

Women's Struggle against Patriarchy: An Analysis of Radical Feminism Through Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows*

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Abstract. Under twenty years of war, women in Afghanistan suffer from oppressive situations and rules resulting in inequality and injustice. Afghanistan women face difficulties at all levels of Afghanistan patriarchal society. Male domination is the root cause of damaging to women's rights in Afghanistan that brings impact to inferiority of Afghanistan women. Using radical feminism by Kate Millet, this paper tries to describe the struggle of Afghanistan women in gaining opportunities to move forward in their society. The analysis is focused on the female characters who deal with problem solving to their unfair condition such as Zeba, Gulnaz, Latifa, , Mezghan, Bibi Shireen, the wife of judge Najeeb, Sitara, Meena, and Aneesa. They begin to build self-consciousness, to demand autonomy in decision making, to declare resistance to be controlled by the men, and to get their basic rights such as the right to speak, the right to get education, and the right to work to earn money. The strong self-awareness and determination as reflected from the female characters are the women's primary step to get rid of male domination and to proceed in their lives as well as in their society. Through this literary evidence, radical feminism emphasizes that women's efforts to protect their rights means approval that inequality and lack of opportunities for women still happen.

Keywords: *women in Afghanistan, women's struggle, radical feminism*

INTRODUCTION

Since feminism emerges in the early twentieth century, women's awareness about their rights has been spread in many countries around the globe. However, the news and records about discrimination and lack of opportunities for women to advance in patriarchal society seem endless until today. Afghanistan as one of the patriarchal countries is known for its strict rules on women since the reign of the Taliban. Afghanistan is situated in the center of Asia, bordering Iran to the west, Pakistan to the south, China to the far north-east, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north. Afghanistan, a land of high mountains and rugged topography has faced one of the worst human tragedies of modern times (Das, 2006: 8). Having suffered violence and discrimination during Afghanistan civil war under the Taliban

(1996-2001) and the U.S led intervention (2001-2005) bring impact severely on women (Brown *et al*, 2001: 2). Kristensen (2016: 1) states that Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous and difficult countries for women to live. In addition, there are plentiful accounts of oppressed women in Afghanistan in the international media, development reports and the academic literature, and images that so many times Afghan women have become the world's stereotypical victims of male domination (Murray, 2012: 1). Therefore, related to women's studies, Afghanistan gets main attention from countries around the world. The serious conditions that happen to Afghanistan women cannot be separated from the existence of patriarchy through the tribal strong practice of Afghanistan.

The patriarchal society often puts the women in lower position. Related to the patriarchy, Sultana (2010: 1) writes that patriarchy refers to the male domination both in public and private spheres. Nasimi (2014: 2) states that Afghanistan is a patriarchal society where all the major institutions are controlled by men. Although, since 2001, there have been many endeavors to elevate women and improvements have been observed, the foundations of discriminations against women have not been uprooted. Similarly, Povey (2004: 6) strengthens that patriarchal attitudes and structures remain extremely strong in Afghanistan. Afghan women resist and struggle against different structures of power (male, ethnic, religion, age, regional and international). It indicates that the women in Afghanistan suffer from the social system that is made by the men in their male-dominated society. The men have the power or control over the women. Based on Sultana (2010: 3), the patriarchal system is characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.

During the reign of the Taliban, the norms make strict rules for the women that it gives wider chance for the men to oppress the women. Women's rights are violated by the Taliban discriminatory policies. The women are deprived of their right to freedom of expression, association and assembly, the right to work, the right to education, freedom of movement and the right to health care (Brown *et al*, 2001: 10). Das (2006: 3) says that flagrant abuses of Afghan women's most basic human rights in the sectors of education, health, and civil and political participation have been widely documented. Therefore, the women face inequality and injustice in the environment where the men take full authority over the women in all fields of life. This brings effect to the inferiority of Afghanistan women because their basic rights as equal human being like the men have been denied.

However, the history through women's studies has proven that the women come to the state where they are aware of their suffering and

their lost of rights as a normal human being. The women have lived in inequality without the power to solve their situation. Acknowledgment of these inequalities has developed a number of feminist movements aimed at achieving equality between men and women (Vernet and Butera, 2005: 176). The feminists use the term 'patriarchy' to describe the power relationship between men and women as well as to find out the cause root of women's subordination Sultana (2010: 1). It means that in feminism studies, patriarchy is the main subject. According to Guerin (1999: 196), feminism theory is a theory of literary work that concerned with the marginalization of women with their being relegated to secondary position by patriarchal culture. It can be seen that feminism is the theory about women in low position under patriarchal culture. Patriarchy is the social system arranged by the men in the purpose to dominate the women. The women are made inferior in power while the men are superpower.

Among the braches of feminisms, radical feminism strongly against the force of power in patriarchy. Patriarchy has undeniable connection to subordination of women (Johannasdottir, 2009: 9). Furthermore, radical feminists blamed the patriarchy for women's subordinated status in society. In other words, men's violence against women is seen as an important basis of men. The system in patriarchal society is used as an 'instrument' for the men to have power over the women.

Kate Millet is one of the American radical feminists who argues that patriarchy is a political institution. Millet (1970: 52) defines the term politic as the power-structured relationships, whereby one group of persons is controlled by another. Related to women's struggle in patriarchal society, Millet (1970: 77) writes:

Women to be aware of their situation both in the society and at home, to form their self-consciousness as women, to demand their equality with men and to obtain their autonomy. The resistance is the one way to achieve

equality, dignity, and rights (such as right to education, right to birth control, right to divorce, and to participate in decision-making).

Based on this quotation supported by references in this background of the study, this paper aims to identify and explain the struggle of Afghanistan women in patriarchal society by using radical feminism as seen through the female characters in the novel *A House Without Windows* written by Nadia Hashimi (2016).

METHODS

The present study is intended to explore women's struggle against Afghanistan patriarchal society as reflected through Hashimi's third novel, *A House Without Windows*. Using the extrinsic approach, the research is designed qualitatively (Gay *et al*, 2000) by applying close reading technique proposed by Jacobus (2001). The study describes the aspects of women's struggle based on Millet (1970) and guided with radical feminism point of view by Johannasdottir (2009). The writer as the observer studies the female characters Roberts (2003) through the written data in the form of words from the novel.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this discussion of women's struggle, through the female characters in the novel, the women have done a lot of efforts to gain chances to get their rights. The detailed exploration about women's struggle of Afghanistan is as follows:

A. Building Self-Consciousness

The first form of women's struggle is to build self-consciousness. After all of male domination, discrimination and mistreatments, oppression and violence that throw away the women's rights, the women begin to realize that those are unfair and injustice attitudes. The men can do anything they wish to the women while the women may not give any comment or show refusal. The women have gained some

understanding that they cannot accept any harsh treatment anymore. The norms applied in the society belong to the men while the women are the victims.

The first female character in the novel that has self-awareness is Gulnaz. She is not well educated woman and only knows how to read and write but she can understand the condition that is happening in their country. Afghanistan is having a civil war and competition for the top leader. In her awareness, she thinks that it is not safe to have many children. Her way of thinking is not the same like the common women at that time that can give birth to five or six children. On the contrary, she has only a couple children. How Gulnaz develops her thinking is seen through the quotation:

Afghanistan changed hands that year, one president replacing another who had either died of natural causes or had been smothered by mutinous hands. The truth would remain elusive. Since chaos breeds chaos, the new president would be replaced before the year was over. It was an inauspicious time to bring new life. Gulnaz wondered if Zeba had been a mistake.

Imagine a home led by three different patriarchs in one year, she thought to herself. No, this kind of home could not survive, nor could a country. (Hashimi, 2016:19)

The quotation reflects how the woman tries to control reproduction because she is the one who gives birth to the children. The main consideration is the country's economic hardship and insecurity because of the civil war. Moreover, this quotation also has one strong point about the patriarchy, that a household cannot be led by too many men, such the father, the grandfather, the uncles, and the elder men of the father's line. Gulnaz as the representative of women thinks that not all men can rule appropriately. They may make some mistakes. Therefore, it is important for the women to take

part as to make balance between the role of men and women.

The second woman who gains self-consciousness is Zeba, Gulnaz's daughter. In Zeba's case, she has to cope with a drunken, penniless, irresponsible, and cruel husband. After too many abuses, she comes to realize that she does not deserve to be treated this way. She used to be a loving daughter, a polite woman and a peaceful villager but her reputation is destroyed by Kamal's bad attitudes. Zeba's raising of her self-consciousness is seen through the quotation: "Zeba had changed too. She wasn't the bright-eyed she'd once been, but she'd believed their love had a trajectory. There was supposed to be only one direction to their relationship. This was all wrong (p. 52-53)." The quotation means that Zeba comes to understand that her marriage has gone wrong. This situation reflects that after having the self-awareness, the women begin to know deeper about right and wrong.

The next woman in the story who gains self-consciousness for freedom is Latifa. She comes from a poor family where her birth is not wanted. She gets bad treatments in her own family. It is depicted in the following quotation:

... She'd been beaten and cursed at until the day she'd decided she could take no more. ...

It was all my doing, she'd said, tapping her hand over her breastbone and nodding affirmatively. I decided to flee that miserable home. I wanted to save myself and my sister. ... (Hashimi, 2016:34)

It can be concluded how the Latifa starts to realize that the atmosphere at home is too bad for her. The only option she can do is to run away and hope to find a better place to live. She does not intend to get her own freedom but she also takes her younger sister because she does not want the situation keeps happening to the girls. In this awareness, the women think what

they can do to get out of their situation. They use even the smallest account of chance to get free.

Moreover, Gulnaz as the mother shares her self-consciousness to Zeba, When Gulnaz visits Zeba in the women's prison, she advises Zeba to be able to make up her mind about the accusation for her. Gulnaz delivering her thought to Zeba is seen through the following quotation:

"Rafi said good things about this lawyer. They both want to help you, but they are men, and men can often only see what they can hold in their hands. The world is made of rocks and wood and meat for them. It's not their fault; it's how they were designed." Gulnaz sighed. "We cannot leave everything in the hands of men. I made that mistake once, and I won't make it again." (Hashimi, 2016:107)

The quotation suggests that the women cannot depend totally to the men. Men commonly find and get what is advantageous for them. They know how to win something that they want. The women show a strong determination how they deal with the men. In this case, building self-consciousness can be held together between one woman with another especially when they face the same situation.

Collectively, Zeba transfers her self-consciousness with her fellow women prisoners. She has listened to many sources of problem why the women here are imprisoned. Zeba's speech is seen through the quotation:

They all begged Zeba for help. They needed the judge's mercy. They needed their families to be understanding. Their needed their husbands to grant them divorces. The prison was teeming with stories of sex, love, and violence.

Zina.Zina.Zina.

"This place, these crimes – it is an injustice what's being done here," Zeba declared. A chorus of agreement rang through the small

cell. "What a burden it is to be born a woman." (Hashimi, 2016:155)

It can be inferred that Zeba inspires consciousness of other women. The women become strong when they are united because they have been suffered in the same situation. They intend to ask for mercy through Zeba as their representative. By building the awareness in justice, the women defeat the unfairness accusation that has happened to them so that not any single woman will face the same thing. That means they protect other women in future.

B. Demanding Autonomy in Decision Making

The second form of women's struggle to get their rights is demanding autonomy in decision making. In relation to this study, the women wants to have the independence to choose and decide what is best for her life without intervention from somebody else, especially the men. The women also have the ability as well as the men to reconsider the good and bad things about their choice. Therefore the women demand autonomy as the opposite to be determined their whole life by the men. By having the self-autonomy, then the women will feel that they own their own lives.

Based on the story *A House Without Windows*, the demanding in autonomy is in deciding the marriage. It is discussed previously that marriage arrangement is made by the men and the women only accept the decision. In this struggle, the women no longer want to accept passively what the men try to arrange for them. They want to get out from the situation where their whole life is ruined as soon as they get married by forced. The female character in the novel that demands independence for her marriage is Sitara. Her behavior to defense her determination is seen through the quotation:

Yusuf's eldest sister, Sitara, fell in love just after finishing high school. She had met an Afghan boy who lived in the same apartment building. ... Yusuf's parents warned their daughter to stay away from

the boy who worked part-time as a bank teller and whose parents were of a different ethnicity. Doors were slammed, phone calls were intercepted, and seething looks were exchanged. Predictably, the young lovers grew all the more desperate for each other and embraced on public buses, caring less and less that their parents would learn of the improprieties.

To stave off rumors, the families agreed to have the two married ... (Hashimi, 2016:6-7)

The quotation means that Sitara ignores her parents' dislike about the man of her own choice. She does not care if other people will see her with her boyfriend. She shows rejection to her parents by acting that she has made her decision and no one can change it. This demanding autonomy works because in the end, the parents let Sitara marries her boyfriend.

Not only in deciding marriage for the daughters, the widow in the story also demands independence of remarry. It means that she does not let the men of her family to decide with whom she will marry again to replace her husband. This happens to Gulnaz who is left by her husband for war. For years there is no news about him and the people assume that he is dead. Gulnaz does not want to remarry. Her strength is seen through the quotation:

"I kept his clothes at the house. There was always a place for him in case he did return. And I wept sometimes to see the emptiness where your father should have been, but they were bad times for us too, and I had to think of you. I had two children to feed and only my sewing kept us alive. Your uncles hinted at me marrying one of them, but I told them I wouldn't marry again until your father's body was brought home." (Hashimi, 2016:110)

The quotation means that the woman has her own positive consideration about how to run her life. She shows self-government that she can take care of herself. She is not dependent to any man. The woman has another responsibility to her children rather than to think to get married again. Besides, the woman can defend herself not to be intimidated by the other men of husband's family to marry one of them. It is like an oppression for the widow but the woman can show rejection and build her own principles.

C. Declaring Resistance to be Controlled by Men

Related to women's struggle based on the novel, the women try a great effort to declare that they refuse some forms of men's control such as refusing to have too many children and refusing marriage arrangement for girls. Declaring resistance is done by Gulnaz. She is a calm person but after building her self-consciousness, she cannot stay silent anymore. She will speak directly what she has in her mind. This is against the norms in Afghanistan patriarchal society where the women commonly do not have the gut to reject anything decided by the men. Gulnaz refuses to have too many children. Gulnaz braveness in making resistance is seen through the quotation:

While most of the women around Gulnaz round with their next child by the time the previous had taken its first steps, Gulnaz was not like any other woman. She thrived on having control – control of her emotions, her body, and her family. Her husband was content to let her exert her will. She drew much envy for that, which further fueled her need to be in command.

Gulnaz would have a child only when she wanted. ...

We will have no more children, Gulnaz had declared to her husband and their family. No one doubted her when she made the vow. They

knew, by then, that she could circumvent nature to make it so. (Hashimi, 2016:18)

It is clear from the quotation that Gulnaz states clearly in front of her husband and family that she takes control of the childbirth. She declares frankly her way of thinking because she believes she can handle her problem. With this effort, the people begin to put trust to the woman that she is a capable human. To proof the ability, the women need to take some action and try. This is the struggle for the women because they do a lot of effort to take out their potency to solve their situation.

The same effort happens to Meena who tries to fight the weak side of herself as the woman. Her parents try to match her with Yusuf because they know his background and he has a good job as a lawyer. However, Meena does not approve the relationship that her family is making with Yusuf family. To prevent further relationship, Meena encourages herself to speak directly to Yusuf. Meena's way of declaring resistance to the match is seen through the quotation:

"I need to tell you something. I've been trying to find a way around it, but I can't come up with anything and I feel like you deserve to tell the truth." ... "I...I've been in love with someone for the last year. My parents are not happy about it because they don't like his family but...but that doesn't change anything for him or me. I'm so embarrassed to tell you this." ... "My mother was hoping that seeing you...talking to you...the possibility of going to America...that it would change me. You know what I mean?" (Hashimi, 2016:117-118)

It can be seen that slowly but sure Meena tries to explain that she cannot accept Yusuf as her future husband. She refuses the match because she has a man of her own choice.

She cuts the match by directly talking to Yusuf. This means that Meena also has her self-awareness that a happy marriage is almost impossible for Afghanistan women when they never know the personality of the men appointed for them to marry. Men's judgment or parents opinion are not always successful for daughter's marriage. Therefore, the women must be brave to express that they have different point of view.

D. Getting Their Right to Speak, the Right to Get Education and the Right to Work to Earn Money

The last form of women's struggle in Afghanistan is getting their basic rights. Based on the findings, there are three kinds of efforts that the women do to get their basic rights: they are the right to speak, to right to get education, and the right to work to earn money. The female character in *A House Without Windows* who encourages her nerve to the right to speak is Gulnaz. It happens when she wants to speak with judge Najeeb to have mercy for her daughter, Zeba. Zeba is accused for killing her husband, but the truth is he is murdered by a young girl named Laylee. Gulnaz's courageous to talk to the judge is seen through the quotation:

"Very true," he agreed. "You did not bring Yusuf with you. Why?"

"He had his turn to speak with you. This is mine."

"I see," the judge nodded.

"Qazi-sahib," she began. "I am here because of my daughter. You are the judge presiding over her case. Since I'm the one who gave her her first breath, I thought it only fitting I should speak with the man who might sentence her to death. You and I share a connection, in that respect, that is undeniable. Wouldn't you agree?" (Hashimi, 2016:135)

The conversation is between the judge and the mother of the prisoner. Usually the

family of the accused is not presented to the judge without their lawyer but for Gulnaz, she is confident to meet the judge personally. Gulnaz wants to emphasize that the man and the woman has the same right to speak with the judge. The woman is not always dependent on the man for any kind of chance. The woman can have her own chance if she dares herself to start speaking.

The second struggle in getting the basic right for women is getting the right in education. Getting the right in education is a struggle for Afghanistan women because normally, based on the norms, education is not priority for the women. It is enough for them to be able to read and write. Beside, the country is having a civil war so that it is not safe for the women to go to school. However, the female character in the novel succeeds in her education because she is persistent to become an educated woman. It is seen through Meena's effort in the quotation below:

Their conversation flowed naturally – Yusuf's mother would have been pleased. He asked about her work and she told him about the United Nations Gender Program. She was an assistant to the director, charged with organizing meetings and coordinating agendas between cooperating departments. Kaka Siar's family had returned to Kabul in 2002, the year the Taliban were ousted and hope for a peaceful Afghanistan flourished. Even while refugees, Meena had continued her studies, including English. Her command of the language had helped her secure the job. She had aspirations to advance in her post and was taking computer classes as well. (Hashimi, 2016:49)

The conversation happens between Yusuf and Meena. It can be inferred that Meena never gives up to study even at hard times of the Afghanistan. She has the ability in English and

computer. The quotation shows that as a young woman she has a good job in female field. This suggests that with continuous effort in studying, the woman can achieve similar opportunities in education and resulting in good future.

Moreover, the women continue to recover their situation and improve their standard of life by becoming career women. They can go to work and earn their own money. They used to be limited in house works and have economic dependence on the men, but then by having the education, wider chances are opened for the women because they have the skills and integrity needed in the working field. The female character who tries to get her right to work and to earn money is reflected through Aneesa in the quotation below:

... Aneesa was the head of the legal aid group. She was a bold woman in her early forties ... Yusuf had been immediately impressed by her when they'd first met. ... She had a sharp legal mind, Yusuf had learned quickly. Well versed in both Sharia and constitutional law, she could glide between Dari and Pashto and had built a reputation as one of the city's most formidable lawyers ... Yusuf could only imagine what kind of force she'd been in Australia, the salary she must have turned her back on to return to her homeland. (Hashimi, 2016:114-115)

It can be understood from the quotation that education plays important part for women's career. The women can become the head of an institution where the men become her staff. Working women defeat the image that only the men can influence the society. The women with excellent capability can prove that they can get to work, get paid, and therefore earn their own living. Having this right, the women can achieve economic independence from the men.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the present research suggests that women's struggle to get their rights is the evident that inequality and lack of opportunities for women still happen until now. Through the men's full authority in patriarchal institution, they are given supreme position to enforce the norms they want to the women. However, the women have their own inner potency to stop their suffering. Women's awareness is central to step out of their oppressive situation. They start to defeat their weaknesses as a woman. They try to prevent the injustice and furthermore they fight to achieve their rights as a normal human being.

Based on the female characters in *A House Without Windows*, the women try to improve their condition. They begin to raise self-consciousness as well as inspiring others who face similar situation. The first step they take is to demand autonomy in decision making so that they can choose what is best for their own lives. The second step is to declare resistance to be controlled by the men in order to cut the men's power over themselves. The last but the very important steps that the women struggle is getting their basic rights such as the right to speak, the right to get education, and the right to work to earn money.

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