



RESEARCH PAPER

Violence Against Women in Afghan Patriarchal Setup Reflected Through Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows*

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ABSTRACT

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The present research deals with violence against women in Afghan patriarchal society as reflected through *A House Without Windows* by Nadia Hashimi. Besides, the purpose of this study is to discover the factors that cause violence against women in Afghan patriarchal society. For this purpose, Sylvia Walby's insight of violence has been taken as a theoretical framework to analyze the text minutely. In addition, the researcher has discovered that violence against women shatters the peace and mutual understanding of families in Afghanistan. The undertaken research is based on textual analysis and is qualitative in nature. Furthermore, it suggests that women should be given freedom oriented environment with due rights and be protected from violence and exploitation so that they may actively contribute to the prosperity of society.

Introduction

The message, the rain, and the divine light come through my window

Falling into my house from my origins

Hell is that house without window

True religion, O servant of God, is creating a window

Do not raise your ax to every nook, come

Raise your ax to frame a window

Do you not know that sunlight?

Is only the image of the sun that appears beyond her veil? (Hashimi, 2016)

Hashimi chose the title of the novel from Rumi's Masnavi. The title *A House Without Windows* is itself symbolic. For example, the word 'windows' in the title symbolizes optimism, hope, light, and also shows a connection to the outside world. Without windows, a house is very dark, confined and constricted and without connection to the outside world - as the female characters of the novel reveal the same situation. In addition, human rights report on imprisoned women in Afghanistan, her family, journalist reports and her travel to Afghanistan evoke Hashimi to write such burning issues, problems, and violence against women in Afghan patriarchal society (Martin, 2016).

Moreover, Nadia Hashimi seems to develop a distinct voice, pointing out the Afghan women's problems which are usually ignored by society and the authorities. Similarly, she tries to make people aware of the violence against women in Afghan patriarchal society. Hashimi is an Afghan-American writer, a pediatrician, and also an author of three international bestselling novels such as *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*, *When the Moon Is Low*, and *A House Without Windows*. Besides, Hashimi's novels are more concerned with the lives of the Afghan people especially women. Specifically, she points out the women's issues in a patriarchal society- describes the Afghan traditions and culture in details. In her another spellbinding novel, *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*, she points out the fate, helplessness, and powerlessness of young girls. Rahima and her sisters are confined in the four walls of their house, and can rarely go to school or outside the home just because they are girls.

Literature Review

Report on Afghan Women

Hussain Hasrat makes a report on Afghan women which shows that violence against women is a focal problem and women are facing various difficulties and challenges in their private and social life. It is perpetrated in manifold shapes and forms and the perpetrators are mostly men. From this viewpoint, violence against women is an undeniable issue and reality in Afghanistan. The report discusses multifarious kinds of violence against women. The common manifestation of violence against women is, i.e. domestic and physical violence, verbal abuse, economic, and sexual violence (2002, p. 4). In addition to it, the report shows that fifteen thousand women have faced different types of violence in one year. The first most common type of violence is physical violence in Afghanistan. It is related to the forced prostitution, forced sexual intercourse, husband's illicit relationships with other women, and demands for unlawful acts (Hasrat, 2002, p. 2).

Reviews on Book

Saadia Faruqi believes that Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows* portrays the life of Afghan people and culture, norms, and values. However, the theme of the novel is touching, for instance, the fate of girls and women in patriarchal strata. Hashimi has fabricated one female character that shows the ups and downs faced by the women living in Afghanistan. The story revolves around the protagonist, Zeba, who murders her husband and this story of murder reveals different practices, biases, and prejudice against women. In the same way, this story of murder makes readers curious to read more and more in order to solve the murder mystery (Faruqi, 2016).

In addition, Zeba has been living a miserable and pitiful married life as she is the wife of a dunker, Kamal. When she is in jail she realizes that jail is teeming with stories of crimes as the majority of female characters have been accused of jail because they don't follow men's orders. She understands the stories of other female characters as they are the passengers of the same boat and jail is something like a shelter for women. Women face humiliation, disrespect, and violence as the major theme of the novel is Violence against women. Zeba shapes her thoughts into words that explicate the problematic condition of women (Faruqi, 2016).

Nadia Hashimi has written much about Afghanistan, Afghan culture, and tradition and also portrays the picture of Afghan women. She belongs to America but she writes about the country where her parents used to live. Her style of writing is surprisingly astonishing, as, in one chapter, the reader is at home but at the same time, after a couple of pages, the story takes the reader to America with a family who has migrated to America via Pakistan. Similarly, Yusuf, an Afghan-born American raised lawyer who comes back to his birth country, Afghanistan, has to do well for his country. Thus, he joins an N.G.O and is assigned Zeba's case, who is accused to murder his husband, Kamal. Gulnaz, Zeba's mother, having green eyes is a *jadugar*, works for the prisoners at ChilMahtab where her daughter is imprisoned. Life within the prison is not bad as female characters think about, as compared to the prison in India (Raja, 2016). Although, the life of women around the world is improving and they are "entering the work force and becoming financially independent, as well as becoming more aware of their rights, but the change is slow, and has not dismantled the underlying problem, that of impunity" (Ismail, 2020, p.53).

Research Methodology

The research is based on textual analysis and is qualitative in nature. The researcher has undertaken the task to explore the theme of violence against women in Afghan patriarchal society in the selected text. Similarly, research has been completed through the interpretation of various sources like books, journals, articles, book reviews and materials available on the writer.

Theoretical Framework

This chapter deals with the theoretical framework which helps in analyzing the selected text. Taking insight from feminist theory, this chapter points out the connection of patriarchy with male's violence against women in strict Afghan patriarchal society. For example, the selected text reveals that women are facing socio-political and economic inequality in Afghan society. In addition, for textual analysis, Sylvia Walby's structure of violence has been applied.

Feminism takes into account several issues related to women, for instance, domestic, physical and sexual violence, harassment, right to cast vote, and right to own property. Moreover, patriarchy reinforces men to exploit women because it is socially constructed. Heidi Hartmann defines patriarchy as "a set of social relations between men...which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (Murray, 2005, p. 7). Furthermore, in *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Sylvia Walby defines that "Patriarchy is a system of social structure and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (1990, p. 20). Walby further categorizes patriarchy into six structures: the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, patriarchal relations in sexualities, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. More recently, in relation to each of the structures, it is possible to identify sets of patriarchal practices in a male-dominated or patriarchal society (1990, p. 20).

In the same way, the first structure, patriarchal production deals with women's household duties and labor. In exchange for labor, women may receive maintenance as they are not tied up in waged labor. Housewives are producing class, while husbands are expropriating class. Further, the second structure of patriarchy deals with the economic level that shows the patriarchal relation within paid work. It shows that women are disrespected by men as they are given inferior jobs or jobs that are for a less skilled person. Similarly, the third one is related to the state as the state is male-dominated as well as capitalist and racist. The state has partial biases towards patriarchal comforts in its actions and policies against women.

Similarly, Walby in the 4th structure of *Theorizing patriarchy* describes men's violence against women such as physical, sexual harassment at workplace, rape, child molestation, and sexual assault specifically under patriarchy or patriarchal society. Male violence is a worldwide phenomenon as it prevails in every country i.e. America, Britain, and Afghanistan, etc.(1990, p. 129).Walby further states that violence against women can be identified by analyzing the three perspectives of male violence. For instance, she further categorizes male violence into three groups i.e. liberalism, radical feminism, and class analysis. The first one explains the psychological disturbance while the second one deals with men's frustration in society. Similarly, the third one describes the power of males in a patriarchal society.

Liberalism sees male violence in terms of the psychological disturbance of men that are considered abnormal. Specifically, it deals with the psychological procedure rather than the social environment. It is noted through the text that rape is an act of an individual man who has not developed or nurtured in a healthy environment. They claim that this is the outcome of bad childhood experiences and disrupted the family background (West, 1978 et. al. 130). They research to analyze the reason behind the aggressive attitude of men towards wife and children either sexual abuse or physical violence. Twelve rapists are interviewed by the psychiatrist and they come to know that rapists have a problematic childhood. They are not given love, stability, and attention in their childhood. Furthermore, men are discontented with their sexual outlets and sexual performance. Their frustration is considered to be a result of sensitization to stress as a result of difficulties in man's early upbringing, problems in engaging in a heterosexual relationship and the struggle to maintain his conception of masculinity (Walby, 1990, p. 130).

Similarly, Gelles and Straus support this view because, in working-class society, the rate of violence against women is greater than the elite class society. They further share their experience that, in 1967, research was conducted to know about the violence rate between white-collar and blue-collar. The rate of violence is higher in the families which have a \$6,000 income or below to this income. Moreover, in the subcultural model, Amir follows the first model to find out the male violence in social society. He describes that men develop their values and rules which are dissimilar to the main culture. Similarly, in this context, men build their own distinction to women i.e. physical supremacy. However, Amir claims that subculture produces the worst form of violence that is rape or sexual assault (Walby, 1990, pp. 132-133).

To sum up the above discussion, it is pertinent to mention that the study is going to limelight the theme of violence against women in Afghan patriarchal society in the selected text through the structure of violence in the next chapter. The selected text unfolds vivid glimpses of violence against women and socio-political and economic inequality.

Discussion

This chapter reflects the violence against women in Afghan patriarchal society in Nadia Hashmi's *A House Without Windows*. It is pertinent to explain that violence against women is a deplorable social evil that destroys the peace of a house, society, and a country. Moreover, "gender-related inequalities are pervasive in the developing world" (Zoloth, 2017, p.140). It is noted through the characters of the novel that violence disturbs the peace and mutual understanding of couples, families, and society. Besides, men often exploit women both physically and sexually. In the same way, violence can be seen through the ferocious attitude of men and their relationship with women either in the form of husband-wife, brother-sister or father-daughter. Even in the whole Afghanistan, "women have been beaten for showing their ankles and stoned to death for accusations of adultery; under ISIS

rule, gay men have been pushed to their deaths off of buildings" (Zobair, 2015, p.152). Through the characters like Zeba, Mezghan, Nafisa, Latifa, and other female characters, the researcher highlights the domestic, physical and sexual violence, and gender inequality. Furthermore, through the character of BibiShireen and two unnamed characters, this chapter unmasks the unfair legal system of Afghanistan reflected through the selected text. Zeba, the protagonist, having four children, is a genteel lady who performs her duties at house impressively. She is a loving mother and a kind wife, lives peacefully in the four walls of her house, and does not bother her neighbors. The narrator describes Zeba's character that "She was a loving wife, a patient mother, a peaceful villager" (p. 3). Moreover, Zeba's husband, Kamal, is quite different from her. Even Zeba's kind and respectful attitude do not melt his heart as he often beats his wife and children. The violent attitude of Kamal creates violence, imbalance, and disorder in the house. He is indifferent to the family's responsibilities. It is noted through the text that he is not a decent father and a devoted husband. He is a drunker, a cheater, and liar, violent and arrogant. She cries, "Kamal stumbled about the house, shouted at the children to keep out of his way, and grumbled about needing his medicine" (p. 71).

Her voice echoes, "With each time, Kamal was spotted drunk in the town, he further condemned Zeba to a life of ignominy. She begged him to consider their family, their reputation. For that, Kamal had broken her nose, her rib, and half their dishes" (p. 71). Kamal's character displays the gender inequality and violent attitude of a husband towards his wife and family. It also throws light on the dependency of a woman and highlights the superiority of a male character in Afghan society. In the same way, Zeba tries to stop her husband drinking liquor but in retaliation, he beats her. Gender inequality breeds pain, disorder, chaos, and imbalance in Afghan society as portrayed in the text. Home seems a devastated place, without order, and full of violence due to a husband's violent attitude. Hashimi sketches a picture of their home, "Home had been, for as long as Basir could remember, a broken place – broken dishes, broken ribs, broken spirit" (p. 4).

Furthermore, Zeba's mother first protests against the early marriage of her daughter but seems helpless in this regard. Later, Zeba's mother, Gulnaz, requests her father to reconsider the marriage as she is young, but her request seems useless in front of her father's decision. Gulnaz requests that "she is young and it is bad time for a marriage, Gulnaz insisted. Let us wait a bit more" (p. 55). Women seem helpless in front of the man's order and decision. At the same time, a mother seems helpless in front of the man's (father) order. Women seem voiceless and helpless in Afghan patriarchal society as portrayed in the text. Gulnaz insists to delay the marriage, dislikes the spouse but she yields in front of her father's decision. In the same way, the aftermath of grandfather's decision can be seen through Zeba's statement as she tells hesitantly his son Basir, "Your father and I were a bad pair" (p. 193). Zeba admits that it is not a good match but she has to live with the man his grandfather has chosen for her because women are not allowed to challenge man's decision in the Afghan patriarchal setup.

Eventually, Zebais charged of murder at ChilMahtab, women jail, where she befriends other female characters, whose stories seem similar to Zeba's story. Through the interaction of different women, different stories of violence against women are exposed. Zeba's story exposes her through her cellmates at the jail. Similarly, Zeba and Kamal's characters unveil the violence going on at the domestic level. Kamal manipulates Zeba according to his own desire as he hurts her physically, verbally, and emotionally. She seems confined in her own body, dependent, and tries to suppress her own desire for her husband. The bond of their relationship shows the topsy-turvy situation of their domestic life and violence. She reflects:

She'd been too dependent on him, but what else was a husband for? She would not turn to him as much, she promised herself. She had less and less desire to, anyway. The way he turned away when she undressed, the way he'd called her a fatherless whore—those were all points in the wrong direction. The marriage game was not as close as it should have been. (p. 73)

The above lines unmask the exploitation of a husband and highlight violence against a woman (wife). Inside a house, the role of Zeba seems precarious as she has less desire to be fulfilled due to the indifferent attitude of Kamal and gender inequality. He disrespects her, humiliates and beats her and often abuses her. Furthermore, Kamal exploits Zeba and children as they fear to face their father. After the death of Kamal, they don't speak and miss their father because they are the victim of his outburst and know evils about his father.

Similarly, through Zeba's character, the researcher unearths the key issues faced by the women in Afghan patriarchal society reflected through *A House Without Windows*. Zeba experiences the same problems in her society. Love, marriage, and freedom seem the crucial issues of Afghan society. Zeba's voice flutters, "Love, marriage, freedom" (p. 52). Zeba faces the same problems out of the jail or at home. Her marriage seems a deal between two elders. She loves her husband but he disrespects her, humiliates her, and beats her. She is restricted within the four walls of her house and has to obey her husband's order.

Similarly, Zeba's character is being exposed through other female characters as she shares her experiences with other women. Women are not given liberty and freedom as they live a suppressed and nervous life at houses. The female characters reflect the pathetic image of women. There are several restrictions on them, as they are not allowed to interfere in men's matters. Zeba used to stop her husband, Kamal, but he beats her severely. Women have to follow men's orders in an Afghan patriarchal society. However, inside the jail, Zeba shares her feelings in a poetic way and without fear. It seems jail gives women liberty, freedom. As women like Nafisa, Mezghan, Latifa feel free to share their views, traumatic stories of life, emotions, feelings, and sentiments to other female characters.

Latifa, a twenty-five-year-old lady, is also the prey of men's violence as she has been beaten by the members of the family. Women like Latifa are not treated well in Afghanistan as Hashimi portrays in the text. She seems tired of the domestic violence produced by the men of her family. As Latifa fears to live with her own home, that's why she walks calmly through the front door of her home. Similarly, Latifa feels comfortable and protected at ChilMahtab, a women prison, where women are treated well and given respect. She never imagines that she can be treated properly in an honorable manner in prison. Hashimi, through Latifa's character, shows the miserable picture of a house where a lady is not treated well, and she does not want to live in her own home. Hashimi précises:

Latifa had no interest in leaving ChilMahtab, a place where she was treated better than she'd been treated in her life. Had she known what prison would be like, Latifa often thought, she might have marched herself past the barbed-wire fence long ago, turning herself in for some kind of impropriety. (p. 45)

Likewise, women can be seen feeling contented at ChilMahtab, a women's prison, as Latifa seems secure in prison where she is treated well. Jail seems a secure place for Latifa where she is happy more than her own home where she has faced physical violence, verbal abuse, and disrespect.

Similarly, through BibiShireen's character, the researcher highlights the unfair legal system and violence against women in Afghan patriarchal society. BibiShireen does nothing wrong or immoral but she is in jail for a crime that she has not committed herself. Bibi's son loves a lady and the elopement of the lovers disturbs the rest of BibiShireen's life. As Bibi makes Zeba understand her tearful story. She 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's got to be blamed. And 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)

The above lines also unveil the ferocity faced by the women in Afghan society as Hashimi depicts in the text. She unmasks the cold-heartedness of men as she, for no crime, is in jail for thirty years.

BibiShireen, an aged woman, a victim of masculine society, shares her story of violence. She is in jail for the crime committed by her son. Her son elopes with his girlfriend and her brothers find them and kill Shireen's son and send her in jail for false accusation. Similarly, the other female characters have also uncovered the stories of their painful journey, a journey that leads them outside world to jail. Women are mistreated or forced to marriage by men. The narrator explains, "An eighteen-year-old girl had run away from her elderly husband. A wife had left a

husband after he sold their ten- and twelve-year-old daughters into marriage. Another had been arrested when a stranger reported seeing her leaving a man's private office" (p. 197). These female characters, in the text, show the violence and helplessness of women in Afghan society. Women in Afghan society seem insecure as they are facing multiple issues i.e. violence and forced marriage.

The prison is full of female characters that face difficulties, hardships, and violence in Afghan patriarchal society. Zeba wants to save women but she knows that she cannot save all of them. The character of Zeba shows not only violence but also a melting heart for the women. She tries to help them as she knows there is not a single character facing violence, humiliation rather there are several female characters that face humiliation, sufferings, and violence and even her spell cannot save them as:

Zeba rubbed at her eyes. The stories were too much for her. There was no way her jadu would free a prison full of condemned women. No spell would change the fact that a woman's worth was measured, with scientific diligence, in blood. A woman was only as good as the drops that fell on her wedding night, the ounces she bled 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 above discussion, it can be said that gender inequality creates violence against women in Afghan patriarchal society. It ruins the lives of female characters in the novel. Violence against women disturbs the peace of a house, society, and country. In addition, patriarchy seems a cause of violence and socio-political and economic inequality in Afghan patriarchal society. Hashimi seems to propose that with the mutual understanding of husband and wife or men and women, a country can be flourished and prosper. A house without violence can be a peaceful place which seems to be the motive of Hashimi in *A House Without Windows*.

Conclusion

This research leads to the conclusion that violence against women prevails in different forms such as inequality, domestic and physical violence, rape, and sexual assault in Afghan patriarchal society. The primary causes behind such pervasive violence against women include gender inequality and the patriarchal mindset of male characters as reflected through *A House Without Windows*. The selected text reveals that an unfair legal system entraps Afghan women to jail without investigating whether they have committed the crime(s) or not. It is one of the major issues faced by the female characters in the Afghan patriarchal society. The representation of the violence against women, through the male-female characters, is one way to criticize the inequality and violence against women in Afghan society. Moreover, the research has highlighted that women have been disrespected,

humiliated, and often beaten by male characters and they suffer from socio-political and economic inequality in the selected text.

In addition, male characters in the family often abuse women, exploit them physically, verbally, and sexually. Women are mistreated and tortured by men because they are considered inferior to men. They are not allowed to interfere in the personal chores of the males. Husband and wife can play an important role in making and building a healthy house which can lead to the establishment of an affluent society. Furthermore, the research suggests that without women's participation, one cannot formulate a prosperous house or society. The research proposes the solution related to the women's problems that women should be treated in a humanist way so that they can enjoy a happy and joyous life. For a healthy community, it is essential to give women the due rights and opportunities and to allow them to perform their active role in establishing a healthy and balanced environment.

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