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Social Injustice and Female Oppression in the Middle East:
Analyzing *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (Novel 1990)

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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Dedication

First and foremost, all praise is to Allah the Almighty. With Allah's protection and guidance, we gained the strength and patience to finish this work and do our best at it.

We dedicate our work to our loved ones, especially our parents and siblings, for always being there for us and providing us with the mental and physical support in moments of stress and weakness.

Lastly, we dedicate this research to Soraya Manutchehri, the protagonist of the story we are analyzing, and we pray for her pure innocent soul above.

Dhekra, Manal.

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May Allah bless you all.

Abstract

The Study tackles a debatable topic that has persisted across centuries and around the world, which is the social oppression and injustice against women communities. This is explored through an analysis of the novel *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (1990) by the French journalist Freidoune Sahebjam. The book narrates the story of a woman subjected to extreme injustice and brutal violence by her husband. Soraya ends up being falsely accused of adultery by her husband, leading to her horrific execution under complete social acceptance. The novel further presents how women endure oppression and persecution in societies where men monopolize all forms of power. The study adapts the qualitative approach by presenting Feminist Theory and Intersectional Feminism in the first chapter. The second chapter includes their history, principles, and theories which serve the analysis of the events of the true story. The analytic approach focuses on shedding light on the imbalance between genders, the societal factors that represent violence against women, as well as the weaponization of religion to suppress women and perpetuate male dominance and superiority, which are themes vividly portrayed by Sahebjam. The study concludes by emphasizing Sahebjam's reflection on reality. He assumes that women may face this in diverse societies. Through presenting what the work reached of results, it is worth mentioning that the author is not a mere storyteller seeking readers' captivation and entertainment but rather a presenter of crimes committed against females in the patriarchal systems that exploit religion to fulfill men's greedy desires and selfish needs.

Keywords: Feminism, Female Oppression, Social Injustice, Soraya M.

Table of Content

Dedication	I
Acknowledgments	II
Abstract	III
Table of Contents.....	IV
General Introduction	1
Chapter One: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review	
Introduction	7
1.1 Feminism Theory	7
1.1.1 Definition of Feminism	7
1.1.2 History of Feminism	8
1.1.2.1 The First Wave of Feminism	9
1.1.2.2 The Second Wave of Feminism	11
1.1.2.3 The Third Wave of Feminism	13
1.1.2.4 The Fourth Wave of Feminism	14
1.1.3 Principles of the Feminist Theory	14
1.2 Feminist Intersectionality	15
1.2.1 The Concept of Intersectionality	15
1.2.2 Intersectionality as a Theory	16
1.2.3 The Origins of Intersectional Feminism	18
1.2.3.1 Beyond White Feminism	18
1.2.3.2 Kimberlé Crenshaw's Concept of Intersectional Feminism	18
1.2.4 The Application of Intersectionality as a Paradigm in Feminist Theory and Research	21
1.3 Literature Reviews	23
1.3.2 Literature and Media in Stoning of Soraya M.	23

1.3.3 Gender Ideology and Power Relation in <i>The Stoning of Soraya M.</i>	24
Conclusion	26
Chapter Two: The Analysis of Women Oppression and Injustice in Stoning of Soraya M.	
Introduction	30
2.1 The Biography of Friedoune Sahebjam (1933-2008)	31
2.2 Plot of Stoning of Soraya M. (1990)	33
2.3 Main Characters	38
2.3.1 Soraya Manutchehri	38
2.3.2 Ghorban Ali	41
2.3.3 The Mullah, Hassan Ladjevardi	42
2.3.4 Zahra Khanum	44
2.4 Setting of the Story	45
2.5 Analyzing Oppression and Injustice in <i>The Stoning of Soraya M.</i> (1990)	46
2.5.1 Oppression and Imbalance Between Genders	47
2.5.1.1 Soraya and Ghorban Ali	48
2.5.1.2 Soraya and her Sons	49
2.5.2 Social Oppression and Injustice	50
2.5.2.1 Soraya and the Village	51
2.5.2.2 Soraya and Hashem	52
2.5.3 The Misuse of Religion	53
2.5.3.1 The Mullah	54
2.5.4 Social Reaction from the Death Penalty	55
2.5.4.1 Before the Penalty	55
2.5.4.2 During the Penalty	56
2.5.4.3 After the Penalty	57
Conclusion	58
General Conclusion	60

References	64
ملخص	67

General Introduction

1. Background of the Study

Over time, the Middle East, also known as the Near East according to the Western division of the world during the 19th century, has shown great achievements historically, beginning from five thousand years B.C. History states that many important inventions that still exist to this day came from the Middle East. According to the Safe Harbor Website (2022), inventions such as the first hospital, first university, or even banks and checks were first invented in the Middle East and are still being used to this current time. Although these achievements did indeed prove the power and worth of this geographical area, the Middle East still works as a strong life representation of discrimination and injustice, especially against women. Countries such as Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Iran are considered among the top ten countries that represent injustice and patriarchy as stated by Marie Clair magazine (2014). *USA Today newspaper* (2018) published an article stating the top ten worst countries to be a woman at, and according to the Women, Peace and Security Index, the top five countries are all Middle Eastern with Syria and Afghanistan at the top.

Although women play a major role in shaping society, in countries such as Iran, they are considered property to be controlled and ruled over by men. Library of Congress (2021) published an article stating that according to The Human Rights Commission of the National Council of the Iranian Resistance, at least 150 people have been stoned to death in Iran since 1980. It is claimed that the reported number is probably much lower than the actual one since most of the condemnations of stoning by the Iranian authorities are handed down secretly, in addition to the lack of information available from the Iranian prisons. Above all else, women are the major victim of such law, mostly under the accusation of adultery. In the report of the Special Rapporteur on the

situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ahmed Shaheed, submitted to the UN General Assembly on 30 September 2016, at least two women have been stoned to death for being accused of adultery, since 2015.

The BBC (2010) represented a case of a 43-year-old mother of two, Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, who was convicted of an “illicit relationship” for which she was lashed 99 times with her late teen son as a witness in 2005. Her case was then reopened, and she was accused of adultery and then sentenced to death by stoning. Although there was a brief statement from the Iranian embassy in London, stating that the woman would not be stoned. Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani’s fate remains mysterious to this day.

Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani is one of the many women who faced this punishment after being convicted of adultery. Before her, there were many who died under the cause of stoning. There was a woman before her, that had her story spoken to the world after her death. A woman who was accused of adultery and stoned to death in 1987, Soraya Manutchehri. Soraya M. had her story written in a book by a French-Iranian journalist called Freidoune Sahebjam under the title *The Stoning of Soraya M.* In his book, Freidoune S. explains the events he heard from a woman called Zahra upon his arrival to a small village in Iran. Zahra clarifies later that she is Soraya’s aunt and explains the events which led her niece Soraya into getting accused of adultery by her husband then executed to death.

The novel attracted the attention of the director Cyrus Nowrasteh and his wife Betsy Giffen Nowrasteh and was later adapted into a movie in 2008. It won many awards and inspired many organizations to deeply commit against such a cruel punishment, such as The Global Campaign to Stop Killing and Stoning Women, and The Network Against Honor-Related Violence, as stated in the Mongrel Media article (2009).

2. Statement of the Problem

Many women in the Middle East often face systemic oppression rooted in patriarchal traditions, discriminatory laws, and cultural practices. These systems perpetuate gender-based violence, including extreme punishments like stoning, which disproportionately target women and deny them justice.

This research presents the novel *The Stoning of Soraya M.* by Friedoune Sahebjam as an example of the oppression and injustice the female community faces in some areas of the Middle East. This study ought to examine the factors that contribute to shaping women's identity into one that fits the male societal perspective. It also focuses on presenting the multiple types of oppression and violence; whether verbal or physical violence, and explores the broader implications of these issues for gender equality and human rights in the region through the analysis of this novel.

3. Research Questions

This study aims to represent the way Friedoune Sahebjam presented Soraya's story in the novel *Stoning of Soraya M.* By this research, one seeks to answer a set of questions that shape the core objectives of this study:

- a. How does *The Stoning of Soraya M.* portray the social and cultural factors that contribute to female oppression in the Middle East?
- b. What are the legal and societal factors that contribute to gender-based violence, particularly stoning, as depicted in the novel?
- c. Does the novel depict reality in the Middle East, or is it just an extreme case of female oppression?

4. Aims of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze how the story of Soraya M. serves as a portrayal of social injustice and female oppression in the Middle East. Through examining the cultural, legal, and societal factors that contribute to gender-based violence, particularly stoning, as depicted in the novel, one can check the extent to which the story's events do indeed depict reality.

5. Research Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative approach, involving textual analysis which involves, articles, journals, books, official websites, as well as reports in order to answer the questions presented and achieve the objectives this research aims to reach.

6. Significance of the Study

While many studies focus on gender inequality and human rights in the Middle East, few explore how literature like *The Stoning of Soraya M.* highlights and critiques female oppression. This research fills the gap by showing how the novel raises awareness about injustice and advocates for change through storytelling.

Friedoune Sahebjam gives a new brutal image to the violence and the injustice women experience in recent times around the Middle Eastern areas that are ruled by a Shiite (i.e., Shia) system, and men control through a true written story.

7. Structure of the Study

This dissertation consists of two chapters; the first chapter is titled “Theoretical Framework and Literature Review”, it represents the theories used to work on the topic more efficiently as well as a presentation of the studies that were previously published about the novel *The Stoning of*

Soraya M. The second chapter is titled “The Analysis of Women Oppression and Injustice in *The Stoning of Soraya M.*” which highlights and analyzes the social. Legal and cultural forms of oppression and injustice women face in *The Stoning of Soraya M.*

8. Literature Review

Some previous studies already tackled with the novel, we mention two. Firstly, *Literature and Media in The Stoning of Soraya M.* by Purnima Bali is research published in July 2017. It studies the relationship between media and literature through making a comparison between the novel *The stoning of Soraya M.* (1990) by Friedoune Sahebjam and its movie adaptation (2008) by Cryus Nowrasteh. The comparison tends to shed the light over women rights and social issues that are exposed through the narration of both works. The second work is published by Milani Siboro (2023) under the title *Gender Ideology and Power Relation in The Stoning of Soraya M. (1990)* explains the traditional concept of “Gender Ideology” which portrays men as dominant and always the one to divide the power unequally and that through taking the novel *The Stoning of Soraya M.* as an example.

Throughout our journey through the previous works, one could notice a severe lack of data resources especially regarding the novel compared to the movie, and that might be due to the sensitivity of the topic which could get in the way of the research development and hinder it. Such gaps could limitate our ability to gather resources. However, it could also give us a chance to tackle with a new angle and explore it in more depth.

CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Introduction	7
1.1 Feminism Theory	7
1.1.1 Definition of Feminism	7
1.1.2 History of Feminism	8
1.1.2.1 The First Wave of Feminism	9
1.1.2.2 The Second Wave of Feminism	11
1.1.2.3 The Third Wave of Feminism	13
1.1.2.4 The Fourth Wave of Feminism	14
1.1.3 Principles of The Feminist Theory	14
1.2 Feminist Intersectionality	15
1.2.1 The Concept of Intersectionality	15
1.2.2 Intersectionality as a Theory	16
1.2.3 The Origins of Intersectional Feminism	18
1.2.3.1 Beyond White Feminism	18
1.2.3.2 Kimberlé Crenshaw's Concept of Intersectional Feminism	18
1.2.4 The application of Intersectionality as a Paradigm in Feminist Theory and Research	21

1.3 Literature Reviews	23
1.3.2 Literature and Media in <i>The Stoning of Soraya M.</i>	23
1.3.3 Gender Ideology and Power Relation in <i>The Stoning of Soraya M.</i>	24
Conclusion	26

Introduction

When addressing the questions stated in the general introduction, it is important to state the theoretical foundation that serves this dissertation. Starting with the theoretical framework, two theories are tackled: Feminism and Feminist Intersectionality. Firstly, Feminism is defined, and its history and principles are stated to provide a clear view that serves in analyzing the novel in more depth regarding women's oppression and abuse where the female voice has no existence. Feminist Intersectionality is later examined thoroughly to portray the situation of how different forms of oppression come together against women, such as racism, sexism and classes and religious beliefs. The second section is about the previous literature works. The works serve as a visual portrayal of the story and aim at shedding light on different issues in the novel, such as the social victimization of women regarding the basis of gender discrimination, gender ideology and power, and literature and media. A number of gaps and limitations could be addressed in this topic. The severe lack of data about this novel is the main reason behind the purpose of tackling this topic, this study also aims to tackle new angles that were not brought up in the previous research. However, there is a limitation that must be addressed, which is the sensitivity of the topic which could prevent the study from reaching certain angles or collecting specific data.

1.1 Feminist Theory

1.1.1 Definition of Feminism

Generally speaking, one can define Feminism as a social, political, and cultural movement that focuses on shedding light over gender equality. It challenges the traditional power structures and the social norms that have historically oppressed or limited women's rights, opportunities, and autonomy over their own lives (Britannica, 2025). Simone de Beauvoir in her speech *The second Sex* (1949) quotes that: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 283). Beauvoir claims

that femininity should not be seen as a biological destiny to be controlled by men, but rather a social construct. Feminism, for her, involves challenging the social oppressive systems that deny women autonomy and shape them to roles that serve the male-dominated society in exchange for their own lives and freedom (Beauvoir, 1949).

Another book titled *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. South End Press by Hooks (2000) states that feminism is not about hating men but rather the patriarchal systems that harm people regardless of their genders. She integrates intersectionality, stressing that variables such as race, class, and colonialism play key roles in shaping women experiences and called it “a movement to end sexism and oppression” (Hooks, 2000, viii). In 2014, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie wrote the book *We Should All Be Feminists*, she defined Feminism as “the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes” (Adichie, 2014, p. 47).

The Feminist theory is considered as an extension from the Feminism concept. It aims at depicting the roles, interests, and experiences of both women and men, aiming at examining them, in order to be able to understand gender inequality.

1.1.2 History of Feminism

One of the first sparks of Feminism was around 1790. When the English writer and philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792) which was inspired from an American writer and poet Judith Sargent Murray, Wollstonecraft approved of the idea which stated that the best way to fix women’s current condition was through education. The Feminist theory was not taken by any consideration in the Anglophone world. Until the writer and critic John Neal wrote his work *Men and Women: Brief Hypothesis Concerning the Difference in their Genius* (1824). Neal adapted

Mullay and Wollstonecraft's ideology, stating that women are different from men but not inferior. Followed by other works, Neal played a crucial role into bringing the theory back to discussion.

Feminism is divided into historical waves, the first person to represent the term “waves” was Martha Weinman Lear in her article *The Second Feminist Wave* in New York Times. Lear connected the suffrage movement that occurred during the 19th Century with the multiple movements of women in the 1960s. The terminology quickly spread and became a popular way to define Feminism's history. Although “feminist waves” metaphor is considered helpful for people to distinguish between different eras of women's activism, it is impossible to specifically pinpoint the exact dates that each feminist wave started or ended in. Truthfully speaking, each historical era was based on a long tradition of activism that shaped the feminist ideologies. Some researchers though, state that Feminism's history is divided into three waves. While others argue that it is four waves when mentioning the “#Me Too” movement, as published by the National Woman's International Museum (2021).

1.1.2.1 First Wave of Feminism

According to The National Woman's History Museum (2021), the first wave was linked to the Women's Rights Convention, which was first held in 1948. It was also influenced by various movements, especially the French Revolution, the Temperance movement, and the Abolitionist movement. During the French Revolution that began in 1789, women were stated to be frequently on the front lines, demanding their rights, and they took active political roles in their country (NWHM, 2021). It was historically noted that various armed women marched in Paris demanding that the King address their economic issues on October 5th, 1789. However, a few months later, the Reformers were able to persuade the French National Constituent to officially adopt the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizens*, this document gave citizenship to many

members of the population, and women were part of the minority that was excluded from this document. This led to a shift in women's attention to trying to gain citizenship (NWHM, 2021). At this occasion, the playwright Olympe de Gouges wrote *A Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen* (1791). It begins with: "Women are born free and are man's equal in law. Social distinctions can be founded solely on common utility."

The first wave was also influenced by the Temperance Movement that was firstly established in the early nineteenth century. The movement sought to speak out for women as well as children who are being abused and mistreated due to alcohol. During this period, many people began trying to fight against Immorality, promoting what is known as "Moral Reform". It developed in the 1820s and limited or prohibited the consumptions of alcohol. Women began creating literature works such as cartoons, speeches, and songs to represent the negative effects of alcohol. By the year 1831, there were over twenty-four women's organizations dedicated to the Temperance movement. They demanded equal rights, especially in the public work (NWHM, 2021).

The Abolitionist Movement that was concerned with black women demanded their basic rights. During the 1820-1830s, these women established social and literature organizations to challenge slavery; such as the *Daughters of Africa Society in Philadelphia* on February 12, 1821, as well as other female societies such as the *Female Literary Association*, the *African-American Female Intelligence Society*, and the *Colored Ladies Literary Society*.

This was then followed by a speech stated by a woman born into slavery. *Ain't I a woman* is a speech said by Sojourner Truth in 1827. Truth was born into slavery and later escaped with her infant daughter to freedom. She then became an African-American activist. Her speech mainly addressed the limited rights of women. The speech has many versions. In 1851 version by Marius Robinson, Truth says:

I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? I have heard much about the sexes being equal. I can carry as much as any man, and can eat as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now (n.p.).

In her speech, Truth argues that if a woman who is under slavery can do the same duties which are of limit to men only, then any woman regarding her color can do the same. Truth was later placed under arrest for illegal voting, yet she was an inspiration to many activists' literature such as *Speech after Arrest for Illegal voting* (1972) by Susan B. Anthony, and the book *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (1981) by Bell Hooks.

The first wave begins to dwindle with the ratification of the 19th amendment on August 8, 1920, that gave the American women the right to vote (USS). Many of them consider the 19th amendment as the biggest achievement they reached since they begin fighting for their rights, while others continued to raise their voices and advocate for their rights within some local organizations, such as Alice Paul the founder of the Militant suffragist and National Woman's Party. She believed that the 19th amendment was not enough. She represented the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923, which is a constitutional amendment that guarantees a total legal gender equality for both women and men. However, many feminists stood against it, for it threatens their rights in women's protection labor and put it at risks. These ideological differences put the feminist first wave to an end, until the 1960s when the second wave emerges (NWHM, 2021).

1.1.2.2 Second Wave of Feminism

The first wave of Feminism was focusing on women's legal rights. However, the second one was more theoretical, aiming for gender equality regarding female experiences, such as; employment, politics, marriage and family, education, and sexuality as stated in Britannica (2020). The first to establish the basis of this wave was the American author, Betty Friedan, with her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Friedan became the primary catalyst to the feminist second movement. She built her work based on the ideas that exist in the book *Le Deuxième Sexe* (*The Second Sex*, 1949) by the French feminist writer and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, which established the foundation of the modern era of feminism. In her book, Beauvoir explores the various definitions that shape womanhood and argues for society's maxim which place women as secondary to men.

Following these ideas, Friedan gathered oral histories as well as interviews with white, educated, and middle-class women who were dissatisfied with their role as housewives. Her work identifies the pervasive systems that discriminate and oppress women and force rules and roles on them against their own will. This led to a change in the feminist voices, marching from "legal rights demand" to the antidiscrimination legislation. Women were facing worldwide discrimination and this led to the rise of groups and organizations with leaders such as Friedan, Shirley Chisholm, the civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, Native American activist LaDonna Harris, and the writer and journalist Gloria Steinem. Organizations such as The National Organization for Women (NOW) that was founded in 1966 focused on raising awareness on the injustice and oppression women are facing all over the world.

The effort of these organizations resulted in many political and social changes, taking the African-American activist Shirley Chisholm as an example, Chisholm is one of the founders of The National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC, 1971) that focuses on the role of women in

politics. She was the first African-American lady to ran on the United States's Democratic nominations. an example can be the signing into law of Title IX of the Federal Education Amendments which forbids the discrimination based on gender regarding education, in 1972.

Three major feminist schools came into existence; Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, and Cultural Feminism. Liberal feminism focused on the pragmatic changes that circled around the Institutional and Governmental level. it demanded legal access to various roles and opportunities that were previously dominated solely by men, and focusing on establishing structural power. Radical Feminism on the other hand aimed on changing the core of the institutions themselves, arguing that they are patriarchal, hierarchical, and authoritarian deep within. Lastly, Cultural Feminism -also known as Difference Feminism- had a totally different view. It worked on shedding light over the differences between the two genders, supporting women's special qualities such as nurturing and caring for others.

By the beginning of the 1990s, the second waves calls and movements started to slow down. Many organizations and groups succeeded in achieving their goals, while many other issues were taken by the generation of women which shaped the Third Feminist Wave.

1.1.2.3 Third Wave of Feminism

The third feminist wave rose during the mid-1990s century. It was led by scholars and activists from Generation X, who are people born between the 1960 and the 1970. The massive changes and opportunities that women gained from the Second Wave's achievements gave the new generations a chance to realize and understand the barriers presented to the world by Sexism, Racism, and Classism.

This generation chose to fight against the Patriarchy systems by presenting real life examples of women's survival stories and achievement. This generation supported the Radical Feminism, aiming at changing the Patriarchal systems and rebuild a whole other system. They expressed their strong rejection of becoming part of the “machine” of discrimination and oppression. The generation was also influenced by the intersectional Feminist Theory, as explained in The National Women's History Museum. “In 1989, lawyer and theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw developed “intersectionality” to show how someone's various identities (race, class, gender, etc.) overlap to influence how they are treated. This theory led to “intersectional feminism,” that formed as a response to the multiple ways women are oppressed” (2020)

1.1.2.4 The Fourth Wave of Feminism

Plenty of individuals believe that there exists now a fourth wave of feminism. It supposedly began around 2012. It is likely that the wave sparked after allegations of sexual abuse and harassment, mostly in social media, and especially that of celebrities. This led to the birth of some campaigns such as Everyday Sexism Project by Laura Bates and the #MeToo movement.

Some feminist issues came to light with the rise of the internet and the social media platforms, such as discrimination, harassment, body-shaming, and misogyny. These can be widely discussed with some new feminists and activists.

Fourth-wave feminism is more driven to the digital world, it has become more concerned of those with any sexual orientation, ethnicity, and trans individuals.

1.1.3 Principles of the Feminist Theory

Through history, Feminism established numerous numbers of goals and principles that could be taken with serious consideration. Five main principles that all feminists agree on are stated by

the writer and associate editor of “Simply Psychology” website (Olivia Guy-Evans, 2024). First starting with “Increasing Gender Equality”. Gender equality can be considered as the theory’s main core beginning from the first spark of the idea until it was shaped as a theory of its own. The second principle is “Ending Gender Oppression”. The term gender oppression far surpasses inequality concerning the depth of its meaning. Gender oppression is more specified to women’s situation. The term represents women who are simply not unequal to men, but rather abused and violated by men as well. Third, “Ending Structural Oppression”. Feminists aim to present the systems under the capitalist and patriarchal ruling, where men dominate, and can easily violate women’s rights without judgments. Moving then to “Expanding Human Choice”. Feminists believe that the freedom of speech and self-representation should be given to both men and women equally, in order to be able to express themselves and develop their interests, even if this goes against cultural norms. And finally, “Ending Sexual Violence”. Feminists recognize that many women suffer sexual violence all over the world, even during the modern era. Therefore, actions should be taken to address this.

All in all, one could say that the Feminist Theory serves as a key framework which can help analyze what women had to endure throughout history that pushed them to fight and speak up for their own rights thoroughly.

1.2 Feminist Intersectionality

Feminist intersectionality is a framework built upon the idea of intersectionality. For further more clarification, this section delves into the general view of the Intersectionality theory.

1.2.1 The Concept of Intersectionality

Giving the term intersectionality a universal accepted definition can be challenging, yet it is agreed that it was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her paper *Demarginalizing the Intersection*

of *Race and Sex* in 1989 as "Intersectionality is a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood within conventional ways of thinking." (Crenshaw 140), This conceptualization emerged from her examination of employment discrimination cases where courts dismissed Black women's claims because by evaluated race and gender separately rather than as intersecting systems.

She developed it further more in 1991 work *Mapping the Margins* and presented it as "Intersectionality highlights the failure of anti-discrimination law to account for Black women's experiences, where race and gender discrimination compound rather than simply add to each other." (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245), Crenshaw illustrates how legal systems often fail to address the compounded oppression faced by Black women due to their strategies that depends on a single perspective on the matter that treat race and gender as separate issues.

Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge in their book *Intersectionality* (2016) defined the term as "[the] power relations of race, class, [...] gender, sexuality, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age among others - [...] [which] are not discrete and mutually exclusive entities, but rather build on each other and work together" (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p. 10). They embrace the complexity and difficulty of giving a single fixed definition of the concept, and they stress that despite existing debates surrounding the meaning and the use of intersectionality, the term has been endured and can be defined.

1.2.2 Intersectionality as a Theory

Intersectionality or as it is known as intersectionality theory is a complex theory and has many interpretations from different scholars. Kimberlé Crenshaw is the first scholar who coined

the term, she defined the theory in her work *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* (1989) as a theory that challenges the single-axis frameworks that are analyzing for instance either race or gender as separated sources of oppression by investigating how Black women experience a combined discrimination of racism and sexism, and she criticized how the antidiscrimination laws fails to deal with black women's intersection experiences of both racism and sexism.

Patricia Hill Collins describes the intersectional theory in her book *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) as a lens used to understand matrix of domination 'includes race, class, gender, sexuality,' work tighter to shape both individual beliefs and systematic power relations and shows how power dynamics function. Leslie McCall discusses intersectionality in her 2005 work *The Complexity of Intersectionality* (Sings: Journal of Women in Culture and Society) and calls it the most important theoretical improvement that women's studies along with related fields.

In addition, that it refers to the relationships between various aspects and procedures of social relations and subject formations, meaning how society and individuals shapes each other's. In her book *Intersectionality: An actual History*, Ange-Marie Hancock refines the theory as both normative theoretical argument and an approach to conducting empirical research related to the intersection of categories, meaning that it challenge the single-axis analysis by studying how the system of oppressions interconnect and research use it in real-world inequality cases to investigate how multiple identities including race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability combine to create unique experiences or marginalize and oppression.

Feminist Intersectional theory is an extension of the intersectionality theory, it was emerged to address the limitations of the traditional feminist theories that are created for the white women and their struggles only, excluding the marginalized women and their different experience of multiple forms of oppression.

1.2.3 The Origins of Intersectional Feminism

1.2.3.1 Beyond White Feminism

According to Roza Cseby in her 2023 August article *Understanding Intersectional Feminism and Speaking* by (Soken-Huberty, n.d.), intersectional feminism is a sub-branch of feminism discourses that emphasized on the different forms of oppression which impact populations individually based on race, gender, class ethnicity and other characteristics. While the “mainstream feminism” main focus is on gender on its own, intersectional feminism highlights that oppression manifests as a coordinated system. The author adds that in the contemporary discourses, “white feminism” is considered as a critique to the feminist movements for their failure to acknowledge the different experiences and challenges that were faced by colored women and give recognition to intersectionality in general since the original feminist theory was a product of a predominantly white societal context, it often neglects the fact that both white and black women suffer in a different verity of severeness from misogyny, sexual violence, or patriarchal treatment.

Furthermore, white feminist can support gender equality, however, simultaneously, and unintentionally it can sustain racial inequality by emphasizing a narrative based on white dominance, unlike intersectional feminism transcends white feminism by the upholding of its fundamental principle that goes as “none of us are free until all of us are free” (Crenshaw, 1989; Li, 2020).

1.2.3.2 Kimberlé Crenshaw’s Concept of Intersectional Feminism

Roza Cseby elaborates in depth Crenshaw’s intersectional feminist conceptualization. She states that it addresses the antiracist theories and traditional feminist’s limitations and emphasizing the structural and multiple aspects of oppressions and connect them to experiences of individuals

in different marginalized communities. During 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw worked as a professor in California's University, Los Angeles Law school, and she wrote an article with the title *Demarginalizing the Intersectional of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Analysis of Anti-discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics* criticizing the single-axis framework that focuses on the experiences of the privileged individuals of each category, and it exists in the feminist theory, anti-discrimination legislations, and antiracist movements.

In order to strengthen her arguments, she critically analyzed the *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* case (U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, 1976). It is a case where five Black women filed a lawsuit against General Motors, revealing the discrimination of the company against them due to their identity as a Black people. However, the court rejected their attempts to combine their accusations since the case failed to meet the standard criteria as they are suing for two different forms of discrimination, informing the women to select one accusation solely, either racial discrimination or sexual discrimination. In her analysis of the court's decision, Crenshaw used the concept of 'Intersectionality' to show how the legal system failed to address the intersection of racial and sexual discrimination, which is affect Black women situation in the United States negatively (Crenshaw, 1989; Liu, 2020; Soken-Huberty, n. d).

Cseby adds more by informing that Crenshaw discussed two more cases in the remaining of her article, which are the jurisprudence, *Moore v. Hughes Helicopter, Inc.* and *Payne v. Travenol*, as stated in the United States Court of Appeals; Ninth Circuit 1983, and Fifth Circuit 1982. According to her, the embracement of intersectionality and the cases related to Black women's discrimination by the two Courts were a failure. Meanwhile, the stated law regarding sex and racial discrimination respectively defined by the experiences of both white women and black men. The court either evaluated the claims based on white women's limited precedents, or exclude black

women from representing the larger group due to their conflicts with black men. Crenshaw concludes her essay later on by stating that Single-Axis anti-discrimination framework does not lead to black women's exclusion from the feminist theory only, but also gets in the way of the progress of putting an end to racism and patriarchy systems.

In 1991, Crenshaw extended her famous article by publishing another work known as *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color* which includes elements of class and immigration status. She visited shelters of women who are victims of violence in colored communities in Los Angeles and witnessed the accumulating effects of gender, race, and class injustice against colored women there which had kept them stuck in the cycle of poverty and unemployment. This activity provided an additional point of view and allowed her to highlight the multiple forms of oppressions against unprivileged women of color in the United States (Liu, 2020).

Crenshaw introduces in the same article three aspects to her definition of intersectionality: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. Structural intersectionality underlines how the position of colored women in the intersection of race and gender shapes their experiences with sexual violence, domestic violence, and reform attempts different from white women experiences. Political intersectionality shapes the belief that both of the feminist and antiracist movements in the US have led to overlook Black women concerns, experiences, needs, and political goals, and they are forced to choose between two insufficient movements (feminist and antiracist) which they deny a key aspect of their subordination. Representational intersectionality analyzes how women of color are presented in the racist and sexist narratives. It highlights how these portrayers support the cycle of exploitation

and disregard of women of color struggles and also strengthen marginalization, negative stereotypes, and the objectification of these women (Carastathis, 2014).

The intersectionality theory achieved a global recognition in the 2010s and gained huge attention within the academic context and boarder contexts as well until it was added to the English dictionary in April 2017, and Crenshaw never announced that she is the first to recognize the idea of the different forms of oppressions intersect and her 1989 work mentioned the influence of developing Black women scholars and activists on her theory (Liu, 2020), and in her 1991 article, she wrote“ [...] I hope to suggest a methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable. While the primary intersections that I explore here are between race and gender, the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such class, sexual orientation, age, and color “(Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). She acknowledges that her theory is a “provisional” meaning that it’s a starting point to understand structural inequality and a flexible theory and be developed furthermore not a theory that get hold of all the concept of identity.

1.2.4 The Application of Intersectionality as a Paradigm in Feminist Theory and Research

In the feminist study, intersectionality has developed into a theoretical and methodological paradigm that extends beyond Kimberlé Crenshaw’s three initial aspects which are (structural, political, and representational intersectionality). This section explores how intersectionality works as an analytical framework and its main theoretical advantages, that are presented by Anna Carastathis in her article *The concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory* (May 2014).

According to article, the term ‘intersectionality’ is currently used in the literature to identify the theory or approach study “real life” phenomena related to the three types of intersectionality described by Crenshaw (structural, political, and representational intersectionality).

Intersectionality is a methodology and heuristic can possibly be applied on the study of the social cases on the levels of micro, meso, and macro (Collins, 2006, p. 5).

It is mentioned that in particular, intersectionality exposes ‘the workings of power, which is understood as both pervasive and oppressive [...] at all levels of social relations’ (11) as Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana defined, they contend that ‘intersectional analyses, as knowledge accomplished from and about oppressed groups reveal [...] disciplinary, hegemonic, structural, and interpersonal aspects] of power and expose how oppression is built and sustained through various dimensions of identity’, illustrating on Collins’ significant account of power in *Black Feminist Thought* (7; see Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*).

Simultaneity, complexity, irreducibility, and inclusivity are the four primary analytical advantages associated with intersectionality as a research methodology or theoretical framework. Intersectionality insists that multiple, co-constituting analytic categories are effective and equality important in creating institutionalized behaviors and lived experiences, contrary to unified and combined approaches to theorizing oppression that prioritize one fundamental category and neglect or only “add” others to it. Intersectionality addresses the “theoretical requirement [...] to comprehend various categories simultaneously” since ‘a reality individual is not a woman on Monday, a member of the working class on Tuesday, and a woman of African heritage on Wednesday’ (Russell, p. 47).

Intersectionality has two key claims that made it fulfill the theoretical requirement, which are the phenomenological claim that intersectionality reveals how forms of oppressions such as ‘sexism and classism’ are experience at the same time and not as separated problems. An ontological claim that intersectionality theorizes how systems of oppressions co-constitute together and are not experienced individually. Crenshaw’s structural intersectionality makes these

phenomenological experiences of intersection oppressions appear without limiting them to a single category of oppression, unlike the essentialists that are criticized by Angela Harris for dividing the experiences of Black women and separating them between one with a gender issue and other one with race issues (Harris, p. 589). In contrast to monistic approaches that use the single axis analysis, the other theoretical benefit of intersectionality is it captures the complexity of real-world experiences and the structures.

Leslie McCall presented three types of complexity that intersectionality can be managing them as a response to ‘managing complexity’ approaches (p. 1773). The first kind is the ‘intercategorical’ approach, it emphasizes on the relationships of various social groups among the categories of race, gender, and class, and how they are complex (McCall, p. 1786). The second kind is the ‘interacategorical’ approach, it focuses on the neglected social groups at the intersection of oppressions to highlight the complexity of their experiences (McCall, p. 1774). The third kind is the ‘anticategorical’ which aims to challenge the analytical categories, arguing that social life is too ‘irreducibly complex’ meaning it cannot be breaking down into separated into fixed categories (McCall, p.1773). McCall criticizes the monistic and single-axis approaches for their failure to address to the complex social structure and simplifying the complexity of intersection experiences.

1.3 Literature Reviews

1.3.1 Literature and Media in *The Stoning of Soraya M.*

A conference paper called *Literature and Media: A Study of Stoning of Soraya M.* published by Purnima Bali on July 2017 studied the relationship between literature and media with the focus on the Freidoune Sahebjam’s book ‘*The Stoning of Soraya M.*’, and Cryus Nowrasteh’s movie version, particularly in the context of women’s rights and social issues that are exposed through the narrative of Soraya M, a victim of stoning to death in Iran. The paper discussed how media is

serving as a powerful tool to for communication and raise awareness among the people, and it emphasizes that literature shapes their opinion and showing the current world's issues. The paper explored how the transformation of Soraya' story from a written story by the journalist Freidoune Sahebjam to a movie directed by Cyrus Nowrasteh made the impact of the narrative more powerful and how it raises awareness on the global level about the injustices that is faced by women everywhere. Bali wrote in her paper how important the media is, and it can support women all over the world and addressing the cultural and socials actions that aim to violate women and their rights to live.

1.3.2 Gender Ideology and Power Relation in *The Stoning of Soraya M.*

Research under the title *Gender ideology and power relations in Sahebjam's Stoning of Soraya M: A feminist critical discourse analysis* (2023), written by Miliana Siboro and published in Sumatera Utara University, Indonesia. The work is a qualitative study aiming to provide a feminist critical analysis regarding the Iranian power relations and ideological genders in Sahebjam's novel *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (1999). Siboro adopts Ungaretti & Etchezahar (2013) definition of "Gender Ideology" as well as Kroska (2007).

In her research, Siboro explains that the traditional gender ideology aims to portray men as the dominant ones who tend to distribute power unequally between genders, making themselves the upper hand over women, as stated by Ryustiyani et al (2019). Due to this, women found themselves in a negative position. Therefore, they ought to represent the issue through literature.

Siboro chose to analyze *the Stoning of Soraya M.* (1999) by Freidoune Sahebjam in order to give a clear representation to women's similar circumstances as a result of structural gender ideology in the Iranian society to that of Soraya. As such, the researcher divided the structural

gender ideology in the novel into four categories; Starting with Male hegemony and patriarchal culture. The researcher states that women in Iran had significant freedom such as the right to vote, and employment before the revolution. However, the establishment of the new Iranian governmental system gave men more privileges over women such as the decision of woman's marriage with no regard of her own opinion, or to make a decision concerning her based on the vote of men as mentioned in the novel (p. 58 p. 106).

The second category she mentioned is the Constitution. Siboro states that the Iranian constitution is the reason women are classified as mere mothers with the responsibilities of giving birth and not human individuals with rights, whether social or politically or any other area of life. They also linked the leadership and dominance of God, claiming that the closest to God are the Mullah and therefore the law should be in their hands. As a result, Sobiri states that various interpretations to civilians' crimes, especially that of women, and the way to be punished were under the name of religion. Stoning is the main example presented in the novel. The Civil Code was the third point mentioned in the research. It stated the importance of law between women and men. The one responsible for judgments such as divorce or marriage is a religious judge who grants men the right to marry multiple women permanently or temporarily. Siboro stated that power to only men allowing physical violence against women and "mature girls" as stated in the article 1210 of the civil code which consider the girl mature if she is "nine Lunar years".

Lastly, the Penal Code. In a country where law and religion are totally intertwined, dictating the judgments regarding crimes is strongly linked to the Islamic Religion. Sins such as adultery are considered crimes as stated in the article 63-102 and the punishment varies from lashing, to execution and stoning depending on the severity of the crime. Soraya's crime severity was phrased as "smile at each other" as stated by the researcher. As for Soraya, she did not have the power or

evidence to defend herself against the accusation and the witnesses who claimed to see it happen. She also claims that the Penal Code serves as the maintenance of the uneven power distribution between men and women.

Siboro concluded her research stating that gender ideology and power themes that are represented in the novel serve as a representation to the reality of the area the story took place in. her findings conclude that the governmental laws including the Criminal Code, Civil Codem and the Constitution contradict one another complicating women's legal environment as well as the misuse of religion that abuse women's civil rights, as well as the country's patriarchal culture that serves in sustaining gender ideology within the Iranian Society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one might argue that Feminism and Intersectional Feminism serve in favor of the research, the two frameworks are deeply connected and serve the main core and the key concepts the novel circles about. Regarding the literature reviews section, the general idea serves to portray the abuse and discrimination of women under the misuse of religion and men's control. However, one might notice a lack of research regarding the written story, because most of the literature studies and research circle the movie adaptation which presents the novel in a more Western way. The studies also present the story as a fact that can be applied to the whole Middle East as well as the Islamic religion surrounding it. These previous gaps are identified and further discussed in the next chapter. All in all, the first chapter provides a basic foundation which helps in reaching the research objectives.

CHAPTER TWO

The Analysis of Women Oppression and Injustice in

The Stoning of Soraya M. (1990)

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The Stoning of Soraya M. (1990)

Introduction	30
2.1 The Biography of Friedoune Sahebjam (1933-2008)	31
2.2 Plot of <i>The Stoning of Soraya M. (1990)</i>	33
2.3 Main Characters	38
2.3.1 Soraya Manutchehri	38
2.3.2 Ghorban Ali	41
2.3.3 The Mullah, Hassan Ladjevardi	42
2.3.4 Zahra Khanum	44
2.4 Setting of the Story	45
2.5 Analyzing Oppression and Injustice in <i>The Stoning of Soraya M. (1990)</i>	46
2.5.1 Oppression and Imbalance Between Genders	47
2.5.1.1 Soraya and Ghorban Ali	48
2.5.1.2 Soraya and her Sons	49
2.5.2 Social Oppression and Injustice	50
2.5.2.1 Soraya and the Village	51
2.5.2.2 Soraya and Hashem	52
2.5.3 The Misuse of Religion	53
2.5.3.1 The Mullah	54
2.5.4 Social Reaction from the Death Penalty	55
2.5.4.1 Before the Penalty	55
2.5.4.2 During the Penalty	56
2.5.4.3 After the Penalty	57
Conclusion	58

Introduction

Feminism in general took place in the literature world since the late nineteenth century. Women fought against all violations pressed over them by men's power. This caused a major shift; whether socially, culturally, or even legally, and ideally, giving women multiple. However, these massive changes did not reach all women all over the world. Many countries still to this current day treat women the way the European world treated them around a whole century before.

Throughout the years, writers such as Virginia Wolf, Bell Hooks, and Simon de Beauvoir focused on the situation of both white and black women around Europe and America. However, areas such as Asia, and the Middle East were neglected from the portrayal. During the Early ages of feminism; be it general Feminism, or Intersectional Feminism specifically, Women focused primarily on the oppression and misuse of men due to the cultural factors that served society against women; such as education, religion, work, gender abilities, and so on. Therefore, the female European society focused on gaining their rights and establishing them as rules. But due to the vast development of movement, the rights that were fought for in the past became through the passing of time basic rights. This gave women the time to dart their gaze toward a new objective; which is to support and speak up for the minority that is wingless and voiceless all over the world, and not just in Europe.

The Feminist spread all over the world, creating a new feminist society that did not include women only, but also men who fought abusive and sexist men. Friedoune Sahebjam can also be considered a feminist who spoke up on behalf of millions of Middle Eastern women, especially Iranian ones, who died because of the Shia's masculine society that serves the male's needs and goals. In his Novel *Stoning of Soraya M.*, Friedoune Sahebjam wrote the story of a victim who

experienced a brutal injustice in recent times, where most women already have all the same rights as men in work, school and even property ownership.

In this chapter, some corners of the story which serve as a clear representation of gender, cultural, and societal oppression against women in an Iranian and Middle Eastern environment are further discussed.

2.1 The Biography of Friedoune Sahebjam (1933-2008)

Freidoune Sahebjam was a French-Iranian journalist, writer, and a novelist. He came to this world on the fourth of February, 1933. He was born in France and grew up partly there and partly in Switzerland. His father worked as a part of the Iranian delegation to the League of Nations in there. Freidoune Sahebjam lived his life in Europe until he reached twenty years old, where he visited his native land for the first time, and he remained there for four years. He completed his military services and taught French at the Franco-Iranian institute in Tehran, as well as English at the Iranian American society. He was a diplomat from 1958 to 1966, and became a journalist later, and a writer for both Iranian and French magazines and newspapers (Sahebjam, 1990).

Sahebjam stated that he and his family knew the Shah as well as the imperial household. Yet he never hesitated in criticizing the Shah in a number of his articles during the 1970s, especially regarding human rights. This earned him the enmity of the SAVAK (Sahebjam, 1990).

Few months before Khomeini came to power, exactly on September 18th, 1978, Sahebjam wrote an article for the French newspaper *Le Monde* entitled as *Neither Muhammed nor Marx (Ni Mahomet Ni Marx)*. In his article, Sahebjam warned the Iranian citizens against potential dangers from two sides; Russia's desire of spreading communism in Iran to provide access to the Southern seas, particularly the Persian Gulf, and the Shiite intentions on changing Iran's system and

destabilizing the Western monarchy of the Shah into a religious and secretive regime. This led to his kidnapping by Iranian students in the Italian Pavilion in the Cite Universities as he stated. Sahebjam described them as shaggy-haired Iranian students, he said:

I was tied to a chair in the middle of the room, facing a table on which microphones and recording devices had been set up. I was the first Paris-based victim of an “Islamic trial” similar to those that had been taking place by the hundreds in Iran itself since the return of Khomeini in February of that year. (Sahebjam, 1990, p. ix)

He stated that the trials in Iran conclude in a few hours with the defendant taken to a courtyard of a prison or military base where they get executed by a firing squad. Eight hundred ministers, members of parliament, people close to the former court, military personnel, intellectuals, and even scientists were executed within a hundred days of the Khomeini’s return. However, as a mere journalist, Sahebjam’s name was not on the list.

Sahebjam wrote plenty of books, such as *No More Tears to Cry* (1987), *Dead Among the Living* (*Morte Parmi Les Vivants*) (2006), *Come Back Muhammed They Have Gone Mad* (*Reviens Mahomet, Ils Sont Devenus Fous*) (2007), and his most famous novel *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (*La Femme Lapidée*) (1990) which was later adapted into a movie in 2008.

Sahebjam explains the story behind this novel and starts it with “This book relates, in full detail, a case of death by stoning — only one of more than a thousand such cases that have occurred in Iran over the past fifteen years.” (vii) He explains that the encounter of the storyteller Zahra was in the fall of 1986. He was sent by the order of the French weekly *Paris Match* in order to investigate some listening stations and satellite dishes established in Iran’s southern frontier near Pakistan and Afghanistan bordered. After completing his assignment, he arrived through a village

that was near the borders of Pakistan. That is where he heard the story of the book that voiced a person who left the world before Sahebjam even arrives there.

2.2 Plot of Stoning of *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (1990)

The Stoning of Soraya M. is a novel written by Freidoune Sahebjam, in 1990. The novel roams around factual events that occurred in an isolated village near the borders between Iran and Pakistan. A thirty-five-year-old Iranian woman called Soraya was brutally stoned to death after being accused of adultery by her husband. The novel is divided through a brief introduction titled with “Preface” and eight chapters that explain each of the main characters backgrounds and explain the past details which led to the present day of the novel’s events.

Sahebjam starts the novel with a brief introduction about himself, then he narrates the events that led to his encounter with the woman who told him Soraya. At the beginning the narrator explains his arrival to this village that is located near Pakistan’s frontier, He was ahead of his schedule after finishing his job as a reporter regarding some spy establishments near Pakistan and Afghanistan’s frontier, therefore he decided to kill time, and that is when an old lady called him to her garden, Zahra Khanum begin to tell the story of her niece Soraya. Zahra Khanum stated that if he was present in this village only two weeks before this day, he would have witnessed a brutal accident. What was shocking to the narrator is that Zahra claimed that Soraya was completely innocent. Zahra began to tremble, and before she could go with the full details of the story, Sahebjam’s guides arrived. However, before he leaves, he promised her to be back on March 23, 1987.

Sahebjam came on the given date and Zahra started filling him with the details of the story. Sahebjam then began describing the village that he chose to name Kupayeh instead of giving its

real name. He stated that Kupayeh was a tiny town with mere 250 peoples living there in total. It is a village surrounded by mountains, meadows, as well as a clear mountain stream, and it is difficult to reach due to its location. Zahra was the story's main resource; she answered the author's questions and gave him a clear view about the characters that played role in the story, whether the main characters or the side ones. In the story, Soraya is the protagonist of the story and the victim of the incident, Ghorban-Ali is her forty-two-years-old husband and the one who accused her of adultery, and there are the Mullah, Hassan Ladjevardi, and Zahra herself, as well as some other minor characters such as her neighbors, kids, father and mother, and the mayor of the village or as they call him the Kadkhoda, Machdi Ebrahim.

Freidoune Sahebjam divided the novels into chapters, the first four chapters focused mainly in each of the main characters background. Starting with Soraya on the first chapter. Soraya is the main character of the story and the reason this whole book was written, Sahebjam narrates Soraya's story in the first chapter and explains her personality, from his description, it is understood that Soraya is a quiet, and calm lady. She is married to Ghorban-Ali and a mother to over four kids. The first chapter dictates Soraya's childhood, her marriage, and her life after marriage. It shows the oppression and violence she used to face from both her husband when he is at home and even her sons who did not hesitate on raising their hands on their mother. She was a dedicated wife and a mother who took care of her house and kids, and also a quiet woman who found safety and comfort in the presence of her aunt Zahra Khanum.

The second chapter begin with Ghorban-Ali as the star of it. The chapter delves into Soraya's husband life, his background, his personality, his goals, and intentions in life and even the way he views others. Ghorban-Ali then sets a goal to leave the village for he was fascinated by the city and its life and chances. He tried all he could to remain in there however his attempts failed leaving

with boiling anger and frustration that he bored in his wife and children, feeling suffocated and locked in this village. Ghorban-Ali, the man in his forties then, met a girl around fifteen years old and decided to marry her. However, he could not afford marriage twice for he has to end up spending on two families which is over his financial abilities. He tried to push Soraya to get a divorce, yet it did not work. As a result, he chose to get rid of her once and for all with the help of the Mullah, Hassan Ladjevardi.

The third chapter presents the third main character in the story, the Mullah Hassan Ladjevardi. He is a man who passed his fifties. He is a person who used to live in big cities suddenly ending up in a village far away from prying eyes where he can take control over everyone in the name of Religion and Islam. Before he ends up in Kupayeh, he was a prisoner in Tehran, yet he was chosen to work for the government and his life changed. The author explains the Mullah's personality. He is a two-faced person who uses anything and everything to his advantage and never hesitating to eliminate whoever gets in his way or displeases him. However, he kept making mistakes that caused him to flee each time until he ended up in Kupayeh where it played a major role in Soraya's story.

As for the fourth chapter, it was divided between three points, Zahra Khanum the mayor and the beginning of the accusations. The chapter begin with describing Zahra's personality. She is the elderly of the village that was always capable of taking control in the decisions made all over the town. Was seen her past and her strong character since birth. She was a woman who proved her worth and always remained in strong and powerful even in the saddest moments. Another character was presented briefly in the story, which is the mayor, Ebrahim Machdi. He is Kadkhoda of the village who inherited his position after the death of his father, the former mayor. Machdi proved to be unqualified for the position due to his weak personality which could easily end guided,

controlled, or tricked by others, yet thanks to the help of Zahra who insisted he takes the position for his hard work. He was assigned as the mayor.

The third and the last point in the chapter was the setting steps to the main core of the story. The writer mentioned that a woman named Firouzeh who happened to be Soraya's friend died, leaving her husband and children behind her. With the agreement of Zahra, the mayor and the rest of the village, Soraya was requested to help the widower who is unable to deal with his family on his own. However, little did Soraya know that her husband and the Mullah were plotting something against her. By pressuring the widower who is called Hashem into accusing of being unfaithfulness to her husband and presenting himself as a witness to the accusations. Soraya was accused of adultery and did not have any solid proof to show her innocence; she found herself faced with the death penalty with the agreement of the village except her aunt Zahra.

The fifth chapter starts with the villagers waiting outside for the tribunal's verdict concerning Soraya's case, the wooden door opened and the three figures of the village appeared, the mayor, Machdi Ebrahim; the mullah, Sheik Hassan; and Soraya's father, Morteza. With his shaky voice, Mortaza revealed his own daughter's guilt and saying "Mahkum." The crowd reacted wildly, feeling the air with applauses and cheers. A fourth figure appeared out of the door it is Ghorban-Ali, Soraya's husband, he shouted and said "Sang Sar" meaning let her be stoned, the atmosphere shifted to a carnival as the men and the children celebrated with Ghorban-Ali and lifting him high, the crowd now is eager for blood, chanting "Revenge by blood." Soraya's sons and the village leader joined them.

The mayor Ebrahim then announced that the rituals of stoning would follow the Islamic laws, the crowd is so excited to hide their desire for blood as one man openly says he could kill Soraya with a one stone as a rabbit. The mayor presents a speech about how the stoning would regain the

honor of the village, including Mortaza's family honor and the rest of the villagers. During this speech a young kid throws a stone on Mortaza which he hits on the chest, Ebrahim uses this chance to manipulate the crowd emotions even more by mentioning how Mortaza has been hurt twice, first by Soraya's betrayal and now this violence. The speech ends with the official verdict condemning Soraya to be stoned to death before sunset. The villagers go to gather stones and tools to join in the execution as if it was a public event that even Soraya's father and her two sons take part.

The sixth chapter leads to the last moment before the execution, in heartbreaking moments with Zahra, she comforts Soraya and promising her that she would take care of her daughters, at that time, Soraya finds peace and comfort in a dream of her late mother, then she says that she would face her execution with dignity, following by their heartfelt farewell. The path to the village square is chaotic, where Zahra steps in to protect Soraya from the villagers who spit and curse and even attack. As Soraya standing in the square facing the villagers with a white dress as symbol of her innocence, her father Mortaza shouts at her demanding to take off her mother's necklace, breaking their last bond. The men are digging the hole for execution where a travelling circus troupe arrives with their cheerful atmosphere and colorful costumes, creating a surreal contrast to what is happening at the moment, the circus members stand far, unaware of what is happening. Soraya stands calm when her father avoids her gaze, her husband stands proud in the front line, and her kids are preparing to take a part in her death. Zahra whispers in her ear telling her "God knows your innocence" as a comfort.

The seventh chapter describes Soraya's stoning in graphic details, where they turn a religious act as they claim into a brutal show of violence and hatred. Mortaza goes first, trembling, and he misses his throw, her husband Ali throws the stones on her with cruel satisfaction, while Sheikh Hassan blessing the act with verses from the Quran, her two oldest sons throw stones on her without

hesitation, soon after, the whole villagers join in the bloody act. The circus performers who had been cheerful are now watching in shock, with their bright costumes contrasting the white dress stained with Soraya's blood. She stays calm throughout the attack, silently enduring the violence until her body crumbles into the pit, the villagers then leave normally, some avoid the gazes and others laugh, only Zahra stays behind grieving in silence and despair, the performers leave quickly while clenching a bloodstained stone as a cursed keepsake, and Ghorban-Ali celebrating with the villagers while the flies already gather around Soraya's body.

The eightieth chapter is the aftermath of the stoning, the village is haunted with guilt and strange events, Zahra secretly recording the details while noticing supernatural signs as livestock dying unexpectedly, well water turns foul, and there are rumors that Soraya's ghost appears. Soraya is shamefully buried outside the village in a hidden grave in the woods, and Zahra goes to the grave and return the necklace to her. In the end, the journalist escapes under the rain after listening to Zahra narrating everything that happened.

2.3 Main Characters

2.3.1 Soraya Manutchehri

Soraya was born in 1951, exactly on the day of the Shah's marriage, and as such she was named after his wife, princess Soraya. She and her two brothers all had the advantage of getting educated at a certain level, and this helped her read articles and the village notes to her mother. She was five years old when she first met Ghorban-Ali, he was twelve years old at the time, and he made a kite that he played with among the kids of the village, however the girl was a shy kid and during her turn she stumbled against a rock and fell down leading the kite to fly away.

Ghorban-Ali was not pleased and forbid the group of the kids to play with her until she makes a new one. Five years later, Soraya went to finish her studies; she went to the city and became an apprentice for the Arbab who was the landowner with power and wealth. She remained there for three years, receiving all tasks of labor as well as the physical and emotional humiliation.

The little girl did not like the Arbab, this fat, unkempt, and arrogant man who frequently beat her. But what could you do when you were dealing with a man as powerful as he was [...] She bowed her head, asked his forgiveness, and kissed the master's hand. For three years, she had to endure all the humiliations and vexations of an angry man (p. 05)

She was not allowed to see her parents for three years, only her siblings who visit her occasionally. She had to endure the violence from both the Arbab and his sons "The two sons of the landowner poked fun at Soraya," (p. 06).

When Soraya left the Arbab's house, she was thirteen and her father had decided that she should be given to marriage, she married Ghorban-Ali. He too was not a respectful person, constantly beating her and finding the slightest excuse, he violated her, whether physically or emotionally. He even gave permission to his older son to beat her, his own mother. However, Soraya was a quiet woman

Like Zahra, Soraya had a basic education, and she tried to pass it on to her children.

Like Zahra, she was an impeccable housekeeper, and brought her children up to be neat and clean. Like Zahra, she did not linger in the village streets and spoke to no one unless spoken to (p. 66).

Her silent personality as well as her oppressive society gave her no choice but to remain quiet and accept the humiliation for the sake of her children. Little by little she was abandoned completely by her husband, taking care of her family all alone. Soraya slowly became as discreet as a shadow, by the time she was twenty-eight, she looked way older than she was. “I want to die,” she said to her mother one evening. “I want to die, Mama. I can’t bear it any longer. He beats me, he insults me, he beats the children.” (p. 11).

After Ghorban-Ali began his long departures to the city, the villagers did not like this. Soraya was faced with hostility and isolation for being a bad wife whenever her husband is gone for many days. She was viewed as a bad woman for not being able to keep her husband around to take care of his family, treated with hatred from the village, and the violence of her husband whenever he comes back.

Soraya felt ashamed whenever she crossed the village square. People no longer greeted her when she walked by [...] They blamed her for not having known how to keep her husband the way the other women in Kupayeh had, for lowering her head instead of holding it high, for having been incapable of settling her problems without always having to call on her parents, for having a thieving and lying son who was forever stirring up trouble in the village. In short, ‘for being a bad wife and an unworthy mother (p. 11).

Then, Ghorban-Ali decided to marry. Soraya had no opinion in the matter, but she could not accept divorce. She accepted her husband’s provocative attitudes and hateful word, faced with silence, having no choice but to swallow her pride and pain for the sake of the children.

Even on the day she was getting stoned she faced with quietness. The author stated that Zahra chose not to say anything about Soraya's reaction to the death penalty, she only stated that she was at peace with herself. "The only thing she said was that the young woman had seemed at peace with herself, that Soraya had not tried to justify or exonerate herself." (p. 78)

2.3.2 Ghorban Ali

Ghorban-Ali is Soraya's husband. A dictator who never allows his wife to speak back, or give her opinion, or even look eyes with him without receiving some punches. Ghorban was always obsessed with the city life. He began visiting the City Karman once a month, then once a week until his visits to the city became regular. He befriended the bus driver Nasrollah who frequently told him about the city life. Soon enough Ghorban-Ali became displeased with his life, his wife, his village, his children, and even the way he speaks and behaves. He started visiting the city more often, trying to find a way to get rich, and become part of the higher societies in the city. Yet due to his vague language and behavior that mirrored his poor origins, he was seen as a dirt over their shoes. This did not satisfy him, thanks to the help of someone he couldn't even remember his name at first -it was later clarified that his name was Mansour- he was able to get his hand over a position in the prison.

Throughout the story, it can be noticed how selfish and greedy Ghorban-Ali is. He could not remember Mansour's name, although he recognized his face, declaring that he was an old drinking companion, he also hesitated to go greet him, yet did not waste any time in sticking beside him and sleeping over at his place when he realized that Mansour could be helpful in making him rich. Soraya's husband is obsessed with control and power, when he received a position as a guard in a local prison, he started referring to the place as "his prison" as stated in chapter two, page 23.

It is also presented in the story how Ghorban is corrupted to the core, never hesitating on throwing people under the bus if it means he would benefit. Two examples were presented in the story regarding this matter. The first was the Arbab, Ghorban-Ali made sure the Arbab gets executed to receive some of his fortune and he ended up taking the house he was staying in the city and his parents received the “house in the village, a plot of land, free access to the water of the village stream, ten thousand in cash, and the Arbab’s automobile.” (p. 26). The second was his wife, Soraya. Because Ghorban-Ali could afford to get married again, and Soraya refused to divorce knowing that he would abandon his children completely, Ghorban-Ali decided to get rid of her completely using the help of the Mullah of the village. He accused Soraya without hesitation.

2.3.3 The Mullah, Hassan Ladjevardi

The Mullah Hassan Ladjevardi, also known as a Sheikh Hassan, is a tall-bearded man who passed his fifties, he is well-educated and a very smart man, he got arrested few months before the Iranian revolution, the narrator stated that he was accused of “Swindling, fraud, forgery, utilization of forged papers, embezzlement, fraudulent bankruptcy, issuing checks without funds to cover same, resisting arrest, indecent exposure” (p. 34) all on his own. This shows how smart and mastered in the art of scheming and obsequiousness Ladjevardi is. He was later received a job offer to work for the new republic. In just two years, he went from a prisoner to a

scribe, interpreter, police informer, undercover agent for the new police, assistant to the hangman, spokesman for the public prosecutor of the revolution, and last but not least, representative of the ayatollah himself in a village in the northern part of the country (p. 35)

The narrator explained how Hassan did his best to erase his past. Holding his Quran in his hand and speaking in more complex language to appear more educated. Because of his new position and status, he sought to marry someone rich. He married a young, wealthy widow who owned a large house facing the sea and vast plantations of tea and rice. Then he ended up fleeing away after two years of settling there, for he got caught with all the schemes him and the ayatollah he was working with did. He stole his wife's jewelries and fled south. He settled in Yazd, and worked as a handyman in a mosque and remarried to another wealthy widow. Only this time he chose to remain as a citizen and let his wife work for him and provide him with his needs. However, it did not last long when he got recognized by a former prisoner who used to share the cell with him. Once again, this greedy man took all his wife's expensive belongings and escaped. The author describes Hassan saying that:

his gray hair, his elegant beard, his imposing figure — for he was tall — made him look like the serious-minded person he aspired to be. But behind his tinted glasses, Hassan watched and waited, always on the lookout, like a bird of prey. [...] He was also unquestionably an expert in the fine art of flattery (p. 39-40)

This helped him settle quickly wherever he goes and easily gains the locals trust and admiration. He darted farther south with no clear destination until he landed on Karman, with all the money he already had from his theft and his experience in flattery and scheming he quickly gained the trust of the people there and got a high position among them. His work went smoothly until one day he made a mistake by selling a land that already belongs to the family of the mayor's secretary.

He ended up in court, but how smart he is, he already had the whole courtroom into his favor by his precise tricky answers. "Hassan suspected that this was where the conversation was leading. He had been expecting such questions, and his answers had been prepared for two weeks." (p. 43)

he was able to convince the Judge to let him go to the bank to bring the rest of his money to the court. The condition was that he gets escorted by two men, which he accepted with ease. The author later clarifies that Hassan had no trouble escaping from the guards, he says: “After leaving the bank, Hassan had no trouble losing himself in the crowd.” (p. 45).

It was easy for him to reach Kupayeh. Due to his expensive looks, his beard and the Quran in his hand, he was mistaken to be a “holy one” as the bus driver called him. When he reached the small isolated village, he was seen as a prophet-like, and he did not hesitate to refer to himself as such. He quickly took control even over the mayor Ebrahim Machdi. His word was the one above all else, and this was to his advantage when he and Ghorban-Ali planned Soraya accusations and final verdict. He did not hesitate to hurt Soraya and eliminate her for rejecting to get a divorce and marry him instead, and to gain Ghorban-Ali to his side, for Ali is a guard in Kaman and may end up finding his past and using it against him, and lastly to hurt Zahra Khanum for standing in his way. Soraya’s death was a key to all his goals.

2.3.4 Zahra Khanum

From the beginning of the story, one understands that Zahra is Soraya’s aunt, and the main source of the information stated in the novel, “Zahra provided me with all the answers I needed to reconstruct the story fairly and accurately” (p. xiii). In the fourth chapter, it is mentioned that Zahra is the elder of the village. She represents the strong, independent woman who is never hesitant to fight the village traditions and principles.

“Everyone feared Zahra, but all were nonetheless anxious for her Respect.” (p. 62) Zahra proved her presence and control in the village since her childhood, which gave the villagers no choice but to fear her yet earn her respect at the same time. She sought knowledge and was always

eager to learn more and gain knowledge. When she was thirteen, it was decided that she should be married to someone called Morteza, the story stated that she ran to the fields, and remained there until sunset as a declaration of her strong rejection to this choice. She also was not afraid of the villagers' judgements when she clearly said that she refuses to marry someone who could neither read or write. "She ultimately settled for Nematollah, [...] In fact, with the help of Zahra, he became the kadkhoda's right arm, looking after all the paperwork and archives of the village." (p. 64) this presents Zahra's strong personality in the story as stated in the novel.

One could also understand that Zahra is an intelligent woman who knew how to use what is surrounding her to her benefits. By helping her husband work with the Kadkhoda she was able to get access to the village's archives and paperwork through her husband. However, with all that, she still was not able to protect her niece. Sahebjam in one of his quotes said:

Zahra had never accepted the fact of male domination in the village. She never hesitated to speak her mind, and the men of the village were in awe of her and dreaded her tongue lashings. But since the revolution, men had become all-powerful, and Zahra had to admit defeat and let the new order have its way (p. 79).

2.4 Setting of the Story

The story is set in a rural village called Kupayeh which is 35 miles (ca. 56 km) away from the city Kerman in southwestern Iran, and it takes place after the Iranian revolution also known as the Islamic Revolution where the Shi'a Islamism took over the secular Shah monarchy. In the pre-revolution period (Pahlavi Era, 1925-1979) and particularly under Mohammed Reza Shah, the government adapted the Western laws and secular reforms that expand the women's rights in Iran and made their living experiences significantly good.

The government imposed the 'Family Protection Laws' where they banned child marriages and raised the minimum age to 18, men are required to notify the future second wife if they're already married, all marriage contracts, including temporary marriages should be in legal procedure under the ministry of justice, and women granted the right to divorce their husband as well as gaining full custody of the child in some condition. Women were not forced to wear a veil or hijab and have full access to higher education, political activities, and social practices. The punishment laws did not mention the practice of stoning and the adultery was sentenced with imprisonment, at that time, women were seen and treated as equal as men.

After the Islamic Shi'a revolution and under the government of Ayatollah Khomeini, all these laws and rights were suspended and abolished; the hijab is mandatory, the judiciary denies all women petitions of divorce or child custody, and the minimum age for girls concerning marriage becomes 9 or the age of puberty. Men have the permission to divorce the wives at will, secure the child custody automatically, reintroducing the temporary marriages (sigheh), by the time women are banned from most of the study and the working fields and men gains full authority of women's finances regarding their class. The Islamic penalties of various crimes are revived, and one of is the law that state the punishment of adultery is stoning for both genders, but a huge number of women were stoned to death in the base of this law.

2.5 Analyzing Oppression and Injustice in *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (1990)

It is worth mentioning how gender inequality, social oppression, and female injustice are quite presented and strongly mentioned in the story. Feminism aims to shed light and fight all sorts of violence and abuse against females from all over the world, whether it is sexual violence, female choice in society, or gender oppression and inequality. Intersectional Feminism on the other hand focuses on the social class and poverty, as well as the weaponization of religion which serves the

research in presenting the legal oppression that took place throughout the events and cornered Soraya, pushing her towards an inescapable death. All of this is presented in the novel in multiple aspects, which Friedoune Sahebjam aimed at focusing on in *The Stoning of Soraya M.* Soraya was a simple example to all women who are living all over the countries which are ruled by a religious law, taking the Middle Eastern countries that use the Shiite system as a part of ruling system -and especially Iran- as an example. *The Stoning of Soraya M.* showcases the injustice and oppression Soraya faced from many corners of the story; these are presented in this section.

2.5.1 Oppression and Imbalance Between Genders

Women and men were views differently in the novel, women were viewed as inferior stupid living beings that are meant to give birth to children and serve men. In the fourth chapter, and after Zahra noticed that the Mullah and Ghorban-Ali were plotting something against Soraya, she confronted the Kadkhoda, Ebrahim Machdi. “This is men’s business, not women’s. And besides, you wouldn’t understand if I told you.” (p. 56) is what the Kadkhoda said to Zahra. Another example mentioned in the first pages of the first chapter, Zahra told the author about lady Shokat Khanum who happened to be Soraya’s mother. After her sickness, her husband Morteza Ramadani married another woman, it was later clarified that the concubine was tasked all the lowly chores and tasks of the house “which she carried out for many years without the slightest complaint.” (p. 02). This shows part of men’s perspective regarding women and their existence and level of intelligence.

Soraya is a victim to the gender inequality and oppression as well. She received a poor education in her childhood and was mistreated, and violated in all sorts of ways by the Arbab for three years since she was ten years old. From her childhood until the day of her death, she received

nothing by abuse. The first on the list to abuse her the most was her Husband Ghorban Ali, and her sons, especially her older son Hussein-Ali.

2.5.1.1 Soraya and Ghorban Ali

When Soraya was born, her father, Morteza Ramazani, stated clearly that his daughter would be given to the “best” young man in the village. However, when she was thirteen years old, the father decided on her behalf that she should be given to Ghorban Ali in exchange for several heads of cattle, a plot of land and several rugs as a Mahr. Mahr should be given to the wife, as stated in Quran An-nisa: verse four (The Women, Chapter four) it says “And give the women (on marriage) their dower as a free gift; but if they, of their own good pleasure, remit any part of it to you, take it and enjoy it with right good cheer” the verse clearly state that the dower or as known as Mahr should be given to the woman on marriage, and she chooses what to do with it. However, in this case, it was given to Soraya’s father instead. This explains that women were given like a commodity rather than a wife and a partner for life.

After Soraya’s marriage, she was mistreated by her husband, abused, and beaten up by Ghorban Ali, her family did not interrupt “the village tradition prohibited parents from involving themselves in the affairs of their son-in-law’s family. To make matters worse, men’s authority had been absolute.” (p. 11) it was also clearly stated in the novel how women were considered their husband’s property; the wife would be stripped of all her rights, and has no choice but to remain silent.

Ghorban Ali knew how to take advantage of that. He abused his wife and poured all his anger in her. “Once, Soraya showed up at her mother’s house, her face badly bloodied, carrying her youngest child in her arms.” (p. 10) the situation worsened when Ali was prevented from accessing

the city. He started looking for excuses to punch Soraya as well as the kids, Ali tried all the ways to humiliate his wife; He spoke about his affairs to his friends in the village to embarrass her, he tried making her jealous by talking about all the girls he gets in his expensive cars, and he never hesitated to lie in order to provoke the wife he no longer wanted. The silent, quiet woman, who looked many ages older than she actually is. “He would have gone to any lengths to provoke his wife. He used every wile at his command, every device he could think of, to try to induce her to do or say something he could use against her.” (p. 29) yet all could Soraya do was remain silent, for if she said anything she would end up severely beaten up.

When Ali was no longer able to hold anything against her, he chose to accuse her of infidelity. He was easily able to achieve his goal, for the law dictates that in both cases of infidelity, the woman is the one obliged to bring a proof whether she is the one being accused or the one accusing. One could also notice that Ghorban Ali was insisting on the fact that her “caught the on the act”, through the story Ghorban Ali said that he caught them in the act five times between page 67 and 72, that is due to the law presented in the Iranian Islamic Penal Code, exactly article 630; which permits the husband to kill his wife, and her partner if they end up getting caught in the act of adultery. In this way Ghorban Ali would get rid of Soraya without any having any governmental problems, this clarifies the gender injustice between men and women. In all cases, as Sahebjam presented, men were always the top priority with absolute rights to deal with women the way like.

2.5.1.2 Soraya and Her Sons

Soraya had two teenage sons mentioned in the novel, the oldest one is named Hussein Ali, and Hassan Ali comes after him. Throughout the story, one could understand that the kids were taught since childhood that men are the ones in control in life. They felt no shame or hesitation in yelling and beating their mother. Disrespecting her and never listening to her was never a problem

to them. No one said anything, including their own mother. This shows the gender division between women and men. Fathers were allowed to control their daughters however they like and make Important decisions in life, such as marriage, on their behalf without asking for their opinion. Husbands were allowed to disrespect and humiliate their wives for they belong to them, and even sons were allowed to hit and disrespect their mothers without the slightest concern, for they are men and more powerful and capable.

When Ghorban Ali spoke about a girl he is planning to marry in the city, the older son Hussein Ali never hesitated to talk about her and show his curiosity asking questions such as “What does this woman look like, Father? Describe her to us.” (p. 29) or “Have you already talked with her?” (p. 29) Hussein never cared about his mother, she was sitting down near him listening to the conversation, and it was not a problem for him to hear that his father is not faithful to his mother.

When Soraya got accused of adultery, Hussein and Hassan sided with the rest of men. They did not defend their mother, and they did not support or take her side. “The victim’s two sons were next. They both picked up stones and threw them at the same time. One of them struck her on the head. There was a sound, like a loud hiccup, as her head again jerked back.” (p. 112) It did not bother them to stone their mother. It did not hurt them to see their mother being executed by the village this cruelly. For them “A woman who betrays her husband is satanic and therefore must be stoned.” (p. xiv) to Hussein and Hassan, Soraya, their mother, was a satanic woman who should be stoned to cleanse the village from her sin.

2.5.2 Social Oppression and Injustice

Social oppression and injustice are present in the story throughout the novel; the society is the one that states such laws to oppress women and lock them under religious and traditions

excuses. Women were judged by society; they set high standards for women, making their lives quite difficult and suffocating. Women were blamed for everything that is happening around them; whether they were the cause of it or it was men, in contrast, they did not give any chance to women to defend herself. Societies such as Kupayeh village were a great example for that, they disrespected Soraya, did not give her chance to prove herself innocent if she could not give an instant proof, they did not believe her or pity her, and they chose to execute her immediately.

2.5.2.1 Soraya and the Village

Soraya grew up in Kupayeh village and lived there her whole life, she was always known as a faithful wife and a dedicated mother; never speaking back to her husband, always keeping her house clean and organized, her food is always good, and her kids are always healthy and well taken care of. However, things changed, once Ghorban Ali started visiting the city more than living with his wife and kids. Instead of questioning his behavior, the villagers chose to blame Soraya for this.

The village isolated Soraya and avoided speaking to her, always eyeing her and giving her looks that showed their hostility and displeasure of her presence around them. It was all because she was not able to convince her husband and change his mind.

There were the village gossips who said that if Ghorban-Ali went prowling down to the city so often instead of staying home with his family, it was because Soraya was a bad wife. [...] They blamed her [...] In short, for being a bad wife and an unworthy mother.

(p. 11-12)

The author explained later that the villagers, including those who sympathized with her never invited her to their houses. They never defended her whenever her husband or son beat her because

it was not of their business. Ghorban Ali later declared his affairs in front of the whole village no one said a word. The author says:

He drove up from the city, bringing with him a city woman, [...] he drove around the village square three times [...] No one ever commented on his visits [...] they feared him as if he were the plague.” (p. 29-30)

In contrary, they never hesitated to throw rocks on Soraya, curse at her and agree all at once to execute her. This serves as proof to how the social oppression and discrimination women were experiencing in places such as Kupayeh.

2.5.2.2 Soraya and Hashem

Hashem is Soraya’s neighbor, and the husband of her childhood friend Firouzeh. When Firouzeh died, Soraya was the one who helped Hashem take care of the house and the kids by a request from the whole village and Zahra. In exchange for her great help, he helped her husband serve as a proof to her infidelity, as a woman she was obliged to prove her innocence herself, as the Village norms dictate. The author explains it further through the mayor Ebrahim Machdi when he said:

Soraya, you seem to be unaware of the laws of our society such as they were promulgated by our revered imam several years ago. When a man accuses his wife, she has to prove her innocence. That is the law. On the other hand, if a woman makes an accusation against her husband, she has to produce proof. Do you understand? They say you are guilty. Prove the opposite, and we'll all believe you without any problem (p. 73)

This clearly explains the discrimination women experience in such environment, in both cases she is the one obliged to prove her words, and if she fails, she would be viewed as a liar or a satanic being.

Islam gave clear orders regarding adultery; both man and woman should be punished in this case. However, this was not the case in the story, in Kupayeh only Soraya got stoned of such crime where Hashem was left free although he was the one to prove the accusations himself. This serves as a strong example to the oppression women face with no power or abilities to defend themselves. The woman find herself cornered with all men forces and no power to pull herself out of that violence. The same goes for women surrounding her. Although Zahra was presented as a strong woman, she could not protect her niece when all men approved on executing her because for them when men speak, women have no voice.

2.5.3 The Misuse of Religion

This part of the novel serves as the intersection of gender and religion. It is clear throughout the story that the religion is weaponized to serve men's needs and favors against women, saying it is 'God will' only to control women. Ghorban-Ali claimed that the divorce is his Islamic right, while completely ignoring the fact that his religion requires him to pay child support, or as known as *Nafaqa*, for his children after the divorce. With that, he chose to escape it by accusing Soraya of infidelity.

It can also be seen when Ali accused Soraya of adultery without any clear evidence, nor trusted eyewitnesses as the Islamic law demands, the villagers not only did not question Ali's lies and accusations but also dismissed all Soraya's protests to defend herself, or even when her aunt

Zahra tried to defend her. They muffled their voices in the name of religion, violating it once again and claiming that their voices are nothing to be considered just because they are women.

On the other hand, the village leaders which are men gathered and used the religious law again Soraya to punish her with the stoning, despite the stoning law states that both parties that practice adultery shall be stoned to death, they left Hashem face no consequences while Soraya being brutally stoned as stated once again before.

2.5.3.1 The Mullah

Sheikh Hassan was the holy person of the village, in fact wherever he goes, he is treated as someone who is blessed and favored by God. His word is above everyone, when he tried to convince Soraya of divorcing Ghorban Ali, he did not hesitate to call himself a prophet when he said “Soraya Khanum, we are here alone, just the two of us. I am a man of God; I am like the Prophet; you can confide in me. What do you have to say?” (p. 16) villagers, as well saw him and treated as such, for example when the bus driver suddenly met him on the road, from his exaggerated looks he judged him to be a “holy person” as they say. Hassan did not hesitate to use this in his advantage, when he asked about payment, the driver said “On my bus **God** doesn’t pay. He’s our invited guest.” (p. 48) and sheikh Hassan immediately sought to use this part to his advantage, he claimed to be an imam who traveled through the cities to spread knowledge and God's words when in reality he was described as a pervert, a smuggler, a thief, a liar, and a wanted criminal. He was faced with an instant reply from the driver when he said “Glory to God and to his Prophet. . . . Long life to our revered imam.” (p. 50) This explains the way people follow anyone who uses religious words blindly without questioning it further.

Hassan Ladjevardi did not hesitate to rob, lie, and help Ghorban Ali in his crime, using his religious looks to manipulate those around him. When Ghorban Ali made his plan, he used Sheikh Hassan as his solid proof and asked for his presence for his word should be final. He and Ghorban Ali were among the men who made the final decision regarding Soraya's punishment.

All of these events serve as a representation on how the intersection of gender oppression, and religious patriarchy work together to humiliate women and force an overlapping oppression on them, while make men escapes responsibilities under the name of violated religion.

2.5.4 Social Reaction from the Death Penalty

The villagers' reaction from the accusation towards the penalty, specifically men, were presented during the last part of the fourth chapter as well as the second half. One could divide their reactions into three phases; before penalty, during penalty, and after penalty, whether be it a sentimental reaction or a physical one.

2.5.4.1 Before the Penalty

The villagers' reactions to the accusations against Soraya were immediate savage and attack. She was immediately judged, and mistreated by the whole village the moment they heard the accusation. They immediately lashed at her violently, men and women alike. It was stated by Zahra when she described the scene to the author that they did not even try to understand but simply chose to react violently;

With great difficulty, she shouldered her way through the crowd and saw Soraya surrounded by a group of men and women, all of whom were screaming and browbeating her. The young woman tried to escape the enraged assembly, but they began lashing out at her, and She fell under a rain of blows (p. 66)

Even when Zahra tried to protect her niece, she ended up being struck and beaten up. Soraya was later taken to Zahra's house and locked in there. The house was blocked by villagers all around, who shouted and yelled at her near her aunt house. She was called all sorts of names that tarnished her reputation, such as "Shameless one!" (p. 79) "A woman beyond redemption!" (p. 79), or "Let her be put to death!" (p. 79) and "Death by stoning!" (p. 79). All simply because they heard accusations about a woman they knew since her childhood.

2.5.4.2 During the Penalty

The Stoning process was painful to witness, it covered the true nature of the villagers, both men and women. The men of the village joint and participated in the stoning with a cruel joy and satisfaction as the author mentioned, celebrating each stone that hit Soraya as if it was a game winning to them while cursing her as if they would be rewarded to do so; "The applause of the crowd was deafening. "I shall throw as many stones as it takes to kill this, bitch. And afterward, the rest of you can throw your stones as well." (p. 122). The more they throw stones, the more they were turning into unrecognizable monsters to her and seem to enjoy the scene of Soraya's body gets crumbled by the hit; "The unbearable violence of the scene, which seemed to galvanize the rest of the villagers and turn them into monsters... "(p. 122). Upon seeing her near to death, they got even more excited, and it was a horrific scene, they did not care about the Islamic distance that is imposed and immediately passed through just to cruelly make her death even more brutal; "The noisy crowd...moved in even closer, ready for the kill..." (p. 123), her body and face were ruined and exploded, unable to recognize her features no more; "... Her scalp was nothing more than a gaping wound; her jaw had exploded; her eyes and nose burst open. Her head drooped at a grotesque angle..." (p. 123).

The last savage scene happened when one of the men went to check on her death, just to discover that she still catching her last breathes, at that exact moment he crashed her skull with a stone and was followed by another furious man hitting the skull to the point the crowd saw her brain falling out to the ground; "...The skull burst open, and the brains spilled out..." (p. 124), for them to be burst in joy and celebrating heavily and praising God as if it is a victory to humanity; "...an immense cry of joy broke out. "Allah Akbar! Allah Akbar! God is great! . . . Praise be to God!" (p. 124).

2.5.4.3 After the Penalty

After what it seemed like a bizarre carnival, The villagers left the scene with different reactions to what they have done, some of them laugh and the others avowing the gaze of each other's and walking in silent, leaving the body behind as a remains of a dead animal with the surrounding flies; "...which a horde of insects had already begun to swarm..." (p. 126) and the dogs already gathering around it and trying to make Soraya's head the meal of their day; "...the dogs edged in closer to the corpse...tried to seize Soraya's head, ... trying to separate it from the body." (p. 126), as their law states, the people of the village left the body exposed as a lesson to them all, this added more humiliating to Soraya as if she cannot escape from them even after death; "... As the law required, the body of the martyred woman would remain exposed, as an example to all..." (p. 126).

The people returned to their daily routines as if nothing of their crime happened, and the leaders of the villages gathered again, discussing and justifying what happened by the will of God, and they abolished an evil away from their village; "... It was God's will..." (p. 129), later on, they came to an agreement that Soraya is holding too much shame to be buried in their cemetery, claiming that she would only spoil the honor of their late ancestors and even ruining their lands

outside the village, at the end, they demanded the women of the village to throw away her corpse because the men and their law decided that she does not deserve to be buried at all; "... So, I say to you...she will not be buried at all" (p. 131). Time has passed and the village with its people already forgot that Soraya was existed before, they live their lives peacefully, as if that execution did not take a foot in their beloved village; "Now, barely six months after the event, the villagers — seemingly hardworking and decent folk -appeared to have forgotten their collective crime." (p. xiii)

All in all, this explains that the villagers of Kupayeh support violence against women, they did not help her when she was violated by her husband, turned blind eye on her husband affairs because he was a man, yet supported the accusations against her with no solid proof and stripped her of her basic right to speak up and defend herself and chose to support all in her execution including the children, claiming it to be a cleansing to the village.

Conclusion

Both feminism and intersectional feminism sought to bring out voiceless oppressed women from the dark, marginalized life to the center of justice. The two theories aim at presenting the factors that contribute to violating women, forcing them into shaping themselves the way external factors want them to be; whether be is societal, cultural, or gender factors. Freidoune Sahebjam aimed at presenting that in his novel; by using a journalistic style of writing, he sought to present Soraya's story in order to bring out her voice and cries that were long buried under the ground, and present it to the whole world.

Feminism in all of its forms fought for women's basic rights such as gender equality, men's violence, as well as their educational and legal rights centuries ago. Women like Simone de

Beauvoir and Susan B. Anthony fought to be treated as human beings rather than tools. Friedoune Sahebjam, in the story he wrote about Soraya, claims that women in Iran are still being mistreated, violated, and humiliated under the cultural and religious twisted norms that do nothing but restrict women from all their rights except the right to remain silent as he described it in his work.

General Conclusion

While the novel *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (1990) occurs in the 1980s in Iran; its themes could be resonated across border lands and different timelines all over the world. Through his novel, Friedoune Sahebjam sought to expose the patriarchal systems which criminalized women's autonomy and served as a shield against men's impunity. Sahebjam presented through his work another case of a woman's story that could help expand feminism's ideologies and strives into broader areas, and give the world a new view of social oppression to women.

As this study draws to a close, one could present briefly the autonomy of this research. This study is divided into two chapters; the first chapter, under the title "Theoretical Framework and Literature Review", aims to present a clear view of the concept of Feminism, its history, and principles, as well as the theoretical concept of Feminist Intersectionality as a second theoretical framework used into analyzing the novel. These two frameworks build a stable bridge for us to make a clear analysis in the second chapter about some ideas presented in the novel by Sahebjam, the chapter also delves into different studies that shed light on different angles of the story and its themes. The second chapter is titled "The Analysis of Women Oppression and Injustice in *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (1990)".

The chapter is purposed to answer the questions presented at the beginning of this dissertation. It presents the main characters that contributed to the story events and presented the studied themes. The analysis then included the Imbalance between genders, the social injustice towards the main character Soraya, as well as their reaction to the death penalty. Sahebjam through his work aimed to describe a picture that is both difficult to present and not mentioned in the world of literature very often.

Before one concludes the topic, it is worth mentioning the results of this work. Firstly, as the title of the research states, it discusses the social oppression and women's injustice in the Middle East as a whole, and one could state fairly that a single novel and one case cannot present a factual idea that could be generalized over a whole geographical area. In countries such as Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, women are living with both legal and cultural rights through each passing year. Another point that is best to be corrected for is a matter of confusion to many people, especially the Western society, which is the geographical boundaries that represent the Middle East. Geographically speaking, the Middle East includes: Egypt, Cyprus, Iran, Turkey, the Fertile Crescent, and the Arabian Peninsula, meaning that countries such as Afghanistan and Pakistan are not part of it. However, researchers usually refer to them as such when presenting studies regarding women's oppression, and this confusion is due to the legal religious system that is similar to some Middle Eastern countries, as well as the fact that these two countries are close to Iran's borders.

Another point that could be added to the discussion is that Iran's Islamic Penal Code (2013) enables judicial leniency regarding matters that could be classified as honor crimes, articles such as 220, 301, 302, and 630 give either lighter punishment or no punishment when the murder – “Qisas” as stated in the Iranian Penal Code- is related to a family matter, or when receiving forgiveness from the victim's family. The legal system legalizes “honor killing” cases, specifically adultery scenarios. As such, it is difficult to state the exact number of adultery and therefore stoning cases in Iran.

Therefore, one could conclude this part by saying that Soraya's case cannot particularly serve as proof that oppression and violence against women exist all over the Middle East, and the societal,

cultural, and legal factors do not necessarily apply over the whole Middle Eastern area. Shortly speaking, one globally recorded case cannot serve as a representation of a vast geographical area.

Secondly, as mentioned in the novel, Sahebjam begins his work with a quote which states that the story with its “full details” is a real case from plenty of cases happening in Iran, claiming that his source is Zahra Khnum. However, it is worth mentioning that some details of the story, such as the detailed past of Ghorban Ali, and the Mullah, including the conversations and confidential information, are so detailed that it could make it difficult for the reader to believe that Zahra all by herself could bring this massive amount of information, and thus doubts the validity of the case.

Therefore, it is worth shedding light on the fact that Sahebjam is a journalist as he referred to himself in the story, yet he chose to write the case as a novel rather than a newspaper article; this could explain plenty of details that are worth mentioning. Beginning with the fact that the novel could give the writer a chance to be more detailed and expressive, delving into more corners that an article prevents them from. It is also best to state that the narrative style helps to receive the themes and messages presented in the novel better and touch the emotions of readers more than any other writing style. The narrative style could help create pieces of work that remain in the literature world and keep the case standing through the passing decades. Therefore, it could be difficult to state whether the novel does indeed depict reality, or not, due to the lack of two factors; the resources of all the information presented in the story, and the sufficient amount of data regarding women's situation, both in Iran specifically and the Middle East as a whole. As such, Sahebjam's choice of presenting the story could be a matter of discussion. For example, would the story be as touching as it is if it was presented to the reader as a newspaper article? And if it was

indeed written as such, would it remain as a case presented for discussion in further future as it is now?

Finally, it can be said that the research in hand successfully answered the questions presented at the beginning of this study. Through this novel, Friedoune Sahebjam presented a case of a woman who attracted the sight of researchers, activists, and defenders from all over the world. Even though it was published thirty-five years from now, exactly back in 1990. It is still present as a matter of discussion to this current day.

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الملخص

الدّراسة تتناول موضوعا مثيرا للجدل عبر القرون في مختلف أنحاء العالم، يتمثل في الاضطهاد الاجتماعي والظلم الموجّه ضدّ النّساء؛ وذلك من خلال تحليل رواية " رجم ثريا" الصادرة عام 1990 للكاتب الفرنسي "فريدون صاحب جم". تسرد هذه الرواية قصة امرأة تعرّضت للظلم الشديد والانتهاك الصّارخ من طرف زوجها الذي افترى عليها ومجتمع صدّق هذه التهمة ليكون مصيرها القتل بكل وحشية على مرأى الجميع. كما تكشف الرواية كيف تتعرض النّساء للقمع والاضطهاد في المجتمعات التي يسيطر فيها الرجال على كلّ مقاليد السلطة. أمّا عن المنهج المعتمد في تحليل القصة فقد كان وصفيا تفسيريا يستهدف التركيز على تاريخ الحركة النسوية ومبادئها مع إبراز مفاهيمها ونظرياتها من خلال التّطرق للوضع غير المتكافئ بين الجنسين في مجتمع يميّز بالعديد مكن مظاهر العنف ضد المرأة الذي استعمل فيه الدّين وسيلة لقمع النّساء ومنح الرجل الأفضلية والتفوق، وهذا ما صوّره صاحب جام في روايته. اختتمت الدّراسة بالتأكيد على أنّ ما حدث لثرثيا في هذه الرواية مشهد يمكن أن تتعرض له النّساء في مجتمعات مختلفة وفي عصور متعددة، ومنه فالكاتب لم يكن أدبيا أو مجرد قاص ناقل لأحداث هذه القصة المأساوية هدفه امتاع القارئ وتشويقه بقدر ما كان حريصا على فضح جرائم تقترب في حق النّساء في مجتمعات ذكورية تتخذ الدّين ذريعة لتحقيق ما يصبو إليه الرّجال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحركة النسوية، اضطهاد النساء، ظلم اجتماعي، ثريا م.