



Edna's Struggles against Patriarchal Social Discrimination in *The Awakening: A Feminist Perspective*

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Abstract

This study investigates the patriarchal practices imposed on Edna, the protagonist in the novel The Awakening by Kate Chopin, and focuses on her fight to survive in society with her own freedom and individual identity. By using the lens of feminism, this research scrutinizes the novel critically and traces the complexities faced by Edna in the male-dominated society, such as harassment, subjugation, persecution, conflict, domestic violence, and gender discrimination. It also identifies the conflicts between her behavior and the social norms, and shows how she struggles to come out from the male-dominated society. It follows textual analysis as a qualitative methodology and collects the primary data from the text. Besides, some secondary data are used to support the argument as well. The findings reveal that the protagonist does not tolerate the social ideas and so rebels against the society and its conventional norms to build up her own identity. Her struggles, confidence, and inner strength help her bring about a change. To establish herself as an individual being in society, she rents a room, earns her livelihood through her own paintings, and comes out from the so-called social identity of housewife and mother.

1. Introduction

1.1 Opening Discussion and Objectives of the Study

Social stereotypes and gender biasedness are the curses for women. Because of this, women always go through bitter experiences in their lives. Many women have even had to sacrifice their lives for these unjust and dual practices of society. Now, it is time to find out the social misbehavior and the practice of confining women, and to let them lead an independent and respectful life like the men in a society. As literature reflects life as well as society, studying the literature of a contemporary society is a better way to understand that society, its cultural norms, and practices. Naturally, every society has its own different customs and values which can easily be found in the literature of that particular society. After studying these, researchers and intellectuals can work for women, for social justice, and for liberty. Even, just as Allen (1991) suggests, women can be represented as vital agents in literature with their contribution and wisdom to bring about a positive change in society. This paper attempts to conduct a study on the protagonist of *The Awakening*, where the author tries to embody a journey from

oppression and domination to freedom and the creation of self-identity through the character of Edna.

Woman is a large part of a society, like a soul in a body. But a woman in a patriarchal society hardly lives with a free heart. Smriti (2023) says, “A patriarchal society is indifferent towards the aspiration and expectation of women and confines them within the framework of social norms.” They are subjugated, oppressed, and undervalued. They are forced ideologically to follow the standards of the mother and wife that society has set. It marginalizes women. Instead of valuing the expectations and aspirations of women, society tries to impose strict rules and roles on women to confine them within four walls. Though women maintain all the values and norms naturalized by men in a society, society fails to create an identity of women’s own. On the other hand, if they choose to lead their lives in their own ways, they are questioned by all. They are dominated by the family, and this continues from generation to generation. At the same time, they are deprived of equal rights.

Kate Chopin is the keen observer of facts in her own society. She witnessed with utmost curiosity and eagerness what was happening in the male-dominated society. By using her varied experiences of social reality, she took immense interest in the traditional practices with women and attempted to bring a threatening change towards patriarchy through her protagonist. The novel does not imitate patriarchal attitudes as an ideal, nor does it appreciate its practices; rather, it depicts protest, breaks down social standards, and makes a new way of life in front of its readers.

This female writer has brought about a transition from the conventional representation of tolerating, self-sacrificing women to the depiction of their inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. The conflicting interests of men and women in society, as a result of self-asserting women who are engrossed in a fervent search for their identity, is the hallmark of the modern portrayal of female characters (Prakash and Sujata, 2014). This novel deals with many of the issues faced by the protagonist in the male-dominated society and her struggle to overcome her position. The novel reveals the feminist stances of the author, and her protagonist represents feminine sensibility. Therefore, this character can be interpreted in the light of feminism.

Generally, feminism is a belief and a socio-political platform from where a person can raise his or her voice against social discrimination. As Bhasin and Nighat (1999) say, feminism builds an idea to cut off the patriarchal and traditional roles and men’s domination towards women in order to make an equal environment. Hooks (1984) treats feminism as a political struggle. Abrams (2005) shows feminism as a literary criticism that deals with patriarchal ideology and examines the way in which women are challenged and oppressed through cultural work, literature, and production. The word “feminist” refers to a person whose thoughts, viewpoints, and manners are based on feminism. According to Adichie (2014), a feminist can be both a man and a woman who supports gender equality and puts the social construction of gender at the center of one’s inquiry. He or she opposes anything that obstructs the societal growth of women, and even speaks or writes against sexual harassment, sexual assault, and domestic violence. Butler (1996) notes that feminists rejected the idea that biology is destiny. In The

Edna's Struggles against Patriarchal Social Discrimination in The Awakening: A Feminist Perspective

Second Sex, Beauvoir (2003) says that men and women are different because society has set them up that way, and society uses sex to practice power (Foucault, 1976).

The aim of developing this paper is to clarify how the American writer represents the sufferings and struggles of women through Edna. By considering the message of feminism, the present study deals with the following points. The objectives of the study, formed based on the research, are as follows:

- (1) To explore the state of conflict between the attitudes of the protagonist and social values in the novel.
- (2) To point out how she behaves in order to come out from the male-dominated society and its norms.
- (3) To show her struggles in creating her identity in society.

1.2 Literature Review and Justification of the Study

From a feminist perspective, Edna is embodied in the text *The Awakening* to make the readers think from a different point of view. Nur (2017) says that in *The Awakening*, the “feminist character is Edna Pontellier.” The present researcher has made a short review on Edna, and has also attempted to present the concepts and findings of some works conducted by different researchers, as they are more or less related to this study.

Laoumri (2017) explores the audacity of Kate Chopin and Malika Mokeddem in the representation of the intimacy in their selected novels. To her, the writers have used their writings as a means to revolt against phallogocentric rules that control the feminine body and assign a passive gender identity to women. In this article, she explains that as feminist authors, Mokeddem and Chopin succeeded in freeing themselves from an assigned gendered identity through audacious writings about intimacy. Their representation actually urges women to deconstruct the patriarchal system governed by phallogocentric laws in order to recuperate their bodies and affirm their identities. To her, their novels clearly express their rebellion and their perpetual quest to liberate the woman's body physically, morally, and sexually.

Xuemei (2010) says that Maggie in *The Mill on the Floss* by George Eliot and Edna in *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin have completely different life experiences. Both of them, however, experience the awakening and deconstruction of female self-realization. When they face the pressure from the patriarchal society, they have to sacrifice their lives in order to fight against that pressure and maintain their awakening self-realization. The comparative study of Maggie and Edna reveals the inevitability of the tragic fate of awakening women.

Nur (2017) says that conventional social demands and men's domination of Edna make her a feminist who views herself as an individual being and does not identify typically as a wife of a man and a mother of children.

Rosenthal (2015) sheds new light on issues regarding feminism. She follows a third-wave feminist perspective and focuses on an intersectional analysis of Edna's privileges. From this point of view, she explores Edna in the role of the oppressor. To her, Edna desires the freedom

of the upper-class white man, and from her position, she plays a role in oppressing those who fall beneath her in the patriarchal structure. To find her liberation, Edna keeps the quadroon within constraints. Therefore, she says it is ironical that Edna's freedom depends on the continued oppression of women of color.

Sharma (2014) says that Edna is neither a traditional wife nor a traditional mother. Following a critical method, he points out some feminist themes by scrutinizing the social status and condition of women. He comes to the conclusion that the central root of the problem is the system of patriarchy, which leads to all kinds of discrimination against and devaluation of women. Clark (2008) says: "Through an exploration of the use of bird imagery, it traces the development of Edna Pontellier, the protagonist of Kate Chopin's 1899 novel *The Awakening*. It shows how she begins by gaining awareness of being caged by patriarchal restraints, goes through the various stages of self-reinvention, and finally escapes from a society that sought to confine her."

It is found that gender bias and feminism are relevant themes in *The Awakening*. Here, Chopin portrays the predicament of women through her female characters belonging to the male-centered society. Family and political customs play a key role in disadvantaging women. Social constraints are so constructed as to sanctify the persecution of women. This is because, in most civilizations, social structures are basically patriarchal. To these critics, Chopin's novel challenges this position through her avowed feminist stance.

This paper depicts the marginalization of women in the patriarchal society and highlights their confinement at home, denial of their social roles, their overlooked desires, and the miseries they endure because of this. The novel manifests that women's sufferings start from their family, and in a male-chauvinistic society, women will not be treated as equals. The social structures are so constructed that they sanctify women's victimization. Even though women suffer in the hands of a male-dominated society in this novel, only Edna dares to challenge the society. Overall, this study comments that the novel portrays the unjust treatment meted out to those at the lower levels of the social hierarchy.

This article shows that *The Awakening* was a revolutionary attempt on the part of Chopin, who tried to open the eyes of the American community towards the callousness of treating women as objects. It follows the feminist approach to studying the text and explores the constant struggle of women against their incessant exploitation, torture, and hardship, which they undergo because of the male-dominated conservative society.

From the review of the above-mentioned works, it can be said that though some research works have been done on *The Awakening* based on second-wave, third-wave feminism, etc., there is, to the researcher's knowledge, no single investigation quite like this study. Due to this gap, the present researcher works in this area and at the same time makes every attempt to provide new and different information in the field of knowledge.

2. Methodology

This study is mainly conducted based on primary sources. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the overall situation and status of women in a patriarchal society and to understand

Edna's Struggles against Patriarchal Social Discrimination in The Awakening: A Feminist Perspective

how successfully the text depicts its female protagonist with her struggles in this kind of society. The researcher has adopted a descriptive approach in critically examining the necessary elements of the text. In this sense, it follows qualitative data. However, secondary sources have been applied to support and validate the textual analysis. In this regard, relevant books by critics, research articles, theses, and seminar papers have been consulted. The internet has also been browsed for necessary information. In order to strengthen the present researcher's points and arguments, theories relating to feminism have been explored and utilized.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Edna Pontellier as a Feminist Character

The Awakening is the story of Edna Pontellier. It shows the gradual realization of Edna's identity as an autonomous being with all of her wants, existence, and desires, and also highlights her struggle to gain those desires and aspirations in a society where they are not valued. A character is well known through his or her activities and performances, through the treatments of other characters towards the concerned character, and also through the narrator's thoughts and comments on him or her. Through the characterization of Edna in The Awakening, Kate Chopin depicts the conventional atmosphere and the demands of the nineteenth-century patriarchal society on women; and at the same time, by bringing Edna out from the patriarchal norms and constraints, Chopin is able to strike a blow against the command of patriarchy, just like Nora, who by slamming the door revolts against her husband and slaps the face of patriarchy.

3.1.1 Edna Pontellier in a Patriarchal Society

At the beginning of the novel, Edna is characterized as a typical woman who conventionally marries Leonce Pontellier and becomes a mother of two sons. Through the depiction of Edna, Chopin skillfully illustrates male domination, the male gaze, the objectification of women, the nineteenth-century ideology about women as perfect mothers and wives, domestic violence, the conventional marriage system, and altogether the patriarchal values and norms used to control women.

From the beginning to the end of the story, a superior-inferior tone prevails in the relationship between Mr. Pontellier and Edna. Mr. Pontellier as a male claims himself the head of the family, likes to decide everything, and controls his wife as though he possesses her. His controlling voice over Edna is clear when he exclaims:

"What folly! to bathe at such an hour in such heat!" (Chopin, p. 2)

He speaks as if he determines every step for Edna. His commanding role is also evident when he instructs Edna before leaving her and Robert:

"Well, send him about his business when he bores you, Edna." (Chopin, p. 3)

Leonce's treatment, thinking, and outlook towards Edna seem to prove that she is his valuable property, and that everything will run according to his own rules and orders. Because only he

is the dominant figure and has the right to control and drive the family, as he is the one who earns for it. It is an unjust social system that is repressive to women. Chopin here demonstrates the common picture of the patriarchal family, where all husbands think themselves superior to their wives rather than treating them as equals in the family. As the authoritative man of the family:

“Mr. Pontellier was very fond of walking about his house examining its various appointments and details, to see that nothing was amiss. He greatly valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his....” (Chopin, p. 61)

About the traditional patriarchal role, Chopin tries to point out Edna’s position in her family, where she is always under the control of her husband, who continuously imposes authority upon her. Even in terms of controlling a wife, the Colonel’s suggestion to Mr. Pontellier is important to mention here to understand the extreme nature of male oppression:

“Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it.” (Chopin, p. 89)

The objectification of women in a patriarchal society is also highlighted here. The objectification of Edna through the male gaze is best established by the interaction among Edna, Mr. Pontellier, and Robert, which upholds the attitudes of patriarchy towards women. When Mr. Pontellier looks at Edna’s return from the shore, he “fixed his gaze (Chopin, p. 2)” on his wife and treats her “as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage (Chopin, p. 3).” The emphasis on this perception establishes a male gaze that objectifies Edna as a woman, which indicates the oppression of the feminine sex. Besides Leonce, Victor Lebrun reinforces the male gaze by purposefully seating himself where he commands a view of Edna’s face.

The objectification of women in that society is also pictured when Mr. Pontellier celebrates on a “Tuesday” as a social convention and hopes his wife Edna will attire herself in a handsome reception gown and receive visitors. He actually celebrates the day for business purposes and tries to use his wife as a tool.

To highlight the domestic labor of women in a patriarchal society, Chopin portrays Edna with household activities and subjugation by her husband. Mr. Pontellier regards Edna as an object who has to act according to his directions without any voice. She is in his family just to serve him, take care of his children, and make meals for them. To him, Edna is none but a wife and a mother, whose only job is serving, feeding, entertaining, cooking, nourishing children, and pleasing her husband. For this reason, Mr. Pontellier keeps Edna under his surveillance, and he finds “the result of his investigation was far from satisfactory (Chopin, p. 6).” As he tries to keep Edna within his control:

“he reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother’s place to look after children, whose on earth was it?” (Chopin, p. 6)

Edna's Struggles against Patriarchal Social Discrimination in The Awakening: A Feminist Perspective

It is the patriarchal society which, by setting the ideology, tries to naturalize the roles of women as good mothers and wives. This has created an indescribable oppression on women. According to this society:

“they were women who idealized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels.” (Chopin, p. 9)

Even society demands that women must be good at cooking. So Mr. Pontellier says:

“It's strange that a woman hasn't learned yet to make a decent soup.” (Chopin, p. 63)

This clarifies that domestic labor — taking care of children and making good food — is associated with women alone at that time, not with men. This pressure of domestic life destroys all of Edna's interests, such as reading, painting, and music.

The conventional marriage system is depicted through Edna's accidental marriage to Mr. Pontellier. Like other women in society, Edna has to marry her husband because she is pressured by her father and elder sister on religious grounds. She then accepts his marriage proposal because she feels sympathy for his devotion. This traditional marriage system is also conveyed through the symbolic wedding ring. The wedding ring that Edna accepts at first as her marriage sign symbolizes the acceptance of the barrier of marriage, the subjugation of her husband, and the confession of social restriction. It is seen that after swimming:

“she silently reached out to him, and, he, understanding, took the rings from his vest pocket and dropped them into her open palm. She slipped them upon her fingers...” (Chopin, p. 3)

This silent exchange indicates her acceptance of her position in the social construct of marriage, which is the common picture of patriarchy. She now has to take on the responsibilities of household activities, the children, and her husband. She merely does the job of serving her husband's family without any wages. Chopin portrays this picture only to show the conventional situation of women.

It is also noticeable that Edna has no economic freedom in her family. She looks after the family members but cannot have any influence in family matters as she makes no economic contribution. Rather, she is also considered the property of her husband, who has the sole right to direct her in his own way. Even for the lack of economic freedom, Edna cannot buy a fine gift for her sister at her wedding. She therefore decides to buy something from the money Mr. Pontellier provided to Edna for their use before leaving for business. Getting this money, Edna exclaimed:

“It will buy a handsome wedding present for Sister Janet!”

But Mr. Pontellier laughed and said:

“Oh! we'll treat Sister Janet better than that, my dear.”

3.1.2 The Protest of Edna

The above description depicts the picture of conventional Creole society. Chopin sets Edna in this way to illustrate the traditional patriarchal setting where most women are dissatisfied with their restricted marriage lives and conservative lifestyles. But Chopin does not stop here. Though the nineteenth century was a hard time for women to come out from the oppression of men, from social, political, and economic restrictions, and from conventional expectations, Chopin is able to bring Edna out from all these limitations. Edna now moves beyond the patriarchal constraints of society. This society helps her begin her journey of awakening to reach beyond the boundaries of male subjugation and oppression.

In *The Awakening*, it is found that through a series of experiences in this patriarchal society, Edna is able to identify her own independent being, one who no longer agrees to be an object under another's control for even a single moment. Throughout the suffering of her conjugal life and through her husband's behavior and treatment, Edna comes to realize that her husband sees her as a possession he has control over, not as a person. In her realization, Robert Lebrun acts as a catalyst who helps Edna notice a distinct contrast between the treatment of Leonce and that of Robert. Edna comes to understand the motives of her husband, who does everything for his business but never thinks of Edna's happiness. He pays attention to Edna and the children only when it suits him, preferring the company of men at his gentlemen's club, yet expecting Edna to offer her full attention when he comes home late. She is no longer willing to accept this system of masculine control. She breaks down this system by revolting against her husband's domination. She does not behave in the way her husband wishes her to. Her behavior and performance shatter the patriarchal thinking of her husband:

“he thought it very discouraging that his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evidenced so little interest in things which concerned him, and valued so little his conversation.” (Chopin, p. 6)

By observing the activities of Edna, Leonce feels threatened, which actually represents the threat towards patriarchy. He thinks:

“She's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women.” (Chopin, p. 81)

Edna comes out from the control of her husband and does whatever she likes. In this, Mrs. Pontellier begins to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her (Chopin, p. 16).

She breaks down the role appointed to her as a woman by society and acts in her own way. She no longer hides her emotions or thoughts but rather expresses everything openly. This is clear when Edna went out on Tuesday without any reason and Leonce exclaimed asking why she was outside on this grand occasion without informing him. He says:

“Out! Why, what could have taken you out on Tuesday?”

Edna says:

"Nothing. I simply felt like going out, and I went out." (Chopin, p. 63)

This shows Edna's indifferent attitude towards maintaining the commands of her husband.

Edna defies all domestic labor and the social norms about women, mother, and wife that are imposed upon her. She ignores the pressure to be a "mother-woman." Edna enjoys her solitude when her children are sent to her grandmother's house:

"Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which fate had not fitted her." (Chopin, p. 22)

This indicates that she does not accept the burden of rearing children; rather, she enjoys having time to herself, which a patriarchal society never allows or acknowledges. To her, nurturing children cannot be the ultimate goal of a woman. Therefore, she has started showing little interest in her children, her husband, and her household activities. For this, her husband declares her to have failed as a mother:

"His wife failed in her duty toward their children." (Chopin, p. 9)

But who defines her duty? Edna realizes that in a patriarchal society women lead a foolish life, sacrificing their desires, aspirations, and dreams only to serve children and husband. To her, this society treats marriage as merely a contract of being a devoted and obedient wife. She rejects this system:

"It seems to me the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household, and the mother of children, to spend in an atelier days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family." (Chopin, p. 71)

That is, she is not satisfied with domestic life. Instead of being the typical woman of the nineteenth century, she "becomes herself" (Chopin, p. 71). She thinks that her children have no right to possess her soul, and that she still has the right to fulfill her own needs and pursuits:

"I would give up the unessential; I would give up my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself." (Chopin, p. 59)

Thus, Edna comes out from the grip of patriarchy and perceives her own independent identity in the world:

"Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her." (Chopin, p. 16)

Once she sacrificed all her likings, which she had cherished since childhood, because of domestic pressure. But now she becomes attentive to her aspirations, her dreams, her fondness of reading, painting, and music. She is now a woman who likes reading and enjoys solitude while doing it:

"she felt moved to read the book in secret and solitude." (Chopin, p. 11)

She also enjoys listening to music:

“Edna was what she herself called very fond of music. Musical strains, well rendered, had a way of evoking pictures in her mind.” (Chopin, p. 31)

She likes drawing pictures, and for this reason, “Mrs. Pontellier had brought her sketching materials.” (Chopin, p. 13). When Edna’s inner awareness grows that patriarchy is destroying herself, she thinks of exploring her drawing talent:

“I believe I ought to work again. I feel as if I wanted to be doing something... I might study for a while with Laidpore.” (Chopin, p. 68)

Edna revolts against the subjugation of males in the name of marriage, which is a socially imposed system. She defies this system and breaks down this so-called bondage by:

“taking off her wedding ring, flung it upon the carpet. When she saw it lying there, she stamped her heel upon it, striving to crush it.” (Chopin, p. 65)

This expresses her hatred of the burden of marriage life, the suppression of patriarchy, and her feeling of disdain for the marriage system. Once she married Mr. Pontellier because of her father’s and sisters’ pressure. Now she realizes “her husband seemed to her now like a person whom she had married without love as an excuse.” (Chopin, p. 97)

Her summer weekends and her companionship with Robert transform her; she now falls in love with Robert, who awakens her passion, her affection, and her longing, and helps her understand the difference between love and infatuation:

“For the first time she recognized anew the symptoms of infatuation which she had felt incipiently as a child, as a girl in her earliest teens, and later as a young woman.” (Chopin, p. 56)

Now, “the sentiment which she entertained for Robert in no way resembled that which she felt for her husband, or had ever felt, or ever expected to feel.” (Chopin, p. 58)

She is no longer with her husband. In this way, Edna violates the conventional roles of marriage and rejects marital suppression, unlike typical women who silently accept all oppression. She breaks down the social system of patriarchy, the subjugation from which no woman had tried to come out before:

“She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before.” (Chopin, p. 34)

This swimming represents her autonomous identity, her attempt to ignore social norms, and her feminist thought, a place where most women at that time could not reach.

In search of equality, Edna makes many attempts. She leaves her household duties, goes outside alone, and comes home late. She tries to do what a man can easily do in society. She goes to the races and drinks brandy. She simply wishes to enjoy life as a man does. This implies her desire for equality with men:

Edna's Struggles against Patriarchal Social Discrimination in The Awakening: A Feminist Perspective

"I will take some brandy," said Edna... She drank the liquor from the glass as a man would have done." (Chopin, p. 98)

Though conventionally Edna had no economic freedom, she tries to come out from this traditional norm and establish herself with financial freedom. Edna's independent thought urges her to leave her husband's home. She rents a small house, which she calls the "pigeon house." She wants to live her life on her own money. She sells her artwork and earns money through her own labor. Gradually, she becomes financially independent, able to fulfill her own needs, and gains strength and confidence:

"I have a little money of my own from my mother's estate, which my father sends me by driblets. I won a large sum this winter on the races, and I am beginning to sell my sketches... I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence." (Chopin, p. 99)

Edna breaks down the taboo and enters into an extra-marital affair with Arobin. "It was the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded." (Chopin, p. 104). Though it was not from love, she enjoys the moment and consummates her desire.

When Edna finds Robert back, she feels strong love and passion towards him and openly expresses her feelings. But Robert cannot move out from the grip of patriarchy. He loves her but cannot ignore the social norms. To him, Edna is Mr. Pontellier's wife — she is a married woman and therefore not free. Her affection and love have no significance to him because to him, the social system is greater than their love. On Edna's part, however, she is a free woman whom no one possesses but herself. She disdains the social system of marriage and divorce and says:

"I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,' I should laugh at you both." (Chopin, p. 134)

Edna can realize her individual identity. She comes out from the world of dreams. She feels confident and satisfied with her gaining a new meaning of life:

"Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life." (Chopin, p. 117)

After the oppression for a long time, Edna is able to awaken. Her struggle against her husband, society, and suppression brings the light of self-autonomy, her identity, and her free existence. She says:

"The years that are gone seem like dreams — if one might go on sleeping and dreaming — but to wake up and find — oh! well! perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life... There are periods of despondency and suffering which take possession of me. But I don't want anything but my own way." (Chopin, p. 138)

Edna commits suicide. Wherever she looks, she finds the web of patriarchy. Adele's voice whispers to her to "think of the children; remember them," (Chopin, p. 137) and Dr. Mandelst tells her to think of Mr. Pontellier. The society where she lives rejects her new freedom, her new identity, and her new behavior. Even Robert, whom she loves, fails to understand her and behaves like her husband. He cannot ignore social values. Everywhere there is a chain of patriarchy. Patriarchy strongly occupies everyone's mentality. Among these shackles, it is difficult for Edna to survive alone with her exceptional mentality and different thinking. But she cannot sacrifice the freedom she gained after struggling hard for so long. She never goes back to her married life with Leonce and never wants to surrender her whole life and soul for her children. She disparages all social expectations, limitations, and boundaries, and in the end chooses to commit suicide. For this reason, she swims out to sea in the enjoyment of her utmost freedom, instead of surrendering herself to this biased society:

"Her arms and legs were growing tired... Exhaustion was pressing upon and overpowering her... The shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone..." (Chopin, p. 143)

She wants no more to rely on her husband. She desires her liberty and her emancipation, and she completely enjoys her own self in her own free way.

4. Conclusion

In *The Awakening*, Edna's rebellious attitude against patriarchy develops throughout the novel and has the potential to bring about a positive change in society. Edna's characterization turns her into a feminist figure who fights for equality at every step of her life. After understanding her subjugation and the patriarchal oppression she endures, she tries to find social and economic freedom, breaks down the ideology of the good wife and mother, and at the same time tries to move out from the shackles of marriage life and domestic labor. Through all of this depiction, Edna tries to make society understand the necessity of equality between men and women. If a woman can enjoy equal independence, she can easily lead a struggle-free life.

In this study, after analyzing the context, it is seen that Edna's society is a male-dominated society where Edna is a rebellious heroine against patriarchy. She tries to violate all social boundaries as well as discriminations in order to live with a free soul. Society naturalizes woman's roles as good wife, good mother, and housewife, and man's roles as controller of the family and breadwinner. It makes people believe that women's education and economic freedom are unnecessary and that women are only fit for household activities within four walls. But Edna breaks down these beliefs. She infringes upon the social system of patriarchy, disobeys her husband's authority, and tries to be free. Edna leaves her husband's house, rents her own house, and becomes herself and economically independent by selling her own artwork. For her attempt at gaining a liberal identity, she is rebuked, scolded, and neglected, but she does not sacrifice her soul to this society. It seems that the patriarchal society is not conscious of female rights. For this reason, this feminist protagonist tries to achieve her equal rights at the cost of her hardship and her life, which is explored in this study. Edna, from the American context, raises her movement against gender stereotypes, domestic violence, rules and regulations of dominance, objectification, and social norms, and at the same time advocates for

Edna's Struggles against Patriarchal Social Discrimination in The Awakening: A Feminist Perspective

economic independence, social freedom, individual autonomy, social safety, equality in profession, and educational rights.

In the end, it can be said that Edna, as a feminist figure, concerns herself with women's rights and equality. The sufferings of Edna reflect reality — the real-life sufferings of women — and at the same time, her revolt against oppression suggests to women that they should not bow their heads before any kind of suppression. This study considers that Edna, as a representative figure of all suffering women, provides a message about the downfall of an imbalanced social structure. If there is no harmony and equality between men and women, a society cannot progress. Rather, the people of this community will have to suffer greatly, as Edna suffers. On the other hand, a harmonious society always cares about parallel rights for men and women, and everyone can breathe freely and fully.

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