

A POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST STUDY OF THE SELECTED PLAY OF NADEEM

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Original Article

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores Shahid Nadeem's Selected Plays Acquittal, A Granny for All Seasons, Black is My Robe, through the lens of postcolonial feminism as a methodological framework, mainly of Spivak's stance, Can the Subaltern Speak. The study examines how female characters of Nadeem's plays disclose postcolonial as well as feminist issues such as education, liberty, and basic human rights. The main concern of this study is to analyze women's sufferings, hardships and struggles for freedom, independence, and emancipation in contemporary times. The study finds out that women are treated as "Others" in order to subject them to patriarchal dominance and exploit their servile existence. Present study claims that female characters that appear in Nadeem's plays are dehumanized, humiliated, and victimized by the institutes of society, specifically religion. Their close patriarchal kinfolks subjugate their human and civil rights. Women are treated as insignificant half of the society, their fundamental rights are denied, and they are persecuted and jailed for years despite being innocent. Male members of the society persecute and exploit female members of the society to satisfy their desire to dominate and rule. The plays depict men inflicting cruelty, despair, and fortitude on women. They are destined to be the part of the social fabric which gives them no rights, in which denial, pain, and grief are the norms, and freedom of will and happiness are social taboos for women.

Keywords: Post-colonialism, Patriarchy, Feminism, Independence, Freedom, Education, Fundamental rights, Religion

INTRODUCTION

The study focuses on Shahid Nadeem's Selected Plays (2008) with a postcolonial feminist perspective. By digging out the texts, the study aims to discover the condition of women in the third world as portrayed by Shahid Nadeem. The analysis reveals that women have to search for their identities and fight for their rights. The texts also reflect the lives and plights of women addressed from the cultural, social, political, economic, and religious point of view. The plays express plight of women in the third world, the most readily available and chronic victims of the two-fold embrace of domestic and state violence. He dialogues about the time of partition, cultural representations, political issues, women's oppression, male dominance, economic issues, feudal system, martial laws, and their impacts and religious issues, etc.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminism is not a new topic in Pakistani English writing. Following partition in 1947, it quickly became a big trend among the country's English authors. This subject was addressed by a number of the Pakistani English writers, including Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Suleri, Zaib-un-Nissa, Hameedullah, and Zulfikar Ghous. The subsequent writers maintained the same tone. Mohsin Hamid, Mohammad Hanif, Talat Abbasi, Kamila Shamsi, and Uzma Khan were also among them. And in terms of the Pakistani English literature, it exhibits the same traits as literature from any other area of the world. However, Pakistani English literature is distinct in that it is profoundly entrenched in colonialism and British imperialism (Mehmood & Farooq, 2021).

A strong feminist voice emerged in 1970s in the midst of political and religious crisis when the military dictatorship tried to censor the socialist discourse and imposed religious fundamentalism. Moreover, it tried to replace English with Urdu as it highlights nationalism. Islamization of the state was based on the laws curbing women's independence and mobility in the name of religion. Conversely, it gave rise to a resilient progressive feminist cognizance to mobilize women for their rights against the hostile laws imposed by military government. This feminist consciousness inspired the writers to portray the era in literary writings also (Salam, 2011).

Sara Suleri (1992) talks about a particular law passed in Pakistan known as "Hudood Ordinances". Hudood Ordinances were founded on a multicultural foundation. These rules were based on the Muslim concept of 'Hadd' and were intended to stifle a postcolonial criminal justice system based on Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence. The Hudood Ordinances were enacted to align Pakistan's criminal judicial system with Islamic injunctions. In the Ordinances, there are two tiers of punishment. "The first level or category is the one called the 'Hadd' which literally means the 'limit' and the other 'Tazir', which means 'to punish'." (Jahangir and Jilani, 1990:24) The records show that the actual victims of the Hudood Ordinances were women and children, particularly those who lacked access to legal counsel and were unaware of their human rights due to their economic situation.

Post- colonial feminism in Pakistani literature deals with how marriage demolishes a woman's identity and sexuality. The Pakistani males are subjugating the identity of females, exactly in the same way the colonizers did with their subjects. Women have a minor role in the subtle components of domestic abuse in marriage. Their fate depends on marriage, but they have no significant role to play. Domestic abuse has long since been a limitation to women's advancement and success. For ages, males have always sought to dominate women via the so-called holy marital tradition. Marriage is an intriguing and men-offensive component of a prejudicial social and cultural framework. It's not a two-soul connection, but a transaction in women in which women are auctioned. In other terms, it is a technique to control and manipulate the women to satisfy the sexual expectations of the males (Suraj, 2018).

Yasmeen (2022) analyzed Hamid's *Exit West* to explore how the female characters challenge the patriarchal norms; they used to keep them subdued. She has examined the gender roles and the resistance of women to oppressions and patriarchal control maintained in the name of social or western enlightened norms. The findings show that patriarchy keeps women devoid of independent thinking, enslaves them to conform to the prescribed gender roles, deprives them of agency and robs them off their confidence and claim an independent identity. Yasmeen & Ahmad (2022) conducted postcolonial feminist study of *Exit West* under Spivak's concept of 'Subalternism' and found that patriarchy levy multiple responsibilities on women and keeps them deprived by

colonizing their minds so that they may be kept deprived of their agency, basic rights, and do not demand for their separate identity and rights.

Zedan (2013) investigated Atwood's fiction to locate the postcolonial elements. He explored the texts to find out how women are victimized and kept silent through colonial control. He highlighted how the women assume the role of predators. They, sometimes, are responsible for their own disruption and downfall and are humiliated. He studied how they can survive through resistance and finally achieve freedom. The study concluded that in the modern world, both men and women are the victims and need united efforts to fight ignorance. It is not only men, but there are many other factors responsible for the oppression of women including imperialism, underdevelopment, racial discrimination, and women degrading and devaluing their own gender (Ullah, Gul, & Naz, 2020). Religion is used as an instrument to subjugate women. It was found out that women use several tools including language and particular mannerism to resist and fight oppression and suppression.

Ahmad (2017) explored the short stories of the writers, Hameedullah and Abbasi for the portrayal of woman through the Postcolonial Feminist lens. He traced the recolonization of women in Pakistani literature after its independence. He employed the theory of Rutherford and Holst-Petersen which claims that in the postcolonial societies, women are doubly colonized; firstly by the colonizer and secondly by their own men. After the freedom was achieved and Pakistan came into existence, the men tried to re-colonize the bodies of women. They tried to imitate the former colonizers by asserting power over women like masters, eager to be responded with obedience which justified their control over women. Socio cultural and religious values were stressed to legitimize the patriarchal control. The study claims that the female characters are portrayed as controlled and led by male characters. They are still colonized and enslaved through the tools of tradition and religion engaged in the struggle for freedom in an independent state.

Alvi (2022) studied the portrayal of triple colonization of women in the fiction of British ex-colonies: Africa, and the Subcontinent of India. The study has found that the women of these territories have undergone several forms and stages of physical and mental oppression at the hands of colonial and patriarchal masters during and after the colonial phase. The colonization has taken a new shape as they are now the victims of disgrace at the hands of their feminist associates. The study suggests that the feminist authors are promoting surreptitious and furtive suppression of women, causing disgrace through the prurient discourse in their reformist fiction. These blatant sympathizers of the women portray them as victims of disgrace and objectify their bodies through graphic details so as to make them 'visual feasts'. The study argues that the African authors could be taken as models for postcolonial feminism as there is no incongruence between their rhetoric and representation.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Three of the plays from Shahid Nadeem's *Selected Plays* are chosen for the postcolonial feminist analysis. Textual references are quoted to highlight the issues addressed in the plays. Postcolonial feminism questions the western feminism for its homogenizing tendencies. It focuses on highlighting the specific problems of the women in the third world countries. The initiative was taken by the academicians and activists who somehow belonged to once colonized nations. Their aim is to introduce an overall betterment in the lives of women living in postcolonial societies. It challenges the colonial and hegemonic control launched by the native men after the colonial rule

was over. Gayatri Spivak addresses concerns of marginalized subjects, such as subaltern women's role in society and their emancipation. Spivak refers to the underrepresented category of individuals in society as "subaltern." She loves this word because it perfectly captures the image of the working class. In her well-known essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) Spivak posits a philosophy of subalternity and defends the subalterns' limits. By subaltern, she refers to the oppressed people or, more broadly, those who are "of lower status." She claims that the subaltern has no history and cannot speak in the framework of colonial production, and that the subaltern as a woman is much more marginalized.

According to Spivak's notion the subaltern can talk, but others do not have the patience to listen to them. Because of the element of noise, the message sent by the sender does not reach the recipient. Humans articulate involuntarily, but it takes deliberate effort on the part of the listeners to understand things in the actual sense.

DATA ANALYSIS

The major concern of the study is to investigate and evaluate female characters' roles in patriarchal societies, as well as their struggles and opposition to the system. The "Male Gaze" defines women, reducing them to stereotypes and subjecting them to the long-term social and economic repercussions of oppression. In the present study, Shahid Nadeem's plays illustrate how females are dominated by males in the name of religious and social traditions and secondly, it investigates how male dominance over women is established in society.

In his play *Acquittal*, Shahid Nadeem deftly depicted the plight of women when General Zia-ul-Haq enacted the Hudood Ordinance, a set of glaringly inequitable "Islamic" regulations. This law proved to be unfavorable to women's rather punishing women became safe and legal. The women's movement in Pakistan was energized by Zia's anti-women "Islamization" measures. This Islamization has a massive impact on women; even the women's movement was tried to be controlled by sending them to jail. Nadeem has chosen the setting and the characters of the play very expertly in symbolic terms.

In the notes, Nadeem has given the stage directions, which mention that there should be a restricted acting area to represent a cell which has a confined space which hints that women in our society are bound and restricted. The cell is guarded by the male warders, like the women are controlled and put in the four walls of the house by the male members of the family as well as other men. These warders are rude and arrogant, and represent the whole patriarchal society.

Marium has been put in jail because she danced on a Mazar because the Hudood Ordinance Law forbids women from dancing. However, in jail, she suffers repeated rapes by the warders, police officers etc. She gets pregnant, and now she cannot leave the cell, not because of her crime, but to hide the crimes of others. As Jamila says: "How can they let her go out of here with this stomach ...until the baby is born, she will stay here" (p.64). Zahida asks Marium about the father of her baby, she replies: "Warder Karam Dad...no, the man from the hospital...no, I think superintendent Aslam.... All the officers of the jail are its fathers...people can't find one father and this fortunate one has no dearth of them..." (p.64)

Acquittal highlights the issue of forced marriage through the character of Jamila who was forced to marry an old man who would beat her black and blue. She states, "He must have been just a few years younger than my father (p.68). The play portrays women acting as agents and ensuring the continuity of exploitation of women by forcing and convincing each other to submit to

the male dominance as Jamila says: "My mother who had forced me to say yes at the Nikah was weeping with such intensity that I forgot my own sorrow." (p.68). After getting married, women from in-laws take it as their right to torture. Fazal Din's daughter, who was just a year younger to Jamila would not let her have any breathing space. If she tried to wear some make up or jewelry, she would raise objections that her old husband could not clearly see it. She claimed that she being, mother of a grown up (step) daughter should not wear jewelry. Jamila narrates the story of torture and tells when she was thrashed by her aged husband and reacted to the torture and asked him to divorce her, "Father and daughter beat me with brooms and slippers until my back was covered with welts." (p.69). The laws introduced as Islamic ones were constructed according to the interest of patriarchy. Jamila asks Zahida if the family laws support her in case she divorces her husband. To her surprise, Zahida tells her "Yes, you could have divorced him, but after the new amendment this right will be taken away." (p.72).

Nikah's terms and conditions are set and discussed between the bride's guardian and the groom's family. The bride is not told any details, nor she is asked if she wants to put any conditions. Most of the time bride's rights, like divorce and haqq meher fixed according to the economic status of the groom and the beauty and the living standard of the bride are crossed at the time of Nikah. Zahida asks Jamila, if she was given the right to ask for divorce at the time of nikah, she replies "What did I know at the age of fourteen?...They didn't even ask my permission for the marriage. It was my guardian who said yes and I who got married. (p.72).

Jamila is filled with rebellious thoughts being treated as object and lower half of the society. In scene 8, when she opens up to her cellmates, she represents the whole feminist agenda straightforwardly. She argues that a woman becomes a slave for a man, works at home, in the fields, takes care of the family finances, buys products from the shop, entertains guests, sews clothing, cleans; her work is double that of a man's, yet her testimony is worth half a man's. She bears the kid in her stomach, delivers it, nurses it, feeds it, and when the child grows up, the father has the right to it, and when her son grows up, she has to listen to both her son's and her husband's abuse. Is this a fair result?

She has a very high degree of anguish and declares, "If I had an axe, I would slaughter them one by one." (p. 74, 75). She gives a whole list of men she had been exploited by and wants to strike them with her axe. She starts with her father who always considered her inferior in comparison to his sons and forced her to marry an old man. She says, she would then like to strike her brother who never cared for her happiness and the only important thing for him was his honor. She then mentions the libidinous shopkeeper who gazed at her lustfully and let her down by bringing up her misfortunes. She then refers to mullah who performed her marriage in the name of Islam against her will. She does not forget the policeman who beat her Feroze lifeless and then the judge who was going to decide her fate. Finally the prison wardens, who she believes, had made the life of the prisoners hell.

Jannat, and old cell mate of Jamila, pacifies her when she is highly agitated on the warning given by the warders to stop laughing and keep silent, "You bitches! What is this noise? This is a jail, not your aunt's house. Stop making this racket" (p.70). When Jamila tries to raise her voice against the foul language and obscenities thrown on them, Jannat comments that they being women are "even prisoners of laughter and merry making, ...my father used to stop us from laughing at home, he said that the angels of goodness turn away from a house where they hear the sound of young girls laughing and Satan enters the house instead." (p.70).

Postcolonial theorists claim that language is designed by the oppressor, so if the oppressed want to write or talk against the oppressor, they lack vocabulary for this purpose because the oppressors do not include words that may be used to speak against them. So is the case with feminism. As the patriarchy controls the language, so women do not have enough variety of vocabulary. Zahida has a lot of ideas and she wants to write but cannot find verbal equivalence for the emotions triggered by the realities around her. She wonders, "Perhaps the right words have not been invented to describe that was unfolded before us" (p.75). She comments that it were men who invented the language and the dictionary. She believes that the men as philosophers, linguists, and poets have not undergone the experiences, as women have, so women face scarcity of words to describe their emotions and reactions to the unique and gender specific experiences. This helplessness and insufficiency of language causes depression in Zahida and she declares, "Whenever I started writing, tears would fall on the page instead of ink." (p.75).

A Granny for All Seasons also represents the situation of the Pakistani women in Zia-ul-Haq's rule when women were banned from pursuing their dreams. Rani's covering her head has been highlighted in the play. This cultural practice is very profoundly inculcated in the heads of girls that even when there is no male member around, "Ranicovers her head with her dupatta (headscarf) and picks up the phone" (p.88).

If any female member stands against the imposed social norms, the other females behave as agents of patriarchal society and try to shut her up and accept the on-going culture silently as it is their fate to live like that. Sabeen describes the state of affairs, "People are highly conservative and quick to find faults and spread gossips. Granny is always worried about what the family and even the residents of our locality will think" (p.97)

According to postcolonial feminists, girls' intellect is suppressed by the dominant male society. They are trained in a way that they accept every law and order produced by society. Girl asking questions is considered bad and shameful. Feminists ask for this right of women to express their thoughts and question the practices, they disagree with. Nani tries to encourage the young girl to develop her own opinion about the world and have the right to question the set norms.

"Nani: If she does not argue, how will she learn? It's good to ask questions.

Dadi: You have no idea where such a questioning attitude can land you here." (p.98,99)

Nani tries to get Dadi out of her highly conservative thoughts and the way she controls Sabeen's life. Dadi is a kind of female who has given up in front of society and traditions. She appears to be the agent of the patriarchal society who forces others to follow up the society's traditions without any argument. She thinks that, Sabeen's life should fit according to society's ideas, no matter if she has to give up her dreams and happiness. Nani argues with her to change her views and let Sabeen live according to her individuality and free will. She gives her opinion, "...nobody should have the right to live our life for us, nor lay down the law for us to follow. No one should tell anyone what to eat, what to wear, what to think" (p.104). She cannot convince Dadi who believes, "one has to adapt to one's surroundings. And, after all, what is wrong with showing respect to one's religion and traditions?" (p.104).

Behzad's character is the typical representation of males in a patriarchal society. He treats women as sexual objects and as domestic servants. His patriarchal mentality does not accept the fact that women can perform jobs other than domestic chores. He does not support Sabeen's

dream of becoming an actor, rather advised her, "I would rather you concentrated on crocheting rather than acting. It will come in handy after marriage" (p.109).

A Granny for All Seasons, focuses on the concept of veil and dupatta. It is already mentioned how Rani covers her head before picking up phone calls as her mind has been conditioned that way. When Dadi and Rani visit the market, Rani's dupatta slips for a while, and she could not put it back because she was holding groceries in her hands. At that moment, a male appears and asks her violently to put her dupatta back on her head. Rani states "a mullah holding a big stick got after me? He wanted to know why my head was partially bare" (p.113).

Shahid Nadeem very dexterously crafted a story, *Human Being and Woman*, within the plot of the play. It is about a girl from a good family who wants to be recognized for her intellectual contribution rather than for her femininity. Mustaqeem wants Sabeen to play the

role of that girl in drama. The story represents Sabeen's desire to fulfil her dreams specifically and all the other girls of society in general. The play portrays that instead of correcting the male gaze, society focuses on keeping girls bound. Sabeen questions the cultural practice of treating women as inferior, "You tell me, when God created Adam, did He not create Eve along with him? A woman is also a human being and so is a man, so why does she not have her human rights?"

Nani opposes and rejects the idea of Sabeen seeking admission in a coeducation institute. She refers to the family members who love her and kept her in a protected environment throughout her life. It will be a disgrace for men of family "when you join a co-educational college, all those male eyes that will explore your body. They will admire your beauty and not your intellect. (p.126-127). Sabeen declares that if men stare on her then it is not her fault rather they are "guilty" and commit "sin" if they do not listen to her thoughts and concentrate on her looks and beauty.

The play also focuses on the way, society discriminates girls. There are various things or actions which are forgiven if boys are involved in them, but if girls are found doing the same, they are punished. Things forbidden for girls are allowed for boys. When Siddiqa points out that it is *shameful* for girls to dance and sing. Sabeen is disappointed and she reacts and comments that the culture allows the boys to sing and dance. "What is wrong with girls doing the same? Why are you people such hypocrites?" (p.134)

Another critical fact portrayed in the play is that in a patriarchal society, male members consider women as the puppets who should move according to their will. Men cannot bear if women excel in any field of life. They like them to be controlled and bound. Men are attracted to the independent and working women. They prefer goal-oriented females over homemakers, and after achieving them as wives, they start to change them according to their comfort zone. They crush their self-esteem, take away their career and subjugate them. The grandfather (Dada) fell in love and married Sabira, the grandmother (Dadi), after he saw her in a play. Even after getting married "Dada never really reconciled to Sabira's profession" (p.139).

Black is My Robe portrays the community where women are not even treated as human beings; instead their worth is equal to animals. Wasaya is married to two women; he loves his second wife better because she has brought an ox as a dowry. When the ox dies, Wasaya ends up jobless and without any money. He trades his first wife, Sundri, for an ox using the barter

system. Sundri's second husband, Ditta has two oxen but no wife and "needed a woman to look after the children" (p.170). For him, this marriage was like buying a maid for household works. On the other hand, "Wasaya is very happy. He has not only got a new wife but a new ox too. And a healthy ox is as important as a healthy wife" (p.150).

If a woman cannot bear a child, she is considered worthless in the eyes of her husband and society and the husband is automatically allowed to marry another woman. A woman is an object for the continuity of their heredity or line, and the male constructs her identity and social role. If Sundri had born a child for Wasaya, "he would not have spent money on the second marriage." (p.150-151) Marriage is supposed to be economically profitable for men because they receive stuff in dowry that they are unable to afford themselves, as it is disclosed by Wasaya in the text, "The ox has come as her dowry. I could not afford to buy an ox." (p.159). In the play, the women are treated equal to animals, "the death of an ox is as tragic as that of a wife." (p.161)

Despite the fact that women are capable of doing a wide range of tasks, they are not permitted to take any initiative in their life. Ditta gives the description of the contribution of his dead wife: "She got up in the morning, swept the floor, gave breakfast to the kids, massaged my legs, fed the ox, washed the dishes..." (p.162). The mourning of the dead wife is not based on the loss of a person rather for the works that will remain undone in her absence

This play also portrays women as agents of continuity of exploitation of women. In *Black is my Robe*, "Massi" plays the role of that agent of continuity. She inculcates the filthy idea of barter trade in Ditta and Wasaya's head. Maasi convinces them by quoting the examples of different service providers involved in barter system. She says that the shoe maker exchanges shoes for pottery, the farmer barter wheat with weaver. "Can't you see? The world goes around on the barter principle." (p.165). In scene 6, she makes them both agree to do the barter of a woman. she addresses Wasaiya, "Ditta needs a woman badly, and you need an ox equally badly. If you let go of one wife and give her to Ditta, he will be happy to exchange her with his ox" (p. 168). She points out the benefits of the trade which will enable Wasaya to carry water and do other chores after he trades his wife for the ox and Ditta will get a wife to take care of his household and kids.

When Wasay asks her that is this kind of barter permitted in Shariat. She said: "Poor Shariat has nothing to do with it. It is a matter of mutual convenience" (p.168). She also stops him from asking his wife's consent on the issue by saying that no one asks a woman's consent upon which Sohni also says that yes girls opinion does not matter. Later on, she tries to shut Sundri out and stop her from going against the unlawful and inhuman act of her husband. She reminds him, "Don't be angry, Sundri. This is the fate of women" (p.169).

In traditional societies, women bear the brunt of the social, emotional and physical consequences of sterility. Infertility is not only associated with females, rather it is also caused by male issues. If a woman cannot bear a child, or if she has only daughters and no son, then her husband considers it his right to marry another woman or divorce his first wife. A woman is a mere object of beauty, meant to produce babies. As Sundri implores, "Save me sir. If I don't bear a child, Wasaya will throw me out. Where will I go?" (p.176). and finally has been traded for an ox.

Nadeem presents a variety of female characters that are oppressed in various ways. They are the victims of the patriarchal system, that is causing them experience anguish and pain. Women are subjected to constant oppression and denial of their rights at the hands of the strong. The female characters in Nadeem's plays are degraded, humiliated, and victimized by social

institutions, notably religion. They are maltreated, but for the sake of family status and respect, they are not permitted to complain. The family and society are infringing on their civil and human rights. The research also reveals the inhumane and life-threatening treatment of women in jails, while also showing the conditions and causes that lead to awful situation as depicted by Nadeem in his plays. The study examines how female characters in Nadeem's plays reveal postcolonial and feminist problems such as education, liberty, and independence, mainly through the perspective of Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak's postcolonial feminist theory. Women are also disclosed as agents of continuity in keeping their fellow women colonized and oppressed. The conspicuous aspect is that they have come in a position to challenge the ferocities of patriarchy, sociocultural and religious norms approved by the stronger segments of the society. Nadeem has let his characters raise their voice against the disagreeable practices in their own capacities. This proves to be a ray of hope for improvement in the state of affairs.

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