

The Politics of Home: Power Dynamics in Qaisra Shahraz's *Perempuan Suci*

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the multifaceted concept of home as presented by Upstone in *The Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*, emphasizing its role as both a physical space and a metaphor for colonialism. Upstone posits that the home operates as an autonomous entity, possessing its own systems of authority and power similar to those found in nations and cities. Within this framework, the article examines the hierarchical relationships that exist in domestic settings, particularly between masters and servants, and between men and women. In Qaisra Shahraz's novel *Perempuan Suci*, these power dynamics are vividly illustrated, revealing a clear disparity between male and female characters. Men hold dominant positions in the household, while women, including daughters, are subordinated and often subject to oppression. The portrayal of these inequalities highlights the pervasive nature of patriarchal structures and gender politics within the home. Additionally, the article discusses how the relationship between masters and servants further exemplifies the oppressive dynamics at play, leading to practices that can result in violence. Ultimately, the analysis asserts that, despite being removed from external political influences, the home embodies its own complex political landscape, characterized by power relations that echo broader colonial discourses. This study underscores the significance of examining domestic spaces to fully understand the interplay of power, oppression, and gender in postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: *home; postcolonial literature; power dynamics; spatial politics; gender politics.*

BACKGROUND

In her influential work *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*, Sara Upstone explores into the multifaceted concept of home within postcolonial literature. She argues that home transcends the simple notion of a physical dwelling, as it embodies the complexities of city and nation, interwoven with hierarchies, order, and power dynamics (Hinta, 2020). In this context, home emerges as a site of resistance, one that cannot be fully articulated through the constructs of city or nation, nor through the individual journeys of its inhabitants (Sumaryani, 2021). Instead, it is a space deeply influenced by colonial legacies, reflecting the ideals and values that colonialism instilled and perpetuated (Teimouri, 2016).

Upstone identifies two critical aspects of home that warrant deeper examination: first, home as a colonial metaphor, which reveals the underlying power structures and cultural narratives; and second, home as a metonymy, representing broader social and political realities (Ubaidillah & Pratama, 2022). By analyzing these concepts, scholars can gain insights into how home operates within various narratives, particularly in postcolonial contexts.

This article seeks to explore these themes through the lens of Qaisra Shahraz's novel *Perempuan Suci*, which is originally titled *The Holy Woman*. Published in 2001 and awarded the Jubilee Award in 2002, this novel provides a rich tapestry of cultural and social commentary set in Chiragpur, a rural area of Pakistan renowned for its adherence to traditional customs. *Perempuan Suci* unfolds as a family drama that intricately portrays the struggles of women living under the constraints of Pakistani tradition. The narrative predominantly takes place within the confines of the home, highlighting its significance as both a physical space and a symbol of societal norms. Through the lens of Shahraz's writing, the home becomes a microcosm of Pakistani society, reflecting the pervasive influence of patriarchal structures and the authority of landlords.

Moreover, Shahraz's depiction of the homes in Chiragpur illustrates how social status shapes the architecture and living conditions of its residents. The distinctions between houses serve as a poignant reminder of the inequalities that exist within the community, emphasizing how home is not merely a sanctuary but also a site of social stratification.

By employing Upstone's framework to analyze *Perempuan Suci*, this article aims to illuminate the intricate relationship between home, identity, and power in postcolonial literature. Through this exploration, we will uncover how Shahraz's narrative not only reflects the lived experiences of women in Pakistan but also engages with broader themes of resistance and cultural identity in a postcolonial context.

Despite the extensive scholarship surrounding Qaisra Shahraz's *Perempuan Suci*, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning the specific intersection of women, tradition, and space as encapsulated in the title *Women, Tradition, and Space: Exploring Home in Qaisra Shahraz's Perempuan Suci*. While previous studies have examined themes of home and gender, they often do so in isolation, without a comprehensive analysis of how these elements interact within the context of the novel. The existing research tends to focus on either the representation of women in traditional roles or the broader implications of home in postcolonial narratives, but seldom combines these perspectives to explore how home functions as a dynamic space shaped by both gender and cultural traditions.

Moreover, the contemporary relevance of Shahraz's exploration of these themes has not been adequately addressed. While scholars have analyzed the patriarchal structures within Pakistani society, they have not fully engaged with how the interplay between women's experiences, traditional expectations, and their domestic spaces is depicted in *Perempuan Suci*. This lack of focus on the specific title themes highlights an opportunity for deeper inquiry. By centering the discussion on women, Tradition, and space, this article aims to fill the gap in existing research, providing a nuanced examination of how Shahraz represents the complexities of women's lives within their homes, and how these representations resonate with contemporary societal issues.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative analytical approach to explore the concept of home as articulated by Upstone in *The Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*. By examining the theoretical framework established by Upstone, the research situates the home within a broader context of colonialism and power relations. The analysis focuses on the home not merely as a physical space but as a metaphorical construct that embodies hierarchical structures, particularly those related to gender and authority (Sumaryani, 2021). This foundational understanding guides the exploration of domestic dynamics in Qaisra Shahraz's *Perempuan Suci*.

The primary text for this research is *Perempuan Suci*, selected for its rich depiction of power dynamics among household members. Close reading of the novel allows for an in-depth examination of the relationships between male and female characters, as well as between masters and servants. This method facilitates the identification of key themes related to subordination, oppression, and patriarchal control. Through textual analysis, the study highlights how these dynamics manifest in the characters' interactions and the societal norms they reflect.

Additionally, comparative analysis is employed to connect the findings from *Perempuan Suci* to broader postcolonial discourses on home and power. By situating the novel within existing scholarship on colonialism and gender politics, the research underscores how Shahraz's portrayal of domestic life resonates with and challenges these frameworks. This comparative lens enriches the analysis by contextualizing the power relations depicted in the novel within larger societal structures.

Finally, the study integrates critical theory related to patriarchy and gender studies to deepen the understanding of the power dynamics at play. By drawing on feminist theoretical perspectives, the research critically examines how the characters' experiences reflect and reinforce systemic inequalities. This multidimensional approach not only enhances the analysis of Shahraz's work but also contributes to the broader discourse on the intersections of gender, power, and colonialism in postcolonial literature.

DISCUSSION

In her concept of home, Upstone discusses two points related to home as a colonial discourse. The first is home as a colonial metaphor, and the second is home as a metonymy. In the section on home as a colonial metaphor, she explores the physical space of the house, particularly the key spatial locations within it. Here, the house is treated as what it is—'house as a house'—where it serves as a separating space for its owner (Mahdiyani et al., 2021). Within the home, emotional dialogue

occurs among its inhabitants, while externally, the home is a place free from political pressures and public administrative structures (Upstone, 2009). In this context, home is considered an autonomous space, isolated from the public sphere.

Furthermore, within the framework of home as a colonial metaphor, the house becomes a site where power dynamics tend to lean toward domestic space, representing a form of resistance against radical political dimensions. Within this domestic space, power relations exist among the inhabitants. These power relations can manifest as hierarchies of authority and violence, such as those between slaves and masters, as well as the patriarchal system that emphasizes power hierarchies between men and women (Upstone, 2009). In relation to home as a site of power practices within domestic space, the novel *Perempuan Suci* also discusses the power hierarchy that occurs between masters and their subordinates.

Kaniz is a Chaundharani, or landlady, who owns acres of land and occupies a high position in the social hierarchy of her village. She is portrayed as an arrogant, greedy, and cruel woman. Her housemaid, Neesa, has served her for over twenty years but is never treated as a human being by Kaniz. Despite Neesa's long years of service, Kaniz maintains a distance from all her servants, believing that as a mistress and landowner, she must position herself appropriately. She avoids close relationships with her housemaids and subordinates, keeping their interactions strictly within the boundaries of employer and servant.

“Neesa menatap punggung majikannya selama beberapa detik, kemudian perlahan dia belalu meninggalkan ruangan itu. Kaniz bukan seorang perempuan yang menyenangkan untuk dijadikan atasan dalam bekerja. Dia tidak hanya angkuh, tapi juga kejam. Dia jarang sekali memuji dan hanya mengharapkan segala sesuatunya dikerjakan dengan standar kualitas tertinggi. Dia memelihara jarak dengan semua pelayannya, termasuk Neesa – pengurus rumah tangganya selama dua puluh sembilan tahun. Mengingat Neesa adalah bawahannya, Kaniz merasa tidak pantas baginya “menghargai” Neesa dengan kepercayaan” (Shahraz, 2006).

The quotation reveals the toxic dynamics between Neesa and her master, Kaniz, illustrating a relationship marked by power imbalance and emotional detachment. Neesa's gaze at Kaniz's back signifies her silent acknowledgment of subservience and the oppressive atmosphere in which she works. Kaniz's characterization as arrogant and cruel underscores her refusal to foster any warmth or camaraderie with her staff, further emphasizing her elitist attitude. The lack of praise and high standards she imposes create a hostile work environment, reflecting her belief that showing appreciation would undermine her authority. This illustrates how societal hierarchies not only dictate professional relationships but also perpetuate a cycle of emotional isolation and dehumanization, leaving individuals like Neesa trapped in roles devoid of respect and recognition.

Kaniz's treatment of her housemaid and subordinates illustrates the strict social hierarchy she enforces within her home. In this system, the employer wields complete authority over the servant, exercising the right to act as they please. The servant, or subordinate, occupies the lowest social status, rendering them powerless and constantly at the mercy of their employer's whims. In the context of domestic servitude, this power dynamic often leads to instances of violence when a servant makes a mistake. However, such violence is not limited to physical abuse; verbal

assaults, insults, and demeaning remarks also constitute forms of violence. This emotional and psychological mistreatment can be just as damaging as physical harm, further entrenching the subservient position of the maid and highlighting the pervasive nature of oppression within the home.

“Neesa menarik napas panjang dan kembali melakukan aktifitas bersih-berishnya. Dia harus mengecek kembali setiap kamar dan setiap pilar, untuk memastikan tidak ada lagi debu dan sarang laba-laba, berjaga-jaga seandainya dia melewatkan satu celah sekalipun. Sebagai seorang pemilik rumah yang rapid an obsesif, Nyonya Kaniz tentu saja akan terus-menerus mencolekkan jarinya ke setiap permukaan perabot dan memeriksa semua daun jendela untuk melihat ada tidaknya debu, sebelum dia pergi tidur.”
“Majikannya sedang dalam suasana hati yang buruk. Neesa tidak ingin memberinya alasan lain untuk melampiaskan amarahnya padanya kali ini”
(Shahraz, 2006).

The quotation shows Neesa's anxiety and the tense environment created by her master, Kaniz. Neesa's careful cleaning routine highlights her awareness of Kaniz's obsessive need for perfection in her home. She feels the pressure to ensure that every room and surface is spotless, as she knows that even a tiny bit of dust could lead to criticism. The phrase "jaga-jaga seandainya dia melewatkan satu celah" emphasizes Neesa's fear of making a mistake, which suggests the emotional stress she faces daily while trying to meet her employer's high expectations.

Kaniz's bad mood adds another layer of tension to the situation. Neesa is acutely aware that her employer's frustration could easily be directed at her, making her feel even more vulnerable. This fear of Kaniz's anger shows the unequal power dynamic between them, where Neesa is constantly on edge, trying to avoid any reason for her employer to lash out. Overall, this dynamic illustrates how those in subordinate positions often bear a heavy psychological burden, where their self-worth and peace of mind are tied to the whims of those in power. Neesa's situation reflects the broader themes of fear and control in relationships marked by hierarchy, revealing the struggles faced by individuals in service roles.

Kaniz's behavior exemplifies how power can corrupt relationships, turning what could be a mutually respectful dynamic into one characterized by fear and submission. The hierarchical structure she upholds not only dehumanizes her servants but also perpetuates a cycle of abuse that reinforces her authority and control. Such practices reveal the darker aspects of domestic life, where the supposed sanctity of home becomes a site of exploitation and suffering for those in subordinate roles.

The social hierarchy between masters and subordinates also exists in other homes beyond Kaniz's home. This is evident in the Khan family's home, where they are the wealthiest landowners in the village. Fatima, a housemaid in their home, is always required to lower her head to her employers as a sign of respect.

“Fatima menyambut tuannya, ia menggeser pintu hingga terbuka sepenuhnya. Secepatnya ia memberi jalan dan merundukkan kepalanya di hadapan lelaki tua itu sebagaimana yang selalu dilakukannya” (Shahraz, 2006).

This quotation captures the submissive role that Fatima plays in her interactions with her master, reflecting the deeply ingrained power dynamics within the home. By "menyambut tuannya" and opening the door wide, Fatima demonstrates her deference and readiness to serve, embodying the expectations placed upon her as a servant. The act of lowering her head signifies not only respect but also her acknowledgment of the social hierarchy that defines her position. This gesture reinforces the notion that her worth and identity are closely tied to her role as a subordinate. The phrase "sebagaimana yang selalu dilakukannya" emphasizes the routine nature of this behavior, suggesting that such submission has become second nature to Fatima, highlighting the normalization of these oppressive dynamics. Overall, this passage illustrates the internalization of subservience and the ways in which individuals like Fatima navigate their roles within a structure that prioritizes authority and control, revealing the emotional and psychological toll of such a relationship.

Fatima's attitude and behavior demonstrate that a housemaid must humble herself before her master. She is not permitted to make eye contact with her employers, as this could be perceived as disrespectful. Such practices reflect the remnants of colonial oppression. Even in the modern era, forms of subjugation against servants continue to thrive in many households across various countries. This situation highlights a lack of awareness regarding equality and respect for the rights of every individual.

Additionally, as mentioned above, the home as a colonial metaphor also applies a system of patriarchy and hierarchy between men and women. The patriarchal system emphasizes that power is held by men within the household (Liang, 2020). Men are regarded as leaders, occupying the highest position in the home, while women, situated lower in the hierarchy, are expected to obey and comply with their commands. This practice of patriarchy within colonial homes tends to reinforce domestic space and gender roles between men and women (Upstone, 2009).

Women are confined to the domestic realm, burdened with responsibilities for managing the household and caring for children, while men occupy the public sphere. Women's rights to engage with the outside world are restricted by the patriarchal system in the home. This situation illustrates that such a household is closely linked to the power relations of colonialism (Upstone, 2009).

In Khabib Khan's home, one of the central figures in the novel *Perempuan Suci*, the practice of patriarchy is enforced rigorously and passed down through generations. Khabib Khan, as a father and husband, holds absolute power over his wife and children, particularly his daughters. He strictly adheres to the patriarchal principle that men possess authority within the home, asserting his right to establish and enforce rules as he sees fit. Only he has the right to decide all events and issues that arise in his household "*Aku adalah kepala keluarga ini dan aku akan memutuskan apa yang terbaik untuk Zarri Bano, putriku*" (Shahraz, 2006). "*Kau lupa, Shahzada, dalam trah kita, takdir diciptakan dan ditentukan oleh kami. Aku yang menentukan apabila lelaki ini akan menjadi takdir putri kita atau bukan*" (Shahraz, 2006)." These quotations reveal the authoritative stance taken by the narrator, emphasizing the patriarchal control he exerts over family decisions, particularly regarding his daughter, Zarri Bano. The declaration "*Aku adalah kepala keluarga ini*" underscores his self-identification as the ultimate decision-maker, reflecting traditional views that prioritize male authority within the family structure. This assertion of power not only reinforces

his dominance but also implies that his daughter's future is subject to his judgment, stripping her of agency and autonomy.

The second quotation further elaborates on this theme, as the narrator states, *"Aku yang menentukan apabila lelaki ini akan menjadi takdir putri kita atau bukan."* This highlights the belief that familial destinies are not just influenced but entirely shaped by male figures. The use of *"trah kita"* suggests a lineage bound by tradition and expectations, where the fate of women is predetermined by male relatives. Together, these statements illustrate the oppressive nature of patriarchal norms, showcasing how they limit women's choices and reinforce a system where men dictate the course of women's lives, ultimately reflecting broader societal issues surrounding gender and power.

Khabib Khan imposes his desires upon the home, disregarding the opinions of his wife, Shahzada, who opposes his wishes. His refusal to value her perspective highlights the oppressive nature of his authority and the lack of mutual respect within their relationship. *"Berhentilah! Kendalikan dirimu, perempuan!"* Habib memelototi istrinya dengan sorot mata yang lebih dingin dari puncak Himalaya. Dia menjadi sosok yang benar-benar asing bagi istrinya – sesosok tuan tanah feodal yang keji bukan suaminya" (Shahraz, 2006). *"ini bisa dan akan terjadi! Menurutmu, apakah kau, seorang perempuan, dapat mencegahnya? Beban itu menindihmu, perempuan"* (Shahraz, 2006)."

These quotations reveal the intense power dynamics and emotional turmoil within the relationship between Habib and his wife. The command *"Berhentilah! Kendalikan dirimu, perempuan!"* reflects Habib's authoritarian stance, asserting control over his wife in a dismissive and demeaning manner. His cold gaze, described as *"lebih dingin dari puncak Himalaya,"* emphasizes the emotional distance and hostility that has developed between them, transforming him into a figure of oppressive authority rather than a loving partner. The phrase *"sosok tuan tanah feodal yang keji"* highlights the feudal mentality that underpins his behavior, suggesting that his sense of entitlement and dominance overshadows any semblance of intimacy or mutual respect in their marriage.

The second quotation reinforces this theme of patriarchal oppression, as Habib challenges the idea that his wife can oppose the societal forces weighing down on her. His assertion that *"beban itu menindihmu, perempuan"* not only underscores the burdens women face but also conveys his belief that her gender inherently limits her power and agency. Together, these statements illustrate how Habib's oppressive attitude reflects broader societal norms that devalue women's voices and autonomy, ultimately portraying a relationship marked by fear, control, and emotional estrangement.

Khabib Khan's exercise of power creates chaos within his family dynamics. His wife, Shahzada, is deeply concerned about her condition as a woman. She realizes that her position is weak and powerless, ultimately subordinate to the authority of her husband. Shahzada finds herself without a voice in her own home, highlighting the oppressive environment that stifles her autonomy and agency. *"Kesunyian itu mengancamnya, menyingkap ketidakberdayaannya sebagai perempuan, sebagai seorang ibu, dan sebagai seorang istri. Terpasung oleh tradisi dan budaya keluarga besar suaminya yang berabad-abad usianya, dia tak bisa melakukan apa-apa"* (Shahraz, 2006). *"Sebagai seorang perempuan, dia tidak memiliki kekuatan apapun – pendapatnya tidak berarti. Hukum berlaku diantara mereka: kata-kata kaum lelaki adalah perintah, dan mereka dilahirkan untuk dipatuhi. Mereka memiliki kemampuan*

husus dalam hal memberi dalih sehingga segalanya terdengar begitu meyakinkan” (Shahraz, 2006).” This quotation poignantly illustrates Shahzada's profound helplessness and oppression within her domestic environment. It highlights how silence threatens her, revealing her isolation and the emotional burden of being trapped by the longstanding traditions of her husband's family. Shahzada's lack of agency is emphasized by the notion that her opinions are dismissed, underscoring systemic inequality where men's words are commands that must be obeyed. The reference to men's ability to justify their authority further reflects the manipulative tactics used to maintain control, illustrating the intersection of gender, power, and tradition that stifles women's identities and rights within a patriarchal framework.

The patriarchal politics within the home extend to the children, particularly daughters, who, like their mothers, lack the power to resist their father's will. A daughter is obligated to comply with and fulfill her father's desires, often justified by the guise of tradition. This dynamic reinforces the cycle of oppression, as daughters are conditioned to accept subservience and are denied agency, perpetuating the patriarchal norms that dictate their roles and identities within the family structure.

“Seperti juga ibunya, dia sudah dididik sejak bayi untuk menghormati dan memuja setiap keinginan ayahandanya dan siapa pun lelaki yang dituakan dalam keluarga mereka. Menentang salah satu keputusan mereka akan dianggap sebagai pembangkangan tingkat tinggi dan sebuah tanda dari gangguan moral dan sosial, sebentar pemberontakan yang oleh para tetua akan dianggap harus dimusnahkan sesegera mungkin dan dengan sebentar perlakuan hingga dia tidak akan pernah bisa menenggikan kepalanya yang buruk itu lagi” (Shahraz, 2006).

This quotation illustrates how daughters are taught from a young age to obey and admire male authority in their families. The phrase *"dihormati dan dipuja"* shows the expectation that they must respect their fathers and older males, highlighting the conditioning that links a woman's value to her submission. Defying male authority is seen as a serious moral and social wrongdoing, suggesting that any rebellion must be quickly punished. This reveals the oppressive family and societal structures that control women's behavior and instill fear of consequences, ensuring that women remain submissive and lack autonomy.

A woman and a child in a home are compelled to submit to male authority due to an ancient doctrine entrenched in their traditions, which has been instilled in them since childhood. This belief positions men as leaders and rulers within the home, directly correlating with societal norms and laws in their community. Noncompliance from women towards their husbands or fathers invites social consequences, reinforcing a cycle of oppression and highlighting the rigid structures that dictate their roles and limit their autonomy. This dynamic perpetuates the power imbalance, ensuring that traditional views on gender remain unchallenged.

In the context of colonial discourse, the patriarchal system and gender politics within a home can be linked to traditions and cultural values, where the metaphor of a home transforms into a metonymy. As Upstone explains, metonymy is closely related to specific cultural values, prejudices, and limitations (2009). Khabib Khan's adherence to a patriarchal system is deeply influenced by the cultural values of Pakistani society, where the majority follow conventional Islamic teachings. This connection illustrates how cultural norms shape domestic power dynamics, reinforcing

the idea that the home is not just a physical space but also a reflection of broader societal structures and ideologies that dictate gender roles and authority.

Furthermore, the postcolonial discourse challenges the assumption that the domestic sphere is entirely the domain and responsibility of women (Upstone, 2009). This discourse acts as a reversal of colonial narratives, aiming to contest enduring colonial values within the home. The power dynamics present in colonial households often lead to disorder, disharmony, and chaos, themes that are subsequently explored in postcolonial literature. Writers depict and reinterpret colonial practices in their works, encapsulating them within postcolonial critiques where the meaning of home serves as both a public arena and a form of resistance against their own identities. The home embodies a dual power: it reflects and subverts colonial discourse while also representing a postcolonial rebirth. Ultimately, these issues manifest not only on a broader national scale but also within the individual experiences depicted by authors, emphasizing the intricate relationship between personal struggles and the concept of home in postcolonial narratives.

CONCLUSION

The concept of home presented by Upstone in his book *The Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel* extends beyond a mere physical location; it also serves as a metaphor and metonym for colonialism. In this framework, Upstone positions the home as an autonomous entity, free from external political influences, suggesting that the home possesses its own authority and power structures, akin to those found within a nation or city. Within a household, various hierarchies exist, notably between masters and servants, as well as between men and women.

The dynamics of power between genders manifest in the form of patriarchy and gender politics among household members, whether between husband and wife or father and daughter. In Qaisra Shahraz's novel *Perempuan Suci*, this hierarchical power system is vividly illustrated, where men occupy dominant positions while women and daughters are relegated to subordinate roles. This context reveals a fundamental inequality in relationships among household members, with men, as the superiors, having the authority to oppress and mistreat the subordinate women beneath them.

Additionally, the power dynamics between masters and servants are depicted in the novel, where the master exerts complete control over the life of the servant. Such political practices often lead to violence and further entrench the existing power structures. Ultimately, Upstone's analysis of home in *Perempuan Suci* demonstrates that colonial discourses are also applicable within the domestic sphere. Despite being isolated and seemingly detached from external political practices, homes have their own political dynamics that center around power relations. This insight underscores how the complexities of power and oppression are not confined to the larger societal context but are also intricately woven into the fabric of domestic life.

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