



Patriarchal Recolonization: Exploring the Agency Exercised by Women as Subalterns through Postcolonial Feminism in A House Without Windows

Hamna Imran Chaudhary

MPhil English Literature- Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore. Pakistan

Tehreem Arsalan Aurakzai

Lecturer Kinnaird College for Women, Lahore Pakistan

Abstract

KEYWORDS:

Postcolonial feminism, double colonization, representation, essentialism, subaltern

Date of Publication:

25-06-2024



The research study contests the established notion of a house, by analyzing Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows* through the lens of postcolonial feminism. It inspects whether a home, proclaimed as a secured place for women, succeeds in justifying this claim in an Afghani society. It further explores the agency women exercise as subalterns in the Afghani culture due to the prevailing 'double colonization.' Their 'representation' by a female author, and within the text by the male hegemonic discourse, is speculated to identify their being as the voiced or the unvoiced, the silenced or the unheard. The research challenges the question raised in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* by analyzing whether the subaltern can be heard and read, or not. It aims to highlight how the silenced subaltern becomes empowering in the face of patriarchal recolonization; silence, emerging as a weapon that helps women mostly secure their agency.

1. Introduction

The basic aim of this research is to examine how Hashimi debunks the notion of an established house for women, which is considered a safe haven for them. The main objective of this research is to analyze the female characters in the novel through the theoretical framework of postcolonial feminism and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can The Subaltern Speak?" The study will also examine the idea of "subaltern consciousness" and

“essentialism” with regards to the characters who are subjugated. Moreover, the problem of “representation” will be explored. This will be demonstrated through the behavior of the characters and the way they react in response to the male hegemony.

Postcolonial feminism addresses the concerns of the doubly colonized women that were out of question before. Earlier feminist frameworks satisfied the needs of the first world women as the law, and developed a reasoning that the whole gender has attained rights. Postcolonial feminism, thus, caters to the need of the third world women, like that of Afghanistan, the docile beings, who are oppressed and silenced under the patriarchal discourse.

The pivotal concern of this theory is “double colonization.” It means that the women of the third world are not only subjugated due to colonialism, but also due to patriarchy. Spivak’s notion of the silenced “subaltern” will be explored with respect to the women of Afghanistan. The reason behind her answer to the question “Can The Subaltern Speak?” in the negative will be contended to see if the subaltern is voiced or unvoiced in the novel. It will be observed as to who is “representing” the Afghani women and if it is an authentic “representation” or not, because this is a pertinent concern of the postcolonial discourse. Furthermore, the idea of “essentialism” will be speculated which posits that there are distinct innate features present in both men and women that make them different from one another. The “essence” of women according to the male gender is sexuality which makes the former less of a man and the very reason to be inferior. For Spivak, essentialism itself has no essence. The issue is how it is used. It will be speculated how the very essence of women is defined by men in the novel.

This research study will focus on the women of Afghanistan. Postcolonial feminism appears to be an effective yardstick through which not only will the ‘double colonization’ of Afghani women be identified, but also it will seek practical means for their voices to be heard, their identity to be distinct and made recognizable. One cannot overlook the fact that the Third World countries were once colonies. Hence, the label of being ‘postcolonial’ can never be evaded. Therefore, it is by merging the ‘postcolonial’ discourse with other diverse subjects that the concerns of modern era can be dealt with. Postcolonial when merged with feminism caters to the needs of the women of the postcolonial world whose rights were overlooked.

2. Research Questions

This research will address the following questions:

- How does double colonization on a microcosmic level of home and macrocosmic level of state debunk the notion of an established ‘house’ for women?
- Does patriarchal recolonization render the Afghani women as the voiced or unvoiced?

These issues would be addressed through the theoretical framework of Postcolonial feminism. Moreover, Spivak’s essay “Can The Subaltern Speak?” will be examined in the same light to fulfill the need.

3. Literature Review

Postcolonial feminism deals with the prevalent concerns of the contemporary world due to the combination of two diverse disciplines. In *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, Schwartz and Ray write that “postcolonial feminism cannot be considered simply as a subset of postcolonial studies, or alternatively, a different branch of feminism. It is an intervention that is transforming the dimensions of both postcolonial and feminist studies” (Schwarz and

Ray 53). Postcolonial study deals with the concerns of man who is past the colonial age, whereas feminist study is about the women and their concerns in both pre and postcolonial times. The merging of these two disciplines provides one with a framework that pertains to the present issues of the postcolonial women.

The basic criticism on the “western forms of feminism by the postcolonial feminists is the former’s proclivity to homogenize and universalize the experiences of women of the whole world” (Mishra 131). Western feminism held that the women of the third world undergo similar oppression as that of the women of the first world. “All the women share a common identity due to similar experiences of oppression” (Tejero 254). Hence, when the women of the first world attained rights, it was assumed that the third world women had also achieved their rights, when it was not so.

The homogeneity of all women is quite unlike, for the experiences that each woman undergoes are different, which then requires a distinct approach for their emancipation. “The women cannot be classified as one coherent group based on gender. They vary from each other due to ethnicity, class, culture, and religion” (Tejero 255). All women are considered one and like each other due to their gender. This does not imply that everyone is going through the same circumstances and has similar stories; rather, they are different from each other due to their class, religion etc. They might share a similar history of survival under patriarchy, but each one is affected differently and have their own distinct lives. “The prime objective of postcolonial feminism is to make the distinct qualities and differences recognizable” (Mishra 133). To highlight how women are ‘othered,’ misrepresented, and need to be heard, are their concerns.

This corresponds to Iris Marion Young’s idea of “women as a series” mentioned in Alison Stone’s article titled “Essentialism and Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Philosophy” where Young proclaims to “shun the idea of talking about women as a social group rather tend to the diversity in their lives and that each one is distinct from another, though they might share a similar history. A series is a group that is ‘vast, multifaceted, layered, complex and overlapping.’ Thus, the women’s experiences and lives might converge but each one will remain unique and dissimilar to the other. The external factors and forces acting upon each one of them, however, unites them” (Stone 12).

This leads to “essentialism” that every man and woman has biological as well as other characteristics that make him different from one another. The source of oppression on all the women might be similar but the way they experience and respond to it would be different. In the novel, it will be explored how it is the patriarchal hold that has subjugated all the women, yet each woman residing in *Chil Mahtab* shares a different story. However, essentializing by associating a particular narrative with women is a “strategy” to control them (Barry 159). The proclaimed belief that the female gender is subdued and in need of a male gender for its emancipation is only a technique employed by the latter to assert its power.

Double colonization was a term introduced in 1986 by Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford in their anthology “*A Double Colonization: Colonial and Postcolonial Women’s Writing*.” It means that the women are doubly subjugated: firstly, through colonialism and secondly, through patriarchy. Mohanty argues that the third world postcolonial women suffered from “double colonization” (Stone 132) which is the main concern of postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial feminists seek how these women are doubly colonized by the male hegemonic discourse prevalent in their societies. The social, economic, mental, cultural and discursive enslavement demonstrates the reductionist view of the masculine pedestal. It will

be analyzed how women of Afghanistan are doubly colonized and how the fact that the women are unaware of themselves being colonized makes “double colonization” a destructive narrative in the novel.

Postcolonial feminists are also concerned with the problem of “representation”: who is representing whom and how. In an article “Feminism in Literature,” Barman puts forth “the need to take on as subject, the experiences of women surviving under patriarchal oppression and the eternal male dominance in society that silenced their voices, mutilated their lives, and considered their problems as insignificant” (15). The experiences of these women and the subjugation they undergo will help analyze the social and psychological implications of double colonization. It is also significant to observe how the women are ‘represented’ in the novel, how their experiences are unheard by the supreme male power, and how their issues are not regarded as important.

The problem of representing the silenced subaltern has always been an object of criticism in literature. Marx’s *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* states about the subaltern that “they cannot represent themselves; they must be represented” (Barry 103). Similar is the declamation of the male hegemonic discourse that the women need to be represented because they cannot represent themselves. This idea corresponds to the effects of ‘double colonization’ that will be explored critically in the novel. It is when one gender considers the other as inferior that it takes upon itself to maneuver the other. Edward Said examines: “one group or culture (here, patriarchy) considers the other group as unable to represent themselves, thus taking on the responsibility of speaking, writing, and acting on their behalf” (Barry 104). Hashimi also portrays how men think they have the privilege to ‘represent’ women and be the yardstick that molds the cultural and ethical values as they consider suitable.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in this respect, talks about whether the women are given a voice or not, in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” This depends on who is representing the subalterns. Postcolonial feminists consider their duty to represent them, after observing their portrayal by the Western writers. Spivak refers to the ‘subalterns’ as those who are “under-repressed,” are not given a voice, and have a “hidden history.” Antonio Gramsci also used the word ‘subaltern’ which meant “a group without class consciousness” (Barry 161). Nadia Hashimi’s women also have a ‘hidden history.’ The prison, *Chil Mahtab* provides them with an opportunity to share their stories with the others enabling one to observe the repressed state they are in. Postcolonial feminists struggle to retrieve the subaltern consciousness through their true representation and by giving them a voice.

Spivak’s answer to the question “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is in the negative because according to her, the subalterns possess an “irretrievable consciousness.” “There is no subaltern voice that can be retrieved or made to speak. She suggests the critics to not seek for the voice of the subaltern but to point to the ‘silenced subaltern’” (Barry 163-64). Mishra explains the reason behind this in his article “Postcolonial feminism: Looking into within-beyond-to difference” that “the postcolonial women do not stand up or speak for themselves rather continue to remain meek and passive. They do not revolt against the oppression exercised by men, who then continue to reinforce it through culture and religion” (132). Afghani women in the novel are prisoned due to crimes alleged against them, without proper evidence. They cannot or do not take a stand for themselves. They cannot be forcefully made to do so. However, talking about the “silenced subaltern” as postcolonial feminists intend to do, can be a way to enable them to retrieve their consciousness.

Through postcolonial feminism, this research paper will highlight the subjugation of Afghani women for whom the four walls of their house is no longer a safe haven. This research will also establish that being voiceless is a choice, and how silence as a weapon, becomes empowering for the Afghani women.

4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Defamiliarized spaces: *Chil Mahtab* and Home

Nadia Hashimi, in her novel *A House Without Windows*, debunks the notion of an established 'house' for women. In a third world country like Afghanistan, Hashimi explores how the female gender is marginalized. Women are subjugated on both microcosmic (domestic) and macrocosmic (state) level. House, for them, becomes a torture cell rather than a serene dwelling. In search for sanity, they step out of their homes only to meet similar behavior at the pedestal of courts and state. This 'house without windows' becomes claustrophobic for the Afghani women whose freedom is caged and voices are unheard.

The novel revolves around Zeba, a married woman with four children. She is the only person present at the place where her husband is killed. The blood on her hands is taken as a proof of her killing, whereas she was a witness to the brutal attack of her husband on an innocent child. The child, as a reflex, had killed her rapist. As much as the minds of the characters are colonized, the patriarchal influence both within and outside the homes, makes the women unable to do anything themselves. They are made to work, tortured, and falsely blamed to be locked up in prison without evidence.

Zeba is a simple, obedient, and a reticent wife. She made Kamal "feel like a husband should" (Hashimi 1). After the death of his father and brother, "Kamal became the patriarch of his family." His "moods soured" with each passing day. His attitude towards the children became "bitter," "brushing them away if they dared approach." Quite often, "he would send Zeba tumbling to the floor with the back of his hand" (Hashimi 68). Physically torturing the wife was not something exceptional. Men considered it their duty; something that a wife deserves and as a return confirms their manliness.

The physical abuse exercised everyday did not stir Zeba to retaliate or report. One day when she hardly had anything to cook for food, she said, "Kamal-jan, the children haven't had a decent dinner in days" (Hashimi 69). The words were only to be pronounced when the very next instant, Kamal lost his temper. "He threw his sandal at her, missing her head by a hair" (Hashimi 69). The house trembled and feared the sword of patriarchy that killed its residents, both physically and emotionally. This abuse was their cultural norm that it was not considered unusual. Kamal thought that his gender provided him with the privilege of being superior, of exercising his authority in whichever way he wanted, on his wife and children.

Despite her husband's behavior, Zeba continued to remain "a loving wife, a patient mother, a peaceful villager" (Hashimi 3). "Just keep him happy. It could always be worse," she consoled herself (Hashimi 69). It was her courage to endure a man who "wandered in the street, feasting on the women who had thrown aside their burqas" (Hashimi 70). She was never aware of where he went, what time did he left, or what time would he return home. As a wife, she could not even muster up courage to ask her husband about his whereabouts. Such a situation does not make one feel at home. It is as if one is living in a panopticon where constant surveillance is taking place. Zeba and the children regulate their actions according to Kamal whose presence is that of an observer.

In the *Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir asserts that man “is the Subject, he is the Absolute,” while woman “is the Other” (qtd. in Chambers 293). In the postcolonial discourse, “Others are portrayed in disparaging, unfamiliar hues. They are considered menacing, weak, and vulnerable at one and the same time” (qtd. in Chambers 293). Kamal is that Subject “who needed to exert his strength to reassure himself he was capable of something” (Hashimi 186). He wanted his wife and children “react to his presence to confirm he was in command” (Hashimi 186). They, as the Other, had to suffer blows and shouts in case anyone said anything against his will. He could not “tolerate anyone pointing out even the smallest of his shortcomings” (Hashimi 186). Edward Said observes that “the imperialists need to apply these binary oppositions to confirm the superiority of the Self” (qtd. in Chambers 294). Likewise, the Afghani men had to suppress their women to validate their superiority.

Kamal acts out the role of a colonizer. He does what he wants and is not accountable to anyone. By instilling fear within his wife and children, he has colonized his own home. Home, which is more like a cell, houses people who obey him, acknowledge him, quietly accept his undesirable deeds, and fear him. Zeba is the colonized who refuses to speak up or say anything. Her reticence reaches its climax when she is openly blamed for murdering her husband in the courtyard of her house and chooses not to deliver the truth.

The police chief and mullah Hakimi’s questions were met with Zeba’s “moans” and a “blank face,” as if they spoke “a foreign tongue” (Hashimi 21). Zeba knew how effectively law and justice was practiced in the country. In Afghanistan, “the justice system is as twisted as a mullah’s turban.” One cannot “expect this country to have its house in perfect order” (Hashimi 146). Her lawyer, Yusuf, thinks he can redeem Zeba’s freedom and release her from the charge. He claims to know his motherland Afghanistan, after spending his whole life, studying and growing up in America. He chose “law” so that he could champion the “cause of the voiceless” (Hashimi 12). Little did he know that it was still here, and “in many places, the authority of the white beard prevails” (Hashimi 146). Even if there was a doubt regarding a woman having committed an undesirable deed, she was likely to be prisoned, even if there was no solid proof.

Thus, on a macrocosmic level, the third world state of Afghanistan is devoid of law and justice. Women who are tortured in their homes by their husbands do not have any hope that they will find justice once they step out of the house. The state and the courts are presided over by men who consider themselves as patriarchs. Surprisingly, women of the country have been colonized to such an extent that they attribute these roles to men themselves. This gives men a greater opportunity to continue exercising their dominance. The male hegemonic discourse renders women as mere objects who can be abused and mistreated. The prison, on the other hand, provides them with a platform, to form their own community; a no man’s land where they experience life differently and freely.

Led to be imprisoned in *Chil Mahtab*, Zeba lets her desire to save a life overpower her need to be with her children. She decided to save the life of the girl whom Kamal had “assaulted” badly, and who in turn had buried the “hatchet in the back of his neck” (Hashimi 19). “Whispers” floated, and “eyebrows” were raised because “Zeba’s story was more intriguing than most: Typically, husbands killed wives, not the other way around” (Hashimi 19). Despite people’s reactions and the bombardment of questions by the police as well as her own lawyer, she continued to remain silent. The subversion of archetypes is a deliberate attempt on Hashimi’s part to reclaim the elusive female agency through the fictional space.

Chil Mahtab housed criminal women convicted of crimes without evidence. Zeba was imprisoned in a cell already occupied with three girls: Nafisa, Mehzgan, and Latifa. A place where they are alienated from their relatives and close ones, they form a family of their own where they share their stories with each other.

Latifa, a twenty-five-year-old, was “accused of intending to prosecute her sister” (Hashimi 45). It is ironic how she, instead of yearning for her family, showed “no interest in leaving *Chil Mahtab*, a place where she was treated better than she’d ever been treated in her life. Had she known what prison would be like, Latifa often thought, she must have marched herself past the barbed-wire fence long ago, turning herself in for some kind of impropriety” (Hashimi 45). Women who are treated badly at their homes, abused physically and mentally, prefer a prison where they are not interrupted. Meeting and living with people like themselves, they form a community together, shedding tears over the headstrong hard realities of life all women must face.

Chil Mahtab was “a small world” for them; an unconventional haven providing a space both for collective suffering and catharsis (Hashimi 48). The cells were mostly unlocked so the women could roam around or gather somewhere outside. There was “a dark kitchen” occupied with pots and eatables, a “classroom” that had chalks and blackboard, and a “playroom” for children who lived with their mothers. “The prison was home to enough children that walking through its halls sometimes reminded Zeba of an elementary school” (Hashimi 200). There was “a beauty salon” too, “a lopsided chair set up in front of a lighted mirror” (Hashimi 49).

The most enjoyable activity “to battle the ennui of their days” was to share stories, “dazzling tales” of each cellmate (Hashimi 49). At times, the temperature rose to “a hundred degrees” but it did not render the women “immobile” (Hashimi 196). The prison became their sanctuary from all the worries of the world, where they peacefully spent their time, without contemplating or worrying about the duration of imprisonment.

Zeba spent the first few days of her imprisonment in ambivalence. “Though she missed her children dearly, it was hard not to appreciate the freedom” she found here as she felt “light and liberated” (Hashimi 67). She had “no responsibilities in the kitchen. Her meals came with impressive regularity.” She “bathed herself” and no one else. Though she missed ‘Rima’s soft cheek against her own,” there was also “a delicious peace in walking without a baby on her hip” (Hashimi 67). The prison, thus, provided her with “moments of lightness” which she thoroughly enjoyed (Hashimi 67).

Hashimi alters the concept of a safe haven for women in her novel. She has defamiliarized the notion of spaces such as home and the prison. She portrays what women go through under the four walls of their own homes. “A house without windows” does not only make them claustrophobic, but also provides them with no escape. Hashimi begins her novel with Rumi’s quote from his *Masnavi*: “Hell is that house without a window”. “True religion” is “creating a window,” carving a space and framing an identity for women. By deconstructing the established stereotypes, Hashimi has defamiliarized the notion of spaces, such as the home and the prison. She portrays how the absence of windows had made the house a hell and transforms the feminine scripture of oppression by writing the story of a woman who transforms her marginalized space i.e. prison into a powerful one.

4.2 The Rise of the Subaltern

Women, under the male hegemonic discourse, go through patriarchal oppression in various forms. For instance, the women residing in *Chil Mahtab* share their experiences of what they have been through and what made them end up in prison. Nafisa had been “accused by a relative for an improper relationship with a man” (Hashimi 44). Despite her cries and that she had been “an obedient and loving daughter all her life did not change a thing” (Hashimi 44). For “tarnishing their family’s good name,” her brothers would not settle on less than “spilling Nafisa’s blood” to “restore their honor” (Hashimi 44). The matter, when brought into the court, settled on her imprisonment for “three years” due to “attempted *zina*” (Hashimi 44).

Neither the parents nor the brothers showed any interest in looking for evidence. Mere “accusation” by a relative was enough for them to punish their sister. Nafisa felt how superior a position the men of her family held that she could not even prove herself right.

Alison Stone in “Essentialism and Anti-essentialism in Feminist Philosophy” talks about Marrison Young’s idea of “women as a series.” She propagates the idea that all women cannot be put into one category. They exist as a series because the magnitude of oppression that every woman goes through is not the same as the other. Hashimi makes each prisoned woman narrate her experience in order to have a diverse vision of the different ways patriarchal influence functions.

Meta narrative is employed in the novel through the stories that the residents of the prison narrate. Latifa tells how she was “beaten and cursed” at home “until the day she’d decided she could take no more” (Hashimi 45). She took her younger sister along with her, “never expecting they would be missed” (Hashimi 45). However, at the bus station, the police became “suspicious” and “charged her with kidnapping and running away from home” (Hashimi 45). Such is the life of a woman who dares to take an attempt for her freedom, who, when caught alone with no ‘man’ as a guardian, is blamed for a sin instantly, without any proof.

It is not only unethical but impossible for a girl to fall in love with a man. Being a far cry for her to marry, she cannot even think of expressing it. When Mehzgan, “a nineteen-year-old” refused the proposal of her sister’s brother-in-law, her life was made miserable. The revelation of her being “in love with a boy in her neighborhood,” led to her arrest (Hashimi 46). Her exclamation: “I swear I did not do what they say ‘I’ve done. It was nothing like that” was rendered void and unheard (Hashimi 46). This action was the cause of tarnishing the ‘honor’ of the family and Mehzgan’s arrest was the only way they could satisfy themselves.

Zeba, around which the whole novel revolves, is also imprisoned on the account of murdering her husband. She was seen with her dead husband, but no evidence confirmed her as a murderer. Yet, she was immediately brought to *Chil Mahtab* without any inquiry and investigation.

All these four women from different areas are brought together at one place due to one cause: patriarchal recolonization. Considering themselves as the owner of a living being called woman, men recolonize the already subjugated female body through physical and mental torture. Assuming the role of the colonizer, they treat her the way they want. Just like the colonized people considered themselves incapable of revolting, having lesser power, same is the case with the women. They are aware of the fact that they have no say in front of the male body and that it is futile to retort.

Within the four walls of a house exists a dynasty ruled by a man. Each woman is mistreated and tortured in a different way than the other. The walls obstruct one's view from the other, inhibiting the outsiders from knowing what the inside holds. The walls are also symbolic of patriarchal and cultural borders, designed to preserve the honor of women. Thus, as much as each woman is different, her experiences are also not similar to every other woman. The homogenization of all women as one and similar, mars their emancipation. This is because every woman undergoes different forms of oppression, though under the same force of patriarchy. Yet, the experiences are different and require distinct approach for the treatment of each and every one.

Edward Said, a postcolonial critic, describes a relationship between knowledge and power. According to him, knowledge gives one power. The west claimed to have knowledge about the east which gave them the authority to govern it. Similarly, the male hegemonic discourse attains power over women because it has knowledge about the latter. However, Hashimi says that men examined a woman only from "what she was not" which gave them the license to confirm their superiority by inflicting physical torture on her (Hashimi 16).

Considering that a woman is inferior, men take upon themselves the responsibility to 'represent' her. Spivak, in her essay *Can The Subaltern Speak?* talks about two forms of "representation: representation as 'speaking for,' and representation as 're-presentation (70).'" The men in the novel are trying to 'speak for' the women as much as they are 're-presenting' them. For instance, women are not taken into consultation regarding marriage decision which is an important facet in their lives. Zeba "had no say" in "a decision made between her grandfather Safatullah, and Kamal's grandfather five years before their wedding date" (Hashimi 55).

It is questionable that after being subjected to physical and mental torture by her husband, why does Zeba not rejoice at his death or at least unveil the truth that she did not murder him. Her children are taken away from her and she is imprisoned for an unspecified time. She does not even tell Basir, her eldest son, as to what happened despite his inquiry. He, however, knew that "she was the reason he could laugh and eat and look after his sisters. She hid her bruises and her scars." (Hashimi 112). This is what made him doubt his mother being a murderer.

Furthermore, if Zeba "had been so upset" about the kind of man Kamal was, "why hadn't she said something? Why didn't she ever scream out or strike back? She'd always carried on as if his [Basir's] father had been exactly the type of husband she'd expected" (Hashimi 112). It was because of her children that she bore all this. Also, she knew that things would have never changed even if she spoke up. Kamal would have remained the same. Had she asked for a divorce, he would have never given it to her. Tradition also stated that "a woman's word is only worth half a man's" (Hashimi 174).

This is how men not only define the "essence" of women, but also make use of "strategic essentialism." They have ingrained in their mothers, wives, and sisters that their "world is the spaces between the rocks and the meat. Time passes differently through a woman's body: they [we] are haunted by all the hours of yesterday and teased by a few moments of tomorrow" (Hashimi 138). This is how a woman lives, "torn between what has already happened and what is yet to come" (Hashimi 138). Bearing the consequences of the past, she is not exempted from the fear of what the future holds. She is someone who is there to be blamed, be it her fault or not.

Men emerge as supporters for women, taking on the responsibility of truly ‘representing’ them. “They want to help [you], but they are men, and men can often only see what they can hold in their hands” (Hashimi 138). They claim to ‘speak for’ the women, while they are propagating their own ideas and beliefs. “It is not their fault” but this is how they are “designed” (Hashimi 138). Only a woman can, in essence, understand another woman.

The novel portrays how the lawyer fails to help Zeba, while her mother Gulnaz takes it upon herself to tell the truth to the Qazi. Both Yusuf and Gulnaz know the truth but only a woman has the courage to protect her daughter, proving that “a mother’s word is the full story” (Hashimi 174). It was through experiences she had realized quite late in life that “we cannot leave everything in the hands of men” (Hashimi 138). She covers the journey from the unspeakable to the speakable with grace.

Where Zeba chose to remain silent for an “innocent girl,” Gulnaz decided to speak for an innocent woman. Both the paths are carefully chosen, with care and protection. Zeba’s decision to remain silent is her attempt of ‘speaking for’ the girl who had killed her husband. She is blamed for the crime because of being quiet, when she is actually saving the life of someone about whom she knows she would not be heard. She knew that “innocence is a luxury not everyone can afford” (Hashimi 163).

Zeba and the girl stand poles apart from each other. The former is the product of colonialism while the latter is not. Where Zeba quietly bore her husband’s shouts and fists, the non-colonized girl buries the hatchet in the neck of her rapist. Such resistance is absent within the women of Afghanistan who are quietly letting their lives pass “in a house with no windows” (Hashimi 84).

Patriarchy confirms its domination using “epistemic violence” (Spivak 76). Certain created notions are inculcated as universal truths in society, such that they legitimize domination. Hashimi describes how no one could change the fact that “a woman’s worth was measured...in blood because she 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” (Hashimi 201). These very truths are hauled against her, manipulated to be made a “queen of *Chil Mahtab*” (Hashimi 201).

It all came down to “honor; a boulder men placed on the shoulders of their daughters, their sisters, and their wives” (Hashimi 234). Hence, the purpose of their life was to protect this honor; its preservation confirmed their innocence and morality. Rightly does Spivak state in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” that “the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (83). Hashimi, in her novel, gives the reason behind why she ‘cannot speak:’ “What good is a woman’s telling of truth/ when nothing she says will be taken as proof?” Women themselves, and their “word” holds very “little value” (Hashimi 231).

However, Zeba’s silence cannot be taken as the established fact that being a subaltern, she ‘cannot speak.’ Her refusal to unveil the truth is a deliberate action on her part which she undertakes to protect the “innocent child” who had lost “her father’s honor” in her “courtyard” (Hashimi 234). “Girls without honor were better off dead” (Hashimi 359). The “survival” of both Zeba and the child, “with the secrets in the vault of their hearts,” is the greatest art after all (Hashimi 361).

Though “the figure of woman disappears between patriarchy and imperialism” (102), this does not validate Spivak’s argument that the “subaltern cannot be heard or read” (104). When

the subaltern makes a conscious decision itself, like Zeba does by consciously deciding not to speak, it shows that it has an authority, a past, a grounding, and can be heard and read.

5. Conclusion

The research portrays how for Afghani women, the house is more of a torture cell than a safe haven. It challenges the cultural narrative of a 'house' by establishing the fact that in a so called sanctuary called home, a woman is vulnerable and oppressed. It further illuminates the need to essentialize the plurality of women, rejecting the homogeneity of the female gender.

Silence becomes the biggest weapon. Through this weapon, not only does Zeba succeed in saving the child's life, but also her own. The incompetency and hesitant nature of the lawyer when brought in comparison to Gulnaz's courage to speak to the Qazi, also shows the authority of the subaltern. In the light of the novel, it cannot be said that the subaltern cannot speak. Despite being subjugated to double colonization and rendered displaced from their homes, women form a community of their own in a least expected place called prison. Prison becomes their house. It is a place where one woman would prefer to go in order to save someone's life. Hence, it's a woman as a being that is important, her existence is necessary, her life needs to be valued.

Through the girl, who hardly occupies a page in the novel, Hashimi knits the story of Zeba around her, in order to illuminate that the subaltern has history; it can be read and heard. It has a voice, through which it has changed lives. It has the greatest strength i.e. to bear, and this can change its whole history. Hashimi has presented an authentic Afghani female narrative by challenging the hegemonic models of gender performativity and conformity prevalent in the Afghan society. The true representation of women by an Afghani writer makes her emerge as a staunch postcolonial feminist.

This research presents a new possible dimension of the subaltern, by challenging the already established perspective that it cannot speak. It also adds to the literature of Subaltern Studies that being voiceless is a choice. The seemingly disempowering thing i.e. silence, becomes empowering when it is a deliberate decision made by the subaltern. Postcolonial feminism emerges as an answer to all the feminist movements as it rejects the homogenization of women and propagates their plurality. The research also highlights Hashimi as a feminist author, paving way for women to open the windows.

Bibliography

1. Barman, Bhaskar Roy. "Feminism in Literature." *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fissions and*
2. *Fusions*, edited by Sinha, Sunita, Atlantic, 2008.
3. Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory*. 2nd edition, 1995.
4. Chambers, Claire. *Rivers of Ink*, Oxford University Press.
5. Child, Peter, and R.J. Patrick Williams. *An Introduction to Postcolonial Theory*.
6. "Spivak and the Subaltern," ch.5, 2015.
7. Hashimi, Nadia. *A House Without Windows*, London, 2016.
8. Mishra, Raj Kumar. *Postcolonial Feminism: Looking into within-beyond-to-difference*, vol. 3,
9. no. 4, 2016.
10. Loomba, A. *Colonialism/ Postcolonialism*. Routledge. 2005.

11. Schwarz, H. and Ray, S. *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, John Wiley & Sons, 2008.
12. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can The Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*, edited by Williams, Patrick, and Laura Chrisman. Columbia University Press, New York. <http://planetarities.web.unc.edu/files/2015/01/spivak-subaltern-speak.pdf>.
13. Stone, Alison. "Essentialism And Anti-Essentialism in Feminist Philosophy." *Journal Of Moral Philosophy*, pp. 3-5, www.philpapers.org/rec/STOEAA. Accessed 13 Nov 2018.
14. Singh, Namita. "Feminism v/s Gender Equity: Socio- Political Activism in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*." *International Journal of Educational Research and Technology*, vol. 4, June 2013. www.soegra.com/ijert/ijert.htm. Accessed 18 Feb, 2018.
15. Tejero, Antonia Navarro. "Postcolonial Feminism: Teaching how to avoid prejudices about Muslim women in an ESL classroom." <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/4768339.pdf>. Accessed 25 Nov, 2018.