

The Portrayal of Married Woman's Life in Zemindar's Wife by Qaisra Shahraz

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DOI : 10.21107/prosodi.v17i1.19517

Received 28 March 2023; Received in revised form 30 March 2023; Accepted 30 March 2023; Published 10 April 2023.

ABSTRACT

Marriage is a social institution that adopts a patriarchal ideology to regulate the relationship between husband and wife. As a result, conflicts based on gender inequality can arise as patriarchal ideologies in marriage reinforce the dominance of men over women. A married woman's life is often portrayed in feminist literature, such as in the short story of Qaisra Shahraz, *Zemindar's wife*. This study analyzes the married life of Noor by applying the theory of Simone De Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex*. Besides, the study uses a qualitative approach with a close reading method. The results show that the short story *Zemindar's Wife* depicts the unequal gender relationship between husbands and wives in marriage. This gender imbalance leads to inequality, with women being dominated and subordinated by their husbands.

Keywords: *married woman, gender relations, women's struggle.*

INTRODUCTION

In patriarchal cultures, the relationship between men and women is often characterized by a power imbalance, with men holding more power and control over women (Becker, 2015). Patriarchy is a system and ideology that always justifies men to dominate women in both private and public spheres (Sultana, 2011). This system is evident in various aspects of society, including politics, economics, and culture. The ideology of patriarchy can lead to a variety of issues, including gender-based violence, discrimination, and unequal access to resources and opportunities (Tracy, 2007). Women may be expected to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations, such as being submissive and obedient to men. This can limit their autonomy and agency, and make it difficult for them to assert themselves and achieve their goals.

Marriage is a social institution that adopts a patriarchal ideology. The relationship between a man and woman in marriage is not a free relationship. However, there are social structures that legitimate husband-wife relationships as gender relations in patriarchal cultures. Marriage is structured with a gender hierarchy where the husband holds power over his wife (Goldberg, 1993). Males' power in marriage can be manifested in various ways, such as decision-making authority, financial control, and physical dominance. Marriage does not liberate women from gender discrimination. Instead, it subjects them to a new form of subjugation, where they are limited by their roles as wives.

In patriarchal cultures, marriage often results in women being subjected to numerous social rules (Jennifer, 2014). This is because they are considered the property of their husbands, with their individual identities being subsumed by that of their spouses. As a result, married women are often subjected to significant restrictions and are not free to act without the permission of their husbands.

In literature, furthermore, women's lives after marriage are often portrayed as unhappy and facing numerous struggles due to gender inequality. Marital conflicts are frequently depicted as domestic violence, psychological pressures, domination, and many more. Literary works that depict the lives of women in marriage can be categorized as feminist literature. These works not only illustrate the challenges that married life presents for women but also highlight the struggle of women to make their opinions heard and receive equitable treatment within marriage.

Qaisra Shahraz is a writer who brings attention to the topic of women and marriage in her work. One of her collections of short stories, titled *A Pair of Jeans and other stories*, explores the treatment of women in marriage and the impact of patriarchal culture on societal expectations of women as wives. Through her writing, Shahraz sheds light on important issues surrounding gender roles and relationships.

The study focuses on examining one of the short stories in that book entitled *Zemindar's Wife*, which portrays the married life of Sarfaraz and Noor in a feudal patriarchal cultural environment. Noor is married to Sarfaraz, a very powerful landlord in her village. But even so, Noor's individual freedom is restricted, and she is expected to maintain her husband's honor. However, Noor rebels against these societal norms and fights for her rights. To be specific, this study analyzes the portrayal of Noor's life as a married woman and the gender relations in her marriage. For analyzing this issue, the theory of Simone De Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex*, is implemented. Beauvoir proposes that marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. However, marriage has always been a very different thing for men and for women. In the context of marriage, men see it as a way to demonstrate their capability

to establish and maintain a family. In turn, they require the service of a wife. As a result, the primary responsibility of a wife in a marriage is to provide service and care for the presence, support, and settlement that have been provided by her husband (Beauvoir, 1956).

There is a limited amount of research on this particular short story. To be precise, only a small number of studies have been conducted on it. The first is an article of Ghulam Mustafa Mashori and Sabah Zaib, *Subalterns Can Speak: Shahraz's Message of Hope for Human Equality in Zemindar's Wife*. This article employs the theory of subaltern studies in analyzing the data. The study aims to analyze the conflicts between the elite and the subalterns. The result shows that there is a character who is created by the author to fight for rights of the subalterns. The character is the Chaundharani who empowers the subaltern women to speak up (Mashori & Zaib, 2015). The second is a thesis by Wilda Khoiriyah entitled *The Portrayal of Women's Struggle in Qaisra Shahraz's Zemindar's Wife*. The study explores the struggle of women in *Zemindar's Wife* short story using an Islamic Feminism theory by Amina Wadud. The result shows that Noor experiences gender discriminations, however she becomes the agent who helps the villagers to discover justice (Khoiriyah, 2019). Finally, although this study examines the life of the protagonist too, but this study uses a theory proposed by Simone de Beauvoir to focus on the protagonist's marital life and the gender relations that exist in her marriage.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing textual analysis to interpret and explain data. The focus of the analysis is on the portrayal of married women, with the short story "Zemindar's Wife" by Qaisra Shahraz serving as the primary source of data. This story features a female protagonist who faces struggles due to her marriage to a landlord, providing a valuable lens through which to examine the experiences of married women.

To support the analysis, the study draws on Simone de Beauvoir's book "The Second Sex" as a theoretical framework. The data is collected by analyzing the character's utterances and the writer's narration, which address issues and discussions around the portrayal of married women's lives. This data is then classified and selected based on specific points of analysis to be further interpreted and analyzed using the provided theory. Additionally, references are used to assist with the analysis.

Theoretical Framework

Throughout history, society has often viewed marriage as a woman's destiny. However, women's reactions to this institution can vary greatly, ranging from frustration and rebellion to indifference. It is important to note that marriage has always been a different experience for men and women. While both sexes are necessary to each other, there has never been a true sense of reciprocity between them. Women have never been seen as equal partners in the marriage contract. In contrast, men have always been viewed as independent and complete individuals, primarily valued for their ability to provide for themselves and their families through their work (Beauvoir, 1956).

In the course of its evolution, marriage taking on a contractual form has not significantly altered the situation for women. Despite having civil standing as a person through dowry or inheritance, women still remain enslaved to their families through

these means. Historically, contracts were made between father-in-law and son-in-law, not between wife and husband. The freedom of choice for young girls has always been restricted, with celibacy reducing them to the rank of parasite and pariah. Marriage is the only means of support and sole justification of their existence, enjoined upon them for these reasons (Beauvior, 1956).

Marriage is enjoined upon women for two reasons. Firstly, society expects women to provide it with children. Secondly, women are expected to satisfy their husband's sexual needs and take care of his household. Even primitive societies that are not aware of the paternal generative role demand that women have a husband. Marriage grants a woman some ownership in the world, along with legal protections against arbitrary actions by her husband. However, she becomes subservient to him as he is the economic head of the partnership and represents it in society. She adopts his name, religion, class, and social circle, and becomes a part of his family as his "half." Her place of residence is determined by his work, and she must detach herself from her past to become attached to her husband's world. She must also give him her person, including her virginity, and maintain strict fidelity. Unfortunately, she loses some of the rights she had as an unmarried woman (Beauvior, 1956).

The husband, being the productive worker, is the one who extends his interests beyond the family and towards society. On the other hand, the woman is destined to continue the species and take care of the home. The work that women do at home does not give them any independence, as it is not directly beneficial to society, does not contribute to future progress, and does not create anything. The only way it gains significance and respect is when it is connected to individuals who extend themselves beyond their own limitations towards society. Women are not permitted to make any positive contributions through their work, and therefore cannot be acknowledged as complete individuals, regardless of how respected they may be. They are instead considered inferior, secondary, and dependent (Beauvior, 1956).

Marriage typically places women in a subservient role to their husbands, making it more difficult for them to navigate their relationship. The contradictory nature of marriage is that it serves both an erotic and social purpose, which is reflected in the way that young women perceive their husbands. Husbands are seen as demigod beings who possess masculine prestige and are expected to take on the role of the wife's protector, provider, mentor, and guide. The wife is expected to exist in the shadow of her husband, with his values and beliefs taking precedence over hers. In this way, the husband is considered the keeper of moral and ethical standards, and serves as a representation of the couple as a whole (Beauvior, 1956).

DISCUSSIONS

In Zemindar's Wife, Noor is viewed as a fortunate woman by the people of her village. Her life is reminiscent of a queen, and is the subject of envy for many people who dream of having such a life. This is because Noor is the wife of a very wealthy and powerful Zemindar, or landowner. *"The village guests were sitting at round tables. All heads and eyes were riveted on Noor as she entered. A hushed silence fell on the courtyard; even the birds seemed to have stopped singing, entranced by her appearance."* (Shahraz, 2013) Noor is called as Chaudharani, a mistress. She held a position that earned her great respect from the villagers in her community. The status Noor holds indicates that when a woman

marries, her identity merges with that of her husband. Her personal identity is no longer recognized. Things that are attached with her husband, such as status, nicknames, facilities, etc, are now associated with her.

This fact is in accordance with Beauvoir's statement that marriage grants a woman some ownership in the world that belongs to her husband. She adopts his name, religion, class, and social circle, and becomes a part of his family as his "half" (Beauvoir, 1956). Carole Pateman (1988) in her theory of sexual contract also states that when a woman declares she wants to marry a man by saying I do, her status changes, and her husband's identity is tied to that status change.

The merging of women's personal identities after marriage indicates that women and men are already in different gender hierarchies even before marriage. Men are viewed as complete individuals, while women are not. They are seen as dependent entities, and their identity is often defined by their relationship to men. Prior to marriage, a woman is considered the property of her father, and after marriage, the ownership of the woman is transferred to her husband. "*She had wanted to go to her parents' home as a sign of protest, but he had insisted that she stay and host the dinner with him, arguing that it wouldn't be very good for his Izzat, his honour, not to have his wife at his side, especially a wife like his, an asset to show off.* (Shahraz, 2013)" Noor is viewed as a valuable possession by her husband, and her status is a source of pride for him to display to others. The use of the term "asset" implies that the wife is regarded as an object that is owned by her husband. This perspective allows men to treat and control their wives at their own discretion, without seeking their consent or approval beforehand. The state of women being in a subservient position to men is referred as "vassal" by Beauvoir (Beauvoir, 1956). A wife is expected to follow and obey her husband's commands. Pateman's view of a woman's status in marriage is similar to Beauvoir's, in that she is regarded as the property of her husband (Pateman, 1988).

Moreover, due to the subordinate position of women as both vassal and property of their husbands, their movements are limited. Women's place within marriage is confined to the domestic sphere. Beauvoir (1956) mentions that for a wife, the home becomes the focal point of her world. Her home represents her social values and her truest self. "*Noor had obeyed the customs of her family and made very few public appearances.*(Shahraz, 2013)" This quote illustrates that Noor is not permitted to be seen in public and is expected to adhere to the customs of her family. She is expected to spend most of her time at home. Unlike her husband, she lacks freedom and autonomy. Her movements and behavior are closely scrutinized by her social circle, and she does not have the same level of social confidence to appear in public with her husband. This serves as evidence of the presence of gender inequality within marriage.

In marriages, decision-making is often dominated by husbands, with wives being excluded on the basis of their perceived lack of capability. The importance of a wife's consent is often minimized, even in cases where the decisions taken directly impact the shared interests of both partners. "*She was thinking about her husband and the feast they had been putting on and would be on future occasions. He hadn't mentioned next week's feast, but she knew that it was on the cards. He had already ordered lambs to be transported from the neighbouring village. Why was he doing this? What was the purpose behind this goodwill?*(Shahraz, 2013)" This quote suggests that Noor is not included in the decision-making process by her husband. He decides to hold a big party, inviting all the residents of their village. As the host, Noor will be involved in

the party. However, this decision should have been discussed with Noor, and her opinion should have been taken into account. According to Beauvoir (Beauvoir, 1956), because it is the man who take the woman in a relationship, he generally has a greater degree of choice and control in every decision making.

In Beauvoir's view, the fact that men are typically the ones to initiate romantic relationships means that they hold a position of greater power and control. This dynamic can extend to various aspects of decision-making within the relationship, with men being afforded greater agency and autonomy. As a result, women may be forced to conform to the desires and expectations of their male partners, with their own opinions and preferences being subordinated. As they are often subject to the whims and desires of their male partners, they may be denied the opportunity to fully realize their own goals and aspirations. Women may feel pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations, limiting their ability to assert their own identities and pursue their own interests. Furthermore, this power imbalance can contribute to the perpetuation of gender-based violence and discrimination, as men may feel entitled to exert control over their partners through physical or emotional abuse. Overall, the fact that men generally hold greater power and control within relationships highlights the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the need for empowerment and agency for women.

Within the context of marriage, the husband's ego often plays a significant role in shaping power dynamics and hierarchies. This ego is often tied to a sense of superiority and entitlement, which places the husband at the top of the gender hierarchy within the marriage. As a result, husbands may be resistant to any attempts by their wives to challenge their position or assert their own agency and autonomy within the relationship. This conceptual is presented in the next quotation “*She had done an unpardonable thing! His mind was also signalling and flashing all sorts of troubling images; above all, that of his wife’s capacity to undermine his authority and to usurp his role: the master, the Zemindar, of the village. He struggled with the concept again. Who was the master in his marriage? Who was in control, he or she? By her action, her juruth, in doing what she had done, she posed a direct threat to him as a man, as a husband and as a Zemindar.* (Shahraz, 2013)”

This quotation reflects the patriarchal and oppressive nature of gender roles in society, from a feminist perspective. The husband in this scenario views his wife's actions as a direct threat to his authority and power as the master of the village, suggesting that he believes it is his role to dominate and control both his wife and the community. This view is reinforced by the fact that he questions whether he or his wife is the "master" in their marriage, implying that he believes that a husband should be the dominant partner. This mindset is rooted in the idea that men are inherently superior to women and must maintain their dominance in order to maintain their social status and authority. This type of thinking perpetuates gender inequality and oppression, limiting women's autonomy and agency while reinforcing men's power and control. Feminism seeks to challenge and dismantle these patriarchal structures and create a more equitable and just society for all genders.

From a feminist perspective, this paragraph also highlights the issue of gendered expectations and the pressures that both men and women face in conforming to societal norms. The husband is worried that his wife's actions will undermine his authority and position as the Zemindar, indicating that he feels a sense of pressure to maintain this status as the dominant male figure in the community. Meanwhile, the wife may feel pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations, limiting her ability to

assert her own identity and agency. This dynamic reinforces the idea that men must be the ones in control and that women should be subservient to them, ultimately perpetuating systems of oppression and inequality. By challenging these expectations and advocating for gender equality, feminism seeks to create a more just and equitable society where individuals of all genders have the freedom and agency to live their lives on their own terms.

The power dynamic of domination and subordination in marriage is not a new phenomenon, but rather a recurring pattern that has been constructed over generations. The portrait of an obedient, non-resistance wife has been exemplified by both their mothers and their grandmothers, and serves as a model for how a wife should behave within the institution of marriage. *“He struggled with the reality of the situation of living with such a wife, trying to weigh one side against other. He recalled his own obedient mother, always looking up to his father. He remembered one incident when she had spoken in front of another man in a slightly disparaging tone, and his father had never let her forget it. He had thundered and verbally lashed out at her. His mother had literally shrivelled and didn't come out of the room for two days. His father had established who was the Master, and whose words held power and authority. And in the old days, he had heard about his grandfather beating his grandmother over minor things – that was his brutal way of controlling his wife.”*(Shahraz, 2013)”

This quotation reflects the deeply ingrained gender roles and power dynamics that exist within the institution of marriage. Sarfaraz or Noor's husband in this scenario is struggling with the reality of living with a wife who may not always conform to his expectations, and is grappling with the idea of weighing the pros and cons of the situation. His memories of his own mother, who was always obedient to his father, highlight the prevalence of this type of gendered power dynamic across generations. The incident in which the mother spoke in a slightly disparaging tone in front of another man and was verbally lashed out at by her husband demonstrates the extreme lengths to which men may go to assert their dominance and maintain control over their wives. This reinforces the notion that women must be subservient to men and should not speak out of turn. The mention of the grandfather beating his grandmother over minor things highlights the prevalence of gender-based violence within the institution of marriage. This type of violence is often used as a means of controlling and dominating women, and reinforces the idea that men are entitled to exert power and control over their wives.

CONCLUSION

The short story of *Zemindar's Wife* depicts the unequal gender relationship between husbands and wives in marriage. This gender imbalance leads to inequality, with women being dominated and subordinated by their husbands. After marriage, a wife's identity becomes tied to her husband's, and her individual identity is not recognized. Rather, women are often viewed as property or vassals of their husbands and are expected to obey their every command. Married women are also restricted in their movements, being confined to the domestic space and requiring permission from their husbands to venture into the public sphere. Their opinions and voices are often disregarded, and they may not be involved in household decision-making, even when those decisions concern them directly. Overall, the depictions of married women's lives in *Zemindar's Wife* reveal that gender equality is not fully present in marriage.

Women must fight against societal expectations and constructions attached to their social status if they want to achieve a better life.

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