

WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY: A FEMINIST STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF NADIA HASHMI'S "A HOUSE WITHOUT WINDOWS

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Received: 10 January, 2023

Revised: 10 February, 2024

Accepted: 17 February, 2024

Published: 26 February, 2024

ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on women's human rights status in the male-dominated Afghan society as reflected in *A House Without Windows* by Nadia Hashmi. The core objective of this research is to discover how Nadia Hashmi has given voice to the women who lack basic human rights in an extremely dominating patriarchal society. For this purpose, Sara Mills's (1995) "Dominance Approach" from the theory of feministic stylistics has been used as a theoretical framework to analyze the text in detail. Moreover, the researchers bring to the limelight the disasters that are inflicted upon families where men exercise their power over women ruthlessly. In addition, the study also investigates the issues women have been facing due to the deprivation of their social and cultural rights. The current research employs textual analysis and is qualitative. The research suggests that women should be provided with their complete rights to live freely and contribute to society's prosperity.

INTRODUCTION

Nadia Hashmi, the author of the novel "A House Without Windows", has developed this distinct voice through her writings to emphasize Afghan women's glitches that they have been facing for decades. "A House Without Windows" focuses on Afghan women's problems, which are generally overlooked and disregarded by society and its authorities. Nadia Hashmi pointed out the plights of women whom men dominate in all relationships, as reflected skillfully in the novel. At the beginning of *A House Without Windows*, a striking statement is given by a character, "Imagine a home led by three different patriarchs in one year, she thought to herself. No, this kind of home could not survive, nor could a country".

The title of the novel is taken from Rumi's *Masnavi*. The word "window" in the title symbolizes hope, optimism, light and, most importantly, a way to connect with the world outside. Without windows, the same house turns

gloomy, dark, limited and confined without any connection with the outside world, adding pessimism and hopelessness. The female characters of the novel are divulging the same situation. They have been imprisoned in their own houses due to the patriarchal social pressures. Freedom is everyone's basic human right, but the female characters in the novel have been deprived of it. Human rights report on imprisoned women in Afghanistan, her parents, family, media coverage, journalist reviews, and her travel to Afghanistan forced Hashmi to pen down the burning issues, glitches, hardships, and violence against women in the Afghan patriarchal society (Martin, 2016). She describes how the female characters are deprived of their basic rights by showing their fate, helplessness and powerlessness at the hands of men.

The present research is based on investigating the lives of the four Afghan women who are the sample of this study: Zeba, Mezghan, Nafisa and

Latifa, Atifa, Gulnaaz, and Zeba's sister are the minor characters in the novel. Zeba meets these four women during her time in prison. These women come closer to Zeba during their imprisonment. All these four women have their own stories of painful and suffocating experiences at the hands of males in the form of their fathers, brothers, husbands or any male guardian. Zeba is imprisoned with the allegation of killing her abusive husband, Kamal. Other women have their issues, e.g. one is accused of murder without any clear evidence, another is accused of having a marital affair and sex outside marriage, and the third ran away from home as she was forced to marry a boy other than the one whom she loved. Zeba is locked up with her cellmates Latifa, Nafisa, and Mezghan. Latifa is accused of running away from their home along with her sister in order not to live with their parents anymore. Nafisa is charged with having an extramarital affair with a boy. Meghzan is accused of refusing the marriage proposal arranged by her elder sister while her sister knew that she was in love with a boy named Haroon. With time, Zeba, the novel's protagonist, starts feeling free from the clutches of patriarchal society outside the jail and feels more secure in the prison. The imprisoned females have made their world inside the jail and are not ready to leave. They feel happy inside the jail without any men around them who can exercise their power over them. The prisoner women have started feeling their own value and worth of their existence as human beings, which they never realized while outside the prison in control of men. How the status of women as free souls emerges while they open up and vent out their feelings, actions and thoughts inside the jail summarizes how hard it must have been for them to stay in the clutches of patriarchs. Moreover, the unproved charges upon female prisoners due to which they have been imprisoned in Chil Mehtab is a question mark on the legal system of Afghanistan as reflected by the novelist. These are the main reasons the researchers want to analyze the novel *A House Without Windows* using The Dominance Approach from the Feministic Stylistics perspective.

According to "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" preamble which stated,

"Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom" (p-1).

The present research will explore the rights of women in a dominating society, their dignity and worth as human beings, and their freedom and justice through the lens of feministic stylistics in the novel "*A House Without Windows*" by considering four major articles from "the Universal Declaration of human rights", third printing March 1998. These are Article 26,

"Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all based on merit" (p-7).

Article 7

"All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against incitement to such discrimination" (p-3).

Article 16, point 1 and 2,

1." Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights to marriage during marriage

and at its dissolution. 2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses” (p-5).

Article 25, point 2,

“Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection”.

In 1995, Sara Mills coined the term feministic stylistics. In this theory, she provided the tools to unleash the biases against women. This theory discovers the relationship between language and gender in various literary and non-literary texts. A well-known approach that works under feministic stylistic is “the dominance approach”. This approach maintains that women have an inferior status in society and men have the dominant status. This theory argues that men dominate women in all spheres of life. These particular social situations are mirrored in men's and women's language use: Men linguistically exercise power over women, and females are linguistically weak and powerless compared to men. The present research throws light on how the dominance of patriarchy in “A House Without Windows” exercises their power both physically and linguistically on women to the extent that the women prefer to stay in jails instead of living with men peacefully at home.

OBJECTIVES:

The research addresses the following core objectives:

1. To find out the status of women's rights in the patriarchal society reflected through the novel.
2. To find out how the legal system is working impartially without gender discrimination for women, as mirrored in the novel.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The research focuses on the following core questions:

1. What is the status of women in a patriarchal society as depicted in this novel?
2. How partially/impartially does the legal system play its role for the women in the novel?

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”, published in 1998, focuses on the equality of all individuals before the law. It ensures the non-discriminatory protection of the law. Moreover, the law shall stop discrimination and ensure effective safety against acumen based on caste, creed, color, gender, religion, language, political, birth, property, national or international or social origin or any other status.

According to the well-known philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, freedom is the fundamental difference between humans and other creatures on earth (Vincent Martin, 2001). Freedom cannot be talked about or to be proved; it is the biggest reality that has to be experienced by humans. The humans who enjoy freedom govern what kind of humans they will turn into, including their values, beliefs and thoughts, and also determine the instinct within themselves (Vincent Martin, 2001). Several studies have been conducted on patriarchal society and patriarchy in previous years. Most of these studies were on the violence against women in Afghan patriarchal society, as mirrored through A House without Window by Nadia Hashmi (2020), were made by Mohsin Hamid Butt, Saqib Mehmood, and Muhammad Salman. The studies examined female figures in detail and concluded that women were being stereotypically marginalized in the form of discrimination in their rights to live the way they wanted to live and patriarchal domination of male characters in every aspect of their lives.

Another significant study was done in 2019 by Naili Syiva Fauzia and Anik Chanaying Rahayu entitled, Women's Struggle against Patriarchy: An Analysis of Radical Feminism Through Nadia Hashimi's A House Without Windows. The author aims to describe the tyranny of patriarchy and the realization of the females fighting for their basic rights, turning themselves into radical feminism. The third crucial research is done on The Glimpse of Pashtunwali in Hosseini's The Kite Runner, A Thousand Splendid Suns, Hashimi's A House Without Windows and Ackerman's Green on Blue (2018) by Rashid Jahan. The study highlights the concept of Pashtunwali or Afghanityat as a conventional way to live in Afghanistan according to the traditions of the Pushtun tribe.

This study shows how Pashtun people spend their lives by adopting an undocumented code of honor. Jahan highlights a new vision for those who do not have any knowledge of cultural practices in Afghanistan. He also provides first-hand details of Afghans' issues and social problems. He has also worked on digging out the root causes of the social problems, especially the tyrannizing cultural practices in Afghanistan.

Rasheed (2023) studies the personified liberation of women in the jail of Chil Mehtab in Afghanistan in her article, "Women in Afghanistan: The ambivalence of prison in A House without windows" by Nadia Hashmi. According to her, when women are imprisoned because of the hegemonic decree of patriarchal social law, they become the victims of legal injustice and remain there without being proven guilty. The prisoner women in Chil Mehtab have created close bonds to the extent that they feel a sense of strong belongingness to that prison and reject their male dictators house-of-a-man who crush them by treating them as their slaves and considering themselves as their master.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The research is based on qualitative textual analysis and has been applied to investigate the status of women's rights as reflected in Afghanistan by Nadia Hashmi.

"**The Dominance Approach**" from "**Feministic stylistics**" by Sara Mills (1995) has been used as a theoretical framework for the present study. The researchers have explored the status of women's rights and the Afghan legal system in Afghanistan in the selected text. The research was completed by exploring the textual material from the selected texts and various other sources like research articles, book reviews, and journals.

Spender's book, *Man-Made Language*, established the dominance framework. The framework represents women as completely under the dominance and control of men. This is the second main framework out of the three main approaches of feminism introduced by Spender for the first time (1980). Simpson (1993) explains this theory as the most influential contribution to the field of sexism in language in previous years. This theory introduces a notion of complete control of men

and submission of women, and that submission is depicted linguistically in their speech. This theory explains that men are the ultimate authority who, by the use of language, have acquired a certain social position that replaces women and oppresses and excludes them as well. According to Spender, men are the ones who 'made' the English language specifically and never released their grasp over the language because, through the language, men exercise their entire control over women. There is a direct connection between this linguistic dominance and the patriarchal order over the existence of women (Simpson,1993). Simpson reinforces Spender's arguments when he refers to the 'chain of reasoning' by giving these four points of dominance framework:

1. Man-made language
2. Language controls reality
3. Men control reality
4. Men control women

For the present study, the Dominance framework in the selected text, "A House Without Windows", helps explore where men control reality in societal law and women in their relationships. In addition, the dominance framework, according to Spender, requires extensive innovation and transformation of the English language (Simpson, 1993). In order to handle sexism directly, language needs a change in the form of reinvention.

Discussions:

As the prerogative stated earlier, the researchers want to examine the status of women's rights in *A House without Windows* by Nadia Hashmi. The issues were gathered by listing the two research questions: What is the status of women in a patriarchal society depicted in this novel? How impartially does the legal system play its role in women's lives in the novel? In the selected text, the principles of the Dominance theory of feminism by Sara Mills directly align with the violation of basic women's rights. In the novel, from the beginning till the end, it is obvious that the societal hierarchies are constructed and recognized along with the imbalance exercise of power, leading to the subjugation of certain groups. In this context, the women are oppressed and deprived of their essential fundamental rights due to the

dominance forced by the men in Afghan society reflected in the novel. The following discussion and specific textual examples prove the violation of basic women's rights in the light of the Dominance theory of feminism.

The UN Charter writes about its "faith in fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom". It can be seen in the following discussion under the light of the dominant approach of feminism that how the faith in fundamental human rights, equality of men and women to promote social progress in life at larger freedom is violated in the novel as depicted by Nadia Hashmi.

Yusuf, who is Zeba's husband, is found dead as the novel opens, and Zeba is put into jail without being proven guilty. He exerted his control over Zeba when he said, "I was her husband, and it was my duty to guide her, to protect her even from herself". This exercise of power is a manifestation of dominance where male characters like Yusuf strongly believe and try to make his wife realize that they have the entire right to control women's actions, decisions and even their thought processes. Thus rejecting their freedom of opinion and autonomy.

"Yusuf was the authority in our house. [...] My husband told me what I could say and when I could say it." The strict control and restrictions upon Zeba by her husband Yusuf illustrate how she was spending her life in the clutches of male chauvinism. Yusuf was controlling Zeba's actions and turning her into a silent mass of protoplasm. She was bound to bow in front of whatever decision her husband took. This is a clear manifestation of the lack of autonomy and independence that Zeba experienced within her very own home, reflecting the clear picture of a house without windows suffocating her to no end.

The UN Charter stresses the right to education for everyone without discrimination, as is mentioned in Article 26,

"Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be

compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all based on merit" (p-7).

However, the females in the novel are deprived of their basic right to education because of the societal dictates and dominance of males. The males believe that a woman's first and foremost duty is to serve men. Her role as a wife is to serve her husband physically, give birth to his kids, raise them, perform all the domestic chores and remain silent in front of men. Only education can promote awareness of their rights among women. As mentioned in the UN Charter, education is the basic right of all human beings irrespective of gender discrimination. However, when this right is denied to women by men, men deliberately desire to limit women's access to knowledge, freedom and basic rights. As the novel shows, "Yusuf had been the one to say that girls did not need education. Their purpose was to keep a home and raise children". Those were the reflections of Yusuf's limiting beliefs about the role of women and their status in a patriarchal society. That is how men control women and reality, as stated in the Dominance approach. Education is the most important tool that can enhance women's understanding of challenging the authority of men, so restricting their access to education reinforces the power dynamic at its maximum. Many women in the novel, particularly Zeba, the protagonist, are denied this fundamental educational right. The women who are imprisoned in Chil Mehtab have suffered beyond imagination due to physical and mental traumas. Their stories bleed with oppression and cruelty. They turned into silent animals who were prone to suffering and male dominance. "Fear and pain had made my tongue too heavy to lift."

Zeba chooses to remain silent when interrogated by the officials in Chil Mehtab, the jail where she is imprisoned after the murder of Yusuf. However, this silence is not merely the result of tyranny, oppression, and a lack of respect, honor, and love from men but the result of no light of education that has ever entered Zeba's life.

According to the UN Charter of Human Rights Article 16, points 1 and 2, 1, the right to get married is the basic right of every individual.

“Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage during marriage and at its dissolution.2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses” (p-5).

However, the female characters depicted in the novel *A House Without Windows* accurately manifest “females” without “rights”. Mezghan is the jail mate of Zeba. She suffered from societal pressure to get married but was deprived of choosing her life partner. She was in love with a boy named Haroon, and she refused the marriage proposal that her elder sister liked for her. This refusal was considered a crime, and as a result, she was put in jail. "The world watched us. My father's good name would be sullied if I refused the marriage." Again, the father's name is more important than the girl's life and her right to choose her life partner. Zeba was also very young and was not ready to marry Yusuf, but her father exercised his power and authority and bluntly refused to listen to anything from Zeba's mother. Once, Zeba told her son, "I and your dad are the bad pair". Moreover, the social expectation of marriage is also dominant by men. According to the novel, "Marriage was the ultimate promise to obey. To forsake all others, including oneself." - Describing the societal expectations of marriage. The institution of marriage also serves as a tool to exert male dominance. Women are expected to obey their husbands, relinquish their physical and sexual thirst, raise their children, and serve them without a single complaint. In short, the identity and reality of a woman is made by men. She does not have any individuality before or even after marriage.

Motherhood is the most sensitive part of a woman's life, where she needs care, love and affection at its maximum. Every child at the same time has the right to live because he/she is

not responsible for their birth. According to the UN Charter, Article 25, point 2,

“Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection”.

On the contrary, Latifa is imprisoned with the same allegation of murder as the protagonist, Zeba. She is accused of the murder of her illegitimate child, a baby girl, after giving birth to her. As the circumstances of the murder of Yusuf by Zeba are mysterious; similarly, the death of an infant is mysterious. However, it creates a crucial part of Latifa's life as her predicaments throw light on the challenges, injustice, and deprivation of women's rights in the traditional, orthodox and men-dominant Afghan culture. Throughout Latifa's stay in prison, she is seen fighting with the stigma of having an illegitimate child and societal judgements of being an unmarried mother. Social pressures, conservative culture, and violation by men can be the cause of an infant's murder in the hands of an unmarried mother. Resultantly, Latifa never comes out of the mental trauma of killing her daughter, though both the mother and the child have the right to live. She was forced to kill her baby because the father of the baby was not known. This implies two aspects: a man raped her, or a man deceived her in love by developing sexual relations with her and disappeared later.

Elaborating on the discussion on the second research question on the legal system and justice for women in the novel *A House Without Windows*, the researchers explored that the stories of imprisoned women highlight the lack of legal rights in the patriarchal Afghan society. According to Article 7 of Human Rights,

“All men and women are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection without discrimination. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against incitement to such discrimination” (p-3).

Throughout the textual analysis of the novel, it has been illustrated that women are not treated as equally as men. They are mostly treated as the

property or sex objects which are born to serve men. They do not have any social freedom or right over their own lives and bodies but are bound to men's will. They are denied legal rights, as portrayed in the case of Zeba, who is imprisoned without being proven guilty. She is being judged by social prejudices instead of a concrete trial. Only because Fareed, the brother-in-law of Yusuf, started shouting and accusing Zeba of being the murderer of Yusuf, police put her into Chil Mehtab. The following statement from the lawyer in the novel unveils the legal injustice and biases against women, "It's your word against the word of a dead man, and the dead man's word will always carry more weight." The legal system favored unfair trials for women, as Zeba was detained in prison for a longer period without any access to a legal, fair trial and representation. She was not judged on objective facts rather than social expectations and rotten norms.

Lack of legal representation in the form of a lack of adequate lawyers to defend the cases of women, social stigma and the dominating society at large are the root causes of the voices of women being silenced and their perspectives being dismissed. For instance, Latifa, who is in prison for running away from home and kidnapping her sister so as not to be with her parents, is still under the control of her parents, and they make decisions about whether to provide her with legal agency or not. Mostly, the male member in the form of a father, brother or any male guardian never supports a woman if they do not conform to man-made social and cultural norms. So, women like Latifa always lack legal representation and are denied the basic right to defend themselves through fair trials.

Bibi Shireen, a minor character in the novel, shares her traumatic story with Zeba. The researchers highlight the unfair and ferocious legal system working against women in Afghan society. Bibi Shireen an old woman who did not commit any crime and is completely innocent was put to jail only because of her son. Again, a woman is being punished for the misdeed of her son. He eloped with a girl, and this incident destroyed the life of Bibi Shireen, and she became the victim of a biased legal system. She shares her painful story with Zeba and says:

"My son was in love with a girl and

when they ran off together, the girl's brothers found them and killed him. They have locked me up because my son is dead, and someone has got to be blamed. Moreover, they want my daughter to be married to one of the killers, in retribution for my son's transgression. I've been here for three years and have another twenty-seven to go. Do you see my hair- white as garlic clove? I will die here! What can you do for me" (p. 196)

Bibi Shireen fell victim to masculine society as her story unmasked the grotesque picture of the legal system, which turned blind against women as she has been suffering in jail for the last thirty years. Cultural biases and discrimination against women play a significant role in the legal injustices depicted in the novel. Women who challenge traditional gender roles or behave in ways deemed inappropriate by societal standards face harsh judgments. For instance, Atifa, another character in the novel, is imprisoned and faces societal judgment due to her unwed pregnancy, highlighting the cultural stigma against unmarried mothers.

Zeba's mother, Gulnaaz, knows black magic. Once Zeba shares this with the rest of the jail fellows in a poetic way with a tone of freedom, the imprisoned women start showing their desire in front of Zeba if she could help in fulfilling their unfulfilled desires through whatever knowledge she has from her mom. She starts listening to the stories of the unfortunate women. Zeba wishes to save the females who have suffered endless pain, humiliation and violence by men in their lives, yet she knows that she cannot save all of them through any spell or magic. "Zeba rubbed at her eyes. The stories were too much for her. There was noway her jadu would free a prison full of condemned women. No spell would changethe fact that a woman's worth was measured, with scientific diligence, in blood. Awoman was only as good as the drops that fell on her wedding night, the ounces shebled with the turns of the moon, and the small river she shed giving her husband children. Some women were judged most ultimately, having their veins emptied to atone for their sins or the sins of others." (p. 201)

To sum up, the discussion mentioned above, it can be stated that the lack of basic human rights ruins the status of women in Afghan patriarchal society. It particularly has destroyed the female characters in the novel. Gender inequality in terms of deciding to marry, lack of education for women, no security, love, or respect and an unfair legal system is the root cause of women's disturbance and consequently the disturbance of the house, society and country. In addition, strict dominance and control give birth to cynical patriarchy, which will ultimately give rise to the violation of women's rights in society. Nadia Hashmi proposes through her writing that men and women, in general, and husband and wife, in particular, can bring prosperity to the country only if both get equal rights to live peacefully and independently. A house without equal rights is no peaceful place to live in, but a house with equal rights for women can turn a house into heaven, which appears to be the sole purpose of Hashmi in *A House Without Windows*.

Conclusion:

The present study leads to the conclusion that male dominance prevails in various shapes, for instance, violence, sexual assault, domestic abuse, mental and physical torture, rapes, unequal rights for education, marriage and discriminated legal system in Afghan society as portrayed by Hashmi. The main causes behind such an atrocious and discriminated society are the orthodox mindset of men, gender discrimination in every sphere of life and a biased legal system. The selected text unmasks an unfair legal system that deceives and traps Afghan women. They have been thrown into jail with proven guilty. In most cases, they do not have any legal rights to hire a lawyer who can initiate an investigation. The cruelty reaches its peak when, in some cases, it is a lifetime imprisonment where the accused has not done anything wrong at all and is being punished as a replacement for some men. The study also highlights the unending suffering of the women afflicted upon them by men in different forms e.g., extreme humiliation, disrespectful attitude, pinching remarks and extreme mental and physical torture. Females are always considered inferior to men, and they are not even allowed to take part in any major decisions in the house.

Male is considered superior and has the right to abuse women in any way. Men do not give them an equal status to humans. Rather, women have been mistreated like an animal. Moreover, the research proposes that no house can be peaceful without a woman. Formulating a happy house and prosperous society while not giving equal and respectful status to women is impossible. The study suggests the solution to the multiple problems and hardships women face by ensuring equal rights without discrimination. If women get their true status, the house will become a heaven on earth. For a perfect society, it is essential that women get their due rights and status, equal opportunities in education and decision of marriage, and actively participate in establishing a healthy, balanced and comfortable environment. The research strongly supports the idea that a house without women's freedom is no house. Women should be given a house and not a prison.

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