

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Historically, women have fought for the rights to education, decision-making, and determining their own futures, for many years. The patriarchal structures that have historically restricted women to domestic or dependent roles are being resisted, as seen by this conflict. However, in patriarchal society, women are stripped of these rights and treated as subordinate people, with their choices and identities often defined through male authority—be it as daughters, wives, or mothers. Women’s oppression arises from the rejection of their autonomy, which forces them to operate within restrictive social, political, and cultural norms. Therefore, rather than overt rebellion, their quest for agency frequently takes the form of subtly defiant, negotiating, and resilient behaviors. This ongoing conflict emphasizes the feminist idea that agency involves both the creative reassertion of selfhood within structures intended to repress it and the rejection of oppression.

The term patriarchy, which comes from the Greek patriarchies of antiquity, describes a society in which older men have the majority of the power and it is passed down via them. According to Walby (1990:20), patriarchy is “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women.” Men predominate in positions of privilege and power in contemporary society, including those of head of the household, social group leader, employer, and

government. This system, which regards male dominance as an acceptable norm, is the cornerstone of feminist critiques of gender inequality.

One of literary works that portrays patriarchal society is *Ariadne* by Jennifer Saint. *Ariadne* (2021) serves as a novel that retells the Greek myth of Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos of Crete. Although the original myth revolves around the bravery of Theseus and the terrifying Minotaur, Saint's book captures the tale from a feminine point of view of Ariadne and other female characters and also highlighting female characters' agency and vulnerability. The novel not only portrays the well-known mythic events but also deeply explores female characters' experience in patriarchal society. Through its focus on the agency, choices, struggles, and fates of female characters such as Ariadne, Phaedra, and Pasiphae, the novel highlights the often-overlooked realities of women living under patriarchal domination.

Ariadne and Phaedra individually experience oppression shaped by patriarchy, but in different manners that demonstrate its wide-ranging dominance over the identities, voices, and women's bodies. Ariadne's life is confined by her role as Minos' daughter, silenced and burdened by privilege, even her rebellion of helping Theseus reflects desperation rather than true agency. Phaedra's conflict is characterized by overt disobedience of patriarchal norms, yet her resistance only results in humiliation and banishment, demonstrating how systems ruled by males condemn women's attempts at agency. Pasiphae suffers from the most severe kind of oppression, as her body is dehumanized and turned into a political tool and a way for divine justice. Through these three women, the novel exposes how patriarchy affects

every aspect of female existence—personal, social, and divine—rendering women voiceless, disposable, and always restricted by hierarchies of power.

In the context of *Ariadne*, patriarchy analysis would involve examining how the novel portrays its female characters, especially Ariadne, Phaedra, and Pasiphae in terms of agency and vulnerability and their roles within a patriarchal society. Additionally, a patriarchy analysis would delve into the characters' desires, their attempts to negotiate societal expectations, and their struggles for agency within a male-dominated world. It might explore the female main character's agency to achieve her desire to rebel from the constraints of her highly patriarchal environment and also her desire to be in the same position as the men in her society.

The urgency of analyzing female agency and vulnerability in *Ariadne* (2021) by Jennifer Saint lies in its feminist retelling of Greek myth that centers silenced female voices. Through its focus Ariadne and other female characters, the novel criticizes patriarchal narratives and reveals the emotional, social, and political struggles women face in male-dominated society. Exploring themes of betrayal, motherhood, and autonomy, the novel presents agency not only as resistance but also as survival within systems of oppression.

Based on the writer's research, there has been no study that examines female agency and vulnerability in *Ariadne* by Jennifer Saint. Within direct in comparison with previous studies, the writer's case focuses on the agency and vulnerability of female characters in ancient Greece's patriarchal culture. The writer focuses on the study of agency and vulnerability of this novel, by using theory of patriarchy, revealing how the complex interplay of familial relationships, and societal

pressures constructs and constrains the female characters, in their effort for autonomy and identity within a patriarchal ancient Greece society.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

1. How is the female characters' life dealing with patriarchal society in Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne*?
2. How is the female characters' agency portrayed in Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne*?
3. How is the female characters' vulnerability portrayed in Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne*?

## **1.3 Purpose of the Studies**

1. To analyze the female characters' life dealing with patriarchal society in Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne*.
2. To analyze the female characters' agency portrayed in Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne*.
3. To analyze the female characters' vulnerability portrayed in Jennifer Saint's *Ariadne*.

## **1.4 Scope of the Study**

In discussing and answering the research questions, the writer will limit the discussion to make it easier when analyzing the novel. The writer chooses to analyze the character and characterization, setting, and conflict in "*Ariadne*" as the

intrinsic elements. Next, using the theory of patriarchy by Hooks (2000), agency by Kabeer (2005) and the theory of vulnerability by Fineman (2008), the writer will discuss the agency and vulnerability of the female characters dealing with the patriarchal pressures in ancient Greece and analyzes the weaknesses of female characters who are only able to surrender and empowered under the power of men and how women's efforts to defend their rights.

### **1.5 Previous Studies**

The first study is titled *Ariadne* a book review by Judge (2022a), published by *New Classicists*. Judge highlights how *Ariadne* seeks to recover the voices of women silenced in classical myths. Judge notes that while *Ariadne* grants its female protagonists narrative presence and emotional depth, their agency remains constrained by patriarchal structures and mythic destiny. This perspective is valuable because it demonstrates how the novel simultaneously empowers and limits its female characters, reflecting the ambivalence of feminist retellings.

The second study is a review of *Ariadne* by Brona's Books (2021), which provides a reflective reading of the tension between female agency and vulnerability in *Ariadne*. The reviewer emphasizes that Ariadne and Phaedra must make choices shaped by male authority, divine will, and social expectations. Their autonomy is precarious, and survival often depends less on empowerment than on endurance. Although this review is not an academic publication, it is still valuable for demonstrating how readers recognize the novel's portrayal of women's vulnerabilities within patriarchal contexts.

The third study is entitled “Constructing a ‘Different’ Strength: A Feminist Exploration of Vulnerability, Ethical Agency and Care” by Johansson and Wickström (2023). This study highlights how a sense of “difference” and experiences of marginalization can be a source of ethical power and agency in organizations through a feminist ethic of care. This study shifts the understanding that vulnerability only means weakness, and instead emphasizes how vulnerability is the basis of “other-oriented” ethical agency. In this context, vulnerability is not just a passive condition, but a trigger for deep and empowering intersubjective relationships. The relevance of this study to *Ariadne* lies in the representation of female characters who, despite being marginalized by the patriarchal system, demonstrate other forms of power: concern for fellow women and courage in the face of betrayal. However, since this study is based on a modern organization, the mythological and literary context as studied in *Ariadne* has not been addressed, opening up opportunities for further exploration in the context of classical literature.

The fourth study is entitled “Agency and Vulnerability: Reconfiguring the Female Characters in Chimamanda Adichie’s Love Stories” by Ben-Iheanacho (2017). This study examines the dynamics of agency and vulnerability in Adichie’s love stories as a space for negotiating gender identity. The research shows that female characters, such as Ifemelu and Ozioma use their vulnerability as a foundation for individualized agency, both in the context of love and career. On the other hand, the study also reveals the moral complexity of women’s agency—that freedom of choice can conflict with social norms or other women’s values. An important contribution of this study is that it confirms that women’s agency in the

context of love is not always heroic or conventional; sometimes it is contradictory and prone to criticism. However, this study is limited to contemporary African literature and has not explored mythology or representations of women in classical Western narratives such as in *Ariadne*.

The fifth study is entitled “Vulnerable Resistance in Victorian Women's Writing” by Harper, S. A. (2022). In her research, Harper explores how female characters who are socially perceived as vulnerable—and often not read as subjects of resistance—actually exhibit subtle yet significant forms of resistance in nineteenth-century literary works. Harper analyses characters in the works of Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, and Olive Schreiner, using Judith Butler's theoretical framework, specifically the concepts of gender performativity and resistance within vulnerability. Harper emphasizes that resistance does not always come from stereotypically strong and active characters, but can also arise through socially constructed vulnerability. Characters who are often perceived as passive show resistance to patriarchal hegemonic structures in subtle ways, such as the rejection of traditional roles, ambivalent gender performativity, and the exploration of alternative narratives to institutions such as marriage.

Overall, the five studies above enrich our understanding of the relationship between agency and vulnerability in patriarchal societies. However, no one has specifically examined how mythological stories such as *Ariadne* can be used as a field for exploring the relationship between vulnerability, women's symbolic power, and patriarchal oppression. Moreover, there is no research that examines how women's power is manifested through their tenderness, sacrifice or betrayal.

Based on the previous studies that the writer has found, the writer tries to develop research on agency and vulnerability in the novel entitled *Ariadne* by Jennifer Saint. This research thesis is very different from the previous studies; the current research focuses on agency and vulnerability in female characters who live in a patriarchal society in ancient Greece.