

Portrayal of Women's Objectification in *Sending the lord away* by Nasira Sharma

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ABSTRACT

*This research discusses the short story *Sending the Lord Away* by Nasira Sharma, which provides an overview of an Indian Muslim woman who lives in a patriarchal society that limits women in determining their future. Therefore, Farzana tries to break the stereotype of women who have been positioned as passive objects who are subject to male domination and distortion of religion as a rule that binds women. This research uses descriptive qualitative methods by collecting data through stories. In this research the theory used is through a feminist perspective that focuses on the principle of 'the others', especially the objectification of women initiated by Simone de Beauvoir. On the other hand, this research also uses the concept of the theory of objectification by Marta Nussbaum in examining the actions of families and men who limit women with the shield of religion and marriage. Through this research it can be seen that Nasira Sharma shows the position of women in this short story trapped in the patriarchal system. Women are placed as inferior and subordinate objects in every aspect of life by limiting their choices and twisting religion as a shield by men.*

Keyword: *Women, Objectification, Patriarchy, Male domination.*

A. Introduction

Women objectification is a phenomenon that often occurs in various levels of society. This phenomenon was not only influenced by social and cultural factors. The phenomenon of women objectification tends to develop in patriarchal societies. In this situation, women are often considered as objects to fulfill certain desires and expectations, without considering the identity, desires, or contributions of women as individuals. This can be reflected in various aspects of daily life, such as social norms that support stereotypical views of women. This can be seen clearly in the short story *Sending the Lord Away* written by Nashira Sharma. This short story highlights a woman character Farzana who is a victim of women objectification built by a family and society

that still adheres to patriarchal norms.

Culture and traditions inherent in a patriarchal system can threaten women's position in society. Walby (1990) argues that the patriarchal system is a social system by placing the position of men as the highest authority holder. In a patriarchal society men will play a role in having power in various matters including having power over women. The power that men have over women can occur because of the embedded stereotypes that are closely related to gender roles in society towards men and women. The stereotyping of gender by emphasizing that men tend to have masculinity and women with femininity makes it more visible that there is an imbalance in the relationship between men and women. The patriarchal system, which has a view that men are more powerful than women, indirectly shows how women are under male domination. This can be seen in the arranged marriage practice described in *Sending the Lord Away* by Nashira Sharma.

Marriage is a bond that exists between a man and a woman. Nevertheless, in the practice of arranged marriages, it seems to burden women. Beauvoir (1949:2009) argues that marriage is something that is attached to the traditional gender of a woman. Marriage becomes a measure of success for a woman. This also shapes the view that women must get married even through arranged marriages.

The portrayal of Muslim women in marriage relationships is shown to be unbalanced in a patriarchal society that emphasizes men as subjects and women as objects. Muslim women in *Sending the Lord Away* are portrayed as victims of socio-religious traditions that lead to the loss of women's right to have agency over themselves. Farzana in this short story is considered to have to fulfill her gender role as a disciplined and obedient woman. In this case, Farzana was forced to comply with her family's plans to marry the man of her family's choice. Other than that, there is a depiction of women who are only seen as objects through the amount of *mahr* given by men to women. This research aims to analyze the phenomenon of objectification of women in the short story *Sending the Lord Away* by Nashira Sharma.

Simone de Beauvoir's concept of women as 'the others' refers to the view of women in a patriarchal society who are always considered as 'the others'. All aspects related to society are always identified as part of men. Beauvoir (2009:45) also argues that women experience discrimination because they are considered a different group or outside of the norms. In patriarchal cultures, men are seen as the reference point for standards and norms that encompass humanity. In contrast, women are never considered as individuals who are able to stand on their own without the help of men. This results in restrictions on women by placing them in a position of being trapped in gender roles that are attached to the gender hierarchy by placing men as the center. Beauvoir also has the view that women are always seen from their social relationship with men. In this case, women are not seen as individuals who have rights over themselves. Moreover, if women's positions are always associated as children, wives, or even mothers. This emphasizes that women are only seen as part of men, not as individuals who take an active role and have personal interest as well as the same opportunities as men.

Beuvoir's theory about objectification of women can occur when women are not considered as subjects who have rights, freedom, and autonomy over themselves. Women are always placed as objects in the patriarchal sphere by suppressing women's potential as individuals who are capable of being independent. This makes women placed in a lower position when compared to men and dependent on men completely. Especially in a family concept that still adheres to the patriarchal system where men hold the role as the holder of the highest power which causes all decisions to be made by men. Furthermore, in determining a spouse in marriage. Women are often ignored because they are considered unable to choose a suitable spouse for themselves. Beauvoir (2009:544) also explained that marriage is like a destiny that cannot be separated from women.

Marriage seems to be a different thing if it is related to men or women. Even so, if seen both need each other but this does not make an equal position between men and women because women are not seen as subjects but objects.

Moreover, Nussbaum (1995:257) argues that women who experience objectification are only considered as objects in fulfilling sexual needs and their existence is often ignored. This happens because women are considered to have no control over themselves. The objectification of women can be seen in how men treat women as object based on the following characteristics:

- a. Instrumentality: The treatment of men towards women for a specific purpose. This indirectly means that instrumentality is how men consider women as objects that are capable of personal interest and do not see women as individuals who have rights over themselves.
- b. Denial of autonomy: The treatment of women is that they have no control over themselves. Women are seen as objects that lack autonomy over themselves with men ignoring women's freedom to have control over themselves and be able to make their own decisions based on their own desires.
- c. Inertness: The view that women should be dependent on men in every aspect of life. In this case, men perceive women as objects that need to be helped because they are powerless to help themselves to change their circumstances.
- d. Fungibility: Men's treatments towards women as objects that can be exchanged or transformed. This builds the perception that women are seen as one group rather than as unique individuals.
- e. Violability: Men's view of women that women do not have integrity, which makes women more vulnerable to violations that tend to harm women.
- f. Ownership: The assumption from men towards women that women are the sole property of men. This concept of ownership also encompasses the efforts of men who have bodily control over women in the form of choosing clothes, behavior, etc. Moreover, this ownership can also mean that the presumption of women as objects means that women can also be bought.
- g. Denial of subjectivity: The view of men as subjects results in the assumption of women as objects rather than subjects who have agency as individuals and need to consider their potential and experience not just to fulfill the needs of the others.

B. Method

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach in analyzing the short story *Sending the Lord Away* by Nasira Sharma. To understand this short story, a feminist perspective is used with a focus on the theory of objectification of women based on Simone De Beauvoir. Furthermore, the theory of objectification of women can also be seen based on Martha Nussbaum in examining actions taken to limit women.

The data source used in this research is primary data sources. The short story *Sending the Lord Away* is the primary data source in this research. This research focuses on the actions that portray the objectification of Farzana who is a Muslim woman. The actions taken by the characters in this story can be used to analyze the primary sources of this research. Moreover, the narrative aspect of this primary source can also be used to provide information in exploring and contributing to this MORPHOSIS: JOURNAL OF LITERATURE, Volume 6 Number 3, September, 2024

research. On the other hand, secondary sources to support this research that discuss the objectification of women are obtained through several validated sources such as books and journals.

This research uses a qualitative method by collecting data from each part contained in this short story. After that, close reading or in-depth reading of all parts of the short story. Then, identify the parts of this short story that show objectification behavior towards women by male characters. After finding the part according to the topic of objectification, then examine the conversation to be analyzed according to the narrative aspects that support this short story. The data analysis technique used for this research focuses on the narrative aspect of the short story *Sending the Lord Away*. Through the theory of objectification initiated by Beauvoir and Nussbaum, it can be used to provide involvement in analyzing the meaning that Nasira Sharma wants to convey.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. Arranged marriage in a patriarchal society

Objectification of women that occurs in a patriarchal system puts women in a constrained position so that they cannot be free in making their own choices. According to Moswad (2021) one of the main factors for discrimination towards women is the patriarchal system itself. The patriarchal system places men in a position that tends to be dominant and has privileges that women do not have. This privilege is used by men to dominate women and restrict women in their actions. In the short story *Sending the Lord Away* by Nasira Sharma, Farzana as a female character in this story experiences objectification in the form of an arranged marriage.

In the practices of arranged marriage, where the family has a big role in determining the spouse of their children, it can be seen that there is privilege for men. In a small form, patriarchy exists in a family. The dominance of the father figure who is a man has an important role in the family as the head of the family. The father in this case holds the highest power which is shown through the highest decision making to determine a spouse for his child in the marriage. In this short story, it indirectly shows that Farzana is not involved at all in choosing her own spouse or deciding when her marriage will be held. This decision experienced by Farzana shows that men, especially fathers, within the scope of families that uphold the patriarchal system can dominate women's space in determining their future.

“Don't cry, child. Every girl has to leave her father's home one day. Both paupers and the kings have to send their daughters away” (p.239)

In the quotation above, there is a process of transition as a woman who initially took on the role of child becomes a wife who must adjust to her new status. This can reflect that the role women play is always dependent on men and with a much larger social structure. In "Every girl has to leave her father's home one day" shows that women do not have the option to stay in their parent's home after marriage. Women are bound by inherited roles that force them to leave their parent's home once married. This also reflects that the decision to leave the parental home is not a choice based on women's desires but rather social gender expectations that are binding on women.

Farzana as a woman experiences restrictions in choosing. Even in matters of marriages, which is a sacred matter for her, women are not involved at all. This can be seen through:

“It is my marriage, and no one even bothered to ask me. Simply . . . ” (p.237)

From the quotation above, in an arranged marriage there is inequality between men and women. Men are free to choose the women they marry even in arranged marriages. Meanwhile, women are faced with stereotypes that restrict them in making decisions even for their personal lives. Women are positioned as objects of decisions taken in the practice of arranged marriage, not subjects like men. In the "no one even bother to ask me" reflects that marriage decisions are taken without giving Farzana the opportunity to participate or voice her desire. Farzana's disregard for desire or perspective in this case portrayed how women are considered as objects that do not have an active role in shaping their own destiny, especially in marriage.

In the patriarchal system, women are often faced with expectations and roles expected by society dominated by traditional norms. Farzana as a woman experiences a strong internal conflict between her aspirations to continue her education, including earning an M.A and taking the I.A.S. entrance exam, and the expectation imposed by her family, which are reflected in arranged marriages. This highlights how the patriarchal system can force women to follow traditional roles and norms set by society.

"She wanted to do an M.A. She wanted to sit for the I.A.S. entrance exam. Ammi and Abbu liked this one guy and turned a blind eye to her aspirations" (p.239)

The quote shows the conflict between Farzana's desire to pursue higher education and her family expectations regarding her marriage. Despite Farzana's ambitions and desire to pursue her academic achievements, her family prefers to ignore her aspirations in favor of following the traditional norms of marriage in order to fulfill family and societal expectations. The family's decision to "turn a blind eye to her aspirations" shows how women may be forced to sacrifice their careers or education to comply with the norms of marriage recognized by the patriarchal system. Thus, the patriarchal system can oppress women by limiting their choices, requiring them to fulfill traditional roles, and sacrificing their individual aspirations in order to satisfy social expectations made up by patriarchal norms. Farzana is not seen as an individual who has aspirations because all her family wants is for Farzana to marry the man of her family's choice.

2. Distortion of religion as Zubair's domination over Farzana

In the short story *Sending the Lord Away*, Zubair who is Farzana's husband intentionally changes the meaning of dowry according to religion which is the same as degrading women. He uses religion because religion is something sacred that cannot be debated and must be obeyed. This is supported by a patriarchal system that places men in a higher position than women. Zubair feels he is much higher than Farzana so that he can indirectly dominate Farzana. According to Winarti (2020:68), the dominance of men over women in various aspects of life results in women experiencing oppression by restricting women's space and making them not fully free. In this case, religious beliefs seem to restrict women in having rights over themselves. In fact, Zubair utilizes religious beliefs to strengthen dominance over Farzana and has control over her. So that Farzana can be limited in her rights and autonomy by Zubair.

"Yes, you said in our first meeting that you have read quite a lot, you know sufficiently about religion as well, since then I felt inclined that I should carry forward your interest, but so far, even after reading so much, none of the Hadith or the Sunnah have

mentioned that a woman has to exempt the amount for *meher* on the first night."(p.254)

This quotation comes after a sequence of events in which Farzana begins to doubt the fundamentals of their love and seeks a deeper understanding of the religious rules relating to marriage. Zubair as a husband defends himself from Farzana's attempts to find out more about the meaning of the dowry that the man prepares for the woman in marriage. The statement there are no Hadith or Sunnah references to women's obligations regarding the *meher* on the first night of marriage highlights how women's understanding is sometimes ignored in the interpretation of religious value that Zubair spoke of earlier. It can be seen that there is inequality in the relationship.

Instead than responding to Farzana's questions truthfully, Zubair responds by saying that women do not have the right to understand such things. This shows disagreement between the couple in understanding and appreciating each other's roles and understanding in their relationship.

“Women are not aware of these kinds of things. For them, whatever the husband and the maulvi say is the truth.” Zubair laughed. (p.256)

Furthermore, this quotation also includes a passage where Farzana and Zubair argue for their understanding of religious rules. It also highlights Zubair's attempt to assert his dominance as a man and husband over Farzana as a woman and wife. This also can be seen with Zubair trying to maintain his control over religious knowledge in their marital relationship. In "women are not aware" shows that women are placed in a subordinate position by men in terms of knowledge. Women are considered unequal to men so they do not need to know things related to religious values. Moreover, "Husband and Maulvi say is the truth" also highlights that women are under male domination as objects that must obey to male authority. The emphasis on "Husband" and "Maulvi" highlights that men are represented as people who have influence over knowledge and truth absolutely. This seems to emphasize that women are passive objects who only accept various kinds of orders from men without arguing about it.

Both quotations show male control and domination over women in terms of knowledge and interpretation of religion. Farzana tries to understand the religious rules relating to the *meher* but Zubair refuses to give a convincing explanation. This indirectly shows that women are considered not to need to know these things and just obey what the husband says. Zubair as a man considers that he has control in the household as the head of the family who must be obeyed by his wife. Zubair positioned himself as someone who must be obeyed and Farzana should not argue. Zubair's statement reflects a condescending attitude and underestimates women by thinking that men cannot be argued with. This also seems to be an affirmation that men hold the highest control in the household.

3. Meher as a symbol of objectification

In *Sending the Lord Away*, Meher is the amount of dowry promised by the man to the woman in marriage. In this case, *meher* reflects the connection to the patriarchal system and the objectification of women. The *meher*, which is supposed to reflect men's responsibility towards women, turns into a form of objectification. In this short story, *meher* is perceived as a mandatory requirement that must be fulfilled by men in order for women to be considered pure and sincere. This leads to the perception that women can be 'bought' or have a certain value associated with the amount of *meher* given.

“Lawfully, I should hand over the amount of fifty thousand for *meher* at this moment, and it is only then that I will have the right to lift your veil, and touch your body . . . that’s why.” (p.242)

This quotation above shows that *meher* is considered a mandatory requirement that must be fulfilled for a man to have the right to open a woman's veil and touch women's bodies. This portrays *meher* not only as a form of financial respect or responsibility but also as an instrument that gives men the right to physical control over women. Thus, it highlights how *meher*, which is supposed to represent a balanced relationship between men and women, turns into a source of objectification of women in the context of marriage, where a woman's value is measured through the amount of *meher* given by men.

The *Meher*, which was originally meant to protect women's rights and provide financial security, has now transformed into a tool of control and suppression of women's freedom. The *meher* no longer functions as a form of economic protection for women but as something that can be used by men to gain further control in marriage. This can be highlighted that there is a distinction between financial obligations given from husbands to wives in the form of *meher* or physical rights such as touching. When men touch their wives, they still need permission from women as a form that they have agency over themselves. By Zubair treating Farzana as if the *meher* he gave was a material value for Farzana individually. *Meher* in this case can be seen as a form of objectification of women because it creates a view that through giving *meher* which is assumed to be a transaction so Zubair gains rights over Farzana's body.

"Zubair explained how by letting go of the *meher* a woman is deemed auspicious for her husband." (p.244)

In this situation, Farzana is faced with the difficult choice of giving up her *meher* or giving up her rights. This creates a dynamic where women are perceived as objects that can be controlled and traded along with patriarchal expectations of women's roles in marriage. The emphasis on "auspicious for her husband" reflects a patriarchal perspective that positions women as submissive and obedient in order to bring fortune or blessing to their husband. By ignoring the original value of *meher* as a women's rights, *meher* becomes a tool of objectification that restricts women's autonomy and freedom.

This objectification can be seen in the way Zubair uses *meher* to achieve personal goals and judges women's worth based on their adherence to patriarchal norms. This practice shows that even in situations that are supposed to involve justice and equality, the patriarchal system can restrict women's rights and dignity. Moreover, *meher* is highlighted as a form of financial transaction between the man's family and the woman's family. *Meher* which was supposed to symbolize responsibility and respect turned into a transactional element of a material value. As a result, it creates the view that women who are supposed to be spouses in marriage can be treated as if they have a value that can be measured financially.

"Maulvi Imam visited yesterday. Said it is futile, however much you settle the *meher* for! The groom’s side will agree to it in their opulence since anyway they do not even give a do it at the end." (p.238)

This quote shows that the process of determining the *meher* becomes a negotiation or transaction that can be arranged according to the groom's financial capabilities. The statement that the groom's family will agree to a *meher* according to their financial capacity implies that a woman's value can be valued and negotiated like an object of transaction. The *meher* which was originally intended to be a symbol of a man's commitment, respect, and responsibility towards woman turned into a form of objectification. This can be seen when financial value becomes the main focus in the marriage process. This has resulted in women being treated as objects that can be exchanged for material value. In this case, Farzana is perceived as something that can be exchanged for money. The conversation about *meher* continues as if Farzana is an item being marketed and waiting to be bought and sold. While Farzana becomes the object, Farzana's family takes on the role of patriarchal agents who have the power to marry Farzana with a certain value as *meher* with Zubair. In the quote above, it can also be seen that the position of Farzana's family has power over their daughter. This emphasizes Farzana is no longer seen as an individual but an object that can be exchanged for a certain value such as *meher*.

C. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research explores the short story *Sending the Lord Away* by Nasira Sharma, portraying the life of a Muslim woman named Farzana in Indian society which is dominated by patriarchy. Throughout her life, Farzana, being a victim of women objectification, strives to resist these stereotypes. The stereotypes that portray women as passive objects and submissive to domination. The research focuses on illustrating the phenomena of arranged marriages in a patriarchal society, the distortion of religion through Zubair's dominance over Farzana, and Meher as a symbol of objectification. Overall, this research portrays Farzana's position in the story as trapped as an object within the patriarchal system, where women are placed as inferior objects and minorities in every aspect of life, particularly in the restrictions on their life choices, with men using distorted and inverted religious interpretations as a shield for themselves.

Farzana, as the main character in Nasira Sharma's short story *Sending the Lord Away*, successfully demonstrates her resilience in facing challenges from the three main issues she encounters. First, Farzana exhibits determination in confronting arranged marriage within a patriarchal society. Despite being confined by norms that position her as an object, Farzana actively tries to defy the stereotype of passive women by questioning patriarchal norms that limit her choices. Second, in facing the distortion of religion as Zubair's form of dominance, Farzana shows a critical attitude toward her husband's misinterpretation of religion. This step reflects her courage to unravel the religious distortions used as a tool of control in their marital relationship. Third, Farzana responds to the symbol of objectification in the form of meher by realizing that meher should not be a tool to measure her value and rights as a woman. Farzana refuses to tolerate the notion that her rights can be measured in financial terms. This awareness demonstrates her rejection of the objectification of women inherent in the meher tradition and her decision to uphold her dignity as a woman.

D. References

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