
Under the Hood of Gender, Environment and Identity; Tracing the Elements of Ecofeminism in selected short stories of Sabyn Javeri's *Hijabistan*

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Abstract

Sabyn Javeri's **Hijabistan**, a collection of short stories set against the vibrant yet often oppressive urban backdrop of Karachi, Pakistan, offers a compelling lens through which to examine the intricate connections between gender, environment, and identity. This paper employs an ecofeminist framework to analyze how Javeri's narratives, particularly "The Date," "The Adulteress," and "The Urge," illustrate the parallel subjugation of women and the degradation of their physical and social environments within a patriarchal Islamic society. By focusing on the experiences of veiled women navigating societal constraints, economic pressures, and personal desires, the study reveals how the urban landscape becomes a symbolic representation of their inner turmoil and the external forces limiting their autonomy.

Javeri masterfully weaves the environmental realities of Karachi – its chaotic urban sprawl, pollution, and restrictive public spaces for women – into the emotional and psychological landscapes of her characters. The hijab, often perceived as a marker of modesty and religious adherence, is recontextualized within these stories as a complex symbol that can simultaneously offer a form of protection and become a tool of societal control. Through nuanced portrayals of female sexuality, transgression, and the yearning for self-expression, Javeri challenges monolithic interpretations of Muslim womanhood and exposes the environmental injustices that disproportionately impact women's lives and choices. Ultimately, this analysis demonstrates how **Hijabistan** contributes to ecofeminist discourse by highlighting the interconnectedness of patriarchal oppression and environmental degradation, urging a re-evaluation of the relationship between gender, nature, and the quest for liberation in a contemporary Muslim context.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Hijabistan, Sabyn Javeri, Gender, Environment, Identity

Ever since the dawn of mankind, literature has managed to reflect the complexities of human relationship as well as an individual's position within the natural order. Be it fiction or non fiction, literature ably describes the engagement of humans while emphasizing on environment as a major backdrop. Which throws light onto the social, cultural and political landscape of the society being lived in. therefore, the environment presents itself as a conscious and sustainable stimuli that help shape narratives and ideas in a work of art which further embellish the human experiences and responses that challenge the environmental quo. When a work of art mingles with the human psyche, it produces a fine perception onto themes like societal norms, humanism, insightful experiences lived as well as cultural autonomy that impacts the zeitgeist of the age.

In a similar manner, Sabyn Javeri knits the web of islamization, feminism and environmental and cultural diaspora in order to create a bigger picture of the contemporary society. the background in her stories not only presents environmental oppression upon women but also stand as an epitome of their inner struggles. Sabyn Javeri is an award winner renowned Pakistan author based in Karachi. She is best known for her works such as "Nobody Killed her" which already a best time seller all over Pakistan. Moreover, her writings delve deep into the orthodox emblems of customs and traditions as well as modernity that effect the Islamic perception of women not across Pakistan but around the entire world.

Her work "Hijabistan" is an anthology of short stories that talk about emotional suffocation, life of desires and chaos and the stereotypical fights fought in order to break free from the shackles of Pakistani-Muslim Patriarchy. It consists of 16 short stories and almost each one of them talks about the idea of sex, marriage, notions of shame and honor that come along with a woman through 'societal' norms (Fathima M 19). The book is a great kaleidoscopic view into the issue of liberal and conservative and how one gets stuck between the two and makes life miserable for his/her own self. In addition to that, Saira Khan, in her research article, explores how Javeri's intentional portrayal of Karachi's Urban environment serves as a commentary on the struggles and societal pressures on their sex and the construction of identity that come along with it (khan 23). Speaking of which the short stories "The Date", "The Adulteress" and "The Urge" are of utmost importance as they provide us with a multifaceted portrayal of urban life, male chauvinistic rules, financial constraints and the overall image of a hijabi women as opposed to the Islamic teachings. Secondly, by using the

lens of Eco criticism and feminism, we can analyze the narratology of the events and that how Javeri discerns emotions like coquetry and modesty under the veil of socio-cultural and economic divides that a woman suffers from in her life in a Pakistani context.

As far as the word Hijab is concerned, it has many signifiers. Firstly, it is a piece of cloth worn by women for covering their heads so that not a single strand of their hair is to be seen. It is wrapped in a fashion that it covers their chest and neck thereby promoting a sense of grace and modesty. In light of Islamic teachings, Hijab for the women is seen as a sign of humility that can help a woman avoid any sorts of harassment or violence. However, the western and contemporary lens often sees hijab as a sign of coercion and 'obsoleteness' on account of a woman's identity. Veiling is an experience lived under many contradictions and complications (Piela 22).

For instance, if we look at the short stories of Javeri under study, we see that hijab has been seen in more of a liberal and negative connotation; something more instrumental rather than a mere ornament. The short story "The Adulteress" describes the life of an agitated and insatiable woman who endeavors to find comfort in writing and love outside of wedlock. The main character trespasses her ethical boundaries and goes on to have an affair as the environmental injustice eroded her sense of autonomy. The story revolves around the themes of physical and emotional needs, social expectations as well as the rigid setting of the male dominating society of Pakistan. Likewise, "The date" tells us of a steamy affair between a young secretary and her boss and how they fight the traditional gender stereotypes. The illicit nature of their encounter describes the voyeuristic stance of the society that is eager to "see behind the curtain" despite the odds. Lastly, is "The Urge". This short story by Javeri investigates the intricacies of female sexuality in a general public that frequently smothers ladies' longings. The protagonist's conflict under the surface between her actual longings and cultural assumptions reflects the difficulties faced by numerous ladies in "Hijabistan." Javeri's book likewise features the manners by which ladies' sexuality is many times policed and constrained by male-centric powers. It starts with a young girl finding cosmetics and dressing as a defense mechanism against the societal suppression. Her husband lives a free life of pleasures and wealth while she ends up as a prostitute thus becoming a downtrodden (both economically and individually).

Sabyn Javeri's "Hijabistan" along these narrative lines offers a rich landscape for ecofeminist investigation. Ecofeminism is a playful take on

two schools of thoughts; eco criticism and feminism. The former relates to the intertwined relationship between literature and the physical environment where critics explore the fact that how literature addresses the environmental concerns and how humans act within the natural order (of society and norms) (Berry 239). While the latter deals with the fact that how literature posits or challenges traditional gender roles. It also tells us that how the agency of womenhood is portrayed literary works. So, Ecofeminism shows how nature and humans interact with each other and influence one another. Secondly, how individuals fight the patriarchal system and rise above the values of despondency.

Speaking of which brings us towards the three above mentioned short stories.

Therefore in light of this literary lens we see that her accounts enlighten the manners by which women's persecution and ecological double-dealing are interlaced, provoking the reading public to reexamine the connection between sexual orientation and nature. Through her nuanced depiction of female characters and their communications with the normal world, the writer highlights the criticalness of tending to women's activism and environmental worries in contemporary society. Not only has she used hijab as a weapon to unlock the chambers of dark devotion but also presents the wretched face of ennui.

The veil or Hijab also highlights the image of Muslim women across the brief history of paradigm shift from subservience to challenging. The environment of Karachi plays a pivotal role in shaping up the characters' identities throughout the stories. Hitherto, Karachi of Pakistan has been a city of hustle and bustle due to its over dense population. The environment is mostly humid and polluted due to immense traffic and sea breezes thereby leading to health issues and lack of access to cooling resources. Secondly, the unpredictable weather forecast hinders daily routine of the residents leading to less mobility and more indoor sitting. Out of all residents, the most effected ones of them are women. Women in Pakistan especially in Karachi do have access to quality education, better employment status and hygienic domestic routines. However, a significant portion of women still stay within the four walls of their homes and are emotionally, mentally and physically dependent upon their husbands. As Ayesha Khan takes note of, "the environmental issues confronting Pakistan excessively influence ladies, who are frequently on the cutting edges of overseeing organic earthly resources and really looking after their families" (Khan 2021, p. 87).

We see similar issues affecting the lifestyle and life choices of women. In "The Date" the chaotic landscape and constant traffic represents the protagonist's inner turmoil that she feels in her personal and emotional space. While the city's pollution is a part of the landscape, it contributes to a bigger meaning. It stands as a metaphor for the moral and emotional suffocation that has fogged her physical reality. Even a simple act like going out for a coffee with a man was a tedious task for her as she was in a constant fear of being judged by the society. This line from the story articulates this fact. "Everywhere she looked, she felt eyes watching her, judging her every move" (Javeri 34). In a similar vein, "The Adulteress" is a story of infidelity and betrayal and portrays an aspect of Karachi where public spaces are not much welcoming for women. This was the main reason why her affair, along with pleasure, becomes a burden as she struggles to hide it from the hawk eyes of the public as "every corner seemed to hold a familiar face, ready to report back to her husband" (Javeri 76). So, the sense of vigilance clashes with her quest of free will thereby leaving her in a state of half amusement half guilt. While in "the urge", the plot opens up with a girl loathing over her physical appearance as she is forced to wear Abaya even in ceremonious occasions. The pollution and lack of daily life necessities for women stand as a symbol of patriarchal oppression where men prove to be uncharitable in providing the basic human rights towards women folk. The protagonist ventilates her toxic surrounding by finding solace among make up items and flamboyant dresses. The writer captures her agony through the following lines; "The bathroom became her sanctuary, a place where she could experiment and create without fear of judgment." (Javeri 25). This shows that bathroom becomes her portal to escape the mundane and depressed life full of tyrannous motives.

Javeri successfully champions the idea of faith, feminism and identity and how and how it navigates through the male dominating narrative while presenting the hijab as a symbol of resistance as well as a rebellious spirit. Many studies had been made on the subject of religious disposition in context of Muslims as the 'other' in post colonial context. However, the study of societal and feminist values with reference to Urban environment of Pakistan is very limited. Hijabistan presents us a world 'shrouded' with lascivious and proactive activities. As per Ali, "The metropolitan scene in Javeri's accounts doesn't simply act as a background however is fundamental to figuring out the intricacies of ladies' lives in a male centric culture" (Ali 18, 102). Moreover, Khan (2019) contends that "Karachi's depiction as a city

of observation in Hijabistan highlights the manners by which ladies' bodies are pry upon, reflecting more extensive cultural nerves about female independence" (Khan 89). This double faced portrayal of nature as both supporting and harsh coordinates with the ecofeminist evaluation of how ladies' bodies and the climate are exposed to control by man centric philosophies (Mies and Shiva 13). Then, Riffat Hassan, opines that the hijab frequently turns into a site of discord where ladies' bodies are controlled all the while assuming a pretense of strict or social standards, which have themselves established in man centric understandings of Islam (Hassan 223). It is through this piece of head cloth that the writer exposes the truth of not just women but the people that surround her life.

In light of the brief evidences discussed above, it can be deduces that that the characters had achieved their targets wearing the hijab and how two or three characters were searching for their character in the public cover. The book hopes to wipe out the male driven structure from society and examine the womanhood their desires their achievements their guidelines about their own life which somehow unsatisfactory in a Muslim society. she highlighted the reality of hijab in the overall population, and she made authentic use of the hijab in great and awful way nowadays in the public field. In a gathering, the essayist Sabyn Javeri imparted to her peruser that you can make rushed decisions dependent exclusively upon appearances page. The clever's three focal characters, Ayesha, the hero of "The Date," the anonymous lead of "The Inclination," and the lead of "The Adultress," each wrestle with the abusive powers of man centric society and the ecological debasement of their city.

Ecofeminism, as a main theoretical system, places that the double-dealing of ladies and the double-dealing of the regular world are interconnected. Along these lines, Javeri's assortment is critical because this image and the scope of champions she remembers for her works additionally catch the ongoing fight for woman's rights (Rafiq 19).

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