



## Representation of Women in Kashmiri Literature: A Feministic Analysis of Mahjoor's "The Unwanted Woman's Tale" and Naseem Shiafaie's "Neither a Shadow nor a Reflection"

Dr. Gazala Gayas

Associate Professor in English

**\*Corresponding Author:** Dr. Gazala Gayas, Associate Professor in English, India

**Abstract:** The paper aims to portray the role of women in Kashmiri culture. Both Mahjoor and Naseem portray different roles a woman plays in Kashmiri society, rather than how she is treated in Kashmiri society. Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor, a Kashmiri progressive poet, and Prof. Naseem Shiafaie a Kashmiri feministic voice portray Kashmiri women in their poems as victims of patriarchal setup. Mahjoor's simple and moving language speaks about the pangs of the woman being both betrayed and powerless. Naseem's forthright language speaks loudly, about the sufferings of women in contemporary Kashmiri society. She argues about the need to allow women and girl children to realize their potential. Feminism can be called a mode of critical discourse which emphasizes culturally determined gender differences in the interpretation of literary works. Feminism generally focuses on the history of male dominance and oppression in all aspects of life. Feminism has become a dominant force in contemporary literary criticism. It has made considerable advancement during a small period. Feminist literary criticism has played a crucial part in breaking the logocentric tradition and challenging the supremacy of the privileged concepts and values in the patriarchal systems. This is its alternative approach to literary as well as cultural studies. The phrase "feminine mystique" was coined by Friedan to describe the assumptions that "women would be fulfilled from their housework, marriage, sexual lives, and children. The prevailing belief was that truly feminine women should not want to work, get an education, or have political opinions."

**Keywords:** Feminism. Patriarchy. Feminine Mystique. Kashmiri Women, Pangs, Feministic. Culture. Etc.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Ghulam Ahmad Mahjoor occupies a central in Kashmiri Literature. He is one of the great poets of the Kashmiri language. Kashmir is a far-off valley so every place here is a small center itself and this effect can be seen in its culture, tradition, art, and literature. Normally poets and writers are not recognized during their lifetime, but fortunately, Mahjoor got enough fame during his lifetime as a poet, the reason is that his creative and aesthetic faculties went very close to common men. Mahjoor is one of the most prominent pioneers of modern Kashmiri poetry, known as, 'The Poet of Kashmir'. He stands a link between old and new Kashmiri poetry. He gave life and vitality to his verse and theme to his poetry. He was a great personality indeed, a journalist, a historian, a writer, a poet. To study nature, as a subject Mahjoor had achieved mastery. A close look at the expanded collections of his poems reveals that he undoubtedly was the greatest nature poet of Kashmir. He depicts nature and puts deep and hidden meaning in the objects of nature and also at times gives spiritual interpretations to nature. Mahjoor's sweet, soft and lofty voice gave an awakening to every Kashmiri, whether literate or illiterate. His thought-provoking poems made Kashmir feel proud of its origin, national identity, and inherent capacities bestowed upon him by nature. Thus a sense of respect and love for the homeland was cultivated. Mahjoor with his sweet, chaste and melodious lyrics pulled out a common Kashmiri from the morass of self-denial in which illiterate and self-styled mystic poets had thrown them. Mahjoor in his famous poem, " An Unwanted Woman's Tale" writes about women and their status in Kashmiri society. He not only sings of poverty, slavery, and freedom, but he also writes about the condition of women in Kashmiri society. In this poem, he describes all the stages of a woman from her birth to death and how she is treated in Kashmiri society. She is born uninvited and then not given any skill or education to grow. She is ready for marriage but nobody asks for her consent. She is a queen like Habba Khatoon and a great philosopher mystic like Lal Ded, but still a

victim of the patriarchal system. Mahjoor compares women with Mother Nature. Her presence is the sign of creation in this world. Like Mother Nature, she is humble and soothing.

Similarly, Naseem Shafiaie (1952-) is a contemporary Kashmiri poet who writes, among

other things, about Kashmir, women from Kashmir, and their perspective. She has a Masters's degree in Kashmiri language and literature. In 1984 she joined the higher education department of the Jammu and Kashmir Government and has taught undergrads at the University of Kashmir. In 2011, she was honored with the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for her collection of poems, *Neither a Shadow nor a Reflection* (published in 2007). She is the first Kashmiri woman ever to have been bestowed this distinction. Her works have been translated into several languages including English, Italian, Korean, Urdu, Kannada, Tamil, Marathi, and Telugu. According to a blog, Kashmir Forum, Shafiaie's poetry is "an expression of a woman's inner passion for self-esteem and self-admiration...termed as 'Sun Passion' by Kshemendra, the 10th-century writer from Kashmir." You will be interested to know that in the 1970s, Shafiaie was the only woman poet to attend mushairas in Kashmir. The poem's title, "Neither a Shadow nor a Reflection" conveys a desire – the hope to be a person with an identity and not merely another's shadow with no identity, dreams, or ambitions. The woman in this poem asserts that she is a woman, a living being, not a lifeless reflection. And because she is animate, she is not to be shamed and treated with disrespect. This poem is an assertion of a woman's self-respect where she asks her man to be "beside" her. The woman reminds her man that she has been with him whenever he needed her and that he should never abandon her even when the patriarchal society tries to silence her honest dreams and forbids her from talking about her pain and sorrow.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Mahjoor and Naseem were raised in totally different ages and social structures, yet both share some common features in their poems to express suppression in society. Being bold, they protested and expressed their concerns about women in their society through the medium of poetry. What is common between them is their resistance to traditions and patriarchal society. The difference lies in their style of protest. While the issues addressed by Mahjoor are very broad, the range of themes and concerns dealt with by Naseem are comparatively sensitive. The focus of the present paper is to examine and analyze the poetic worlds of two different poets hailing from two different ages and genders but living in the same culture. The present paper attempts a critical investigation of the poetic concerns from a feministic perspective to identify and compare the poets' strategies of response to the forces of oppression that exist in a gendered society, and the poetical similarities and dissimilarities in their poems. Therefore, a Comparative analysis of Mahjoor's poem and Naseem's poem shall provide us the result that poets being sensitive raise a voice against any kind of oppression irrespective of their age, and sex.

## **3. DISCUSSION**

A woman's life, like that of both these poets express, leads to the discovery that women are the product of the cultures, the making of which they have had no part. Their true identity is smothered by the patriarchal culture that assigns their experiences to the margins or marginalizes their female experience. To salvage the self, to find out who they are, and what they have lost, it becomes imperative that they should reinstate their experience as women, within which they acquire autonomy over their being.

Feminism is a movement that tries to define and establish social, legal, and cultural freedom and equality for women. Gender equality is at the core of the feminist movement: it advocates women's rights on the ground of the equality of sexes in all spheres of life. Feminism, as a literary movement, aims to revolt against the patriarchal society which associates masculinity with superiority, strength, action, self-assertion, and domination; and feminine with inferiority, weakness, passivity, obedience, and self-negation. Feminism aims to emancipate women from the chains of subjugation and domesticity. By depicting domestic violence, sexual harassment, male ego, etc., in their works, the Feminist writers highlight and condemn the plight of women in the patriarchal society and thereby try to inculcate a sense of rebellion and self-identity in them. Robert Webb defines feminism in the following terms: "Feminism isn't about hating men. It's about challenging the absurd gender distinctions that boys and girls learn from childhood and carry into their adult lives(1)."

#### **4. MAHJOOR AS A – A FEMINIST POET**

Mahjoor is a male voice and a representative feminist poet. The themes prevalent in his poem "The Unwanted Woman's Tale" make his poem highly absorbing and feminist. Many scholars find powerful feminist imagery in Mahjoor's poem, focusing on critiques of marriage, motherhood, women's relationship with their bodies, and the roles women are offered in traditional Kashmiri patriarchal society. Mahjoor's poetry artistically portrays the unhappy, dissatisfied life lived by a female in Kashmiri culture. His poetry is a critique of patriarchal prejudices and discriminations. In the poem, the narrator narrates her plight and says:

How can I change my fate and destiny  
When my friend, my beloved does not love me  
Careless he is the creator of my destiny  
My friend, my beloved does not love me.2

Mahjoor, exposes the supposed and self-assumed superiority of the patriarchal society in his poem. Sexual exploitation, betrayal, and the lack of love in a man-woman relationship are the major themes of this poem:

My beauty and my passion were in high quality  
But patience and modesty kept everything in a cage  
Hidden somewhere he never wanted to see me.(1)

Feminist literature highlights and condemns the inequalities and injustices in the treatment of women- the disadvantages women have to bear on account of their gender." (Kumar, 9). Feminism, as a form of revolt against patriarchal prejudices and bias, can be found in most of her poems. Mahjoor's poem "The Unwanted Woman's Tale" is seminal for the discussion of feminist strain in his poetry. It is a representative feminist poem composed by him. He not only depicts the plight and sufferings of a married woman chained to her husband's house but also revolts against male domination. The poem symbolizes a protest of all womanhood against the male ego:

My mother, my beloved an angel was she  
Who taught me how to cook and be submissive  
Neither a word nor any skill was given in my dowry  
My friend, my beloved does not love me. (2)

The poem highlights and condemns the miseries of a woman, a wife, who is expected to play certain conventional roles, and her wishes and aspirations are not taken into account. Mahjoor exposes the callousness and the hollowness of patriarchal society in this poem. The miserable condition of a woman in a patriarchal society has elegantly been portrayed in the following lines of the poem:

Someone came like a stranger and took away me  
They never ascertained my view and opinion  
I accepted the injustice and nodded with sublimity  
My friend, my beloved does not love me. (2)

Mahjoor underlines patriarchal prejudices. The poem exposes the hypocrisy and the hollowness of the male-dominated society which associates inferiority, and submissiveness with the 'feminine' and in contrast strength, power, and assertiveness with the 'masculine':

Lal, I roamed naked in the valley wantonly  
They called me mad woman, fiend, and crazy  
Shahamdan accosted me then have to hide my body  
My friend, my beloved does not love me

One day a country lass born in a poor family  
I rose to a queen of beauty and high dignity  
Even in that royalty I feared God and never felt proudly.(2)

Mahjoor's aim as a poet, thus, is to highlight and condemn the plight of women in a society governed by men. His poem is a remarkable manifestation of a woman's longing for domestic security and independence. He raises a voice against the callousness of patriarchy by trying to assert, conquer and dominate. He tries to uplift the position of women and thus resist the dominance of men. In his poem, Feminism gets manifested through the themes he presents- victimization, revolt against patriarchy, and man-woman relationship. In the end, the poet feels dejected by the society in which he lived. Women are maltreated and dominated by the callous and irresponsible nature of men:

Blossomed bough I gave birth to a big family  
Thorns and flowers were born out of me  
Increased thorns put my head down shamefully  
My friend, my beloved does not love me. (4)

Thus With the publication of Virginia Woolf's "A Room of One's Own"(1929) and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1952), the real beginning of feminism took place. Woolf argued that women have been denied access to a room of their own. For Woolf, the room suggested the psychological and financial independence of women. Later, Simone De Beauvoir, summarizing the whole discourse formation about women from Aristotle, Aquinas and down to modern times, famously argued that "Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as autonomous being...she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the other" [and] "One is not born a woman but [one] is made so" thereby saying how the male linguistic discourse has shaped the identity of the woman. What she argued was that woman has been treated as the Second sex and an 'Other' of the 'essential' male. The basic assumption behind all strains of feminism is that all discourse formation about women has been male-dominated which; to use a term from structuralism, caught in the web of binaries has either demonized woman as a 'whore' or romanticized her as an 'angel'. What feminists argue has been side-lined in this discourse formation about women has been their 'true, actual and objective' representation. Like Virginia Woolf, Mahjoor too argued that women have been denied access to education, skill, and opinion. He says:

Unwanted I was born, I came uninvited  
My birth was never celebrated in my family  
My birth made everyone unhappy  
My friend, my beloved does not love me  
Born out of pity, was bred with affliction  
Miseries' misfortunes always followed me  
My friend, my beloved does not love me  
My mother, my beloved an angel was she  
Who taught me how to cook and be submissive  
Neither a word nor any skill was given in my dowry. 2

Similarly, Naseem in her first collection *Open Windows* says "I wanted Kashmiri women to look out of the window... [And] let the outside world have a look at them" (interview). Speaking of Naseem Shafiaie's poetry Majrooh Rashid, a critic and an author and Scholar says:

Naseem is proud of being a woman and does not seem to bother about the equality of men and women. She rather asserts with confidence that man is a victim of his passion and as such needs a woman to control his desires. She is capable of performing the role of a daughter, sister, beloved, wife, and above all, a kind mother.(3)

This poem "Neither a Shadow nor a Reflection" is also thematically important because here in this poem she posits that essentially men and women are very different and they perceive the world differently, so parameters of the male world should not be applied to judge the female experience. The purple patch of the poem is when referring to the typical male, the female speaker of the poem says:

"I am not like you, neither a replica of your dream,  
you have your own identity, I have an existence of my own  
if you care to know, you shall realize a new world  
my endurance is different, and you shall comprehend that....(4)

The woman tries to analyze her man's strange behavior and concludes that he does not speak to her because he cannot understand her. She tells us that her vocabulary is limited and she does not "possess" is the simplest of words through which she can make him understand her feelings and share her passion. The woman says that if she could begin to even speak about her desire, her man would grow closer to her and share his "fiery words" of pleasure, which would enrich their relationship. You can easily imagine how much better this would be from their present where the man "stands still" and "speechless" and his woman is "unable to decipher" his passions:

As always you once again came, standing  
at the door speechless. Only if I had had a few words would I decorate  
them on your lips and hear those fiery words you wish.  
unable to decipher, I feel the heat of your eyes.  
I knew for me you would certainly come,  
I felt the hope of your arrival and felt,  
that like a gale of spring, you would enter my heart, and  
every particle of my life would get rejuvenated.( 4)

The poet makes references to various religious and mythological figures and she tries to make the readers realize that women experience abuse and neglect globally. Women are capable of bringing social equality and justice by refusing to accept ill-treatment silently. "If that Habba Khatoon decides and leaves you midway... she is not to be slain" is a powerful statement that supports women who, refusing to compromise on their self-respect, walk out of bitter relationships. Slaying suggests extreme violence and the poet insists that violence can never improve relationships. Men and women can live together only when a man supports and respects his woman "like a true Adam" –the first human created by God– who never left his woman and always stood by her even when she made a wrong decision. The poet tries to make her readers understand that if you love someone, you do not make them feel guilty, but help them get over their mistakes and lead wholesome lives:

like Lalla, rose in the late hours of the night,  
and lulled you in my lap and woke you up.  
I, like Habba Khatoon, said you are the sky,  
I am your earth, you the shelter of my secrets,  
the garden belongs to you, come and enjoy it,  
what rival of mine lured you away?(4)

Naseem Shafiaie is well aware of how the theological discourse has been used by the male world to subjugate the world of women. So to counter this she enters into a dialogue with the Creation myth and very subtly reinterprets the meaning of the creation myth. The dominant narrative in creation myth is that it was Adam from whose rib Eve was created and later on it was Eve who was tempted by the evil serpent which in turn led to the downfall of Adam. So traditionally Eve has been accused of being a 'temptress' leading Adam to commit that 'sin' that caused their 'fall'. Countering this male-dominant interpretation of creation myth, Naseem Shafiaie inverts the whole myth to bring home the point that it was a woman who lend Adam his dignity, who made him worthy of being worshipped, and who taught him the secret of love and life. She stresses the fact that woman was essential in the development of man's consciousness. As in the poem, the female speaker says to the male one:

Stay a while and ponder, didn't I sing:  
Ó love I shall adorn you under the cherry trees,  
Fasted I for you that you stay with me.  
My nights passed reciting holy verses for you.  
If like Krishna you wish and change your guises,  
If that Habba Khatoon decides and leaves you midway, what  
if she too feels hate, she is not to be slayed.(4)

The narrator argues that the man-woman relationship is a social phenomenon created by tradition and patriarchy. We can bring positive change by becoming more aware of the consequences of our actions. The best way forward is to generate awareness of how gender imbalances make women feel insecure, vulnerable, and threatened. It is but natural that men will feel guilt and seek forgiveness, which the female voice in the poem says must be forthcoming: "realize your fault... I shall be assured that you realized :/ I am neither a shadow nor a reflection."(2-4). Revenge is not a solution for it cannot undo injustices. To be given her space, freedom, and identity is a woman's right. She should not let herself be reduced to a lifeless and drab reflection that follows her man's instructions and is not allowed to have hopes and dreams of her own. Lalla, Habba Khatoon, and Eve – the much-celebrated women in the poem – were not only dedicated to their men but had strong identities of their own. They were with their men in different avatars – as a mother or seductress or as a devotee or guide. Their strong individuality and faith in the power of love are legendary. Lalla and Habba Khatoon were from Kashmir. The two of them had much in common even though Lalla was from the fourteenth century and Habba Khatoon lived in the seventeenth century. Both were married when they were just twelve or thirteen. Their husbands and in-laws treated them badly because of which they walked out of their marriage. Lalla became an ascetic who raised her voice against the wrongs committed by the ruling Brahmanical classes. Though Shivas a Kashmiri Pundit, she spread her revolutionary ideas by writing poetry in the Kashmiri language, not the elitist Sanskrit which was the symbol of the upper classes. Lalla challenged the authority of Sanskrit in the 14th Century by composing Vaakh in the local language. She inspired the peasants and the common man to such an extent that she has since been venerated by Muslims and Hindus alike. Habba Khatoon was a beautiful and gifted child who composed sensitive poems and sang beautifully. Her original name was 'Zoon,' which is Kashmiri for the moon. Her exceptional beauty attracted Yousuf Shah Chak who became her second husband and went on to be the last independent ruler of Kashmir during the Mughal era. It is believed that Zoon was his inspiration. She was widowed following a long tragic separation from him when he did not listen to her advice. Eve is a mytho-religious figure who took an independent but incorrect decision to eat the forbidden fruit of Paradise. Her disobedience resulted in her and Adam being expelled from Paradise where life was extremely comfortable, to Earth, where life was very tough. Eve was a companion to God's first human creation, Adam. She took a bold decision to eat the forbidden fruit of Paradise because of which she and Adam were thrown out of Paradise to Earth where they faced innumerable problems. However, despite her rashness, Eve is celebrated because she remained loyal to her husband and never left him. Shafaie goes on to give vent to the fact that how male tactic works. She speaks through the female speaker that she tried to play every role to 'please' the male. She tried to become Habba Khatoon idealized as a woman pining for her lover, yet it could not yield any fruit because there was an essential misunderstanding on the male's part. The male took her as an object, a toy, to 'use and throw'. With a heart-rending imagery Naseem speaks about how when the female tries to speak out her heart, she is silenced, and not even allowed to sigh by being labeled as "impatient". Though Naseem, speaks against the oppression of women in a patriarchal world, though she speaks against using women as a 'commodity', and against their 'objectification', she does not propound a separate path for women to take like radical feminists. She does not lose hope of a male and female relationship based on mutual love and dignity. Instead of taking a radical step she calls on the male and exhorts him to, first of all, conquer his passion and then try to understand the woman as a human being who is both flesh and soul. This way she re-imagines the whole relationship of male and female based on mutual love, self-respect, and dignity. "Neither a Shadow nor a Reflection" is a poem that

describes the trauma faced by independent-minded women throughout history and across religions. The poem tells us that a woman has enormous patience and courage because of which she can take care of her husband and also fight for him in adversity. A woman's selflessness should not be abused and lead to her victimization. The poem gives us examples of courageous and strong women who were taken for granted and exploited, but who refused to take this unjust treatment silently. These women not only rebelled against their partners but also contributed to making a more just society. They have become legends and are universally celebrated.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

In the end, the conclusion is drawn that Feminism is a sensitive movement. Not only, Women, but sensitive men feel the oppression of women in their society. Both Mahjoor and Naseem are strong voices of resistance and for both the existence of a dignified self of a female is more important needed for bringing peace and for both human lives. Both are culturally conscious people, who believe that women in Kashmir have always strived, whether it is Lal Ded or Habba Khatoon. Both the poets make references to various mythological figures and they try to make the readers realize that women experience abuse and neglect globally. Women are capable of bringing social equality and justice by refusing to accept ill-treatment silently.

## **REFERENCES**

- Aafaqi, Asad-ullah. *Aiyena-i-Haq: Kulliyat-i-Shaikul Aalam*. Srinagar: Gulshan Publications, 2008. Print.
- Ackoff, A. Russell. *Creating the Comparative Future*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1981. Print
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *We Should All Be Feminists*. Vintage Books. 2014. PDF.
- Azad, Ghulam Mohammed. "Mahjoorini Shaeri Manz Kashmir." *Sheeraza* 3.1 (1987): 3-10. Print.
- Bazaz, Prem Nath. *Daughter of Vitasta*, New Delhi: Pamposh Publications, 1959.
- Beauvoir, de Simone. *The Second Sex*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2009.
- Kachru, Braj B. "Kashmiri Literature." *A History of Indian Literature*. Ed. Jan Gonda, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1980, 1-106.
- Lone, Ali Mohammad. *Kashmiri Poet in Indian Poetry*. Delhi: ICCR, 1998. Print.
- Mahjoor, G.A. *Kallami-Mahjoor*. Delhi: National Archives, 1969. Print.
- . *Payami-Mahjoor*. Delhi: National Archives, 1969. Print.
- . *Sallami-Mahjoor*. Delhi: National Archives, 1969. Print.
- Mohiudin, Akhter, *A Fresh Approach to the History of Kashmir*. Srinagar: Book Bank, 1998.
- Naji, Munawar, and Shafi Shaque, eds. *Kaeshir Zubaan Ti Adbuk Tavaaryiekh*. Srinagar: Ali Mohammad and Sons, 2012. Print.
- Parray, Ashaq Hussain. 'Re-Imagining the Man-Woman Relationship: A Feminist Appraisal of Select Poems of Naseem Shafiaie', *The Criterion: An International Journal in English* Vol. 8, Issue-III, June 2017. ISSN: 0976-8165.
- Shabir, Junaid. "The Recounting of Loss, Pain and Gloom in the Poems of Naseem Shafiaie.
- Shafiaie, Naseem. *Open Windows*. Srinagar: Kashmir Publications 1999.
- . *Neither Shadow nor Reflection*. Srinagar: Kashmir Publications, 2000.
- Showalter, Elaine, ed. *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room Of One's Own*. Mariner Books. 2005.

**AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY**



**Dr. Gazala Gayas**, Associate Professor of English at GDC Tangmarg Baramullah . She has authored five books. She has also published 24 research papers in International journals. She is reviewer of prestigious journal *ATNER* of Athens Greece.

Recognized as Reviewer for *International Journal of Management and Social Studies*.2021

She has also received many international awards . She is a poet and a fiction writer. She has translated many Kashmiri poems into English. She has presented papers in International Conferences . She is member of ICLA,CLAI, InSc, and Capecomerin Trust Tamilnadu.

**Citation:** Dr. Gazala Gayas. "Representation of Women in Kashmiri Literature: A Feministic Analysis of Mahjoor's "The Unwanted Woman's Tale" and Naseem Shifaie's "Neither a Shadow nor a Reflection" " *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, vol 10, no. 7, 2022, pp. 1-8. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.1007001>.

**Copyright:** © 2022 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.