



RESEARCH PAPER

**Investigation of Women's Empowerment in *The Begum and Dastaan*  
by Tarana Hussain Khan**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research is concerned with feminism and feminism is not only an age or area-specific movement rather it is a general movement that fights for the social, political and economic rights of women in the whole world. Khan has written about the falling condition of women showing how they were treated in the Harams of different Sultans in princely times in India. The main objective of this study is to explore how individuals get empowerment in a typical, narrow and bound atmosphere of a 'Nawab's Harem'. The methodology is based on descriptive and qualitative research. The primary source for research is *The Begum and Dastaan* by Tarana Hussain Khan supported by critical literary theory, research papers and literary reviews. This research work is limited to *The Begum and Dastaan* however it paves the way for other researchers to explore the lives of women in particular Harems.

**KEYWORDS** Feminism, Women Empowerment, Radical Feminism, Harems, *The Begum and Dastaan*

**Introduction**

The term Feminism is derived from the term "Femme" and it is a movement that fights for the rights of women. These rights range from things like fighting for the women's right as individuals, to striving for better conditions for women economically, socially, and politically Kaifa, et. al., 2024). These women can be either those who fight for the rights of all women, or those who fight for the betterment of the economic, social, and political conditions of women. There are also some men who fight for the rights of women, and this is because they see the honor of women as being important. God has created all people - including women - free, but there are many boundaries placed on women by society. The fight for the rights of women is a very popular movement in the modern age, and it is not just restricted to books or writers. There are also many organizations working to help women achieve their goals, and they are doing this in a variety of ways.

*The Begum and Dastaan* is a novel of equals, three stories organizing each other and attempting to add importance to the principal story which has every one of the components of a verifiable pot heater. Feroza Begum, a stunning, independent and wonderful blue-eyed woman resists the family's wishes to be a part of Sawani festivities at the Benazir Palace of Shams Ali Khan Nawabin the Sherpur, a princely state of India. Feroza's family disowns her, her partner is compelled to divorce Feroza afterwards she is abducted and held captive in the Nawab's opulent harem. Feroza reluctantly marries the Nawab and must deal with the harem's glitz and obsceneness. Kallan Mirza who is a talented dastango dancer, performs a hauntingly familiar story about Tareek Jaan, a tyrannic wizard. He also narrates about an lavish and fictitious city, Tilism-e-Azam in which females had been imprisoned in underground cellars, in the bazaar chowk. The lines between reality and fantasy start to blur as Kallan becomes more and more dependent on opium. In the present, Ameera listens her grandmother who narrates the famous tale of

Feroza Begum their great-grandmother. Ameera finds solace in Dadi's story as she is confined to her home due to her parent's failure to pay her school fees. She is forced to consider whether anything has changed for the women of Sherpur as her world falls apart.

In the early days of feminism, critics looked at how male novelists often treated female characters very poorly. This included things like making them seem weak or stupid, or not giving them enough of a role in the story. This criticism mainly happened in the early days of feminism, back in the late 1960s and early 1970s. First-wave feminist criticism is a type of criticism that looks at how male novelists often treat or marginalize female characters in their work. This criticism started in the 1960s.

Gynocriticism examines female writers and their contributions to literary history, as well as how female characters are handled in works by both male and female authors. The investigation of a female literary heritage is the third and most significant component of gynocriticism which serve the purpose of reviewing literature, how females are treated within books, and how female characters are portrayed. First, gynocriticism looks at the history of women in literature and how they've been treated. Second, it considers how female characters are portrayed in the books through both male and female writers. Finally, it explores a body of works by women writers.

### **Literature Review**

Women's literature has been around for a long time, but it's been treated differently than men's literature. Until the Renaissance Period, most women only wrote about things that were related to their lives like writing for church activities, in courts, or among the upper class. However, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a few women started writing about other things. They suffered a lot because people didn't understand them or thought they were strange.

This is why so few women wrote in the past- they felt too inferior to challenge and question their situation. Women had practically little chance of success in achieving dreams of their own if they wanted to become like the men in this world of literature (Gilbert & Gubar, 1383). Beauvoir says that this is because women are born into a world where men make all the decisions. Women don't have any own religion or poetry - all of that comes from men. Beauvoir also says that because of these rules, women have been stuck in a state of dependency for centuries. Women have to rely on men to help them speak and write because these activities were once closed off to them. The 1920s were known as the modernist age. This was known as "The Era of Anxiety" because so much change was occurring so rapidly. The lives of women at this period were distinct from those of women in the Victorian era. At this time, notable female authors and painters were Edith Wharton and Willa Cather. Other feminist authors that discussed the strength of women were Woolf, Mansfield, and Hurston.

Tarana Khan's words have magical properties. She has the ability to captivate her readers with intricate writing that is infused with the spirit of an unvarnished story. Khan dedicates her book a to the particular females of the 19th century, who had recurrently been concealed, unnoticed and overlooked. Their details are found in *The Begum and the Dastan*. Being a royal begum makes no difference if she is a part of male-controlled society. You're just a female at the end of the day. The purdah's boundaries are the only thing that can contain your grandeur.

*The Begum and Dastaan* was published on January 1, 2021. It is actually a novel having a historical context and its roots mainly lie within the princely times in India where the lords and 'Nawabs' were the possessors and the masters of the lives of the people in its real sense. The novel has been called a dazzling one from an exciting and

thrilling new voice and also a stirring story of a majestic state and of the women living here. It is acclaimed to be written in the inspiration of real-life events and characters.

Three stories are combined in Khan's *The Begum and the Dastan*: the historical fiction story of Feroza Begum, one of the wives of Nawab Shams of Sherpur, set in the late 1800s; Kallan Mirza's dastangoi of the tale of Tilism-e-Azam, which is magically realistic; and the contemporary story of sixteen-year-old Ameera. The author has done extensive research and presented the Nawabi culture of the 19th century. The performances of the main lead are really brilliant and prose is exquisite and almost fantastical. A moving journey of love, loss, treachery, and needless suffering, *The Begum and the Dastan* occasionally combines fantasy with history and its effects.

A number of writers and critics have remarked about the significance of the novel, its context and its very inquisitive subject matter. For example, a renowned author of India, Musharaf Ali Farooqi declares it a captivating novel that shows Khan's masterful insight into human heart, tragedy and complexities of love. Similarly, Indian great fiction writer and editor, Namita Gokhale, the author of *Gods, Graves and the Grandmothers* remarks about Khan's work:

*"Evocative writing that summons the soul of the feudal past, rich with history and romance and heartbreak."*

Manu Pillai, the writer of the famous work *Gods, Guns and Missionaries*, calls the novel, *a poignant, even tragic, story about pride, loss, bravery, and tenacity, as well as the human ability to use art and storytelling to overthrow oppression.*

A number of newspapers, magazines and journals have reviewed Khan's latest work with different literary and critical lenses. They have declared it the best fiction of its times in its particular genre with historical background and in a feministic context.

For example, the *Daily Guardian* declares the novel '*the haunting tale of a grand city and its women.*' It further remarks: '*The Begum and the Dastan*' takes you on a journey. It masterfully develops and conjures the scene, transporting you in time and allowing you to become a part of the lives of its characters.' (Thakur, 2022)

According to *Scroll*:

*'The Begum and the Dastan': A novel that shows how to write history without condoning it. Tarana Husain Khan doesn't write women only as damsels in distress, she writes them as women who challenge.'* (Ayidh, 2021)

According to *Frontlist*:

*'The Begum and the Dastan' is a tragic adventure of love, loss, treachery, and unnecessary suffering, with fantasy interludes that combine with history. The author has done an incredible job combining fiction and history with a light touch of imagination. This book is definitely a must read for people who are interested in knowing how women in 19th Century were treated.'* (Frontlist, 2022)

So far as the relevant studies and authors are concerned, an evaluation of the boosting of ladies as portrayed in a few works by Black American women's activist essayists was conducted by Wongpinit (2006). This study plans to look closely at the ways in which the female protagonists in different works. It is discovered that there are four categories into which the causes of the heroes' problems in life and abuse may be placed; obliviousness, man-controlled society, cliché demeanor and bigotry.

Woolf (1882-1941) was an English essayist, thinker, pundit and chief innovator of the twentieth century. Woolf was known for her emotional episodes and profound misery. She spearheaded a recent trend of composing - the continuous flow, which she applied in a large portion of her books. Woolf's exceptionally acclaimed books are *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Beacon* (1927) and *Orlando* (1928).

Regardless, this section centers around the four journalists previously referenced in the presentation; Charlotte Bronte, Thomas Solid, Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson, every one of them writing in an alternate ten years, or even a hundred years, Charlotte Bronte in the main portion of the nineteenth century. Ladies were as yet seen as spouses, moms and guardians of the family toward the start of the nineteenth century, by the by, the aversion and the need for autonomy began to be evident. The book was seen as being very engaging at the time it was published because of how the author's existence inspired this piece of art. It also addressed the contemporary viewpoint on women's status in the media. Although many agree that Charlotte Bronte was a feminist activist and that *Jane Eyre* is a feminist work, some insist that Bronte's only goal was to highlight the social structure of the day.

It is biased to announce that women ought to limit their personality and their activity just because they are women but instead, women should be exceptionally quiet for the most part. In contrast to it, women want to counter men in all the aspects of life. They also want to utilize their passions and possessions in multiple ways for their survival and they also demand acknowledgement for that. While practicing this, they have to suffer the adverse circumstances and they are taught to be within their actual limits. Moreover they are biased in their more unique individual animals.

Bronte created a different kind of brave lady as well as a guy who represents Byronic mythology; he is boring and perplexing yet adoring and gentle. It was his adoration for Jane that made this book so sexy and extreme. Near the end of the book, when he declares his love for her, "each particle of your tissue is as dear to me as my own: in agony and affliction it would in any case be cherished," he says that he would still love her even if she went crazy because he loves her for who she is, which makes him overpowering.

The second part of the nineteenth century was the time in fact when women started to comprehend that serving as a mother or spouse being deprived of the chance to study or to have a legitimate occupation isn't OK. The term women's liberation was not begat yet, nor there were any female gatherings supporting ladies' freedoms, in any case, Solid depicted a portion of his female characters as women's activists. *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) isn't viewed as Hardy's magnum opus, in any case, the hero, Bathsheba Everdene, is depicted as a scrappy women's activist.

Apparently, conventional men take spouses since ownership is absurd without marriage, and that standard ladies acknowledge husbands since marriage is unimaginable without ownership; with absolutely contrasting holds back nothing similar on the two sides.

## Material and Methods

The main focus of the research is based on feminism and especially the concept of radical feminism. Radical feminism aims to overthrow patriarchy and other social structures that abuse or suppress women. Radical feminists are of the view that society as a whole has a patriarchal nature and this male-dominated society does not allow women to practice and enjoy their due status in social as well as economic contexts. The main characteristics of radical feminism are to improvise or transform society by challenging

male dominant society and changing gender roles demanding sexual freedom and raising awareness.

The current research work is qualitative in nature. In this exploration, the fundamental female liberation can be obtained as a hypothetical device. The published data can be chosen in connection to the female activist characters found in these collections of memoirs of Tarana Hussain Khan. These literary lines can be tested from the female activist's point of view.

In current research work, radical feminism is opted for the analysis. While acknowledging that other social divisions, such as those based on race, class, and sexual orientation, also have an impact on women's experiences, radical feminism advocates for a radical reorganization of society that would eradicate male supremacy in all social and economic contexts. The main goal of radical feminism is to challenge the patriarchal notion that a woman's private life should be devoted to raising children, getting married, and running the home. Because of this private realm, women are harmed by rape, domestic abuse, and prostitution in the patriarchal political sphere.

Australian philosopher and eco feminist Val Plumwood (1939–2008) is well-known for her writings on anthropocentrism. She was instrumental in the growth of radical ecosophy starting in the 1970s. The socialist feminist concentrates on gender roles in the political economy, while the ecofeminist holds that women and nature are closely related due to their shared history of patriarchal oppression. The fundamental feminist principles of gender equality, a reappraisal of non-patriarchal or nonlinear structures, and an outlook on the world that values organic processes, holistic relationships, and the value of intuition and teamwork are all used in ecofeminism. (Val Plumwood, 2025).

According to Plumwood (Plumwood, *Feminism and the mastery of nature*, 1993) the oppression of nature is a crucial and absent component of feminist thought, even though feminist philosophy has thus far addressed the oppressions of gender, race, and class. In order to incorporate nature into an expanded feminist theory that uses a race, class, and gender analysis, she so leans on conceptions of human dominance. According to Plumwood's description of the philosophy of domination in Western civilization, humans have rationalized their position as dominators in the grand narrative by seeing the human-nature relationship as a dualism that permits a logical framework of otherness and negation. The thesis revolves around the idea of dualism. Dualism is a construction that clearly distinguishes "one" from "other" and assigns a higher value to the one, in contrast to a straightforward dichotomy. According to Plumwood, a specific type of denied dependence on a subservient other leads to dualism. In Western philosophy, for instance, "culture" and "nature" have been separated, with women and nonwhite men more frequently identified with the less valued identity of nature and (white) males with the more valued identity of culture. (Plumwood, 1993)

In this research thesis, Revolutionary women's liberation is settled on the examination. Extremist women's rights are a perspective inside of women's rights that calls for a through reshaping of humanity, eliminating male superiority in socioeconomic culture and recognizing that women's experiences are influenced by other social divisions, including those based on sexual orientation, race, and class. Because of this private circle, the political circle of man-centric society brings about ladies being hurt through assault, abusive behavior at home, and prostitution.

Momentum's work expects to investigate about the significant jobs abuse in regards to the crucial privileges of mankind underneath the hypothesis of lady's freedoms. A coordinated utilized for the removal of work of Tarana which integrates *The Begum and Dastaan* by Khan.

## **Result and Discussion**

Since that Indian women have been marginalized for the past few centuries, the topic of strengthening women become relevant. They have been brutally treated and denied their liberty. Notwithstanding the strict restrictions and liberties guaranteed by the Constitution, they continue to be victims of assault, torture, domestic violence, remorselessness, honor killings, female feticide, and a long list of other crimes. Regulation by itself won't alter the current situation. Real strengthening can only occur through awareness, training, financial independence, or more, each of which requires a change in attitude.

Writing and society are inextricably linked; they both operate as circumstances and logical outcomes for one another. Writing represents recognized examples of cognition, feelings, and behavior, including examples of articulation and society's uninformed assumptions. The social situation finds expression in writing. Indian journalists, and especially Indian women essayists, have adjusted to the environment and successfully reflected the condition of women as well as their hopes and aspirations in their work. Men authors have also written extensively about women's difficulties, but female essayists are writing with an "insider's knowledge," putting the mistreatment and minimizing of women front and center.

Women's activist literature is playing a key role by bringing forth positive examples in addition to highlighting the mistreatment and concealment of women. Women's activist fiction is the greatest progressive development in modern literature, according to Bassneit, both because it is formally inventive and because it helped bring about a social revolution. Sehgal, Markandaya, Deshpande, Shobha, Kapoor, Desai, Mukherjee, and others are prominent Indian women who write essays in English. This big group of female essayists focus their writing on the "Ladies' Enquiry" in their essays. They are adopting a crucial role in understanding and influencing modern social consciousness.

While going thoroughly through the novel, the readers and the researchers come to know that Feroza is leading the cradle of the story throughout the novel. Toward the beginning of the story, Feroza is cheerfully hitched to Murtaza Khan, joyfully pregnant, and she's at her natal home, joyfully expecting the rainstorm. A uniform satisfaction makes certain individuals even more fretful. She's interested in the Nawab, and against her dad's desires, chooses to go to the Sawani celebration at the Benazir Castle. Her dad is troubled on the grounds that the Nawab is a known defile, an aiyashi. We understand what's coming, however Feroza doesn't. Khan skillfully summons considerably more than tension in the pursuer: irritation, fear, trailed by stunned feel sorry, when the Nawab traps her in the royal residence. In these lines, there is a correlation attracts the perspective of Feroza in two distinct circumstances, one she is with her adoration for life where she is feeling cherished, respected and tranquil and then again, and second, she is with an individual to whom she is being tied without her will.

*'Begum has missed her period so I brought Hakim Sahib for a diagnosis, the Daroghan lowered her eyes. She was aware of the menstrual cycles of all the women of the harem, informed no doubt, by Badamiya of their regularity.'*

*'Mubarak, the Begum is with child,' he beamed. Feroza went into her room, caught Laila by her hair and slapped her. 'You whore! You carry tales about me. Get out of my house!'*

This is a novel of equals, three stories organizing each other and attempting to add importance to the principal story which has every one of the components of a verifiable pot heater. Feroza is spoilt and persistent and demands that she will pull off it. Anyway, Destiny tosses her in the Nawab's way in a condition of downpour wet dishevelment. Regardless of the fabulousness and the excitement, Khan's interpretation of history stays

undaunted. She narrates an existence of misuse, connivance and murder where ladies are exploited and hitched or unmarried as indicated by the impulses of eminence.

The tale of Feroza is juxtaposed with that of her tremendously talented daughter Ameera, whose grandmother is telling the story of the big terrible Begum. Unpredictably, the Nawab's sculpture has disappeared and the Pathan Rohillas have arrived on Earth during Ameera's lifetime, and her father is unable to afford to send his children to school. The third story is that of the narrator, the Dastango, Mirza Kallan who has a figurative story to resemble Feroza's grabbing. The story of Ameer Hamza and the vanishing of his delightful pixie spouse who falls into the grasp of a strong, licentious performer is interspersed by sorcery sparkles and shots of afeem since Mirza Kallan needs shots to get into the temperament.

Khan invests energy skimming on the outer layer of her characters since she has a ton of ground to cover and maybe an excessive number of characters to shuffle as she recounts her nearly pixie story of a blue-eyed princess. The story is genuine - she has taken history and fictionalized it adding her own ornamentation. One more jeopardized performing workmanship, really that bound of the universe of the tawaifs however for various reasons - add nothing to an intriguing and rather shocking piece of court history. She has memories of being recounted to this story by her grandma and the book is the consequence of following the string of the story down the pathways of history.

Without a doubt, besides the fact that most characters meagerly outlined are, there are extremely significant number of them. Khan is incredible at portraying settings — at anything having to do with material realities. The issue emerges when she needs to transform history into a story. It's anything but another issue.

The roots of 'Dastangoi' are found in the Persian language. The word 'Dastan' indicates a story and 'goi' means "to tell a story". A talented "Dastango" named Kallan Mirza transforms the story of an oppressive magician named Tareek Jaan and his fantastical city, the Tilism-e-Azam, where women were imprisoned in storm cellars beneath the market chowk, into a emotively real tale. The boundaries of reality and imagination begin to blur as Kallan descends deeper into an opium addiction. Also, in the current day, Ameera pays attention to Dadi portraying the story of Feroza Begum, Ameera's extraordinary grandma. Ameera, who is confined to her home because her parents have not covered her educational costs, finds comfort in Dadi's story. She is forced to ask whether anything has changed for Sherpur's ladies as her reality worsens. The author also made reference to a few crude observations about child marriage and love servitude.

*The Begum and the Dastan* is an unpleasant tale of a great city and its women, driven by real people and events. Three equal stories are told in the book: Feroza Begum's life; the Dastan, which is full of "Aiyys and Tilisms, Paris and Sovereigns," and is told by someone inside Feroza's story; and the edge story, which takes place between 2016 and 2017 and compares Feroza Begum's story to that of a young child being told by her grandmother. The fact that there is a "Sher" in each section is one of the book's strongest points. In this magnificently explored novel, you will genuinely want to know how Feroza continued to live her life, her thoughts and goals, and her death.

The configuration is amusing and almost dream like, and the characters are so brilliant that it is difficult to appreciate them. The author insists that the issue of man-controlled society be at the heart of *The Begum and the Dastan*, having woven two different plot lines into the book. Even though Tarana's primary focus was writing Feroza Begum's story, she was plagued by the problem of the female child's predicament in the humble Indian community because of her keen observation. Ameera, a modern-day resident, wonders if anything has changed for young children in the present.

The writer maintains that her peruses should contemplate some different options from Feroza's situation. Feroza's misery slipped by everyone's notice, and life stayed secret underneath the castle's greatness and sparkle. The unpleasant aspects like enduring of ladies, man-controlled society, and backward practices expected towards ladies could easily be noticed in the society of that time. The entire subject matter is presented in the novel in an exquisite way that the readers is flabbergasted by these sentiments. Man-centric society affects little kids in Indian families by restricting their picture of themselves and putting actual cutoff points on them. This book manages those characters for the most part. Sadly, not much has changed for ladies. To make this a total book, the writer has made a fantastic showing of fusing antiquity with literature with a flimsy indicator of creative mind.

### **Conclusion**

Khan's *The Begum and the Dastan* opposes this eradication. Khan's personality, Ameera's grandma, whom she considers Dadi, tells her the dastan about Feroza Begum, Ameera's extraordinary grandma. Feroza Begum went to sawani festivial at Nawab Shams Ali Khan's Benazir Castle, resisting her family, just to be grabbed by the Nawab. Khan makes the dastan cautiously, protecting the elements in Sherpur, a regal state, similar to one would sharp pickle in a container.

She winds around together the tales of three ladies, Lalarukh, Feroza and Ameera, with the assistance of three dastangos, about KallanMirza, Ameera'sDadi, and herself. Every story, inside another story, gives up as a wake-up call. In some cases, as a spoiler, that gives you the reins to ride through the remainder of the story. Fault crawls across every story, murmuring at each lady who resists and activates her requirement for autonomy.

Across these three stories in the novel, heroes anticipate that men should secure, not on the grounds that they defraud themselves, but rather in light of the fact that that's educated to ladies: reliance is an ideal quality. Khan recognizes how man-centric society spills on the men, drawing out how Lalarukh, Feroza and Ameera feel sold out by the men in their lives for not safeguarding them. Khan employs the tone of every story, cautiously joining the reason of a lady violated in various periods and spaces. She utilizes the first-individual viewpoint to portray Ameera's life, disintegrating with her family's carelessness towards her, utilizing a voice similar to a young person stewing with outrage. Feroza is a defective person, yet she is certainly not an imperfect casualty, and that's what Khan declares.



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