

The Anxious Patriarch: Male Fragility and the Crisis of Hegemonic Masculinity in Haider's *A Woman on a Suitcase*

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Abstract

Shazaf Fatima Haider's *A Woman on a Suitcase* (2024) challenges the gynocentric focus of existing South Asian literary criticism by offering a scathing diagnosis of the male oppressor. This research paper shifts the critical lens from the female protagonist to the male characters—Momin, Jameel, and Ameen—arguing that their tyrannical behavior is not an expression of inherent power, but a symptom of "male fragility" and a profound crisis of hegemonic masculinity. Drawing on R.W. Connell's sociological frameworks, the analysis reveals Momin not as a traditional patriarch, but as a "performative" figure whose sexual anxieties and professional insignificance manifest in the ritualistic eviction of his wife. Similarly, Seema's father, Jameel, is interpreted as a "failed patriarch" whose descent into dementia serves as a psychological flight from his inability to reconcile his desires with his duties. Building upon recent scholarship regarding Seema's political mobility and aesthetic resistance, this study contrasts the female capacity for evolution with the male descent into stagnation. While Seema utilizes the "suitcase" to navigate the world and the "canvas" to create meaning, the male characters remain paralyzed by their need for control. Muneera's husband, Ameen, utilizes violence not out of strength, but out of a paranoid fear of female independence. Ultimately, this paper posits that the patriarchal structure in the novel is collapsing from within, sustained not by authority, but by the "tin-drum" noise of anxious men terrified of their own irrelevance.

Keywords: *A Woman on a Suitcase*, Hegemonic Masculinity, Male Fragility, Toxic Masculinity, Performative Patriarchy, Crisis of Masculinity, Gender Politics, South Asian Literature, Domestic Violence.

Introduction

In the extensive canon of South Asian postcolonial literature, the figure of the patriarch typically looms large as an embodiment of absolute authority. He is often depicted as the stoic provider, the unquestioned decision-maker, and the guardian of lineage and honor (*izzat*). From the feudal lords of Bapsi Sidhwa to the stern fathers of Kamila Shamsie, the male head of the household is historically positioned as the "unmoved mover," a figure whose power is assumed to be as solid as the walls of the ancestral home. However, Shazaf Fatima Haider's *A Woman on a Suitcase* (2024) disrupts this monolithic representation. While the novel is celebrated for its feminist critique of domestic confinement, a closer reading reveals an equally scathing diagnosis of the oppressors themselves. Haider presents a domestic world where male power is not a manifestation of strength, but a symptom of profound fragility. The narrative centers on the dissolution of the marriage between Seema Hyderi and Momin Hyderi. On the surface, the conflict appears to follow the traditional trajectory of a patriarchal morality play: a rebellious wife (Seema) is disciplined by a traditional husband (Momin)

and his powerful parents (Arshad and Haneen). Momin repeatedly evicts Seema from the house, enforcing his territorial dominance. His father, Arshad (Ba Jee), commands the family with a booming voice and a decisive hand, orchestrating the lives of his children. Yet, beneath this veneer of control lies a reality of anxious incompetence. The men in Haider's novel do not rule because they are capable; they rule because they are terrified of being exposed as inadequate.

This paper argues that the central crisis in *A Woman on a Suitcase* is not merely the "woman question," but the "man question." It posits that the male characters—Momin, his father Arshad, Seema's father Jameel, and her brother-in-law Ameen—are suffering from a profound "crisis of hegemonic masculinity." Their violent outbursts, emotional withdrawals, and obsessive surveillance are not expressions of inherent power, but defensive mechanisms triggered by "male fragility." By shifting the critical lens from the female subject to the male object, this study aims to deconstruct the "anxious patriarch"—a figure who must constantly perform a strength he does not possess. To analyze the specific pathology of the men in this novel, it is necessary to employ a theoretical framework grounded in masculinity studies. The primary concept utilized here is R.W. Connell's theory of "hegemonic masculinity." Connell defines this as the culturally idealized form of manhood that requires men to be unemotional, dominant, heterosexually potent, and economically successful. In the South Asian context, this hegemony is tied to the role of the provider and the protector of family honor.

However, Haider's characters fail to meet this ideal. Momin is not a stoic leader; he is emotionally volatile and professionally insecure. Jameel is not a protector; he is a man who retreated into dementia to escape his mother's control. Ameen is not a benevolent guardian; he is a paranoid abuser who needs digital surveillance to feel secure. This gap between the ideal of masculinity they are expected to uphold and the reality of their limitations creates what contemporary theorists call male fragility. Just as "white fragility" describes the defensive reaction of a dominant group when their racial comfort is challenged, "male fragility" describes the defensive aggression of men when their gendered dominance is threatened. As established in previous research, "The Subjective Turn: Reclaiming Autonomy from Postcolonial Patriarchy in Haider's *A Woman on a Suitcase*," Seema's journey is one of reclaiming political and spatial autonomy (Bibi et al., 2025). That study analyzed how Seema moves from the static home to the mobile suitcase. This paper complements that analysis by examining the immobility of the men. While Seema evolves, the men remain trapped in static roles. Momin is paralyzed by his need for parental approval. Jameel is literally paralyzed in a wheelchair. The patriarchy traps men in cages of their own making, rendering them incapable of the "subjective turn" that Seema achieves.

Furthermore, this analysis builds upon the aesthetic critique presented in "Canvas and Cage: Aesthetic Resistance and the Politics of Domestic Space." This study argued that Seema uses art to create a "wild" counter-narrative to the "manicured" domestic sphere. Here, it is argued that the men lack this creative capacity. They cannot create; they can only destroy or maintain. Momin is described metaphorically as a "tin drum"—loud and hollow. His noise is a substitute for substance. By triangulating these perspectives—political, aesthetic, and gendered—this paper offers a comprehensive reading of the collapse of male authority in the novel. Momin Hyderi serves as the novel's primary case study in performative masculinity. He is introduced as a man who has "returned from America" to run the family business. This backstory sets up the expectation of a modern, capable leader. However, the reality is starkly different. Momin hates the factory; he feels "unheard and unimportant," a "marionette" dancing to his father's tune. His professional castration is mirrored by his domestic insecurity.

The novel reveals that Momin's aggression toward Seema is rooted in sexual anxiety. In a pivotal scene, Seema exposes the truth of their wedding night: Momin suffered from performance anxiety and was "terrified" by her enthusiasm. He projected his own inadequacy onto her, calling her "vulgar" for enjoying sex and blaming her for his failure. This is a classic example of "projection," a defense mechanism where the ego defends itself against unconscious impulses by denying their existence in themselves and attributing them to others. Momin cannot accept that he is sexually inexperienced or anxious, so he constructs a narrative where Seema is the problem. His "loins" are not leonine (as his father mocks with the nickname "Loin Singh"); they are the source of his deepest shame. Momin's

repeated eviction of Seema—throwing her and the suitcase out of the gate—must be read not as an act of strength, but as a tantrum. A secure patriarch does not need to physically expel his wife to prove he is the master of the house. Momin does so because he feels small. He uses the "suitcase" as a weapon to assert control over space because he has no control over his emotions or his professional life. As the narrator notes, he acts like a "convict" in front of his own parents. He is a man-child masquerading as a master.

While Momin represents the anxious present, Seema's father, Jameel Khan, represents the "failed" past. Jameel is a tragic figure whose life is defined by the surrender of desire to duty. He wanted to join the Navy—symbolizing freedom, the ocean, and the "canvas"—but was forced into accountancy by his mother's threat of suicide. This initial trauma set the pattern for his life: he learned that male survival depends on capitulating to the emotional blackmail of women (first his mother, then his wife). Jameel's descent into dementia is interpreted in this paper not merely as a medical condition, but as a psychological flight. Faced with the reality of an unhappy marriage to Sommaya (Mummy) and the guilt of his infidelity, Jameel's mind retreats into a fantasy world where he is a "naval officer" defending the country against "enemies at the gate". This delusion allows him to reclaim the masculinity he was denied in real life. In his mind, he is powerful, commanding, and vital. In reality, he is "unloved and neglected," fed watered-down soup by a wife who has emotionally banished him. Jameel's tragedy illustrates the high cost of hegemonic masculinity: the pressure to be the "good son" and "provider" destroyed his authentic self, leaving only a shell that eventually escapes into madness. If Jameel is the passive victim of patriarchy, Ameen (Muneera's husband) is its violent enforcer. Ameen represents "toxic masculinity" in its most dangerous form. He controls Muneera through physical violence, beating her until she requires stitches. However, the novel suggests that this violence is born of paranoia, not power. Ameen installs a "ring doorbell" camera to monitor Muneera's visitors, panicking when he sees an unrecognized face. This reliance on surveillance technology reveals a deep-seated fear of female independence. He knows that his authority is fragile; it requires constant reinforcement through terror. He is described as a "narcissist" who enjoys tormenting his wife to assert dominance over her powerful father. His need to "break" Muneera—comparing her to a horse that must be tamed—exposes the fragility of his ego. He cannot exist in a relationship of equality; he requires a victim to validate his existence. This research paper analyzes three distinct male characters—the performative, the failed, and the toxic—to offer a critique of the patriarchal system in *A Woman on a Suitcase*. The primary objectives of this study are to show that Momin Hyderi's aggression is actually a symptom of his professional and sexual insecurity; to interpret Jameel Khan's dementia as a psychological escape from the pressure to be a dominant man; and to examine Ameen's violence through the lens of "male fragility," arguing that his need for control comes from a deep fear of female independence. Therefore, this paper argues that the patriarchal order in the novel is not a fortress of strength, but a fragile "house of cards" maintained by anxious men.

Literature Review

The scholarship surrounding South Asian Anglophone literature has traditionally been preoccupied with the "woman question." From the partition narratives of Bapsi Sidhwa to the contemporary domestic realism of Kamila Shamsie, critical attention has largely focused on the subaltern status of the female subject and her struggle against the monolithic structures of patriarchy. However, a growing body of "masculinity studies" is beginning to interrogate the oppressor himself. This theoretical turn posits that patriarchy is not merely a system that subjugates women; it is a rigid performance that traumatizes and deforms men. In the context of Shazaf Fatima Haider's *A Woman on a Suitcase* (2024), existing reviews and papers have thoroughly mapped the terrain of female resistance. Yet, the specific pathology of the male characters—their anxiety, impotence, and fragility—remains underexplored. This literature review synthesizes current scholarship to argue that the male characters in Haider's novel are not omnipotent villains, but victims of a "crisis of hegemonic masculinity."

To analyze the "anxious patriarch," this study grounds itself in the foundational theories of R.W. Connell. In *Masculinities* (2005), Connell introduced the concept of "hegemonic masculinity"—the

culturally idealized form of manhood that requires men to be stoic providers, sexually potent, and dominant over women. Connell argues that this hegemony is always in crisis because very few men actually meet these impossible standards. When men fail to achieve this ideal, they experience "status anxiety." This anxiety manifests as "male fragility." Drawing on parallels with DiAngelo's sociological work on fragility, contemporary gender theorists argue that when a man's dominance is challenged, the result is not a confident assertion of power, but a defensive, often violent, reaction born of fear. This theoretical lens is crucial for reading characters like Momin Hyderi. Momin fits Connell's category of "complicit masculinity"—men who benefit from the patriarchal dividend (status, service) but lack the internal strength to uphold its values. As Haider (2024) illustrates through Momin's "performance anxiety" on his wedding night and his professional insignificance at the factory, Momin is a failed hegemon. His violence—the eviction of his wife—is a compensatory act to mask this failure. Reviewers have widely praised Haider's novel for its sharp dissection of the domestic sphere, though the focus has remained largely gynocentric. Rumana Husain (2024) describes the novel as an "incisive family saga" that exposes the "complexities of marriage" and intergenerational conditioning. Husain identifies the "brocade curtains" as a metaphor for the facade of domestic perfection. This aligns with the "anxious patriarch" thesis; the curtains are necessary precisely because the reality of male authority inside the house is so fragile. Mariam Tahir (2024) commends Haider for portraying abuse that is not limited to physical violence but includes "emotional manipulation" and "neglect". Tahir notes that the novel depicts male characters as "products of patriarchal conditioning", supporting the view that men like Jameel and Momin are victims of their own privilege. Critics like Cris (2024) have highlighted Haider's humanistic approach, noting that women become heroes when they "pursue their pleasure". However, Beenish Mahmood (2025) offers a counter-critique, suggesting that the novel occasionally risks "one-dimensional vilification of men". This research paper directly addresses Mahmood's critique by analyzing the complexity of the male characters, arguing that their villainy is a symptom of psychological collapse rather than innate evil. While the female journey in the novel has been rigorously charted, the male trajectory of stagnation has received less academic attention. In *"The Subjective Turn: Reclaiming Autonomy from Postcolonial Patriarchy in Haider's A Woman on a Suitcase,"* Bibi et al. (2025) analyzed the novel through the lens of critical spatial theory. That research established the "joint family home" as a "panoptic space" and identified the suitcase as the "key material metaphor" for the mobile, un-rooted female self. The focus was entirely on Seema's movement. This current paper inverts that spatial analysis. While Seema moves, the men are statically confined. Momin is trapped in his parents' bedroom, unable to create a separate home. Jameel is confined to a wheelchair and a single room. Ameen is confined by his paranoia, needing a "ring doorbell" to monitor the boundaries he cannot psychologically secure. This study argues that in the postcolonial joint family, patriarchy restricts male mobility just as severely as it restricts female mobility, binding sons to the "ancestral hearth" even at the cost of their marital happiness.

Similarly, in *"Canvas and Cage: Aesthetic Resistance and the Politics of Domestic Space,"* the analysis focused on Seema's artistic production. That paper argued that Seema uses the "Canvas" to create a "wild" counter-narrative to the "pruned" existence of the "Cage" (Bibi & Shaheen, 2025; Haider, 2024). This paper contrasts Seema's creativity with the men's sterility. Momin cannot create; he can only mimic. He is described as a "tin-drum"—loud but hollow. He brings no new ideas to the factory and no passion to the bedroom. Jameel wanted to join the Navy (a life of adventure and vast aesthetic horizons) but was forced into accountancy (a life of ledgers and rows). By viewing the men through the lens of "failed aesthetics," this paper argues that their violence stems from a deep envy of the female capacity for regeneration. To fully understand the "crisis of masculinity," one must categorize the distinct manifestations of male anxiety presented by Haider. Momin represents the "crisis of the modern male." He has the external trappings of a modern man (a degree from Wisconsin), but internally, he is essentially a child. Haider (2024) reveals that his rejection of Seema is rooted in sexual insecurity; he blames her for his own impotence because he cannot accept that he is not a "tiger" in bed. The author herself, in an interview with Malik (2025), notes that the story was born from

reflections on "emotional abuse" and the glorification of endurance. Momin uses emotional withdrawal as a weapon because he lacks the maturity for confrontation. Jameel Khan represents the "psychological cost of patriarchy." He is a man who followed all the rules—he obeyed his mother, abandoned his dreams, and provided for his family—yet he ends up "unloved and neglected". His dementia is not merely a biological fact but a narrative device. As Bibi et al. (2025) argued regarding "Existential Free-Will" in Faiqa Mansab's work, characters often retreat into "Bad Faith" to avoid the burden of reality. Jameel's retreat into a fantasy world where "the enemy is at the gates" is a desperate attempt to reclaim the agency he surrendered decades ago. He can only be a commander in his mind because he was a servant in his life.

Finally, Ameen represents the "terror of the patriarch." He utilizes physical violence and digital surveillance to maintain control. However, as Seema observes, his violence is not a sign of strength but of "fear". He is terrified of Muneera's potential independence. The literature on domestic violence suggests that abuse often escalates when the abuser feels he is losing control. Ameen's need to "break" Muneera, comparing her to a horse, reveals his fundamental fragility: he cannot exist in a relationship of equality; he requires a subordinate to validate his existence. This literature review establishes that while the "Woman on the Suitcase" has been thoroughly analyzed as a symbol of liberation, the men who put her there have been inadequately theorized. Existing scholarship acknowledges their villainy but rarely dissects their vulnerability. By integrating R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity with the spatial and aesthetic frameworks established in previous research, this paper aims to fill that gap. It posits that the true tragedy of the novel is not just the oppression of women, but the hollowness of the men who oppress them—anxious patriarchs ruling over empty kingdoms, terrified of the women who are slowly packing their bags to leave.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, literary-critical approach to analyze Shazaf Fatima Haider's *A Woman on a Suitcase* (2024). Unlike the previous two studies in this series, which centered on the female subject (Seema Hyderi) and her strategies of resistance, this paper enacts a deliberate shift in the critical lens. It adopts an androcentric focus—specifically examining the male characters—to deconstruct the mechanisms of patriarchal power. The research design is predicated on the understanding that patriarchy is not a monolithic force of nature, but a "performative script" that often fails. Therefore, the study treats the male characters not merely as antagonists, but as "clinical subjects" suffering from a crisis of identity. The primary method employed is characterological analysis combined with close textual reading. This involves dissecting the internal monologues, dialogues, and behavioral patterns of the three primary male figures: Momin Hyderi, Jameel Khan, and Ameen. The objective is to identify the "fractures" in their masculinity—the moments where their performance of strength collapses into anxiety, violence, or silence. This approach allows the research to move beyond a binary reading of "oppressor vs. oppressed" to a more nuanced understanding of how the patriarchal system victimizes men by trapping them in impossible roles.

To rigorously analyze the pathology of the male characters, this study utilizes a triangulated theoretical framework. The core theoretical pillar is R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. Connell defines this as the culturally idealized form of manhood that requires men to be dominant, unemotional, and successful providers. In the South Asian context, this hegemony is tied to the concept of the "protector" of izzat (honor). This study operationalizes Connell's theory to measure the "deficit" in the male characters. The analysis will compare the ideal (the strong patriarch) with the reality (Momin's professional failure and sexual anxiety). Momin is analyzed as an example of "complicit masculinity"—a man who benefits from the patriarchal dividend (status) but lacks the internal strength to uphold it. Complementing Connell, the study employs the concept of "male fragility." This theory suggests that when male dominance is challenged, the result is not confidence, but defensive aggression. This lens is essential for interpreting Ameen's violence and Momin's eviction of Seema. The methodology treats these acts not as assertions of power, but as "panic responses" to the threat of female independence.

This paper integrates the critical spatial theory used in "The Subjective Turn" (Bibi et al., 2025). By synthesizing Connell's sociology of masculinity with the spatial and aesthetic frameworks of research, this methodology provides a robust tool for deconstructing the male characters. It shifts the analytical focus from "what men do to women" to "what patriarchy does to men," revealing the deep structural cracks in the edifice of male power.

Theoretical Framework

To rigorously analyze the pathology of the male characters in Shazaf Fatima Haider's *A Woman on a Suitcase*, this study necessitates a theoretical apparatus that moves beyond the binary of "oppressor vs. oppressed." While feminist literary criticism has traditionally focused on the impact of patriarchy on women—a task undertaken in previous studies on political autonomy and aesthetic resistance—this paper requires a specific focus on the construction of masculinity itself. Therefore, this research employs a triangulated theoretical framework that integrates masculinity studies (Connell), psychoanalytic criticism (Freud/Defense Mechanisms), and an inversion of critical spatial theory (Lefebvre). This multi-lens approach allows for a clinical dissection of the male characters—Momin, Jameel, and Ameen—revealing that their tyranny is not an expression of inherent power, but a symptom of profound structural and psychological crisis. The foundational pillar of this study is R.W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. Connell defines hegemony not as a static character type, but as a "configuration of gender practice" that guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. In the South Asian context, this hegemony is culturally codified through the concept of the patriarch—the stoic provider, the sexual conqueror, and the guardian of izzat (honor). However, Connell also posits that hegemony is always in crisis because very few men actually meet its rigorous standards. This study operationalizes Connell's concept of "complicit masculinity" to analyze Momin Hyderi. Complicit masculinity refers to men who benefit from the patriarchal dividend (status, domestic service) but lack the internal strength or charisma to uphold its values. Momin fits this archetype perfectly. He enjoys the status of the "only son" and the domestic labor of his wife, yet he lacks the professional competence to run the factory or the sexual confidence to consummate his marriage without anxiety. The theoretical task here is to measure the "deficit" between the ideal Momin is expected to be (the American-educated heir) and the reality of his existence (a "tin-drum" patriarch).

Complementing Connell, the study integrates the contemporary sociological concept of "male fragility." Similar to DiAngelo's concept of white fragility, male fragility describes the defensive responses—anger, violence, withdrawal—triggered when a man's dominance is challenged. This lens is essential for interpreting Ameen's violence. When Muneera challenges Ameen, even silently, his lash-out is not a display of strength but a panic response to the threat of female independence. By framing their violence as "fragility," this framework dismantles the myth of their invulnerability. While sociology explains the social role of men, psychoanalysis explains their internal collapse. This study employs Freudian concepts of defense mechanisms—specifically projection, regression, and dissociation—to analyze the male characters as clinical subjects. The study analyzes Momin's sexual dysfunction through the lens of projection. Unable to accept his own performance anxiety on his wedding night, he projects his inadequacy onto Seema, labeling her "vulgar" for her enthusiasm. Jameel Khan's dementia is analyzed not merely as a medical condition but as a psychological fugue state or dissociation. Faced with the unbearable reality of his failed marriage and his inability to assert his will against his mother or wife, Jameel's mind retreats into a fantasy world where "the enemy is at the gates." This is a defense mechanism against the realization of his own powerlessness. By viewing his madness as a choice (conscious or unconscious), the framework connects his mental state to the pressures of hegemonic masculinity. To maintain continuity with the broader research project, this paper integrates the spatial and aesthetic theories established in my previous scholarship, but applies them through a deliberate inversion. In *The Subjective Turn*, the suitcase was analyzed as a tool of mobility for Seema. In this study, the spatial lens is turned on the men to reveal their immobility. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's concept of the production of space, the methodology examines how the

men are physically and psychologically trapped within the spaces they claim to own. Momin is confined to his parents' bedroom, unable to establish a neolocal residence. Jameel is confined to a wheelchair and a single room. Ameen creates a "surveillance state" with his ring doorbell because he is terrified of boundaries he cannot physically secure. This comparative spatial analysis argues that while the woman moves (via the suitcase), the man remains static (trapped in the house), challenging the traditional notion that men control space while women are confined by it.

Similarly, the study draws on the ecofeminist aesthetics established in *Canvas and Cage*. In that paper, Seema's painting was analyzed as an act of creation ("wild roses"). Here, the framework analyzes the male lack of creativity as sterility. Momin is described metaphorically as a "tin-drum"—loud but hollow. He cannot create art, nor can he create life (he fails sexually and spiritually); he can only mimic his father's words. Jameel's dementia is analyzed as a "failed fiction"—a retreat into a fantasy world because he lacked the aesthetic agency to shape his real one. This lens allows the paper to argue that the crisis of masculinity is fundamentally a crisis of imagination; the men cannot envision a world outside the rigid scripts of patriarchy, and thus they crumble when those scripts fail. By synthesizing Connell's sociology, Freudian psychology, and inverted spatial/aesthetic theory, this framework constructs a model of the "clinical patriarch." This model posits that the oppressive behaviors of the male characters are not signs of their success as men, but symptoms of their failure. The violence, the surveillance, and the eviction are all desperate attempts to maintain a hegemony that has already fractured. This theoretical triangulation provides the necessary rigor to argue that in Haider's novel, the patriarchy is a "house of cards," sustained only by the collective fear of its own collapse.

Analysis and Discussion

The character of Momin Hyderi serves as the novel's primary locus for examining the "crisis of hegemonic masculinity." R.W. Connell posits that hegemonic masculinity is often a fantasy—a standard that few men can actually meet, leading to a state of perpetual anxiety. Haider introduces Momin through a lens of promise: he is the "only son," the heir apparent who has returned from the West to modernize the family legacy. However, the narrative systematically deconstructs this facade to reveal a man who is intellectually hollow, professionally impotent, and sexually insecure. Momin's behavior within the domestic sphere cannot be understood without analyzing his failure in the public sphere. Patriarchy promises men power in exchange for economic competence. Momin, however, fails to secure this competence. Despite his degree from "Wisconsin" (Haider, 2024, p. 53), he finds himself emasculated within his father's factory. The text reveals that "the manager patronized him - listening to his instructions and then ignoring them, just as Ba Jee had probably told him to do" (p.7). This professional invalidation creates a profound psychic wound. Momin confesses to Seema in a rare moment of vulnerability: "I feel I don't belong, you know?" (p.7). He is described as a "marionette" dancing to his father's tune (p.7).

This professional "castration" directly fuels his domestic tyranny. Unable to command respect from his employees or his father, Momin seeks to extract it by force from his wife. His eviction of Seema—throwing her and the suitcase out of the gate—is an act of displacement. He treats the domestic space as a kingdom he can rule solely because he has no authority in the real world. As noted in the study *"The Subjective Turn"*, the home is a "carceral space"; however, this analysis reveals that Momin is as much a prisoner of this space as Seema. He leaves work early, "restless and unsatisfied" (p.7), returning to the safety of his parents' bedroom because he cannot navigate the adult world. He is a "limp rag" (p.7) masquerading as a master. The deepest fracture in Momin's masculinity is located in the bedroom. Hegemonic masculinity demands sexual potency; the patriarch must be a "tiger" in bed. Momin, however, is crippled by performance anxiety. The novel offers a scathing dissection of his wedding night, reversing the traditional gendered script where the woman is terrified and the man is eager. Instead, Seema is eager, and Momin is terrified. When Seema expresses enthusiasm, Momin recoils. He cannot process female desire because it threatens his need for control. The text describes his reaction to her intimacy: "He had taken her praise as an insult - 'I don't need your congratulations every time I ejaculate,' he'd said before flopping off to go wash himself" (p.135). This moment is

pivotal. Seema's praise ("Well done!") unwittingly highlights the performative nature of the act, shattering Momin's fragile ego. He cannot accept his own mediocrity, so he utilizes the Freudian defense mechanism of Projection. He projects his own feelings of inadequacy onto Seema, labeling her desire as "vulgarity." He rewrites the narrative of their sexual failure to blame her, complaining to his father that she is "so unresponsive, so dry it was like scraping his cock against denim" (p. 4). This betrayal of privacy is not an act of power, but of desperation. By dragging his father into the bedroom (metaphorically), Momin admits he cannot manage his wife alone. He retreats to the status of a child seeking parental validation for his adult failures. As Seema astutely observes during the airport confrontation, his anger is predictable and mechanical: "Momin was a geyser... caught in the steady and predictable outbursts of hot air and steam" (p. 205). He generates heat but no light; noise but no substance.

In "*Canvas and Cage*", it was argued that Seema uses art to create a "wild" counter-narrative. In contrast, Momin is defined by aesthetic sterility. He cannot create; he can only critique. He looks at Seema's painting and sees only mess; he looks at her body and sees only flaws, noting her "expanding waist-line" (p. 1) and comparing her thighs to "curdled milk" (p. 53). This inability to see beauty is a symptom of his internal hollowness. He updates his Facebook status to "Free as a Bird" (p. 38) immediately after Seema leaves, performing happiness for a digital audience because he possesses no internal joy. He is the "Tin Drum"—an instrument that makes a loud noise only because it is empty inside. If Momin represents the anxious struggle to become a patriarch, Jameel Khan (Seema's father) represents the tragic failure of being one. Jameel's character arc offers a poignant critique of the "patriarchal bargain"—a concept Deniz Kandiyoti originally applied to women, but which here applies to Jameel's surrender of autonomy in exchange for the safety of social conformity. Jameel kept his side of the bargain, but the authority never materialized. Jameel's crisis of masculinity is rooted in a foundational trauma: the sacrifice of his dream. The text reveals that "Jameel Khan had started life wanting to join the Navy, but his mother had thrown a fit... swallowed a bottle full of sleeping pills" (p. 27). This emotional blackmail forced him into the sedentary, un-heroic life of an accountant. He traded the "seven seas" for a "little desk with ledgers of paper" (p. 27). This sacrifice is the key to understanding his later dementia. As Sartre might argue regarding "Bad Faith," Jameel suppresses his "true self" to fit the "false self" demanded by society (provider/son), resulting in an existential break. Jameel's dementia is not merely a neurological decline; it is a psychological revolt. It is a dissociative fugue. Confronted with a life of drudgery and a wife (Sommaya) who despises him for his infidelity, Jameel's mind snaps. He retreats into a fantasy where he is the Naval officer he was forbidden to be. He sits in his wheelchair but believes he is commanding a warship: "The enemy has been spotted at the horizon. We must contact Naval headquarters" (p. 30). This delusion allows him to reclaim the hegemonic masculinity denied to him in reality. In his mind, he is a protector, a commander, a man of action. In reality, he is "unloved and neglected," fed "watered down soup" by a wife who has "banished him from her life" (p. 71). By analyzing Jameel through this lens, the novel suggests that the pressure to be a "good son" (saving his mother from suicide) destroyed his capacity to be a "real man," leaving him trapped in a hallucination of power while physically impotent.

Jameel also represents the failure of the patriarch to provide the "Sanctuary" promised by the joint family ideal. He failed to protect Seema from her mother's coldness, just as he failed to protect himself. When Seema returns home, hoping for support, she finds him lost in his "battle mode." He asks, "Do I know you?" (p. 30). This lack of recognition is the ultimate failure of fatherhood. However, in a twist of irony, his dementia allows him the only moment of honesty in the book. When Seema wheels him into the drawing room to face the Hyderis, he shouts at Momin: "Are you responsible for this mess?... I am your superior officer!" (p. 36). Though spoken in delusion, it is the only time a male figure challenges Momin's entitlement. Jameel's tragedy is that he can only speak truth to power when he has lost his mind. While Momin is pathetic and Jameel is tragic, Ameen (Muneera's husband) is dangerous. He embodies "Toxic Masculinity"—the use of violence and surveillance to compensate for a terrified ego. Ameen is the "Anxious Patriarch" taken to its violent extreme. Ameen controls Muneera through physical terror. Seema witnesses him "deliver a hard slap on Muneera's cheek and

yank her back inside" (p. 147). He drags her by the hair, leaving a "gash on her head" (p. 149). Conventional readings might interpret this as an assertion of power. However, Masculinity Studies suggests that such violence is often a reaction to fear—specifically, the fear of losing control. Ameen is described as a "narcissist" who "enjoys tormenting his uncle by torturing Muneera" (p. 160). This reveals that his abuse is performative; he uses Muneera's body to send a message to other men (her father). He is not confident in his own status; he needs to degrade his wife to feel superior to her powerful family. His violence is triggered by "male fragility", a concept adapted from DiAngelo, where the slightest challenge to dominance results in defensive aggression. When he feels his dominance is questioned—even by something as small as an unannounced visitor—he lashes out. He breaks Muneera because he fears she is stronger than him. As Seema notes, "He was a monster and she was frail. He could have snapped her into two" (p. 171), yet it is Ameen who is psychologically brittle, needing constant reassurance of his dominance.

Ameen's anxiety is spatially manifested through technology. He installs a "Ring doorbell" and monitors the house remotely. He interrogates Muneera about visitors: "No, no one is here, why do you ask?... Oh, you saw the ring footage?" (Haider, 2024, p. 146). This creates a domestic Panopticon, employing Michel Foucault's concept of permanent visibility to enforce discipline. A confident husband trusts his wife; a paranoid one spies on her. Ameen's need for digital surveillance proves that he does not possess authority (which is granted willingly); he only possesses power (which must be enforced). He is a jailer, not a husband. The environment he creates mirrors the "bonsai trees" he keeps in the house, which Seema observes are "stunted, almost mangled" (p. 145)—living things violently curbed to fit a decorative shelf. He treats his wife exactly as he treats those trees: pruned, contained, and reduced. This surveillance state inverts the "Spatial Autonomy" discussed in my previous paper. While Seema uses the suitcase to expand her world, Ameen uses the camera to shrink Muneera's world. He traps himself in the role of the watchman, forever anxious, forever guarding a gate that he fears will one day open.

Synthesizing the analysis of these three men, it becomes evident that the patriarchal order in *A Woman on a Suitcase* is in a state of terminal collapse. The "Patriarchal Bargain"—the implicit social contract where women trade submission for protection—has been broken by the men themselves. Momin demands submission but provides no emotional or sexual satisfaction. He is a "consumer" of female labor who offers nothing in return but scorn. Jameel demands respect as the head of the house but retreats into childhood, leaving his wife and daughter to fend for themselves. Ameen demands loyalty but offers only terror, turning the home into a war zone. These men are not the "unmoved movers" of tradition. They are "anxious," "fragile," and "performative." They are terrified of the women they claim to rule. Momin is terrified of Seema's sexuality; Ameen is terrified of Muneera's potential independence; Jameel was terrified of his mother's wrath. The novel exposes that the "Cage" of domesticity is maintained not by the strength of the bars, but by the hysteria of the guards. The men utilize the tools of patriarchy—the suitcase eviction, the slap, the silence—not because they are strong, but because they are weak. Seema's ultimate victory at the airport, where she observes Momin with the "vacant eyes" (p. 204) of his new wife and realizes he is just a "geyser," (Haider, 2024, p. 205) is the moment she sees through the performance. His hand grasping his new wife's arm with "bony fingers" (p. 205) is a final image of deathly grip, not loving embrace. She realizes that the "Anxious Patriarch" has no power over her once she stops believing in his myth. The "tin drum" has been punctured, and the noise has finally stopped.

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that in Shazaf Fatima Haider's *A Woman on a Suitcase*, the patriarchal structure is not a monolith of strength, but a façade of profound insecurity. By shifting the critical lens from the female subject to the male object, the analysis reveals that the oppressive behaviors of Momin, Jameel, and Ameen are not expressions of inherent power, but symptoms of a "crisis of hegemonic masculinity." The study concludes that the violence and control exerted by these men are defensive mechanisms—"performative acts" designed to mask their internal hollowness. The paper

identified three distinct typologies of the "anxious patriarch," each representing a different facet of masculine collapse. Momin's tyranny is exposed as a compensation for his professional and sexual impotence. His eviction of Seema is not an assertion of authority, but a tantrum thrown by a man described as a "limp rag". His inability to consummate his marriage without anxiety, followed by his complaint that Seema was "scraping his cock against denim", reveals the lie of the "leonine" masculinity expected of him. Seema's father illustrates the psychological cost of the "patriarchal bargain." Forced to abandon his dreams of the Navy for the drudgery of accountancy, he retreats into dementia. His delusion that "the enemy has been spotted at the horizon" is a tragic attempt to reclaim the agency he surrendered to his mother and wife.

Finally, Ameen represents the paranoid extreme of male fragility. His use of physical violence and the "ring doorbell" surveillance proves that he does not possess authority (which is granted freely) but only power (which must be enforced). He breaks his wife because he is terrified of her potential independence. In "The Subjective Turn" (Bibi et al., 2025), the Suitcase was identified as a tool of female mobility. This paper contrasts that mobility with male *stasis*—Momin is trapped in his parents' home, and Jameel is trapped in his wheelchair. In "Canvas and Cage" (Bibi & Shaheen, 2025), Seema's Painting was identified as an act of creation. This paper contrasts that creativity with male sterility. Momin cannot create; he is a "tin-drum" who can only make noise but lacks substance. Ultimately, Haider's novel suggests that the old patriarchal order is collapsing not merely because women are resisting, but because the men are weak. The "Anxious Patriarch" is a figure of pity as much as terror. When Seema walks away at the airport, observing Momin as a "geyser" of hot air and noting his "bony fingers", she dismantles his power simply by seeing him clearly. The novel posits that the greatest threat to patriarchy is not female rebellion, but the exposure of male fragility. Once the "tin drum" is punctured, the performance ends, and the woman on the suitcase is free to walk away into a world of her own making.

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