

# The Condition Of Afghani Women And Radical Idealism In Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows*

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## Abstract

A philosophical school known as radical idealism emphasizes the importance of our thoughts and perceptions in shaping our worldview. It declares that rather than being outside of our brains, reality is ultimately a creation of our ideas and beliefs. Islamic extremism, also known as radical Islam, is an extreme ideology, set of behaviors, and belief system within Islam. These are still infamous ideas that can mean anything from academic justifications to the belief that all other ideologies are flawed and ineffective.

In the 20th century, several Afghan women face discrimination in education due to lack of knowledge and limitations in understanding the outside world. Women are not permitted to vote or contribute to the development of their country, and they are often confined to marriages and not allowed to divorce. In 1920, women's emancipation began worldwide, and Afghanistan participated in it. Education schools were established during Amanullah's government, and the Afghan Youth Organization was founded for women's relief.

Women in Afghanistan cannot do all activities, as they must be controlled by men or those with higher status. In rural areas, control over their lives and gender roles is determined by patriarchal kinship arrangements. The justice in rural areas and cities is very different, with rural people being treated differently from urban ones.

In the 21st century, women in Afghanistan have limited access to education, with only 26% of the population being literate and a decrease in women's literacy rate. Of school-age children, only 38% (4.2 million) do not have access to schools, with the majority being girls. The government has changed over time, but society still believes that women only need to stay at home rather than go outside to study at school. When Afghanistan was led by the Taliban, they did not allow women to go to school and only allowed men to get good education. In the government of Taliban (1996-2001), schools were operated but only allowed males to study, strictly rejecting and banning female education.

This condition assumes that men have higher value than women, decreasing their chances of having equal rights like men. The majority of Afghan population consists of Pashtoon who traditionally do not give much importance to female education, allowing girls only for primary education, which only allows them to learn basic reading and writing. After primary education, their educational career begins with uncertainty.

Key words : Discrimination, Stereotype, Afghan women, Education and Nadia Hashimi

Nadia Hashimi is a pediatrician, novelist, and former Democratic candidate for the 6th congressional district of Maryland. *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*, *When the Moon Is Low*, and *A House Without Windows* are among her three best-selling books worldwide. Hashimi studied biology and Middle Eastern studies at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts. After graduating from SUNY Downstate with a medical degree, she trained as a pediatrician at NYU/Bellevue hospitals in New York City.

Two Afghan women who live a century apart but are connected by their shared heritage are the subject of her debut book, *The Pearl that Broke Its Shell*. The book has been translated into several languages and was a finalist for the 2014 Goodreads Fiction and Debut Author categories.

2015 saw the publication of Hashimi's second book, *When the Moon Is Low*, which became her second worldwide bestseller. *O, the Oprah Magazine*, praised it as "A must-read saga about borders, barriers, and the resolve of one courageous mother fighting to cross over." *A House without Windows*, Hashimi's third book, became her third worldwide bestseller when it was published in 2016.

Hashimi's campaign focused on bringing her medical expertise into Congress. If elected, she would be the first female Democratic physician to serve as a voting member of Congress. She was soundly defeated by David Trone (40%-10%). In 2008, Hashimi and her husband moved to Potomac, Maryland, where her husband, a Maryland-based neurosurgeon, arrived in the United States as a refugee. Hashimi has stated that "the Afghan culture has always been part of my daily life" and has joked about her traditional Afghan wedding. They have four children and a parrot named Niles.

*A House without Windows* by Hashimi is a literary work that delves into the lives of Afghan women, examining gender norms and societal codes that restrict and enslave them. Set against Afghanistan's sexist culture, the novel presents a nuanced and multidimensional picture of Afghan women that goes beyond clichés and dispels common assumptions about their existence. The story revolves around the superhero Zeba, who is charged with killing her husband. The story takes readers on a journey that clarifies the subtleties of sex roles in Afghan society and exposes the truth about the murder.

Prejudices based on gender and geography significantly affect Afghanistan's legal system, further marginalizing and oppressing women. Hashimi's work highlights the resilience and courage of Afghan women, highlighting their capacity to overcome hardships and peer pressures while redefining themselves.

Her writing pushes readers to think again ingrained sexual and social norms that limit women's freedom of choice.

The harsh truth faced by Afghan women, who often find themselves imprisoned in a society that maintains gender inequity and denies them access to basic opportunities and rights, is brought to light by her artwork. Hashimi demonstrate show these customs fuel violence and injustice against women in Afghan culture by looking at the association between gender dynamics and cultural norms via Zeba's voyage. She also highlights the power disparities that classically occur in Afghan homes and communities, showing how these disparities support the culture of violence against women. As Zeba is raised to admiration the strict cultural norms of deference and humility, she is an ordinary wife and mother who has dedicated her life to pleasing these roles.

The analysis of Zeba's character in Afghanistan has been limited in investigating the long-term effects of her actions on other women's lives. Earlier studies have focused on the immediate impact of Zeba's resistance, but have not considered the long-term consequences or proactive ways in which these women challenged patriarchal norms.

The deep and diverse history of Afghan culture has influenced gender standards and social mores that are still in use today. In Afghanistan, patriarchal traditions and gender inequality have a long history, with the tribal-based social structure giving completely men rights and unfettered access to public spaces contributing to the determination of a deeply ingrained form of patriarchy. Islam's influence on Afghan society has had a significant impact on the formation of gendered power dynamics and the reinforcement of cultural norms about men's and women's responsibilities.

Growing knowledge and education have contributed to changes in Afghan women's circumstances over time, challenging long-standing norms and sparking a movement for gender equality. However, advancing women's rights and achieving complete equality still requires overcoming deeply rooted cultural and gender conventions. Gender stereotypes are the biggest barrier facing Afghan women, as they still face discrimination and have limited opportunities due to cultural expectations.

To challenge and go against these cultural and gender conventions, it is imperative to advocate for education and awareness campaigns that support gender equality. This could involve initiatives that prioritize enabling women and girls to attend education and encouraging gender-sensitive courses that debunk stereotypes. Additionally, grassroots initiatives and community service can play a critical role in advancing gender equality and dismantling harmful cultural norms.

Working toward altering the legal frameworks that uphold gender inequality and limit women's rights is also critical. By advocating for legislative and policy changes that promote gender parity and defend women's rights, Afghan women might gain the confidence to challenge and overturn these cultural and gender conventions.

*A House without Windows* is a work that examines the violence against women in Afghan societies where men dominate. Critics argue that the text sheds light on the invasive mistreatment Afghan women endure in a patriarchal setting, using Sylvia Walby's theory of violence as a hypothetical framework. Afghan patriarchal customs and traditions significantly impact the legal system, which is predicated on the idea that women are inferior to males and must adhere to strict gender norms and expectations. These cultural traditions often control the rights and agency of women, especially in relation to marriage, property ownership, and divorce.

Sharia law greatly influences Afghanistan's legal system for women, which upholds male supremacy and restricts their rights. Not all Afghan women submit to these limitations and gender standards, but many actively challenge and oppose these social conventions. Their communities now have linkages of trust and support due to their self-organization into groups and organizations. Collectively, these women have developed gender-specific survival strategies and boosted their voices on social media platforms.

The cultural implications on Zeba's character are also examined in the text. When Zeba is suspected of killing her husband, her persona becomes the focal point for examining how gender and religious norms are restricting in Afghan society. Despite her innocence, she encounters bias and discrimination based only on her gender. As she is presumed guilty in the lack of substantial evidence, she must negotiate the complexities of a patriarchal legal system that favors men.

Hashimi's portrayal of Zeba's character draws attention to the need for reform and critiques traditional norms that marginalize and subordinate Afghan women. By shedding light on the cultural effects on Zeba's mentality, readers can sympathize with her struggles and injustices. In *A House without Windows*, Zeba is a character who faces the challenges and limitations that Afghan women face due to societal culture and gender norms. She is imprisoned for a crime she was not guilty of, but her time in jail serves as a catalyst for her growth. Zeba begins to question and challenge the cultural and gender standards that have shaped her life up to this point, helping her fellow inmates discover their voices and advocate for their rights. Through her interactions with other female prisoners, she learns that she is not the only one who is impacted by gender and cultural standards. Unfair and harsh treatment inside the correctional system ignites dissent, and she turns into a source of support and direction for the other jailed women, helping them navigate their own obstacles and find their own avenues of resistance. Her actions disprove the notion that women ought to feel meek and subservient, showcasing the power of resilience and persistence in resisting oppressive norms. Her incarceration periods also highlight the importance of cooperation and solidarity in the fight for justice.

The various other women in prison in Zeba's story are more than just supporting figures; they stand in for the fortitude and defiance of a collective. Their joint efforts and experiences demonstrate that the detrimental effects of social and sex norms are part of a larger repressive system rather than isolated incidents. While some have experienced bias and exploitation, others have experienced physical and psychological assault. Zeba is aware of these injustices and understands that resistance must seek to destroy the social institutions that uphold oppression in addition to pursuing her own liberation. To create a sense of community among the ladies, she urged them to share their stories and offer support to one another. She tries to create bonds and connections inside the prison that transcend racial and cultural divides in order to promote a sense of belonging. Zeba's actions show that people may challenge oppressive gender and cultural standards and stand up for what they believe in, even while accomplishing so in a correctional environment.

The figure Yusuf is crucial to Zeba's quest for liberation and opposing the preventive social conventions that go along with her incarceration. He fights for Zeba's rights and protects her in spite of the risks and social pressure to fit in. Studies on gender discrimination in Afghanistan's macho society have highlighted the importance of people like Yusuf who actively work to abolish it. By protecting Zeba, Yusuf transforms into a symbol of resistance against the cultural norms that sustain injustice in Afghan society.

Zeba's mother and sorceress, Gulnaz, is crucial in defying expectations and standing by Zeba. Gulnaz is well-versed in traditional Afghan magic and has utilized it to subvert patriarchal norms that limit women's rights in Afghan society. By applying her knowledge of ancient Afghan magic, she is able to enter a domain beyond the jurisdiction of the Western judicial system, revealing the bias and flaws in it.

In *A House Without Windows*, Nadia Hashimi explores the instability of living as a woman in Afghanistan and how events beyond one's control can shape and redefine one's life in horrifying ways. The story follows Zeba, a married woman who is accused and convicted of murdering her husband, and Yusuf, her defense lawyer. Born in Afghanistan, Yusuf and his family relocated to the United States before September 11th, where he grew up and returned to his homeland with the aim of helping his country and his people. However, it is never that simple, as he soon discovers a society torn between the old ways and the new, a people stripped bare by the repeated incursions of other countries in the names of war and peace. The author reflects on the treatment of women in Afghanistan and how it is easy for white people to look at other cultures with a Eurocentric lens and judge them, calling them "backwards" or "oppressive." This is not the case when women in Canada still experience sexism and violence daily, and Indigenous women go missing and are murdered disproportionately. The author feels a mixture of acceptance and disgust when reading this book, as they see the manifestations of oppression in different cultures and how much of it is internalized white supremacy bleeding through.

The author connects the dots between modern Afghanistan and the modern West, noting that modernization does not associate with liberation or equity. As our scientific knowledge has increased and advanced, there

have always been those who seek to use science to quantify and justify oppression. Science, being a human endeavor, is very much political, and just because a society cloaks its oppressive attitudes with scientific language instead of religious language does not make it more progressive.

*A House Without Windows* is thoughtful and moving as it explores the ways in which women find freedom within the constraints of their culture. Zeba's mother, now Zeba, takes on the role of jadugar, one who can work spells and magic to help (or hinder) others. Women like Latisha, who finds life in Chil Mahtab far preferable to a life outside the prison, might be forced to marry, contrast with women like Aneesa and Sultana, who were lucky enough to receive more liberal educations and have a drive to change their country.

Hashimi's prose is lush and sometimes purple, but the author has not fully embraced her way with words. The book has a certain power and gravitas, and if you like rich description and careful characterization, you might find it captivating. Although it did not have quite as powerful an effect on me, I still enjoyed its story and the way Hashimi shows us a post-occupation Afghanistan with nuance and sincerity. There is no romanticizing happening here, there is ebullient hope but also carefully learned despair, and Hashimi's greatest achievement in this book is managing to balance them in a way that seems believable.

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