

Arranged Marriage to Enforced Women's Objectification in *Blue-Winged Girls* by Husn Tabassum Nihan

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Abstract

*This Research examines the short story *Blue-Winged Girls* by Husn Tabassum Nihan which portrays the journey of the Indian women, Razia, Rani, and Sheeba in navigating societal expectations and cultural constraints within an arranged marriage context. The method used in this research is a descriptive qualitative research method in conducting this research by collecting data through the story. The theory utilized in this research is the theory of feminism proposed by Simone De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex*. Drawing upon those theories, in the short story *Blue-Winged Girls*, Husn Tabassum Nihan conveyed that the struggle for women's rights was an important part of the larger struggle for Indian women. Razia, Rani, and Sheeba, in this story, try to show that women have the right to marry someone they love and regardless of caste.*

Keywords: *Feminism; arranged marriage; seeking freedom; patriarchal*

A. Introduction

The entirety of *The Silence That Speaks: Short Stories* by Indian Muslim Women explores the range of hardships that the characters go through, which is written by Muslim women from colonial and postcolonial India. Originally, all these short stories were written in Indian and then translated into English by Haris Qadeer, who later published them in 2023 by Oxford University Press. The anthology contains 38 short stories by many authors; therefore, each short story has its own style, modes, and forms. The Short stories tell about various life experiences of various Muslim Women in India,

either from the author's creative imagination or the author's lived experience. They question various labels, investigate identity intersections, dispel many myths, and show how the writers negotiate the world of voices and silences. Women have a lot to deal with, even when they are just born. Husn Tabassum Nihan shared her situation and feelings about being a woman in India. The patriarchal worldview diminishes women's freedom and eliminates their rights, the family marginalizes women, tradition and communities paralyze women with their bindings, and false religious concepts restrict women's growth.

According to Millet (2016), patriarchy is a constitutional cause of women's oppression and is socially constructed. Through the story, Husn Tabassum Nihan conveys that despite all the pain and pressure, women still need something to survive and evolve. The *Blue-Winged Girls* by Husn Tabassum Nihan shows the struggle of Razia, Rani, and Sheeba to escape from an arranged marriage that has been forced on them by their own family. They are running away from their family because they know about their grim fate that is caused by an arranged marriage. Now Razia has to escape from her arranged marriage in order to meet with her one true love and also become the person who controls her own decisions in life.

The story of Razia, Rani, and Sheeba empowers Muslim women to reject Women's objectification that comes from an arranged marriage, it also tells women to become their own agency and start to control their own destinies. In summary, this short story examines the challenges faced by a number of Indian women who are attempting to break free from the antiquated traditions of their families, which prevent them from having a free will of their own. Razia and her friends' challenges demonstrate that Indian women must voice support in order to make their own decisions and live free from outside influence, even from their families, about their arranged marriages. This research argues that Nihan's writings provide a sophisticated and nuanced picture of Indian women's experiences and battles for justice, challenging feminism myths.

This research will delve into the social and personal struggle of Razia, the main protagonist of *Blue-winged Girls*. The research will employ feminist theory as its guiding principle for analysis. As outlined by Tong (2014), and exemplified by Simone De Beauvoir's popular work, *The Second Sex* (1949). Simone argues that women are not simply "the Other" to men, but rather an individual who can decide her life for themselves, she also argues that gender is only a social construct, meaning it is created and reinforced through cultural and societal norms. Simone uses the terms "the Other" and "the One" to describe the power dynamic between men and women. Men are viewed as the "One", the autonomous and self-defined subject, the women are relegated to the role of the "Other", the dependent and defined by their relationship to men. Beauvoir suggests that women can liberate themselves through education, work, and shaping society.

We can tell that liberal feminism emphasizes the pursuit of equal rights and opportunities for women in various spheres, such as choosing a decent career, having

a good education, and health. This is why we think that this theoretical framework resonates with Razia's own struggles, as the story explores the themes of gender inequality, social expectations, and the pursuit of individual agency. By using the feminist lens in order to shed light on Razia's experience of being objectified and oppressed because of her gender. We can analyze the story through this lens because it allows us to identify the constraint or problem that Razia faced during the status quo, and examine how and why she resisted the patriarchal system and women's objectification. With feminist theory, this research seeks to illuminate the lived experience of women who strive for autonomy and equality within the restricted social environment.

B. Method

This research deals with non-numerical data and derives its understanding of the causes and mechanisms of a particular occurrence in social life and therefore uses a qualitative research method (Berg & Lune, 2012). Qualitative research is a research method to investigate and understand the meaning that some particular groups of people think comes from social life or human issues (Creswell, 2013). According to Moleong (2018), qualitative research is used to comprehend a phenomenon experienced by study subjects, such as behavior, motivation, perception, and action, through verbal descriptions and discussion in a particular environment using natural approaches. This research approach relies on the researchers' perceptions, insights, and expertise. In conducting this research, Feminist theory is used in order to have a thorough understanding of Razia, Rani. and Sheeba are struggling to seek their rights and freedom. According to Tong (2014), Feminist theories seek to depict women's oppression, explain its causes and effects, and determine strategies for women. To narrow down this research, the feminist theory that will be used is focused on feminist theory by Simone De Beauvoir, with her popular work, *The Second Sex* (1949) defines the feminist theory as focusing on women's movement to demand equal rights and opportunities in societies, including to choose decent freedom. Furthermore, this theory will be used as a method in analyzing the short story; *Blue-Winged Girls*.

C. Findings and Discussion

Razia's Responses to Patriarchal Society

In India, the Patriarchal system has been very deeply rooted in their culture, and society for centuries. The men hold the primary power and privilege over women, and usually, the son of the family has more authority than the mother or the sister. With the unfair ruling of the Patriarchal System, the women of India started to fight for themselves, in order to protect, and free themselves from the clutch of the Patriarchal system. In *Blue-Winged Girls*, Razia takes the role of the one who rejects the system, as an Indian woman who has seen the result of forced marriage created by the Patriarchal System. During her time living with her family, Razia felt that her family

treated her like a stranger, she felt alienated in her house just because she was a girl. After all this time, she finally had it, her father forced her to marry the eldest son of the eldest aunt. She decides to escape from her family, and finally meet with her lover:

“Marriage was fixed with the eldest son of eldest aunt. He is an acclaimed businessman!”, “Why don’t people understand? She was in a dilemma. I am the one who has to fall in love; I am the one who has to get married.” (p.324) “Marriage can be forced upon us, but not love!. They will decide whom shall I fall in love, and they will choose a husband for me . . . What sort of dictatorship is this? Can these things be forced upon? It is supposed to happen on its own!” (p.325)

The quotations above show how the patriarchal system and forced marriage create unfair choices for Indian women, it also ignores them and suppresses women's choices forcing them to obey the man in charge. Razia feels how unfair the system is, she is the one who is supposed to marry, yet her family ignores her feelings, ignores her rights, they forces her to marry someone she does not love, and does not give her a chance to speak for herself. In the end, she decides that she has had enough, and she decides to follow her heart.

“Hum ne Ghar chora hai . . . rasm ko toda hai Hum door kahin jayenge, Nayi duniya basaenge (We have left our homes . . . we have broken the traditions/ We shall go somewhere far and start a new life).” (p.326)

The quotation above tells how Razia finally decides to leave her door and make her own choice. Not only that, she has escaped from her forced marriage, she cut her ties with her family, she has destroyed the tradition of arranged marriage, and most importantly she’s free and ready to start a new life for herself. Despite the fear of her family, Razia steeled herself and decided that she had enough of her family. She escaped from her house in order to rebel against the patriarchal system and forced marriage, she also rejected being objectified by her family. Razia shows that Indian women must freely decide their own choices, and not be tied down to the patriarchal system that wants to use them like an object.

Rani’s Limitation with Her Marriage

Indian women have limited ability to move for their rights and cannot be separated from dictating the norms and traditions with their status in society. However, inequality in the patriarchal society they were living in made the discrimination and oppression of women something that could easily happen. Therefore, Betty Friedan (1963) criticizes patriarchal, male-dominated institutional and cultural practices in society. To add more, Moawad (2021) conveyed patriarchy as the main factor in determining the discrimination of women. In *Blue-Winged Girls*, Rani takes the position of an Indian woman who lives with social and familial patriarchy. In her environment, Rani faced an “old thought” and received oppression from her family. It happened when the proposal between Rani and Ashraf, her boyfriend was rejected by Rani's father.

“Rani’s father turned down the proposal, ‘You won’t be married off to a man of lower caste. If you want to go with him, you will have to walk over my corpse.’” (p. 325)

The quotation shows how the patriarchal system attempts to silence and control women. Her father’s action reflects the societal expectation for women to conform and adhere to the traditional rules of marriage. His words show a condemnation and prohibition toward Rani’s desire. Based on what Rani’s father said, Rani will have to walk over his corpse. The dialogue characterizes someone who is conquering challenges while ignoring any risks or dangers involved, and it is also impossible for Rani to do that. Furthermore, Rani’s father also forbade Rani to marry a lower caste man and looked down on those with lower castes which reflects the crucial marriage’s traditional norm in India.

Rani also faced a sudden arranged marriage and violence from her father.

“After a week or so, she was forcefully married to a boy from her distant family. Her marriage ceremony was performed at an Ijtemah (a religious gathering). She went away with a heavy heart, and was welcomed with Abid’s punches, kicks, and blows. She turned into a living corpse – only her funeral procession and her burial ceremony were left to take place.” (p. 325)

The quote above depicts suppression and violence against Rani. Her father uses violence as a form of loyalty to local wisdom about arranged marriage, and Rani must obey him. Her father's action emphasizes the power dynamics at play and the aggressive manner in which her viewpoints are being dismissed. This shows the existence of patriarchal control and the silencing of women’s voices. It highlights the expectation that women should not challenge or deviate from their roles, and any attempts to do so are met with hostility and anger.

Sheeba’s Act Against The Traditional Rule

Someone who is often hurt even by their own family, will come to a time from them, does action as resistance, as well as what the character Sheeba does in the novel *Blue-Winged Girls*. Women who are given a burden of demands from the family, such as arranged marriage, will tend to resist oppression because every human feels that they have rights over themselves. Sheeba thought the same thing, the family's oppressive demands made her a rebellious figure.

" and Sheeba was from the Syed community...."

Shebaa still maintains her desire to reject this traditional rule, not only does she not want to be matched, but Shebaa also has a lover, even though her lover has a lower social stratum than her.

"people are as sour as Kakraunda. . . they were all surprised. How could she? What did she find worthy in him? "

The quotation above illustrates that in a tradition-based environment, there are boundaries that community members must abide by. If someone refuses to follow these boundaries, then they will be talked about in a negative light. Differences in social strata can also be a factor that makes it difficult for someone to gain freedom in choosing their life partner. In the case of Sheeba and Thaseef, the difference in their social strata meant that Sheeba had to face pressure from the community to cancel her

relationship with Thaseef. In general, the quote shows that tradition and differences in social strata can limit a person's freedom to choose their life partner. This can lead to various problems, such as discrimination and human rights violations.

" Why shall I sacrifice myself at the altar of their false pride? Why shall I offer my delicate-as-flower life? Why shall I not follow Sheeba's footsteps and save my life? And save the dignity of love? Let me not disgrace my ancestors, who sacrificed themselves for loyalty. Shouldn't I bring honour to their name? "

A movement of resistance to culture carried out by Sheeba seems to affect other characters as well, the quotation above is taken from the words of Razia who is having doubts about her fate and is constrained by tradition. However, objectification in a patriarchal view will greatly affect mentally and even physically a woman who is objectified, this can be seen in Sheeba who tries to fight against existing traditions, then what she does affects the minds of other characters as well.

D. Conclusion

The result of this research, *Blue-Winged Girls* observes women's struggle in developing their own freedom through the portrayal of the characters, Razia, Rani, and Sheeba, who have complex individuality due to their painful situation because of the patriarchal system. The tradition of arranged marriage is a tradition that still occurs in India. This tradition has existed for centuries and is still maintained by Indian society to this day, the tradition of arranged marriage is a tradition that makes women in India have to marry men chosen by the family only. Arranged marriage is a form of women objectification, this issue is raised in the story *Blue-Winged Girl* by Husn Tabassum Nihan, which shows how women are only seen as objects or media for an arranged marriage, specifically portrays the journey of Indian women in navigating societal expectations and cultural constraints within an arranged marriage context. Then, it focuses on how the characters in the story *Blue Winged Girl* struggle they do to fight this arranged marriage system, their struggle can be a symbol that women are also entitled to their own life choices without having to be bound by tradition or cultural ties because basically, women are also strong and independent figures. By analyzing each character in the story, it can be concluded that they are symbolic of women's freedom, especially in choosing what they want to do in life.

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