

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN IN THE NOVEL “A HOUSE WITHOUT WINDOWS”

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### **Abstract**

The contemporary world witnesses the heart breaking fate of women under the authority of men. Today, we can see a lot of incidents related with women's rights and freedom to express herself. The novel 'A House without windows' portrays the life of an Afghan ordinary woman imprisoned by the morality of a patriarchal society. Through the novel, I intend to analyze the captivity and violence suffered by the women folk of our world. The novel tells the story of Zeba, a young wife, is found near the corpse of her husband with a hatchet in her hand. The society convicted her as the murderer of her husband. The novel exposes the life of a housewife who restricted access to the power and privilege that is attributed to men. The struggle of women characters to achieve their rights, is a picturization of the reality of the world itself. The women have no rights to speak in a patriarchal world and they are the victims of exploitation. The novel discusses the various issues suffered by a woman in the society. And apart from this, there is a story of sisterhood and a powerful friendship that gives them courage and strength to protest against their surrounding world. The novel urged upon to fight against the enslavement of women, controlled by the rules and ideologies constructed by a male hegemonic society. This is the eye opening novel about the true life of women in a gender biased society.

**Key words :** women, imprisonment, windows, gender

### **Introduction**

In olden days, the status of women was controlled by the established system of a society. The world history witnessed great struggles to preserve the rights of women. The cultural norms restricted them from achieving better education and the fulfillment of their dreams. In ancient times, women were recognized only as wives and mothers. The patriarchal society that controls the social, political and economic life of people has never encouraged its woman to go outside of their home and imprisoned them in their kitchen. But later many social reformers tried to bring changes in the social system

concerning women. The participation of women in politics can be traced from 19th century Reform movement. The History of women is constructed by many milestones including the achievement of the right to vote. In India the abolition of Sati system was a greatest part of women's history ever.

The novel A House without Windows presents the suffering of Afghan women who is surrounded by some cultural norms and no glance towards the outside world. The image of a house symbolizes the norms and restrictions constructed by the society for women and the Closed window symbolizes their imprisonment in the middle of those societal establishments.

The woman doesn't allow to see the outside world except the four walls around them. The novel was first published in 2016 and discusses the oppressions suffered by women under the unsympathetic attitude of Afghan patriarchal society. The novel portrays the dark reflections of Afghan culture.

The novel opens with an action and the readers are left to think why the female character did so, and if the readers should hate her or not. The miserable married life of Zeba reflects the injustice and life along suffering received by an Afghan woman. Zeba is found in the courtyard of her village home with a hatchet in her hand and husband's dead body nearby. The woman endured her husband's eating and drinking for years, bearing him four children, cooking, cleaning, washing and always being a dutiful wife. The people charged her the murder of her husband, Kamal. The women have no voice in the Afghan society. They are controlled by the social system that gives importance for men. They are dutiful wives, loving mothers; but their life was surrendered for the kitchen, and four walls of a house. They don't know what is going in the society. But their entire life is devoted sincerely for their family. After the imprisonment, Zeba did not try to defend herself. The novel discusses the fight of women against the existing oppressive system of Afghanistan and a picturization of the suffering undergone by women.

When the neighbours and husband's family accused her the murder of her husband, her silence was her only revolt to the male dominant society. She is arrested and sent to Chil Mahtab women's prison. The Silence of Zeba is meaningful and symbolizes a world, where the woman has no words and their words became dumb. She always remains silent and does not

speaking anything about the incident. The Afghan women are themselves totally dependent on the dominance of men. The men have the right to present their ideas before the society and they can do anything they wish to. But at the same time, the women have no rights to give any comment or show refusal. Like men, women has the right to take their own decisions through out their life. But the authority of men wants to suppress those women who are trying to stand in the forefront of society.

### **Methodology**

The novel shares many problems faced by women in Afghanistan regarding marriage, Education, occupation etc. The story "A House without Windows" demands the autonomy of women in deciding their marriage. The marriage arrangement is made by the men and women have no right to object the decision of the family controlled by men. In the story of Zeba, she has to cope with a drunken, cruel husband. After too many abuses, Zeba comes to the self consciousness that she does not deserve to be treated this way. She used to be a loving daughter, a polite woman and a dutiful wife, but her reputation is destroyed and exploited by her husband. We can think that the Prison is a safe place for Zeba, that protects her from the exploitation of the world. Like Zeba we can see a lot of Afghan women who are fighting for liberty even now.

We can see many women who ran away from their home, betrayed mothers, suppressed daughters etc. It is evident that their own family was a weapon against them. In the novel, the prison is a safe and secure home for the women from their cruel surroundings and also it is surrounded by four walls with out a window, so the women can't get hold of the outside world. When Zeba overcomes the shock of Kamal's

death, she found many unbelievable stories that have sent many unfortunate Afghan woman to its overcrowded prison cells.

The novel presents the different angle of Afghan society with its unsympathetic attitude towards women. The other prisoners have been charged with the crime of violating Afghan patriarchal culture. Latifa, with her younger sister fled from the painful atmosphere of their home . The other woman called Nafisa, has been imprisoned to protect her from the honor killing for having an improper relationship with a widower. Mezghan, a nineteen year old woman who is pregnant and charged with a 'love crime'. The another important female figure was 'Gulnaz', the mother of Zeba. Zeba has inherited a stubbornly independent mind from her mother, known for her power in witchcraft. The author wants to convey the reason for the imprisonment of all is the same -male dominance. Different characters are the Prisoners in their own lives because of the power hold by men. The patriarchy becomes a burden and limitation to them. When her husband lies dead, the men who ingrained power from the patriarchal setups decides that she is the murderer of her husband. Here, the Afghan culture that denies the identity of a woman. The men who surrounded her, fabricated narratives and leaving her out of any chance to save herself. Because their culture is created upon a myth that falsify the man as decision maker and dictator of truth. The inmates of Jail have different reasons for being there but the root cause is same, that is the power figures- the men of society. These power figures offended by the women and they detained them in the small space of a prison, to make them dumb , so that they will not overstep again.

Analyzing the female characters of the novel, Gulnaz is the first female

character achieves self awareness about their society. Afghanistan is having a civil war and competition for the leader and she knows that it is not safe to have many children. The chaotic Afghan Society for power, causes economic hardship and insecurity because of the civil war. Here she knows that a household cannot be led by men and Gulnaz realizes that it is important for women to take part in the system for making a balance between the role of men and women.

Latifa, the other woman in the story who was coming from a poor family where her birth is not wanted. She used to get bad treatments from her own family. And she decided to run away and hope to find a better place to live. She also took her younger sister and want to protect her from the painful situation happens to girls.

The female characters that demands freedom for her marriage is Sitara. Sitara ignores her parent's dislike about her love marriage . She shows her rejection to her parents by the determination that she has made her decision and no one can change it. Not only in deciding marriage but also the independence for remarriage is demanded by the widow in the story, Gulnaz. She was left by her husband for war. But Gulnaz did not want to remarry because she wants to take care of herself. She did not want to depend on any man. She knows about her responsibility to children. These two female characters acquired self respect themselves and they refused the dependency of men. They know that the society speaks in the words of man and it is important for women to come forward against the inequalities constructed by the male population . Meena, is the another character who refuses to marry Yusuf because she chose a life partner in her own choice. She awares that a happy marriage is impossible for Afghan women when they never know the

personality of the men. Meena, Gulnaz and Sitara are the women, they reached to self awareness from the life usually happens in Afghan women. And they earned the courage to speak in front of men for achieving their personal freedom .

In Jail, Zeba meets other three women Latifa ,Nafisa and Mezhgan. Most of them in Chil Mahtab were accused of moral crimes like sex before marriage, falling in love, and running away from home etc. According to the Afghan culture, those women who challenges the authority of men, it is enough to land them in prison. The prison gives the women a freedom to do what they like. Latifa smokes, Nafisa texts to her beloved, and other have the pictures of their favorite Bollywood actors and actresses on the walls of their cells, and they apply make-up in the prison Saloon and usually watches reality shows on TV. The life in their home was an actual prison for them. They have no right to do without the permission of male figures in the family.

They are restricted between the do's and don'ts. But the Chil Mehtab is a home for them that presents a peaceful life before them. They start to share a life of ease with no fear of the male dominants. Zeba also finds her space of peace and resistance inside the prison . Her words :

This is not a prison. Prison is out there God as my witness, I am unshackled

Chil Mehtab was a peaceful home for its prisoners and they can do what they want to do. These female characters explain how they have been oppressed and dominated by men in their physical, mental spheres of life. The novel highlights the captivity of women folk under a power structure and their voice becoming easier to be blamed.

I suppose this bloody mess might be partly my fault

These lines of Zeba explain how the society tries to blame the women because they think women would never be able to fight back. The powerlessness of Afghan women were exploited by the autonomy of men. As Zeba, her mother and all other women in the jail, struggle against the patriarchal norms that prevents women from choosing their life partner and a society that refuses education as well as the right to speak. Meena never gives up to study even at hard times of the Afghanistan. She wants to study and tries to achieve a good job . Aneesa, the other character who tries to get her right to work and to earn money. Different female characters inculcates a study of the status of women in the world . We know that Afghanistan is one of the male dominated countries is known for its strict rules on women since the reign of Taliban. The male domination remains extremely strong and women resist and struggle against different structures of power. The reign of Taliban gave a wider chance for men to oppress the woman. The woman denied the right to speak, for education, right to work and earn money and also their basic rights as equal human being like the men have been suppressed.

The novel A House without Windows is a reflection of the inequality and brutal treatment received by women in a patriarchal world especially under Afghanistan. The different female characters in the novel imprisoned by a system that denies them their rights as a human being .The innocent Zeba did not speak anything to prove her as guiltless. Her silence was a protest against a society that marginalize them . Nafisa, one of the jailbirds, Imprisoned to protect her from an honor killing for her relationship with a widower . But at the same time, criminals

and rascals of men are freely jaunting through the Afghan civilization. Latifa and her sister got a shelter from the cruel treatment from their family that curses the birth of a female child. Mezhgan, a pregnant and unmarried woman who was desperately waits for a good life, represents the cruelty against women. These poor women are imprisoned for taking their own decisions. The woman has their right to express themselves. But the society considers them as underrated to men. The women of Afghanistan compelled to remain in silence without asking and questioning their respect as a human being. They are subjected to live under the authority of the man by eliminating their dreams for better living. They are confined in the world of their children and the small space of kitchen. The novel projects the fight of the whole women for achieving self respect that is similar to men.

Gulnaz, is a strong female character who was brave enough to speak before the judge for her daughter. Usually, the family of the accused is not allowed to meet the judge without their lawyer but for Gulnaz, man and woman has the same right to speak with the judge. Gulnaz built the self consciousness in Zeba when she meets her daughter in prison. She advises her daughter that the women cannot depend totally to the man because men find and get what is useful for them. According to Gulnaz, the woman must follow a strong determination in their dealing with the men. Zeba, the character who protests against the autonomy of men that imprisons their dreams. Sitara took a strong decision to marry someone she likes. They are inspiring the suffocated female figures. Zebra tries to transfer her determination to other fellow prisoners.

## Conclusion

In the novel, Nadiya Hashmi portrays the story of Afghan women, Afghan land and Afghan prisoners against the enslavement of women. We can say that all the women in the novel are the personification of a prison in their lives. For men, Chil Mehtab functions as a place of suppression and discipline. The Prison allows the victims to exchange their stories and victim hood so we can say that chill Mehtab figures as a space of repression and resistance. The victims found a peaceful life in the jail and they replace the cell as a safe haven without windows. The Silence of Zeba shows her power over the body and choosing to be silent for rejecting the patriarchal Supremacy. All the Prisoners of the novel constitute a harmonious oneness by establishing the strength of Unity, we can say that their co existence will help them not only to survive but also to grow against the disorders of their surroundings. By building the determination for justice, the women defeat the unfair accusation that has happened to them. The suffering and enslavement of Afghan women is a persisting problem of the world. The novel invites the attention of the whole world to fight for preserving the rights of enslaved women in the making of a better tomorrow.

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