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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Algorithmic Patriarchy, Digital Feminism, and Female Agency in Tahmima Anam's *The Startup Wife*

Haydor Uddin[1]
Singhania University Pacheri Bari, Rajasthan
E-mail: haydoruddin3@gmail.com /ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5623-172X

Dr. Mumish Kumar Thakur[2]
Associate Professor & Supervisor, Department of English, Singhania University Rajasthan

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Abstract
The rapid growth of digital technology and startup culture has changed the way people live, work, and communicate. However, gender inequality still exists in many technological and professional spaces. This study examines Tahmima Anam's *The Startup Wife* through the ideas of algorithmic patriarchy, digital feminism, and female agency. It focuses on Asha Ray, a talented programmer and entrepreneur whose work and contributions are often ignored or given less importance in a male-dominated startup environment. Using textual analysis and feminist literary criticism, the study explores how gender bias affects recognition, leadership, and power in the digital world. The findings show that technological development does not automatically remove existing social inequalities. Although Asha faces discrimination and struggles to receive equal recognition, she gradually becomes more aware of her position and regains control over her identity and choices. Through Asha's journey, the novel highlights the challenges women face in digital spaces as well as their ability to question and resist unequal power structures. The study concludes that *The Startup Wife* is an important contemporary feminist novel that examines the relationship between technology, gender, power, and equality in modern society.

Keywords: Algorithmic Patriarchy, Digital Feminism, Female Agency, Gender and Technology, Startup Culture, Tahmima Anam.

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, digital technology has become an integral part of everyday life. Digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and start-up companies increasingly influence communication, employment, social interaction, and other aspects of daily experience. These developments are often associated with progress, innovation, and expanded opportunities. However, scholars have argued that technology is not entirely neutral, as it is shaped by existing social structures and may reflect inequalities related to power, gender, and identity (Haraway, 1985; Winner, 1980; Zuboff, 2019). Consequently, social inequalities found in wider society may also be reproduced within digital spaces. Gender inequality remains a significant

example, as women continue to face challenges related to recognition, leadership, and equal opportunities in science, technology, and related professional fields.

Contemporary literature has increasingly engaged with the relationship between technology, identity, and power. Tahmima Anam's *The Startup Wife* (2021) provides an important example of this engagement. The novel brings together technology, start-up culture, marriage, and gender through the story of Asha Ray, a skilled programmer and entrepreneur. Through Asha's experiences, Anam examines the ways gender bias and unequal power relations may operate within the modern start-up environment. Asha is presented as an intelligent and creative woman whose technical knowledge contributes significantly to the development of the start-up. When she first discusses the project with Cyrus and Jules, she joins because she believes that her technological ideas can be developed into something meaningful. As the project progresses, Asha recognizes that she is using her coding skills in a practical and influential way. She gradually becomes one of the key figures involved in the development of WAI (We Are Infinite), a platform that later achieves considerable success and attracts global attention.

Despite Asha's significant contributions, she gradually realises that credit and recognition are not distributed equally. Although she is one of the founders and plays an important role in the technical development of the platform, much of the public attention is directed towards Cyrus. At one point, Asha expresses her desire to be recognized for her intelligence and professional work rather than being viewed primarily as Cyrus's wife. Her experience reflects the difficulty women may face in gaining independent recognition within professional environments where male leadership receives greater visibility. The novel also suggests that patriarchal patterns can continue within the technology sector. Although Asha's abilities are acknowledged by investors and others, authority and leadership remain closely associated with Cyrus. At times, Asha feels excluded from important decisions concerning the future of the platform and begins to question her position within a company she helped to establish.

These experiences suggest that technologically advanced spaces may also reproduce existing patterns of gender inequality. The concept of algorithmic patriarchy provides a useful framework for understanding this issue. It refers to the ways digital systems, platforms, and technological organizations may reflect or reinforce gender biases and unequal power relations. Although technology is often presented as neutral, it is designed, developed, and managed by individuals and institutions whose assumptions and social perspectives can influence its structure and use. As a result, inequalities that exist within society may also appear in digital environments.

At the same time, *The Startup Wife* is not concerned only with discrimination and inequality. The novel also explores resistance, personal development, and the search for an independent identity. After her marriage, Asha becomes increasingly concerned about losing her individuality. She imagines "Mrs. Jones" as a version of herself confined to domestic responsibilities and focused on meeting her husband's expectations. Her humorous wish to "kill" this version of herself reflects her resistance to traditional ideas of womanhood and her fear of being reduced to a limited social role. Through this internal conflict, the novel highlights the importance of women's voice, freedom, and control over their own lives.

This study examines the representation of algorithmic patriarchy, digital feminism, and female agency in *The Startup Wife*. It explores how technological spaces may reflect gender bias and unequal power relations while also examining Asha's gradual attempt to regain her voice and reclaim control over her identity. By bringing together feminist literary criticism with perspectives from technology and gender studies, the study investigates how Anam represents the relationship between technology, gender, and power. It argues that the

novel offers a critical examination of inequality within the digital world while also highlighting women's resistance and agency in contemporary technological spaces.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the representation of algorithmic patriarchy in *The Startup Wife*.
2. To analyse the relationship between technology and gender inequality in the novel.
3. To explore the ways in which Asha Ray reclaims her agency.
4. To investigate the role of digital feminism as a form of resistance against patriarchal structures.

Research Questions

1. How does *The Startup Wife* portray algorithmic patriarchy?
2. In what ways do digital technologies reinforce gender inequality in the novel?
3. How does Asha Ray challenge and resist patriarchal structures?
4. What forms of digital feminist resistance are represented in the novel?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it examines the relationship between technology, gender, and literature. While many studies focus on feminism in literature, less attention is given to how technology affects women's lives and experiences in digital spaces represented in literary texts. By examining *The Startup Wife*, this study highlights how gender inequality continues to exist in contemporary digital environments. It also explores how women challenge such inequalities and work towards developing an independent identity. The study therefore highlights the continuing importance of women's rights, equality, recognition, and agency in an increasingly technology-driven society.

2. Literature Review

Tahmima Anam's *The Startup Wife* has received growing scholarly attention because of its treatment of technology, gender, entrepreneurship, marriage, and contemporary relationships. Since the novel is set within a technology-driven start-up environment, several studies have examined the position of women in relation to professional identity, gender roles, and male authority. Much of the existing criticism focuses on feminism, gender inequality, identity, and women's experiences in male-dominated workplaces. These studies provide useful insights into Asha Ray's struggles, but they do not fully explain how technological systems and digital spaces may themselves become connected to gendered power. This limitation creates an opportunity to examine the novel through the concepts of algorithmic patriarchy and digital feminism.

One important study, Tahmima's Utopia in *The Startup Wife*: The Existential Feminism in a Male Tech World" (2023), examines Asha Ray's struggle to establish an independent identity within a male-dominated technological environment. The study focuses on the tension between Asha's personal aspirations and the social expectations placed upon her as a woman and wife. It shows that her struggle for identity is closely connected with the pressure to fulfill traditional gender roles. This approach is useful because it draws attention to the personal and emotional dimensions of Asha's experience. However, its emphasis on existential feminism gives less attention to the technological environment in which these gender relations take place. The study therefore explains Asha's struggle for identity effectively but does not fully consider how digital platforms, technological practices, and forms of authority may contribute to her marginalization.

A related but different approach appears in "Coding Out the Female Voice: Gendered Silences in Tahmima Anam's *The Startup Wife* (2025). This study focuses on the ways women's voices and professional contributions are overlooked within start-up culture. It argues that women may receive less recognition for their work, while men are more easily associated with leadership and authority. This argument is particularly

relevant to Asha, whose technical contribution to the development of WAI is significant but whose public recognition becomes increasingly connected to Cyrus. Compared with the 2023 study, this research moves beyond Asha's personal identity and gives greater attention to professional inequality and gendered recognition. However, it still mainly examines inequality through the idea of gendered silencing. It does not sufficiently explore whether technology itself can participate in maintaining these unequal relations. Thus, while both studies identify gender inequality as a central concern, they leave the technological dimension of that inequality comparatively underexplored.

The relationship between technology and gender has been examined more broadly by feminist scholars. Safiya Umoja Noble, in *Algorithms of Oppression*, challenges the assumption that algorithms are neutral and argues that they can reproduce social and cultural biases (Noble, 2018). Noble's work is particularly useful for extending the discussion of *The Startup Wife* beyond individual discrimination. It suggests that inequality may not only exist through personal attitudes but can also be reflected in technological systems and the ways they are designed and used. However, Noble's work primarily focuses on algorithmic systems and their social consequences rather than literary representations of technology. Applying her ideas to Anam's novel therefore requires attention to the specific ways technological power is represented through characters, relationships, and the start-up environment.

Judy Wajcman's work provides another important perspective on the relationship between technology and gender. In *TechnoFeminism*, Wajcman argues that technology and society influence one another and that gender relations are involved in the development and use of technology (Wajcman, 1991). Her approach challenges the idea that technological progress automatically produces social progress. This perspective is relevant to *The Startup Wife*, where a modern and innovative start-up environment can still reflect traditional patterns of male authority. At the same time, Wajcman's broader theoretical discussion does not specifically address the digital start-up culture represented in Anam's novel. This makes it useful as a theoretical foundation but also leaves room for a literary study that connects technology with the everyday experiences of women working within such spaces.

The concept of digital feminism adds another dimension to this discussion. Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose (2018) examine how digital media can provide women with opportunities to express their views, share experiences, build communities, and participate in feminist activism. Their work shows that digital spaces are not simply places where inequality is reproduced; they can also become spaces of resistance. This is important for reading Asha's experience because her relationship with technology is not limited to marginalization. Her technical knowledge also gives her a means of participation and influence. However, digital feminism also needs to be considered alongside the unequal structures within digital environments. Focusing only on the empowering potential of technology may overlook the ways in which digital spaces can continue to reflect existing social inequalities. Therefore, a balanced reading of *The Startup Wife* needs to consider both the restrictive and empowering possibilities of technology.

The idea of female agency is closely connected to these discussions. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, examines how women have historically been positioned in relation to men and denied full control over the definition of their own identities (de Beauvoir, 2011). Her ideas help explain Asha's struggle to define herself beyond the role of Cyrus's wife. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* further questions the idea that gender roles are fixed or natural, arguing that they are shaped through repeated social and cultural practices (Butler, 1990). Butler's perspective is useful for understanding Asha's resistance to traditional expectations of womanhood. However, these feminist theories focus primarily on gender, identity, and social relations rather

than digital technology. Their relevance to the present study therefore lies in bringing questions of female identity and agency into conversation with the technological environment represented in the novel.

Taken together, the existing scholarship shows that *The Startup Wife* can be read as a feminist critique of gender inequality, professional recognition, and women's struggle for identity. The 2023 study emphasizes existential feminism and Asha's search for an independent identity, while the 2025 study focuses more directly on gendered silencing and unequal recognition in start-up culture. Although these approaches differ in emphasis, both mainly understand the problem through social and gender relations. The broader work of Noble and Wajcman helps move the discussion towards the relationship between technology and social inequality, while Keller, Mendes, and Ringrose highlight the potential of digital spaces for feminist resistance. The feminist theories of de Beauvoir and Butler further provide a basis for understanding Asha's struggle for identity and agency.

Despite these valuable contributions, an important gap remains. Existing studies have not sufficiently brought together the questions of gender inequality, technological power, algorithmic systems, and digital feminist resistance in their reading of *The Startup Wife*. In particular, limited attention has been given to how a technology-driven environment can reproduce gendered power relations while also providing women with opportunities to challenge them. This study addresses this gap by examining *The Startup Wife* through the concepts of algorithmic patriarchy, digital feminism, and female agency. It investigates how technology and start-up culture shape gender relations, how Asha experiences unequal recognition and authority, and how she responds to these conditions. In doing so, the study argues that the novel presents technology as a complex social space in which gender inequality may be reproduced, questioned, and resisted.

Research Gap

Many researchers have studied *The Startup Wife* from feminist, identity and entrepreneurship views. Most of them focussed on gender inequality, women's struggles and their experiences in the start-up world. But very little work has focused on ideas like algorithmic patriarchy and digital feminism. Most studies looked at how women face discrimination in tech and start-up culture. But they did not really explore how digital systems, algorithms, and online platforms can also support male dominance and power. Many studies did not also discuss how women use digital spaces to challenge these problems and build their own identity. So, this study tries to fill that gap by looking at *The Startup Wife* through algorithmic patriarchy and digital feminism. It shows how technology and start-up culture shape gender relations and how Asha Ray fights these challenges and creates her own space. This gives a new and simple way to understand the novel and adds to current feminist discussions.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study looks at *The Startup Wife* through three main ideas: algorithmic patriarchy, digital feminism and female agency. These ideas help to understand how technology, gender and power are linked in the novel. As the story is set in the world of start-ups, AI and digital technology, so it is important to look not only at women's experiences but also at the systems and technologies that impacts their lives.

i. Algorithmic Patriarchy

Algorithmic patriarchy means that technology and digital systems can also support gender inequality. Many people believe technology is fair and treats everyone the same. But scholars say that technology is made by humans, so it can also carry the same biases and unfair ideas that exist in society. Safiya Umoja Noble is an important scholar in this area. In her book "*Algorithms of Oppression*", she explains that digital systems and

search engines are not fully neutral. Sometimes they reflect social bias and unequal power relations (Noble, 2018). This idea helps to understand *The Startup Wife*. In the novel, the start-up is based on new ideas and advanced technology but still men get more credit and attention than women. Asha, even though she is one of the main people behind the company's success, is always not properly recognized. Asha also comes up with the idea of using AI to build rituals and communities. She says, "I said I would customize the Empathy Module algorithm to create rituals around the things that people loved" (Anam, 2021). This shows that she plays a key role in developing the start-up's ideas. But as the company grows, most of the attention and leadership shifts toward Cyrus. Through this, the novel shows that technology by itself cannot remove gender inequality because old patriarchal thinking can still exist inside digital spaces.

ii. Digital Feminism

Digital feminism means how women use technology, social media and online spaces to express themselves, connect with others and challenge unfair treatment. It looks at both sides how technology can help women and how it can also create new problems for them. Scholars like Jessalynn Keller, Kaitlynn Mendes, and Jessica Ringrose argue that digital spaces can help women speak up and build support networks but they can also reproduce discrimination and exclusion (Keller et al., 2018). In *The Startup Wife*, digital feminism can be seen in Asha's way of thinking about technology. She does not see it only as a tool for profit. Instead, she wants to use it to connect people and create something meaningful. Her work with AI shows a more caring and inclusive idea of technology. Even though she works in a male-dominated field, she challenges the usual idea that only men can lead or innovate in tech. So, digital feminism helps to understand how Asha uses technology not only for work but also to challenge gender stereotypes and create new opportunities for women.

iii. Female Agency

Female agency simply means a woman having the freedom to make her own decisions, control her own life and shape her own future. In feminist studies, this idea is important because it focuses on women's independence and self-identity. Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, says that women have often been seen as dependent on men, instead of being treated as independent individuals (Beauvoir, 1990). She believes that women should have the freedom to define themselves and make their own choices. And this can be seen clearly in Asha's character. After marriage, she starts feeling that she may lose her own identity. She imagines another version of herself called "Mrs. Jones": "Mrs. Jones kept me up at night. She was my shadow self, a laundry-doing, husband-pleasing ordinary person who wanted nothing more than to be an excellent wife" (Anam, 2021). This shows her fear of becoming someone whose life is only limited to being a wife. Asha wants to be known for her intelligence, creativity and work, not just for her role as a wife. Because of this, she questions this identity and resists it instead of accepting it silently. Her struggle shows her desire to protect her independence and individuality. Another important feminist thinker, Judith Butler, also helps to explain this idea. In *Gender Trouble*, she argues that gender roles are not natural but are created by society (Butler, 1990). People can question and challenge these roles. Asha's refusal to become "Mrs. Jones" reflects this idea, as she rejects traditional expectations and tries to build her own identity.

The ideas of algorithmic patriarchy, digital feminism and female agency help to understand *The Startup Wife* in a simple way. Algorithmic patriarchy shows that even in modern technology, gender inequality can still exist. Digital feminism explains how women use technology to speak up and challenge unfair treatment. Female agency helps to explain Asha's struggle to stay independent and keep her own identity. Together,

these ideas show how Tahmima Anam's novel connects technology, gender and power. They also show that women may face inequality in the digital world but they can still resist it and create new chances for themselves.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the representation of gender, technology, and female agency in Tahmima Anam's *The Startup Wife* (2021). A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on the interpretation of literary themes, characters, relationships, and social issues rather than on numerical data. The study uses textual analysis as its main research method and closely examines the novel to understand how gender and power operate within its technology-driven setting.

The primary source of the study is Tahmima Anam's *The Startup Wife* (2021). Relevant passages, dialogues, character interactions, and events are selected for analysis on the basis of their connection with the study's research objectives and questions. Particular attention is given to Asha Ray's experiences as a programmer, entrepreneur, wife, and co-founder. Her changing position within the start-up, her relationship with Cyrus, her professional contributions, and her struggle for recognition are examined to understand how gendered power relations are represented in the novel.

The analysis is guided by three main concepts: algorithmic patriarchy, digital feminism, and female agency. The concept of algorithmic patriarchy is used to examine how technological environments may reproduce gender bias and unequal power relations. Digital feminism provides a framework for understanding how digital spaces can become sites of both inequality and resistance. The concept of female agency is used to examine Asha's efforts to make independent choices, challenge traditional expectations, and regain control over her identity. These concepts are used together rather than as separate categories because the study is concerned with the relationship between technology, gender, and power.

The study also draws on secondary sources, including scholarly books, journal articles, and critical studies related to feminism, gender and technology, digital feminism, algorithms, and female agency. The theoretical ideas of scholars such as Safiya Umoja Noble, Judy Wajcman, Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and scholars of digital feminism provide the conceptual basis for interpreting the selected passages from the novel. Existing research on *The Startup Wife* is also reviewed to identify areas that have received attention and those that remain comparatively underexplored.

The textual analysis is carried out in three stages. First, relevant passages are identified and grouped according to recurring themes such as gender inequality, professional recognition, leadership, technological power, identity, and resistance. Second, these passages are examined in relation to the selected theoretical concepts and the wider social context of technology and gender. Finally, the findings are compared with existing scholarship to identify similarities, differences, and gaps in previous interpretations of the novel. This process allows the study to move beyond simple description and develop a critical interpretation of how Anam represents gender and power within a contemporary technology-driven environment.

The scope of the study is limited to the representation of gender, technology, and female agency in *The Startup Wife*. It does not attempt to provide a general study of the technology industry or to make claims about all women working in technological fields. Instead, it treats the novel as a literary representation through which broader questions about gender, power, and technology can be examined. Since the study is based on textual interpretation, its findings depend on the selected passages and the theoretical perspectives used for analysis.

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5. Algorithmic Patriarchy and the Gendering of Innovation

i.Asha Ray as the Intellectual Architect of Innovation

One of the central concerns of *The Startup Wife* is the tension between technological innovation and gender equality. The novel presents the start-up world as a space that appears to value creativity, intelligence, and new ideas, yet Asha's experience reveals that professional recognition is not always distributed according to ability alone. Through Asha Ray, Tahmima Anam draws attention to the difference between creating an innovation and receiving recognition for it. Asha possesses the technical knowledge behind the company's central idea, but her contribution becomes increasingly less visible as the start-up gains success.

From the beginning of the novel, Asha is presented as an intellectually capable programmer whose technical knowledge shapes the development of the project. While discussing the future of the platform, she proposes: "I said I would customize the Empathy Module algorithm to create rituals around the things that people loved" (Anam, 2021).

The language of this statement is significant because Asha speaks in the first person: "I said" and "I would customize." The repeated use of the first-person pronoun places her directly at the center of the creative process. She is not simply assisting with an idea developed by others; she is describing a specific technical intervention that she herself can develop. The verb "customize" also highlights her technical agency. She understands the existing algorithm and has the knowledge required adapting it for a new purpose. More importantly, the phrase "things that people loved" connects technical knowledge with human emotion. Asha's innovation is therefore presented as both technically informed and socially oriented. The technology she imagines is designed to create connection rather than simply produce commercial value.

Asha's confidence becomes even clearer when she says, "I don't know. But I can figure it out" (Anam, 2021). The contrast between "I don't know" and "I can figure it out" is important. The first part acknowledges uncertainty, but the second immediately establishes confidence in her ability to overcome it. Anam therefore avoids presenting Asha as someone who is successful because she already knows everything. Instead, her intelligence is connected with curiosity, problem-solving, and willingness to learn. The short and direct structure of the sentence also gives it a sense of determination. Asha does not wait for someone else to provide the answer; she presents herself as capable of finding one.

These moments establish Asha as an intellectual architect of the start-up. Her contribution is not limited to carrying out instructions. She develops the technological idea, understands its possibilities, and has the confidence to solve problems independently. Yet the recognition she receives does not remain equal to her contribution. As the company develops, Cyrus increasingly becomes associated with its public identity; while Asha's technical contribution becomes less visible. This contrast between creation and recognition is central to the novel's treatment of gender and innovation.

The difference is particularly significant because Asha's technical expertise gives her a form of authority within the start-up, while Cyrus gradually gains greater public authority. The novel therefore separates technical knowledge from social recognition. Asha may possess the knowledge required to create the product, but visibility and leadership are increasingly connected with Cyrus. This suggests that professional power is not determined only by who contributes the most to an innovation. It can also depend on who is allowed to represent that innovation publicly.

Anam thus questions the assumption that the technology industry operates purely according to merit.

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The start-up presents itself as a modern environment based on creativity and innovation, but the distribution of recognition reveals older gendered patterns. Asha's experience suggests that women can occupy central positions in technological production while still struggling to receive equal authority and visibility. The novel's critique therefore lies not in suggesting that women lack access to technological innovation, but in showing that their participation does not necessarily guarantee equal recognition within the structures surrounding that innovation.

ii. The Myth of Technological Neutrality

A second important concern in *The Startup Wife* is the assumption that technology is neutral. Technology is often presented as objective because it is associated with logic, data, and scientific processes. However, feminist scholars such as Safiya Umoja Noble and Langdon Winner have questioned this assumption by showing how technological systems can reflect social values, political interests, and existing inequalities (Noble, 2018; Winner, 1980). Anam's novel similarly presents technology as something shaped by the people who create, manage, and control it.

Asha's idea for the platform is particularly important in this context. Her decision to customize the "Empathy Module algorithm" is not simply a technical act. The word "empathy" gives the technology an explicitly human and emotional purpose. Asha wants the algorithm to help create "rituals" around the things people value. The combination of technological language such as "algorithm" with the social and emotional language of "empathy," "rituals," and "loved" challenges the idea that technology exists separately from human relationships. The algorithm is designed according to a particular understanding of what people need and how they should connect with one another. In this sense, the novel presents technology as a product of human choices rather than as an independent or purely objective force.

At the same time, a tension develops between Asha's intentions and the power relations surrounding the platform. The technology is imagined as a means of creating connection and community, yet the organisation developing it continues to reproduce unequal forms of authority. This contrast is significant. The problem does not necessarily lie within Asha's technological idea itself; rather, it emerges through the social structure in which the idea is developed and represented. The novel therefore separates the purpose of technology from the power structures surrounding its production and use.

This distinction helps explain why technological innovation does not automatically lead to social equality. Asha creates technology with the intention of connecting people, but she herself experiences exclusion from important forms of recognition and decision-making. The irony is important: the person developing a system intended to create empathy and connection can experience a lack of recognition within the organization responsible for that system. Through this contrast, Anam suggests that technological ideals can coexist with unequal social relations.

The novel also draws attention to the people who control technological innovation. Although Asha possesses significant technical knowledge, public authority increasingly becomes associated with Cyrus. This suggests that technological power is not located only in algorithms or digital systems; it also operates through the human relationships and institutional structures surrounding them. The person who controls the public image of the technology can acquire greater authority than the person who contributes much of the technical knowledge behind it.

Therefore, *The Startup Wife* challenges the belief that technological progress itself can resolve social inequality. The novel presents technology as a social practice shaped by human choices, relationships, and

systems of authority. Its representation of Asha shows that innovation may create new possibilities while existing gender hierarchies remain present within the institutions that develop and control that innovation. In this sense, Anam's novel encourages a more critical understanding of technological progress: equality depends not only on creating new technologies but also on questioning who designs them, who receive recognition for them, who controls them, and whose voices are included in the process.

6. Digital Feminism and the Reclaiming of Female Agency

i. Asha Ray as a Digital Feminist Figure

The Startup Wife presents gender inequality within the technology industry while also exploring women's resistance to the structures that limit their professional and personal freedom. Asha Ray is not presented simply as a victim of a male-dominated environment. Instead, Anam portrays her as a technically skilled, independent, and self-aware woman who attempts to maintain control over her work and identity. Her experience reflects an important aspect of digital feminism: the effort to question gendered power relations within technology while also creating space for women's voices and participation.

From the beginning of the novel, Asha is established as a skilled programmer and an independent thinker. Her technical knowledge is central to the development of the start-up, and she participates actively in creating its technological vision. Her confidence is particularly visible when she says, "I don't know. But I can figure it out" (Anam, 2021). The contrast between "I don't know" and "I can figure it out" is significant. Rather than presenting uncertainty as weakness, Asha treats it as part of the process of solving a problem. The second clause shifts the emphasis from what she does not know to what she is capable of doing. The first-person pronoun "I" also places her directly at the center of the action and reinforces her sense of professional independence.

This short statement is particularly meaningful within the context of a male-dominated technology environment. Asha does not seek authority by imitating masculine behaviour; instead, her authority comes from her knowledge and confidence in her own ability. Her character therefore challenges the assumption that technical expertise and innovation are naturally associated with men. However, the novel also complicates this empowerment because Asha's technical contribution does not always result in equal recognition. Her experience shows that having access to technological work and having power within technological institutions is not necessarily the same thing. In this sense, Asha represents both the possibilities and limitations of women's participation in the digital world.

ii. Marriage, Identity, and the Search for Self

Asha's struggle for agency is not limited to her professional life. Marriage also becomes an important site through which she questions traditional expectations of womanhood. Although she loves Cyrus, she gradually becomes concerned that her identity may be reduced to her role as his wife. This concern is expressed through her imagined figure of "Mrs. Jones," whom she describes as "a laundry-doing, husband-pleasing ordinary person who wanted nothing more than to be an excellent wife" (Anam, 2021).

The description is significant because of the contrast between Asha's professional identity and the domestic image represented by Mrs. Jones. The compound expressions "laundry-doing" and "husband-pleasing" reduce the imagined woman to domestic service and marital responsibility. The phrase "wanted nothing more" further suggests a restricted life in which personal ambition has been replaced by the desire to fulfill the expectations of an ideal wife. Through this exaggerated image, Asha expresses her fear of losing the intellectual and professional identity she has developed for herself.

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Her response becomes even stronger when she jokes about "murdering Mrs. Jones" (Anam, 2021). The violent language is presented humorously, but its symbolic meaning is important. Asha is not expressing a literal desire for violence; rather, she is rejecting the version of herself that she associates with traditional domestic expectations. The imagined "death" of Mrs. Jones can therefore be read as the rejection of a socially imposed identity. Her humour allows Anam to present this conflict without turning Asha's resistance into a simple or dramatic declaration of feminism. Instead, the scene reveals the tension between Asha's desire for intimacy and her need to remain an independent individual.

This conflict connects Asha's personal identity with the broader question of female agency. Her struggle is not simply about choosing between marriage and career. It is about having the freedom to define herself beyond roles imposed by others. In this respect, her experience reflects de Beauvoir's argument that women have historically been defined in relation to men. Asha's resistance to the identity of "Mrs. Jones" represents an attempt to become the subject of her own story rather than being defined primarily through her relationship with Cyrus.

iii. Reclaiming Agency through Self-Determination

Self-determination is another important aspect of Asha's development. Throughout the novel, she attempts to make decisions about her own future rather than allowing other people to determine her identity. She describes herself as "a person who chooses her own destiny" (Anam, 2021). The verb "chooses" is particularly important because it presents agency as an active process. Asha does not describe herself as someone whose future simply happens to her; she defines herself through the ability to make choices.

The phrase "her own destiny" also emphasises ownership. The possessive "her own" separates Asha's future from the expectations of her husband, family, and wider society. This becomes especially significant when considered alongside the difficulties she faces in her marriage and professional life. Her claim to choose her own destiny does not mean that she is free from social pressures. Rather, it expresses her desire to make choices despite those pressures.

Asha's agency therefore develops gradually. She experiences uncertainty, disappointment, and conflict, but these experiences contribute to her growing awareness of what she wants for herself. The novel does not present empowerment as an immediate transformation in which Asha suddenly becomes completely independent. Instead, her agency develops through reflection and resistance. This makes her character more complex because she can be both vulnerable and determined. Her struggle suggests that reclaiming agency is an ongoing process through which individuals negotiate personal desires with social expectations.

iv. Digital Feminism as a Form of Resistance

Technology in *The Startup Wife* is presented as both a source of inequality and a possible means of empowerment. Asha's understanding of technology is particularly important because she does not view it only as a commercial product. Her idea for the platform is connected with empathy, community, and human relationships. Earlier in the novel, she describes her intention to customise the "Empathy Module algorithm" to create "rituals around the things that people loved" (Anam, 2021). The combination of technical language such as "algorithm" with emotional terms such as "empathy," "rituals," and "loved" reveals her attempt to bring human connection into technological design.

This is significant from the perspective of digital feminism because Asha's relationship with technology is not based solely on the pursuit of profit or efficiency. She imagines technology as something that can respond to human needs and create forms of connection. Her approach challenges a narrow

understanding of technological innovation in which success is measured primarily through commercial growth. At the same time, the novel complicates this vision by showing that a human-centred technological idea can still operate within an organisation shaped by unequal gender relations.

The phrase "human-centered" is therefore useful for describing Asha's approach to technology, but it should not be treated as automatically feminist. What makes her position relevant to digital feminism is the way she attempts to connect technological innovation with human experience while also questioning the power structures surrounding that innovation. Her experience demonstrates that women's participation in technology involves not only gaining access to digital spaces but also having a meaningful role in determining how those spaces are created and used.

In this sense, digital feminism in the novel extends beyond online activism. It involves questioning who has authority within technological environments, whose ideas are valued, and whose contributions become visible. Asha's technical work gives her a position from which she can participate in technological creation, while her struggle for recognition reveals the limitations placed upon that participation. Her experience therefore illustrates both the empowering possibilities of technology and the gendered structures that may restrict them.

v. Challenging the Myth of Male Genius

The novel also challenges the familiar idea that successful technological innovation is primarily the achievement of a single male genius. Start-up culture often celebrates founders as individual visionaries, which can make the contributions of other members less visible. In *The Startup Wife*, this pattern becomes apparent through the contrast between Asha's technical contribution and Cyrus's growing public visibility.

Asha's role in the development of the platform demonstrates that innovation is a collaborative process. Her programming knowledge and creative ideas are central to the project, yet Cyrus increasingly becomes associated with the public identity of the company. This contrast between contribution and recognition is important because it reveals how professional authority can be distributed unevenly even within a supposedly innovative environment.

Anam therefore questions the idea that technological success can be explained through individual brilliance alone. By placing Asha's technical contribution alongside Cyrus's public authority, the novel draws attention to the difference between creating an innovation and being recognised as its representative. Asha's experience also reflects a broader feminist concern about the historical invisibility of women's intellectual and professional contributions.

Ultimately, *The Startup Wife* presents female agency as a process of resistance, self-definition, and negotiation. Asha's struggle is not limited to gaining recognition within a start-up; it also involves protecting her identity within marriage and determining the kind of life she wants to lead. Her technical knowledge gives her a position within the digital world, while her resistance to gendered expectations allows her to question the conditions under which that participation takes place. The novel therefore presents technology as a complex space that can reproduce unequal power relations but can also provide opportunities for participation, creativity, and resistance. Through Asha's journey, Anam highlights the importance of female agency in challenging both traditional gender expectations and the unequal structures that may continue to operate within contemporary technological spaces.

7. Discussion and Major Findings

The analysis of *The Startup Wife* shows how Tahmima Anam uses the world of technology and start-

ups to examine questions of gender, power, identity, recognition, and independence. Although the novel is set within a modern digital environment, it reveals that technological progress does not necessarily remove existing social inequalities. Through Asha Ray's experiences, Anam presents a workplace that appears innovative and progressive but can still reflect unequal gender relations. At the same time, the novel does not present women only as victims of these structures. Asha gradually questions the conditions that limit her and attempts to regain control over her professional and personal identity. The major findings of the study are discussed below.

i. Technology Is Not Completely Neutral

One of the main findings of this study is that *The Startup Wife* questions the assumption that technology is completely neutral. Asha's contribution to the start-up begins with her technical knowledge and her ability to connect technology with human relationships. She explains, "I said I would customize the Empathy Module algorithm to create rituals around the things that people loved" (Anam 83). The first-person expression "I said" establishes Asha as an active creator rather than a passive participant. Similarly, the verb "customize" highlights her technical control over the algorithm. Her idea is also significant because she does not imagine technology only in terms of efficiency or profit. By connecting the algorithm with "rituals" and the things people "loved," she gives the technology an emotional and social purpose.

However, the social structure surrounding this innovation does not necessarily reflect the values represented in Asha's idea. While the algorithm is designed to encourage connection and empathy, Asha herself experiences a lack of equal recognition and authority within the organization. This contrast suggests that technology may be developed with progressive intentions while the institutions surrounding it continue to operate through unequal power relations. The novel therefore separates technological innovation from social progress. Anam suggests that creating advanced technology does not by itself transform the social structures within which that technology is produced and controlled.

ii. The Role of Algorithmic Authorship in Gender Dynamics

Another important finding concerns the relationship between technological authorship and gendered recognition. Asha's development of the "Empathy Module" establishes her as an important intellectual contributor to the start-up. Her work combines technical knowledge with a creative understanding of human relationships. However, as the company becomes more successful, Cyrus increasingly becomes associated with its public image and leadership. This creates a significant gap between who contributes to innovation and who receives recognition for it.

Asha's experience is important because the problem is not presented simply as a lack of female participation in technology. She is already inside the technological process and possesses the skills needed to shape it. The difficulty lies in the unequal distribution of visibility and authority. Her technical contribution becomes less visible while Cyrus gains greater public recognition. This suggests that participation in technological innovation does not necessarily guarantee equal professional power.

The idea of algorithmic authorship is therefore useful in understanding Asha's position. Authorship involves more than producing an idea; it also involves recognition, ownership, and the authority to influence how that idea is developed and represented. Asha's struggle can consequently be understood as a struggle to maintain a connection between her intellectual labour and the recognition attached to it. The novel raises an important question about who has the right to be recognized as the creator of technological innovation.

This issue also expands the meaning of digital feminism in the novel. Equality in technology cannot be

understood only in terms of increasing women's participation. It also requires attention to who receives credit, who holds decision-making power, and whose ideas become visible. Asha's experience shows that women may have significant technical expertise while still facing barriers to recognition and authority. Anam therefore presents technological authorship as a question of gender and power rather than simply a matter of individual achievement.

iii. Start-up Culture and the Reproduction of Gender Inequality

The novel also suggests that start-up culture may reproduce traditional gender inequalities despite its emphasis on innovation, flexibility, and new ideas. Asha plays an important role in the development of the company, yet public attention and leadership increasingly become associated with Cyrus. The contrast between Asha's technical contribution and Cyrus's public visibility reveals how professional authority can be shaped by gendered expectations.

This contrast is important because the start-up presents itself as a modern alternative to traditional workplaces. Its innovative identity creates the impression that conventional social hierarchies can be left behind. However, Asha's experience complicates this image. The workplace may be technologically advanced while still reflecting familiar patterns in which male figures receive greater visibility and authority. Anam therefore questions the assumption that a modern workplace is necessarily an equal workplace.

The novel does not suggest that every start-up operates in exactly the same way. Rather, Asha's experience demonstrates how gendered expectations can remain influential even within workplaces that value innovation and merit. The tension between the start-up's progressive image and its unequal distribution of recognition becomes one of the novel's central criticisms of contemporary technology culture.

iv. Women's Contributions and the Problem of Recognition

The study also finds that *The Startup Wife* draws attention to the limited visibility of women's professional contributions. Asha provides technical knowledge, creative ideas, and significant intellectual labour to the development of the start-up. Yet her contribution does not receive the same level of public attention as Cyrus's role. This difference between contribution and recognition is central to the novel's representation of workplace inequality.

Importantly, Anam does not present this inequality only through direct acts of discrimination. It also appears through everyday patterns of visibility, leadership, and professional authority. Asha's experience suggests that recognition can be shaped by assumptions about who looks like a leader and whose contribution is considered central to success. The problem is therefore structural as well as personal.

This finding strengthens the study's argument about algorithmic patriarchy. If technological organizations are shaped by existing social values, then gender inequality can influence not only who works in technology but also whose knowledge is valued within it. Asha's experience demonstrates why equal participation alone may not be sufficient. Meaningful equality also requires recognition of women's intellectual labour and their inclusion in decisions concerning the work they help to create.

v. Female Agency Develops Through Resistance

Another major finding is that Asha's agency develops through her resistance to roles that threaten her independence. Her struggle is particularly visible in her imagined figure of "Mrs. Jones," whom she associates with domestic responsibilities and the expectations of being an ideal wife. Her humorous desire to "murder" this imagined version of herself reflects her rejection of an identity that she believes would limit her individuality.

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The significance of this moment lies in the contrast between Asha's professional identity and the identity represented by Mrs. Jones. Asha is a programmer, entrepreneur, and creator, while Mrs. Jones represents a life centred on domestic service and pleasing a husband. By imagining the destruction of this version of herself, Asha symbolically rejects the idea that marriage should define the boundaries of her identity.

Her agency, however, is not presented as complete or effortless. Asha experiences uncertainty and conflict, and her understanding of herself develops gradually. This makes her journey significant because empowerment is shown as a continuing process rather than a single act of rebellion. Her ability to question expectations, make independent choices, and reconsider her position allows her to move towards a stronger sense of self.

vi. Digital Feminism Creates New Possibilities

The study further finds that *The Startup Wife* presents technology as a space that can provide possibilities for both inequality and resistance. Asha is not merely a consumer of technology; she is a programmer, creator, and entrepreneur who participates in shaping technological innovation. Her position challenges the assumption that technological expertise belongs primarily to men.

Her understanding of technology is also different from a purely profit-oriented approach. Her idea of the "Empathy Module" is intended to create connection and community. This human-centred approach gives her technological work a social dimension. The combination of technical knowledge and concern for human relationships allows Asha to imagine technology in a way that differs from conventional narratives of technological success.

However, the novel also shows that creating a more human-centred technology does not automatically transform the power relations within the organization. Asha's own experience demonstrates the tension between the values built into a technological idea and the social structures surrounding its development. Digital feminism in the novel can therefore be understood not simply as the use of technology for feminist activism but also as a challenge to the gendered structures that shape technological production, recognition, and leadership.

Taken together, these findings show that *The Startup Wife* is more than a novel about technology, business, and start-up culture. It uses the digital world to examine continuing questions about gender, recognition, identity, and power. The novel suggests that technological development may create new opportunities without necessarily removing existing inequalities. The experience of Asha Ray demonstrates how gendered power relations can remain present within workplaces that appear modern and progressive.

At the same time, Anam does not present Asha only as a victim of these structures. Her technical knowledge, confidence, resistance, and gradual development of self-awareness demonstrate her capacity to challenge the limitations placed upon her. Her struggle for recognition is therefore also a struggle for agency. Through Asha's journey, the novel brings together two important aspects of the digital world: technology can reproduce existing inequalities, but it can also provide opportunities for women to participate, create, question, and resist.

The study therefore argues that *The Startup Wife* offers a significant feminist reading of contemporary technology culture. By connecting technological innovation with questions of gender and power, the novel encourages readers to consider not only who creates technology but also who receives recognition, who exercises authority, and whose contributions become visible. Asha's journey ultimately highlights the

importance of female agency and equal recognition in shaping a more inclusive technological environment.

8. Conclusion

This study examined Tahmima Anam's *The Startup Wife* through the concepts of algorithmic patriarchy, digital feminism, and female agency. The analysis shows that the novel uses the world of technology and start-up culture to explore continuing issues of gender inequality, recognition, power, and identity. Although technology and start-up culture are often associated with progress, innovation, and equal opportunity, the experiences of Asha Ray suggest that these environments may also reproduce existing gender inequalities.

One of the major findings of the study is that technology cannot be understood as completely separate from society. Through Asha's experiences, Anam shows how gendered power relations can operate within technological environments. Asha makes significant contributions to the development of the start-up, particularly through her technical knowledge and the development of the Empathy Module. However, her contribution does not always receive the same level of recognition or authority as that of the men around her. This difference between contribution and recognition demonstrates how gender can influence professional visibility, leadership, and access to power.

The study also finds that the start-up environment presented in the novel may reproduce traditional ideas about leadership and authority. Although Asha possesses technical expertise and contributes significantly to the company's development, Cyrus increasingly becomes associated with its public identity and leadership. Her experience therefore suggests that technological workplaces may appear progressive while still reflecting familiar gendered patterns. The novel challenges the assumption that talent and innovation alone determine professional success and recognition.

At the same time, *The Startup Wife* is not only a narrative of inequality. It is also a story of resistance, self-discovery, and the development of female agency. Asha questions the expectations placed upon her both as a woman and as a wife. Her struggle to protect her professional identity and independence shows that agency develops through the process of questioning and resisting restrictive roles. Rather than presenting empowerment as a sudden transformation, Anam represents it as a gradual process of self-awareness and self-determination.

The study also highlights the importance of digital feminism in understanding Asha's relationship with technology. Asha is not simply a user of technology but a creator and innovator who participates in shaping it. Her vision of technology is connected with empathy, human connection, and community. This suggests that when women participate in shaping technological systems, technology can become a tool for empowerment. At the same time, the novel shows that such possibilities depend on challenging the unequal structures that influence technological production and leadership.

Overall, this study argues that *The Startup Wife* is a significant work of contemporary feminist literature because it brings together questions of gender, technology, entrepreneurship, marriage, and identity. Anam's representation of Asha demonstrates that technological progress may create new opportunities while existing social inequalities remain. The novel therefore encourages readers to consider not only the possibilities offered by technology but also the social attitudes and power structures that shape its development and use. Meaningful equality requires attention to both technological change and the gender relations within which that change takes place.

Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to the existing scholarship on *The Startup Wife* by bringing together literary

analysis and perspectives from feminist theory, gender studies, and technology studies. First, it examines the novel through the concept of algorithmic patriarchy, which has received comparatively limited attention in existing discussions of the text. While previous studies have largely focused on feminism, identity, entrepreneurship, and gender inequality, this study considers how technological environments may reflect and reproduce gendered forms of power and recognition.

Second, the study contributes to literary discussions of technology and gender by applying the concept of algorithmic patriarchy to a contemporary literary text. Rather than treating technology as a separate or purely technical subject, the study examines how technological innovation is connected with social relationships, professional authority, and gender. The close reading of Asha's experiences demonstrates how literary representation can reveal the social and cultural dimensions of technological development.

Third, the study brings the concept of digital feminism into the discussion of *The Startup Wife*. It considers digital spaces not only as environments in which gender inequality may be reproduced but also as spaces in which women can participate, create, question existing structures, and develop forms of agency. This provides a more balanced understanding of technology as both a possible site of inequality and a possible space for resistance.

Finally, the study contributes to the growing discussion of gender and technology in contemporary literature by connecting Asha's professional experiences with broader questions of recognition, authorship, leadership, and female agency. Through this approach, the study highlights how *The Startup Wife* reflects wider concerns about women's position within technology-driven societies and demonstrates the continuing relevance of feminist literary criticism to contemporary digital culture.

Future Research and Final Reflection

This study opens several possibilities for future research. Future scholars may examine the representation of artificial intelligence, ethics, and technological responsibility in contemporary fiction. Further research could also explore the representation of women in start-up culture and entrepreneurial narratives, particularly the relationship between professional success, gender, and leadership. Other possible areas include digital labour, gender inequality in contemporary literature, and the relationship between feminism and technology in South Asian writing.

Comparative studies could examine *The Startup Wife* alongside other works by Tahmima Anam or texts by contemporary women writers. A comparison between *The Startup Wife* and Begum Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream* could be particularly valuable for examining how ideas of women's empowerment, technology, and social freedom have developed from early feminist writing to the digital age. Such a study could explore the different ways in which technology is imagined as a means of challenging gender inequality across different historical and cultural contexts.

Overall, *The Startup Wife* suggests that technological advancement does not necessarily eliminate existing social inequalities. Gender discrimination may take different forms as social and technological environments change. At the same time, the novel offers a perspective of resistance through Asha Ray, who is presented as an intelligent, creative, and determined woman seeking greater control over her professional and personal identity. Her journey highlights the importance of women's ability to claim recognition for their work, express their own voices, and define their identities on their own terms. In this sense, *The Startup Wife* functions both as a critique of gender inequality within contemporary technological spaces and as a representation of women's agency and resilience in a changing society.

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