as other crimes of violence. The characteristic compromise arrived at is usually the rapist marries the victim, accepts her hand in marriage in the presence of the elders of his and her clan. (Farah, 1981, p.256)

Farah highlights and thereby lambasts and ridicules the inhuman treatment and physical abuse of Somali women. He fights for the cause and unfortunate position of women in Somalia.

In summary, it can be comfortably concluded from the critical discussions of the two novels that through the portrayal of female characters namely, Ebla, Medina, and Amina in the two novels, *From a Crooked Rib* and *Sardines*, Farah has shown an explicit empathy with the pitiable plight of women. Further through the resistance shown by the two respective female heroines, Farah has contrapuntally shown that women are able enough to resist the patriarchal crime and conservative cultural wrongs and abuses that have been illegally established by men in Somalia. Ebla and Medina, if on the one hand symbolise the victims of state dictatorship and male-dominance, on the other hand they typify to the greater extent those enlightened, defiant, and dashing ladies who are a direct challenge to patriarchy. Further the two heroines stand for the torch-bearers to subaltern women. The two female characters in the two respective novels stand for the compelling images of women in action in times and places not very much given to recognising and promoting female strengths. They fight for their lives in situations where attempts at self-expression are checked by the obnoxious and overriding forces of tradition. They both move for a utopian society in which women can live freely. They dare to step outside the humiliating societal path traced for them by tradition and emerge triumphant.

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