



Traversing East-West Cultural Strives and Discovering Hybrid Identities in Nadia Hashimi's *House Without Windows* (2016): A Cultural Delineation

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Abstract

Culture is an art which beautifies the identities of people. It includes their language, lifestyle, costumes, food, behavior and ethical values. It varies according to the distinct places and countries. It is not constant. It evolves according to the generation, advancement of learning and technologies as they highly influence the people in recent era. But certain identities always carry its ancestors' foot prints to make their culture alive and shine among other nations. Countries like Afghanistan is totally exceptional from these evolutions. They always stick towards their principles even the whole earth starts to step into Gen Beta. Unfailingly, their respect towards their religious norms, patriotism and tradition astonish the outsiders. At the same time, the questions like whether the native Afghan folks enjoy their social life? Do the children and women of Afghanistan live an unthreatened life? are they comfortable with their cultural principles? are unanswered. This article deals with the cultural conflicts faced by the native Afghans and the difficulties faced by the person who stands as the symbol of hybrid identity in the novel, *House Without Windows* (2016) by Nadia Hashimi. This article also clearly argues the role of westernized ideas which drives the native people to give up their blind tradition.

Keywords: culture, gen beta, Afghanistan, religious norms, tradition, hybrid identity

Introduction

Children learn their culture by observing their parents. They grow up by following their moral tradition. It lifts them higher in life. It adds peculiar respect based on their individual characteristics, behaviour and good communication. Culture also acts as the bridge which connects various nations through travel or migration. Venice carnival celebrated in Italy, Songkran in Thailand, La Tomatina in Spain and Holi in India are some of the famous cultural festivals which are greatly enjoyed by all over the world.

Even it's a dream of some people to participate in such festivals at least once in their lifetime. Culture gives happiness. It builds human conduct. It stands as their symbol of identity. The same culture also acts as the handcuff which ties up the freedom of certain community in the name of moral, tradition and devotion. Afghanistan is one of the important nations which ties up their people's basic rights. This paper opens up such conflicts faced by the people in their day-to-day life through the novel *House Without Windows* (2016) by Nadia Hashimi.



As Raymond Williams says, “Culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings” (Williams, 2003) in his essay, *Culture is Ordinary* (1958) every country is shaped with their own culture with proper reasons. It may be constructed according to the history, religion or environment. Afghanistan is also fabricated with plenty of cultural practices. It is the perfect match for Antonio Gramsci’s idea on cultural hegemony that “The Supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’.” (Gramsci, 1957). In *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971), he says that in the name of culture, the ruling class steals the rights of common people and implement their ideologies. Instead of forcing the people, they control them by using their religious beliefs. Without getting a chance of questioning against them, people are practiced to live under them. Not only in Afghanistan, in this era most of the people are blindly following the ideologies of some other stranger kings inadvertently.

Migration and social media help the people to learn many things. It reshapes the man with new thoughts. It tends him to come out from his narrow ideologies and look the world in new eyes. It is beautifully explained by Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, “Hybridity is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures. It is the third space which enables other positions to emerge.” (Bhabha, 2011). Hybrid characteristics has the ability to change the society with their collaborated ideas. The novel *House Without Windows* by Nadia Hashimi consists of various characters who stands as the symbols of the cultural hegemony, cultural hybridity, and the people who get struggle by standing in between eastern and western cultural strives.

Classical Culture of Afghanistan

The national flag of Afghanistan represents that there is only one God in the universe and He is Allah. This is the foundation for all the frameworks of the country. The laws organized by the constitution, government, religion and social life are sculpted by this belief. Khaled Hosseini says, that many cooked stories about the wars, terrorism and opium trade of

Afghanistan are prevalent but only there are a few about the culture, traditions and the lifestyle of people and how they tackle their colonizers very often they meet.

Afghan people are greatly appreciable for their hospitality. They treat their guests down to the core. They have well organized society. Their food is flavoured with rich classic ingredients. Their devotion towards their almighty is incomparable. And so, it is easily used as the key to capture their lands by the invaders. They believe that being neat and clean brings them near to God. They bring up their children by teaching the importance of self-respect. They give much priority to the family’s honour. No one in Afghanistan tolerate the shame of the family. If they find any one with adultery, without any investigation they will always be ready to behead them. Such crucial punishments become very common after the reign of Taliban in 2021.

Nadia Hashimi is a successful novelist, politician and physician. She migrated from her native, Afghanistan to United States with her parents to survive from dark life. Even though, she is grew up in America, she is passionate about her mother country. Through her novels readers can get the true essence of her longingness to see her country as a land of freedom. She proves that she is the symbol of optimism and self-persistent through her novels like *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* (2014), *House Without Windows* (2016), *The Sky at Our Feet* (2018) and so on. Her women characters are notable for their resilience, generosity, compassion, authenticity and boldness. The protagonist of the select novel, Zeba is portrayed as the symbol of compassion and patience.

Cultural Strives between Eastern and Western Countries

East represents the country, Afghanistan and West represents the United States. Afghanistan’s culture has been destroying since 2001. This is because of the attacks on the popular heritages, Palmyra and Mosul in 2014 and Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 by Taliban. From then, media has changed their eye from cultural heritages to wars and destructions of the country. It has achieved its complete form when Taliban re-entered into Afghanistan after the withdrawal of



US Military force on August 20, 2021. In ancient times Afghanistan was not only the land of Islam. People belonged to Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and Christianity were lived there. Because of several invasions the country is filled with Islam. Now, after Taliban's reign it has become their empire.

Zeba is the protagonist of the novel, *House Without Windows*. She has a son and three daughters. Her husband, Kamal is a drunkard. The initial period of their marriage has been filled with love and care. But as the years pass Kamal's real face has begun to fire. It has burned the life of Zeba and also their children when he has tried to abuse a girl who has the same age of his daughter. When Zeba notices his misbehavior, she urges to stop him. Unfortunately, the little girl cuts Kamal's back head with a hatchet. Zeba sends the girl immediately to her home and instructs her to not to tell anyone. Zeba accepts the blame to save the little girl. Without any proper investigation the cops arrest Zeba and imprison her. In prison, she meets many women who have been taken under imprisonment for meaningless reasons.

Nafisa, Mezhgan and Latifa are the cellmates of Zeba. The stories behind these four women's imprisonment are discussed as the testimonies of east-west cultural strives. Nafisa is an unmarried woman. When she is taking lunch with a widower, spotted by her relative. It is informed to her brothers. Her brothers decide to kill her by considering that as a huge crime and a shame for their family. To save her life her mother herself reports the crime to cops. Latifa is twenty-five years old. For no reasons, she is ill-treated by her family. She decides to move away from her family when her struggle crosses the limit. She decides to take her sister also to protect her from the same trap. They plan to go to Iran. When it becomes dark, they get a shelter from a strange woman. Finding it as a safe place to stay, they spend their night there. The next day the cops catch them at a checkpoint and filed a case against Latifa as she has tried to kidnap her sister to indulge in prostitution. No one believes her words. In the case of Nafisa and Latifa, the crime is nowhere seen.

Mezhgan is a young girl. She is in love with her neighbour, Haroon. When her pregnancy is confirmed, the cops arrest both Haroon and Mezhgan

for committing adultery. In western countries, getting married after begetting a baby is normal. But in Afghanistan, it is a great sin than a crime. Though the couple is ready to get married to wash away their sins without any concern they are sent into the prison. Even their family is not ready to support them.

Time passes through women's body. We are haunted by all the hours of yesterday and teased by a few moments of tomorrow. This is how we live – torn between what has already happened and what is yet to come. (Hashimi, 138)

Nadia Hashimi's words sensitively speak for Afghan women who deserve all the rights but kept in cages as the symbol of good culture of that country. Though they have better understanding about life they are not allowed to speak for themselves. They get stuck in between family and society.

In western countries, women are given good independence. They are allowed to speak with anyone at any time anywhere. They also possess their own moral values. At the same time, they are treated equally in the society. But in Afghanistan, certain principles are constructed for women alone to be obeyed like they are not allowed to get educated, to work, to explore the public places as men do. People believe that women are created by God only to take care of the family well-being.

In the novel, it is very notable that only Nafisa is sent to prison and not the man who has had his lunch with her. Latifa is an outspoken girl. In western lands, this kind of women are celebrated as a bold and brilliant beings. Treated cruelly by an unknown person is considered as a pitiful thing. Here, Latifa is suffering within the family. But no one in Afghanistan is ready to speak for her. When she herself decides to escape from her traumatic place she is kept in prison.

This is how they treat men and women in a distinct way. The common thing among all the cases is without any proper investigation the cops arrest Zeba, Mezhgan, Nafisa and Latifa. Zeba says to Yusuf, her lawyer, "What good is a woman's telling of truth When nothing she says will be taken as a proof?" (Hashimi, 231) in the novel *House Without Windows* reflects the real position of women in that country.



Hybrid Identities in Nadia Hashimi's *House Without Windows*

Hybrid Identity is defined as the mixture of two or more culture together and live a well modernized life in society. Hybridity does not only give new atmosphere to the people. It also offers new ideologies on the world. They reshape the thoughts of the human being and make him a good learner. Here, Yusuf, who born in Afghanistan, moves to United States for the betterment of his family, is acted as the symbol of hybrid identity. He is brought up in US by his parents. So, he has the combined nature of Afghanistan and US. He views the world in the eyes of western thoughts. When he comes to Afghanistan to handle the case of Zeba, he gets a chance to recollect his beautiful memories which he has had in his childhood days and also understands his mother land in depth. He gets astonished by observing the cruel life of women in that country.

When Yusuf goes to Zeba's house to find a clue to prove that Zeba is innocent, he notices many odd things. When he enquires about that to a cop who accompanies him, the cop fails to answer his simple questions about the case. When Yusuf asks if he has not undergone proper investigation how could he file case against Zeba and claimed her as the murderer, the cop fails to give proper answers.

When Yusuf finds the whole truth about Kamal's death by himself, he searches a way to get Zeba out from the prison. He is covered with multiple challenges. Firstly, Zeba herself is not ready to reveal the truth. Her only motive is to protect the little girl who is abused by her husband. Secondly, to save Zeba temporarily from hanging, Yusuf requests for the permission to take Zeba to the hospital by declaring her as an insane. The judge orders to take her to the mosque by believing only the mullah, spiritual leader can cure her insanity. Yusuf gets confused by the action of the judge. He argues that giving treatment is the usual way to cure insanity, but taking a patient to a mosque for treatment is an odd suggestion. The judge replies that as the common belief in Afghanistan.

Thirdly, when no one come forward to argue for Zeba being she is a women murderer, with complete determination Yusuf fights against the society, court and even family of Zeba to protect her. The judge

says that there is no escape from the punishment since she has killed her husband, which is considered as the topmost crime in Afghanistan. But Yusuf fights for the freedom of woman who struggles in her married life. He argues that there is no solid witness to prove. Only the situations are suspicious. It is not enough to fix that person as the murderer.

Yusuf has not faced any human beings as the opponents to take Zeba out from the prison. Instead, the principles, ideologies and believes of the Afghan people. From the common people to the court and government have unique ideologies which can be seen only in Afghanistan. Yusuf stands as the representation of truth, modernity and realistic character who has changed the usual judgement by his hybrid ideas for the first time. By his witty moves he gets Zeba out from the prison and gives her new life.

Conclusion

Before Taliban's reign Afghanistan achieved several progresses regarding women's education, employment, healthcare and involvement in politics and media. They have started to establish their skills in all departments. They stand in their own and lead a happy life. But everything has got collapsed when Taliban return back. It is not about the leaders who rules the country but it is about every individual whose ideology reshapes him and also his society. Sometimes, good hybrid thoughts help the people to reshape their blind ideologies of culture into a meaningful one.

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