

## **The Impact of Patriarchal Culture on Female Character in Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, Yasunari Kawabata's *Yukiguni*, and Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article investigates the impact of pervasive patriarchal culture on female characters in three novels from different cultural backgrounds: Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (Indonesia), Yasunari Kawabata's *Yukiguni* (Japan), and Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows* (Afghanistan). Using feminist literary criticism and Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy, this study explores how entrenched gender norms, institutional practices, and male dominance systematically confine women in subordinate roles, denying their autonomy, voice, and fundamental rights. The analysis reveals patterns that recur throughout the novel: social stigma, emotional and physical suffering, economic dependence, lack of freedom, and internalization of inferiority among the female characters. Despite differences in setting and tradition, these novels expose similar mechanisms of oppression-sexual objectification, silencing, and moral judgment-that perpetuate gender-based inequality. However, the texts also reveal moments of female resistance, resilience and agency, demonstrating literature's potential to reflect and challenge patriarchal structures. This comparative study underscores the universality of patriarchal oppression and the importance of literature in advocating for gender justice and social change.

**Keywords:** Patriarchy; Gender Inequality; Female Subordination.

## INTRODUCTION

Male dominance, a fundamental feature of patriarchal culture, perpetuates gender inequality by systematically confining women to subordinate roles that deny their political rights, economic rights and decision-making authority. These restrictions are maintained through entrenched gender norms and institutional practices that sustain male privilege and female subordination (Dzinamarira et al., 2023; Yang & Sun, 2023). Across societies, empirical studies confirm that patriarchal structures position women primarily as caregivers for male relatives, thus reinforcing male dominance in moral, political and property-related decision-making (Abdullahi et al., 2023). For example, research in China illustrates how work-family expectations increasingly marginalize women's professional development (Liu, 2021). Stereotypes of male superiority not only legitimize unequal roles, but also contribute to an environment where women are subjected to gender-based violence and social exclusion (Thaba-Nkadimene & Thamae, 2024), demonstrating the persistence of ideologies that limit women's rights and autonomy.

Embedded within this structure of the widely accepted cultural belief that women need the protection of men is an idea that while seemingly benevolent, reinforces the perception that women are weak, dependent, and unfit to live life independently. This ideology legitimizes male control, reduces women's capacity for autonomy and reinforces their inferiority in both public and private spheres (Annisa et al., 2023). In family and employment settings, the expectation for men to act as protectors sustains the power imbalance, as women's dependency becomes a reason for discrimination and marginalization (Liu, 2021). Feminist scholars argue that portraying women as passively dependent deprives them of agency to resist domination and perpetuates cycles of subordination (Herrero-Arias et al., 2020). These patterns underscore the urgency of dismantling protective stereotypes and creating conditions for women to exercise full societal participation (Adisa et al., 2021).

The persistence of patriarchal values is further reinforced by cultural and institutional mechanisms that socialize these norms from generation to generation. Through early indoctrination and ongoing community reinforcement, patriarchal ideologies are normalized and legitimized, especially in institutions that exclude women from decision-making roles. As noted by Kristensen (2016), women around the world still

face critical threats to their security-from violence and illiteracy to political disenfranchisement. These structural disadvantages not only diminish women's individual rights but also hinder societal progress by excluding the contributions of half the population. In patriarchal societies, women's voices are systematically silenced, their potential ignored, and their autonomy sacrificed under male dominance. However, patriarchal domination is not limited to ideology, it also manifests itself in women's everyday experiences through various forms of economic and institutional marginalization. Women often remain confined to unpaid or low-paid work, face persistent wage gaps, and face limited access to meaningful employment opportunities (Kowalewska & Vitali, 2020). Domestic responsibilities such as childcare continue to be undervalued, thus reinforcing traditional gender roles that prioritize men's contribution to the economy (Shrestha et al., 2024). Institutional neglect further exacerbates this marginalization, with policies maintaining unequal employment systems and limiting upward mobility for women (Feng et al., 2020). Meanwhile, patriarchal violence- including sexual harassment and domestic violence-continues to be a method of control justified by cultural narratives that objectify women and excuse male aggression (Manurung & Panjaitan, 2023; Khatri, 2021; Okafor, 2023; Santos et al., 2021).

Literature, as a reflection of cultural reality, is an effective medium to explore how patriarchal domination works in women's lives. Feminist literary criticism has shown that literary texts not only represent gender-based oppression, but can also reveal the ways in which women respond to and resist the system. As shown by Wijayanti and Rusdiarti (2019), and Rorintulus et al. (2022), literature is often a space where women's experiences under male control can be voiced. Sa'adah et al. (2022) also emphasized how the representation of women in literature can reflect culturally rooted power imbalances. In her study of the novels *Circe* and *The Silence of the Girls*, Sen (2020) outlines how both novels give voice to women in ancient Greek myths. It shows how these stories retell old myths from a feminist point of view, focusing on the struggles and strength of female characters who were ignored or silenced in the original versions. These insights strengthen the foundation for this study, which aims to explore the impact of patriarchal culture on female characters in three novels from different cultural contexts: Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, Yasunari Kawabata's *Yukiguni*, and Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows*.

This article investigates the impact of patriarchal culture on female

characters in Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, Yasunari Kawabata's *Yukiguni*, and Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows*. Although these novels are set in the different cultural and historical backgrounds of rural Indonesia, post-war Japan, and conflict-torn Afghanistan, they all depict societies shaped by deeply rooted patriarchal norms that regulate women's roles, limit their autonomy, and perpetuate gender-based oppression. Through the lens of feminist literature, this study examines how female characters are subjected to control mechanisms such as sexual objectification, cultural silencing, and moral judgment, and explores how the effects of patriarchy affect female characters. By comparing these depictions, it reveals that while the expression of patriarchy may differ across cultural settings, its core structure remains remarkably similar. Ultimately, this analysis argues that literature serves not only as a mirror that reflects the systemic subjugation of women, but also as a space that can challenge, critique and reimagine the gender power dynamics embedded in society.

## METHOD

To gain a better understanding of complex social phenomena, this study uses a qualitative research methodology that emphasizes the collection, interpretation, and analysis of narrative data. Qualitative research allows for a more in-depth analysis of meaning, context, and human experience. This is in contrast to quantitative approaches, which center on numerical patterns and statistical predictions (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Important themes and a deeper understanding of the cultural and social dimensions embedded in literary texts can be discovered through this approach, which is rooted in an interpretive framework (Lester et al., 2020; Baur, 2019). Three novels that come from diverse cultural backgrounds are *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* by Ahmad Tohari (Indonesia), *Yukiguni* by Yasunari Kawabata (Japan), and *A House Without Windows* by Nadia Hashimi (Afghanistan). Since the main theme of these texts, male dominance, is closely related to patriarchal structures, which is the main focus of feminist theory, the texts are examined from the perspective of feminist literary criticism. The data consists of words, phrases, sentences, and groups of sentences that show male dominance directly or indirectly. Systematically, these text elements are identified, categorized, and interpreted according to Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy and other relevant feminist ideas. The

purpose of this analysis is to discover how patriarchal ideology emerges in the narrative and impacts the lives of the female characters. The concluding section outlines the results and conclusions of the study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study looks at how female characters in Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, Yasunari Kawabata's *Yukiguni*, and Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows* get the impacts of patriarchal culture. These novels come from various cultural and geographical environments namely Indonesia, Japan, and Afghanistan. However, they reveal the same mechanisms of patriarchal oppression that shape women's lives. The following analysis is divided based on each novel to emphasize common patterns and cultural differences.

### 1. Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*

In the novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, a number of male characters exhibit patriarchal behavior that harms women, especially Srintil. Sakarya, Srintil's grandfather, gives her up from childhood to become a ronggeng to perpetuate tradition, reflecting male control over women's bodies. Kartareja, the ronggeng shaman, exploits Srintil economically by making her an object of male entertainment. Marsusi, the antagonist, shows excessive obsession and feels entitled to own Srintil because of his wealth and power. Bakar, an educated character, uses Srintil as a tool for his political propaganda, making her an object of interest. Meanwhile, Bajus, who initially appears to respect women, uses a subtle approach to sell Srintil for personal gain and turns violent when he fails. All of these characters illustrate how male domination takes place through various means-from tradition, economics, politics, to emotional manipulation-that put women in a position of powerlessness.

In this way, the novel illustrates the strong male dominance in traditional Javanese society, which is visible in Srintil's life. As the main female character, Srintil shows how the patriarchal system restrains, exploits and deprives women of their rights. In addition, female characters are affected by patriarchal culture, in this case Srintil. The effects include physical and mental suffering, loss of self-esteem, loss of rights, and financial dependence.

### **a. Social Stigma against Female Characters**

As a ronggeng in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, Srintil experiences a strong social stigma from the Dukuh Paruk community. She is simultaneously revered and reproached for her status as a woman practicing an irregular profession. Ronggeng is considered by the community as a symbol of luck and fertility of the village; however, because her profession involves sexualized dances and rituals, they also consider her “cheap” and despicable. This stigma means that Srintil is never truly accepted as an individual who has the freedom to determine her own life, but rather as an object that must be preserved for the benefit of male society. This social stigma also stems from a patriarchally constructed culture, which places women in a subordinate position. In addition, norms set by men govern how women's moral worth is measured through obedience and chastity. Those who cannot fulfill patriarchal requirements of perfection, such as being a “good” wife or a “chaste” woman, are despised and socially ostracized. This is reinforced by the negative stereotypes of ronggeng women; they are regarded as “cheap women” and immoral, so they are often subjected to societal judgment and discrimination.

*“Srintil became a ronggeng not because of her own desire, but because of the pressure of the community who considered ronggeng as a sacred necessity of the village. However, behind that, Srintil must be ready to bear the burden of stigma as an immoral woman.” (Tohari, 1982)*

According to research conducted by Yunita et al. (2013), marginalization and negative stereotypes of women in the novel occur systematically in society, family, and even in the women themselves. Srintil is forced to conform to the beliefs of a patriarchal society. As a result, she lives in multiple injustices, as she is a woman and stigmatized as a ronggeng. In addition, women are often “objectified by not having the opportunity to discuss their own experiences and are forced to follow established rules” in a patriarchal society. This stigma makes it difficult for women to escape discrimination.

### **b. Women's Suffering**

Since her childhood, Srintil was not given the freedom to choose what she would do with her life. Other people determined her fate as a ronggeng dancer, especially her grandfather, Sakarya, who handed her over to Kartareja, the village ronggeng shaman. This is the starting point



of a long journey filled with suffering and exploitation. Because of her status as a *ronggeng*, Srintil is subjected to sexual and physical abuse using traditional *modus operandi*. A traumatic experience that strips her of her bodily autonomy and dignity, she is forced to perform sensual dances, entertain male guests with humiliating demands, and undergo rituals meant to strip her of her virginity. It not only involves physical violence but also causes severe psychological trauma. Srintil feels oppressed and disrespected by the society that exploits her. She loses people she cares about, and the shame and violence plague her memories.

Patriarchal discrimination in the novel causes Srintil to suffer physically and emotionally. Through the “Buka Klambu” ritual, which is a type of covert sexual violence legalized by custom, Srintil's body is physically exploited. Without Srintil's full consent, her body is handed over to the highest man deemed appropriate in this ritual. In order to maintain the custom and the existence of the village, she is forced into a role that she does not want, so her body becomes an object that is used by men. Srintil experiences enormous emotional distress. She has no freedom to choose her life path, including determining her own fate or choosing her life partner. Throughout the story, she is haunted by feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and loss of hope. Srintil is still trapped in the patriarchal system that restrains and oppresses her when she realizes the injustice she is experiencing. This is not only an individual suffering but also reflects the collective suffering of women in a culture that regards women as weaker.

*“Srintil lives to fulfill the needs of men and the hegemony of power (under the guise of preserving culture).” (Endraswara, 2003).*

Unable to determine her own path in life, Srintil also experiences inner distress. Although her heart resists, she is forced to accept her fate as a *ronggeng*. According to another study, Srintil experiences physical and psychological violence, covert prostitution, and sexual harassment caused by male social domination. The feminist analysis conducted by the researchers shows that Srintil experiences physical, psychological violence, sexual harassment, and covert prostitution to maintain male traditions and interests. This shows that patriarchal ideology oppresses practically and systemically, not just symbolically.

### **c. Dependency on Man**

The denial of basic human rights also shows the dominance of men in Srintil's life. She is not given the opportunity to receive an adequate education or explore her potential as an individual from an early age. Instead, she is educated to become a ronggeng dancer, meant to entertain and serve men without considering her own desires and dignity. Her role requires her to please every man who asks her, stripping her of the right to love or be loved in her own way. She has no freedom to follow her emotions, choose her partner, or even listen to what her heart tells her. Most importantly, Srintil has no autonomy to determine her own destiny. Rigid traditions and patriarchal social norms control her body and her decisions, making her a pawn in a system governed by male authority.

Srintil is portrayed in the novel as a woman who lacks social and financial independence. She is completely dependent on men, especially her grandfather and the village men. This dependence includes control over her life and decision-making. Srintil has no access to education, employment, or other resources that can help women become financially independent. With this dependency, women are portrayed as weak and less important in a patriarchal society. Srintil must submit to men who utilize her status as a ronggeng for financial and social gain. Dependency is a form of oppression that is systemic and difficult to overcome because there is no room to refuse or make her own life choices.

*"In the patriarchal system, men are established as superior to women."*  
(Endraswara, 2003).

Srintil cannot determine her own future. She depends on the decisions of Kartareja, her grandfather, and the village men. Women are positioned as the weaker party and always need protection or blessing from men because of this dependency. A study conducted by Yunitha et al. (2013) states that the marginalization experienced by Srintil is part of structurally inherited economic poverty, where women are not given the opportunity to maximize their own potential and depend on men to meet their needs. This shows that women are socially and economically hindered by patriarchy.

#### **d. Control, Exploitation, and Judgment by Male Characters**

From an early age, Srintil is considered a sexual object that can be bought, sold and utilized rather than an individual with thoughts, emotions and dreams. Because of her role as a ronggeng dancer, she is



constantly humiliated and loses her dignity. She is no longer considered a human being; instead, she is regarded as an item whose value depends solely on her shape and appearance. As a result, the harsh society punishes Srintil. She is considered “cheap” by those around her, and this stigma remains with her even after she attempts to leave the ronggeng life. Although she wants to change, she is trapped in a cycle of poverty, exploitation, and social rejection. This makes her feel helpless and hopeless for a better future.

Male characters in the novel have full power to control, use and punish women, especially Srintil. Srintil is never the subject of her own life; instead, men like her grandfather, Kartareja, and community figures control her. They determine Srintil's behavior, the rights to her body, and the way her fate is arranged. Men exploit Srintil through rituals and trade in her body to maintain tradition and socio-economic benefits. Srintil becomes the object of harsh judgment from a male-dominated society, where her every action and behavior is scrutinized and judged by patriarchal standards. In addition, she is forced into the role of ronggeng which requires her to serve certain men without her free consent.

*“Srintil does not realize that she is being used as an object by her grandfather, Kertareja's partner, and the people of Dukuh Paruk. She is objectified to fulfill the demands of society so that she does not have the opportunity to fulfill her desires.” (Djumingin, 2005).*

In addition, Srintil is unable to choose her own life partner as everything has been arranged by men as intimidation and threats from male characters further emphasize the unstable power relations. Srintil loses the opportunity to fulfill her own desires because she does not realize that she is made an object by men and society, according to Djumingin (2005). There is no room for women to resist or challenge male dominance as this control is a layered and systemic form of oppression.

#### **e. Losing Identity**

One of the most tragic impacts of patriarchal domination depicted in the novel is the loss of women's identity and freedom. Srintil loses the freedom to determine who she is and how to live her life. She symbolizes a woman who loses her identity and self-existence because men and oppressive social norms control her life. Srintil loses her identity, so she can never be fully herself. Instead, she is trapped in an imposed role, which gives her no room to grow or pursue personal happiness. Srintil

finds it difficult to escape the social stigma and shadow of patriarchy even when she wants to leave the world of *ronggeng* and lead a normal life.

This is not just a personal tragedy, it is part of a broader social structure that aims to uphold male power. Pillado (2023) explains that patriarchal hegemony is rooted in cultural practices and institutions that enforce gender norms and prioritize male power. These norms systematically impede women's autonomy in terms of mind, emotions and body, leading to inequality at every level. Rorintulus (2023) supports this idea by saying that illustrations like Srintil's are examples of a recurring pattern in modern narratives where violence against women is used to reinforce and maintain male power. Additionally, Kumari et al. (2024) emphasize that psychological trauma, stigma, and gender-based violence exist in many societies and serve as tools to maintain male authority while suppressing agency and self-esteem.

*"All arrangements are made for women, including determining their bodies and identities." (Djumingin, 2005).*

Srintil becomes a symbol of women who lose control over their bodies, their choices, and their futures as a result of strong patriarchal culture. She is never truly a subject in her own life. Instead, she is always an object for the benefit of society and men. According to research conducted by scholars, women in this novel experience the "death of the subject" where they are no longer considered as sovereign individuals, but rather as objects controlled and determined by men. This reflects the deep and systemic gender injustice in the patriarchal society depicted by Tohari.

## **2. Yasunari Kawabata's *Yukiguni***

The characters of Komako and Yoko show the influence of male dominance over female characters in Yukiguni's novel. Yukio is unable to do anything as he has been seriously ill since childhood and needs care. Therefore, Komako replaces his main role as the head of the family. In order to pay for Yukio's treatment and show her gratitude to her dance teacher, who has taken care of Komako since childhood, Komako is forced to become a geisha. This only confirms the image of Yukio as a strong person despite his helplessness, and Yukio's condition turns out to be beneficial to many people. Komako and Yoko faithfully become his servants, despite his helplessness. Komako pays for his medication, while Yoko faithfully takes care of Yukio.

In literary works that address gender issues, characters like Shimamura

and Yukio reflect patriarchal ideologies that disadvantage women. Shimamura is a lazy man who lives off an inheritance and remains in a relationship with a geisha despite being married. He treats women as mere objects of pleasure, reflecting a patriarchal attitude that demeans women and makes them tools of desire. Meanwhile, Yukio, who is portrayed as weak and sickly, is still seen as superior to women like Komoko and Yoko. This shows how patriarchy still places men above women, even in vulnerable conditions. These two characters illustrate how patriarchal culture is maintained through unfair social norms and perceptions of women, giving negative impacts on them as elaborated below.

#### **a. Restrictions on Women's Freedom and Choice**

Komako, the main female character of Yukiguni, is often portrayed as a sexual object and entertainment for men. As a geisha, Komako lives a social life that is limited by the roles defined by Japan's patriarchal society. She does not have the freedom to choose her own path in life. As a geisha, she is seen more as a tool to satisfy the desires and entertain men than as a person who has the power and voice to determine the future. These social and cultural restrictions put women like Komako in a passive and subordinate position. In Japan's strong patriarchal culture, women, especially geishas are regarded as "goods" used to fulfill men's wants and needs, with no room for self-expression or personal goals. Komako is trapped in this system, where social norms and expectations limit her personal freedom and decisions.

*"The geisha's life is one of performance, where personal desires are sacrificed for the pleasure of others." (Suzuki, 2010).*

In addition, feminist studies of Kawabata's work show that women in the novel not only lose their freedom but also lose their independence. They become objects on display and are judged based on how well they fulfill the role of sexual entertainment. This shows that women are systemically blocked from their freedom and right to self-determination by patriarchy.

#### **b. Dependency on Men**

Other female characters in Yukiguni, such as Yoko, are also portrayed as weak and highly dependent on men. Economic, social, and emotional are all components of this dependency. The women in the novel have no

important role in society and must follow the wishes of men. The patriarchal structure that places men as rulers and women as those who must obey and depend on demonstrates this dependency. Yoko and other women do not have equal access to resources and power, so they are forced to be subordinate and unable to challenge male dominance. They have no space to express their own wants or needs because they have to follow the rules made by men.

*"In a society ruled by men, women find themselves bound by invisible chains of dependence and obedience." (Tanaka, 2015).*

Because of this dependency, women are positioned as weak and less important in a patriarchal society, which creates a deep sense of powerlessness. A feminist study of the novel shows that women are dependent on men for social control and power as well as other material needs. There is no reciprocity, women must submit to men's rules and demands. As a result, women are seen as inferior in society.

#### **c. Self-sacrifice of Desires and Ambitions**

The theme of self-sacrifice is very important to Yukiguni's female characters. In order to fulfill the needs and desires of men, komako and other women often have to put their personal desires and goals on hold. This sacrifice includes both physical and emotional as well as psychological aspects. Komako, for example, is willing to sacrifice her personal happiness and freedom to maintain her relationship with the man she loves, even if it means experiencing hardship and loss. Because their social duty is to help and serve men, not pursue their own self-interest, the women portrayed in this novel are forced to restrain their passions and goals.

*"The woman's sacrifice is the silent pillar supporting the man's world." (Mori, 2008).*

This sacrifice shows the demands of patriarchy that require women to give in and prioritize men's interests. It also shows how patriarchal domination requires women to give in and prioritize men's interests. As a result, women live in severe injustice, where their voices and wishes are ignored in favor of maintaining an unequal social order.

#### **d. Gender Inequality**

In Yukiguni, gender inequality is clear from the fact that women do not have the same rights and opportunities as men. With no room to object or argue, women have to follow all the rules and orders made by men. Not only do they have no access to power, but they also have no freedom to determine their own destiny. Men are in total control of women's lives in the Japanese patriarchal culture that Kawabata depicts, both within the family and the wider society. Women are considered second-class citizens who must be submissive and obedient, without equal decision-making rights. This confirms male dominance and emphasizes that women are subordinate.

*"Gender inequality is woven into the fabric of society, where men command and women obey." (Belarmino, Robert, 2019).*

The Yukiguni area is famous for its geisha. This shows that the people in the area really look down on women. The community considers women to be merely objects of sexuality. Sexuality is a place for women in a patriarchal society controlled by men. This tends to cause a loss of self-esteem in the Geisha girls, they also assume that only their bodies can be used. Feminist studies emphasize that this inequality is not just a matter of formal rights, but also of deeply rooted social and cultural structures. Women like Komako and Yoko live in a subordinate position because they do not have equal access to power and freedom. Women in this novel live in a system that constrains and limits them, making it difficult for them to gain true freedom and justice.

#### **e. Social Stigma against Female Characters**

The strong patriarchal dominance in Yukiguni also causes social stigma against women to emerge. Stereotypes about women are often portrayed as negative, such as they are considered weak, emotional, and irrational. These images support the idea that men should control women because they are weak beings. This stigma comes not only from the general public, but also from women's perceptions of themselves. The women portrayed in this novel often experience a sense of inferiority and powerlessness as they are often subjected to forced roles. These unfavorable views are used to maintain male dominance and support the injustices experienced by women.

In Yukiguni's novel, people other than geisha benefit from geisha work. A geisha's body is used as a commodity, and the benefits they get

are not earned directly. A woman, especially a geisha, does not own herself. Men (patriarchal society) control her. Men (in this case Yukio) decide to become a geisha, and after becoming a geisha, men (in this case Yukio and the male guests) control her. Yukio and the geisha guards or employers, for example, enjoy the fruits of their labor. In the view of gender analysis, the subject's body experiences death (Abdullah, 1997: 221). Komako is no longer a subject to herself; as an object, she exists to serve others; as an individual, she no longer has freedom. The subject has died in Komako (Fakih, 2001; Abdullah, 1997).

*"By labeling women as irrational and weak, men justify their control and dominance." (Yamamoto, 2014).*

This stigma is used by patriarchy to restrain women and support their injustice. As feminist studies of Kawabata's work have shown, this social stigma is part of a systemic patriarchal strategy to keep women down. Labeling women as weak and emotional beings makes male dominance seem normal and natural.

### **3. Nadia Hashimi's *A House Without Windows***

*A House Without Windows* shows clear and cruel patriarchal oppression. The novel focuses on Zeba, an Afghan woman imprisoned for allegedly killing her husband. Although the truth is more complex, her community and legal system deem Zeba guilty based on gendered expectations of obedience and passivity. Zeba's imprisonment exemplifies a society where a woman's actions are judged based on a moral code that demands silence and submission over evidence. Zeba meets other women in prison who have stories of abuse, neglect, or punishment for defying patriarchal standards. Ironically, prison is the place where women begin to speak out, recover, and regain their honor.

Zeba refuses to speak or gives explanations because she realizes that the truth could harm her children. Her silence turns into a strategy of resistance, allowing her to protect her family while gradually regaining control over her story. Through her intelligence, her resilience, and her silent defiance, Zeba actively resists the patriarchal structure, unlike Srintil or Komako. Hashimi tells a story of female solidarity and subversion in the face of violence perpetrated by the system.

#### **a. Restrictions on Women's Freedom and Choice**



In *A House Without Windows*, the female protagonist, Zeba, faces a patriarchal system that regulates her social and family life, as well as strict restrictions on her freedom. Zeba has no right to determine her own path in life, including choosing her life partner. She marries into the family without her permission, and her life is filled with violence and oppression from her husband. In addition, freedom of speech and justice are severely limited as women's voices are not considered important in Afghanistan's legal and social systems. These restrictions show how women are deprived of their freedom and restrained by norms that show men as the rulers in a patriarchal society. Zeba even has to choose to remain silent as a form of resistance as gender-biased laws and society deem her statements futile. The novel shows how women like Zeba are trapped in a socio-cultural, psychological and physical "prison".

*"Zeba even lacked the choice to choose a spouse of her liking who eventually begins to beat her, but she remains non-vocalize about this throughout her life because of the complete dependency she has on her husband for the basic survival." (Freepress Kashmir, 2022).*

This is not just a matter of individual choice; this restriction also shows how women in a patriarchal society lose their freedom and are forced to submit to the will of men. Zeba lives in a cultural and social prison that curbs her freedom. In addition, Hashimi uses subjective narratives to deeply depict the experiences of Afghan women, challenging the stereotypes of weak and unfortunate women that are often constructed from a Western perspective. Through Zeba, Hashimi demonstrates the strength of women who are able to survive and fight back in very limited circumstances.

### **b. Dependency on Men**

One of the most visible effects of patriarchal culture in this novel is women's dependence on men. Zeba and other women are portrayed as socially and economically dependent on their husbands or male family members. Because they do not have the resources or strength to survive independently, women face difficulties in dealing with the violence or oppression they experience as a result of this dependency. In this novel, Zeba depends on her husband for basic needs and social assistance to survive an abusive marriage. In addition, a culture that places men as rulers and women as submissive increases this dependency. Decisions

taken by men in the family cannot be changed even by Zeba's mother Gulnaz, who opposes her daughter's marriage.

*"Zeba's mother, Gulnaz, protests her daughter's marriage, but no one listens to her, and the decision that men take is final." (Haripriyadharshini, K., & Nagalakshmi, K. 2023).*

In addition, the culture that places men as rulers and women as submissive increases this dependency. Even Gulnaz, Zeba's mother, could not challenge her father's decision regarding her daughter's marriage. Because of this dependency, women feel very powerless and are seen as the weaker party in a patriarchal society. Women are trapped in a cycle of dependency and subordination because they do not have equal access to education, employment and power.

### **c. Self-sacrifice of Female Characters**

The main theme of the novel is self-sacrifice, where women like Zeba must withhold their personal desires, goals and happiness in order to maintain family harmony and fulfill patriarchal social demands. Zeba is willing to endure physical and emotional suffering in order to protect her family and children. These sacrifices include enduring pain or violence, and suppressing voice and identity. Zeba chooses to remain silent and bear the burden as a form of resistance and a way of survival in an environment that does not allow women to speak or rebel openly. She sacrifices her happiness and personal freedom to maintain her family's dignity and survive in an oppressive society.

*"She swallowed her own dreams and desires, enduring humiliation and abuse silently, because resistance was not an option in her world." (Fauzia, Rahayu, 2019).*

This sacrifice also shows how women are always forced to give in and prioritize the interests of men, even if it means losing their own happiness and freedom. It shows how women are forced to give in and prioritize the interests of men and family over their rights as individuals, even if this means they lose their basic rights as individuals.

### **d. Gender Inequality**

In *A House Without Windows*, there is a clear gender inequality, where women are not given the same rights and opportunities as men. They are not allowed to resist or argue as they must obey all orders and rules given

by men. Women cannot access power or freedom because they live in natural subordination. In the patriarchal culture of Afghanistan that Hashimi describes, men control women's entire lives, both within the family and society as a whole. Women are considered second-class citizens who must submit and obey, without equal decision-making rights. This confirms male dominance and emphasizes that women are subordinate.

*"Women are expected to obey their husbands, relinquish their physical and sexual thirst, raise their children, and serve them without a single complaint." (Ahmed & Farid, 2024).*

Men are positioned as rulers in this patriarchal culture, and women are positioned as submissive. As a result, gender inequality is systemic and difficult to change. This inequality stems from strong social and cultural structures in addition to formal rights. Women live in a system that constrains and limits them, making it difficult for them to gain true freedom and justice.

#### **e. Social Stigma against Female Characters**

In addition, the women depicted in this novel face a strong social stigma. They are usually considered weak, emotional, and responsible for the family honor. Women are hindered in their social and personal lives by this burden of honor. This stigma reinforces male dominance and supports unfair treatment of women, making it difficult for women to gain recognition and freedom. Even if they are victims, women will face severe social punishment if women's honor is violated.

*"It was all about honour. Honour was a boulder that men placed on the shoulders of their daughters, their sisters, and their wives." (Bridgewater Journal, 2021).*

This stigma reinforces male dominance and supports the unfair treatment of women, making it difficult for women to gain recognition and freedom. Hashimi's novel criticizes the patriarchal culture that places women as social burdens and objects of honor. She also shows how women try to maintain their dignity and honor under extremely oppressive conditions.

## CONCLUSION

A comparative analysis of the novels *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, *Yukiguni*, and *A House Without Windows* shows that regardless of the specific cultural context, patriarchal culture systematically limits women's rights, autonomy, and self-actualization. In these novels, female characters such as Srintil, Komako, and Zeba experience deep suffering, physically, emotionally, and psychologically, due to entrenched male dominance and societal expectations. Their experiences are marked by social stigma, enforced dependency, loss of freedom, and internalization of inferiority. The narratives reveal how patriarchal norms are perpetuated through traditions, institutional practices, and cultural narratives that legitimize male control while silencing women's voices. And despite the oppressive structures depicted, the novels also highlight moments of resistance and resilience among the female characters. Srintil, Komako, and Zeba, despite being confined by circumstances, demonstrate acts of defiance, endurance in silence, or maintaining dignity in the face of injustice. These moments, though sometimes subtle, signify the spirit and agency of women who endure a restrictive system.

As such, literature emerges as both a mirror and a critique of societal realities. By representing women's life experiences under patriarchy, these novels not only document the mechanisms and consequences of gender-based oppression, but also provide a space to question, challenge and reimagine gender relations. The universality of patriarchal oppression revealed in this study highlights the urgent need to continue advocating for gender equality, both in literary discourse and in the broader social context. Ultimately, this study affirms the power of literature to foster empathy, raise awareness, and inspire action to dismantle patriarchal structures and achieve justice for women around the world.

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