

Feminist Perspectives in Durrani's Blasphemy

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Tehmina Durrani is a Pakistani English author, born on 18th February 1953, an Afghan Pathan by descent, and born into an educated and influential family. She is the daughter of the late former Governor of State Bank of Pakistan Shahkur Ullah Durrani and granddaughter of Sir Sikandar Hyat. She wrote her autobiography called 'My Feudal Lord' in 1994, detailing her marriage with Muastafa Khar. The book became an international bestseller and won the Italian Marissa Bellasario prize and was later translated into several languages. Durrani's novel Blasphemy is highest degree of male torture upon women and corrupt religious systems. She tried to depict the picture of the sufferings of women at deeper level in her novels. It is the example of utter surprise where exploitation of men over women in the form of patriarchal system is well-exposed. The aim of this paper is to point out the challenges faced by Muslim societies in general and Muslim women in particular. Throughout it clearly emphasise the men domination on women. Durrani has cited and analyzed the plight of women exploitation by men on the basis of patriarchal cultural concepts constructed around the power of men folk. It brings to scene the unjust ruling of patriarchy which indirectly responsible for the present discriminating state of women. Her novel became a current example of Third World countries; Pakistan women are taken as personal properties and possessions of men, since men control every spheres of lives of women even their movements and behavior. Durrani through her novel challenges religious dogmas and the religious patriarchies interpret the religious scriptures in order to subjugate

women. Women in Pakistan suffer from poverty of opportunities throughout their lives. It is higher in rural than urban areas. Durrani emphasise the corrupt natures of religious leaders and the evils like polygamy, rape and child molestation at heart wrenching level.

Keywords: patriarchy, religious dogmas, torture, personal properties, exploitation, possessions

Tehmina Durrani's third novel Blasphemy is a collection of male domination upon women and corrupt religious practices. Through 'Blasphemy', she tried to depict the picture of the sufferings of women at deeper level in her novels. It is the example of utter surprise where exploitation of women in the hands of men are common picture and they never feel guilty for their heinous act.. Blasphemy is a serious comment on the challenges faced by Muslim societies in general and Muslim women in particular. All the episode of the novel spoke only about the attitude of men towards women, but rare she speaks about any religion. There are some people who exploit and prey on the ignorant people. Conventional rearing conditioned by domineering and patriarchal social environment that existed, forced females to succumb to social attitude, social philosophy, which indoctrinated itself into their being and way of living. Durrani through her novel challenges religious dogmas and the religious patriarchies interpret the religious scriptures in order to subjugate women. Durrani has cited and analyzed to show the plight of women being beaten and exploited by men on the basis of patriarchal cultural concepts constructed

around the power of men folk. It brings to scene the unjust ruling of patriarchy which is indirectly responsible for the present discriminating state of women. Marx and Engels argued that the ruling class oppresses women, relegating them to second-class citizenship in society and within the family:

"The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production." Engels gives to the personal aspects of women's oppression inside the family, including the extreme degradation suffered by women at the hands of their husbands, with a degree of inequality that had been unknown in pre-class societies. Engels called the rise of the nuclear family. "The world history, defeat of the female sex."

Engels explicitly argued that rape and violence against women were built in to the family at its beginning. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced of servitude; she became slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children, in order to make certain of the wife's fidelity and therefore the paternity of his children. She is delivered over unconditionally into the power of the husband; if he kills her, he is only exercising his rights

Her novel become an glaring examples that in third world centuries like Pakistan women are taken as personal properties and possession of men, since men control every spheres of lives of women; even their movements and behavior. The women like Tehmina to fight against male hegemony, patriarchal dominance and Islamic fundamentalism to assert power and control over their own lives.

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her autobiography called 'My Feudal Lord' in 1994, detailing her marriage with Mustafa Khar. The book made up international bestseller and won the Italian Murrissa Bellasario prize and was later translated into several languages.

Her third book Blasphemy (1998) was successful but also controversial. The novel is based on real life account of fraudulent religious feudalism where intensity of horrors imposed by men upon women is clearly depicted. Blasphemy describes various plethora of the humiliation and torture of Muslim women. It emphasizes incest, child abuse, prostitution and pedophilia. In the novel she describes the secret lives of the Muslim clergy and spiritual leaders or pirs.

'No nation can rise to the height of glory unless their women are side by side with them

It is crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners.....(Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Father of Nation)

Women are supposed to play a passive role in society and to live according to the age old norms, which are only for women. As the aftermath of freedom, led to the emergence of Pakistan that ushered in copious unfathomable lesions, as its freedom also entailed to serve umbilical connections. Women at the beginning of the 20th century, the novelist Frank Norns could announce that women may have been writing more fiction than men, but they were not writing better fiction. They lacked the necessary involvement with experience with life itself "the crude, the raw, the vulgar" that was the basis for great and enduring literature. Moreover he insisted that, women lacked the physical and psychological stamina to produce great fiction. They succumbed too easily Women- trafficking is increasing all over the world, especially in South- Asian countries. They are trafficked for variety of reasons for examples, for sex slaves, prostitutes, domestic

slaves, begging slaves and sometimes as trade brides. They are usually exploited by their husbands. Poverty, war, need to survive, rising unemployment in developing countries, increased demand for services in developed countries and the exposure to internet are responsible for women trafficking

Poverty is the main cause of trafficking, survival needs force the young girls and women to leave their homes and even their countries to obtain material gains. Some times the poor parents themselves send their daughters to urban centres without the considering consequences. Trafficking is mostly common in areas having natural disasters and marginalized sections.

Bonded labor is another phenomena in developing countries and has many dimensions of exploitation. This labor practice is common in rural and sometimes in urban areas. The whole family including women and children is bound to provide services to the land lords in rural areas only in return for meals and rent of housing. The whole family work for less wages and get exploited. Women ratio to exploitation is more as they sometimes has to fulfill the demand of sexual service to managers and their employees for their personal privileges. Women and children sometimes also has to suffer from debt bondage.

The status of Pakistani women is determined by fertility and child bearing. She has a low bargaining power, the all important decisions like as marriage, securing painful employment , receiving proper health - care, migration and reproductive behavior are made for her by male member of the family.

Durrani's Blasphemy is disclosure to corrupt religious system of Pakistan. In it she emphasizes the corrupt nature of religious leaders, the evils like polygamy, rape and child molestation at heart wrenching level. My paper aim is to focus on exploring and understanding how the patriarchal Muslim society and the

corrupt religious system spoil the women under the aegis of Holy Quran. Durrani's book unearthed the sufferings of oppressed women in the name of religion . In the 21st century where science has shown us many advancement and technological progress, is it good to still hold the tail of orthodox and superstitious beliefs, where every crime to women or girl rotates somewhere round the world of patriarchy or male domination. Both the novel portrayed the male dominated society where women are subjugated a male world dominating over the female world, overshadowing it and governing it. Surrounded with dominant constructed rules firm enough to be broken, they are governed over by patriarchal power, exploited; undergoing physical and psychological torture to such an extent that they become a silent bearer of pain. How do these women gather strength after being repressed, brutalized but remain silence.

In Blasphemy's Tehmina, through the protagonist Heer, strips off the devilish character of a Holy man. The novel unravels how patriarchy can misuse religion to suppress women within the household as well as outside of the threshold. It is not only Heer to be exploited and violated physically, sexually and mentally by Pir Sain who cannot tolerate the slightest of mistake, neither can bear a word against his action, the actions that are motivated by polygamy, sexual abuse of child and women's torture. In Heer words-

"To me, my husband was my son's murderer. He was also my daughter's molester. A parasite nibbling on the Holy Book, he was Lucifer, holding me by the throat and driving me to sin each and every night. He was the rapist of orphans and the fiend that fed the weak. But over and above all this, he was known to be the man closest to Allah, the one who could reach Him and save." (Durrani 1999, 143)

The book unveils the ugly faces of the people

who sit on the seat to rule. The book is set in South Pakistan and depicts male domination of the highest order, tyranny in its crudest form and religious fundamentalism at its extreme. The lines are very repulsive and the thought of women, even today are subjected to this sort of life, is enough to shake and think about the condition of women in the name of religion. The story of Heer is the real story of all Pakistani traditional- mind houses where mother sell her child in the form of marriage to the man double her age and leave her alone in the world of beasts, in the form of husband. It is an example of those girl who faces such traumatic condition where a small age girl has to accept her partner of her father's age. In "Archives" in an interview she says "The real oppression on women is that they must not speak. And doing something is unconventional as writing a book, makes you into a woman who doesn't have modesty." Durrani's Blasphemy revolves round the central character. Heer-a very beautiful woman married to a religious leader-Pir Sain, when she is barely fifteen, much against her wish. She got trapped in her destiny and she had to marry Pir Sain , the man of God as he has been considered by the community eighteen years or so older than she is. Women in such andocentric society are tended purely to serve the master. She herself suffered at the hands of the dominant power regime and is aware of women's horrible plight in Muslim society. The author wants the reader to feel the agony and pain that women have to bear. The pain and suffering can only be felt when one goes through such experience. Her mother ecstasy knew no bounds and she wonders, "How will I sit with him? What will I say? My Pir is becoming my son-in-law! O God, I could not even dream of sitting on a chair in his presence." (page 26 , Blasphemy).

Heer, of Blasphemy, represents all those innocent girl who were eagerly waiting to fulfil their dreams and desires which they have built by watching many movies and serials. She is an example of those girl whose dream shattered

into pieces because of the Pir Sain like husband. Pir Sain is a true example of patriarchal system or society where the male is only to dominate, molest and exploit the female world. The novel is all about 15 year old girl who is forced to marry a much older man and her subsequent trauma as she undergoes torture and sexual perversion. The holy man ,Pir Sain has already killed his two previous wives of tender age by sexual excesses. Her novels illustratet in third world countries like Pakistan, women are taken as personal properties and possessions of men since men control every sphere of lives of women even their behavior and movements. Men have the right and full command to make decisions for women and women have to follow their decisions in family, tribe, community and society. She is snubbed and ridiculed throughout her life not to shun and go against the social order. Our part of the world gives a greater emphasis on male dominant order. Women have always been made to suffer from disappointment, disillusionment and frustration which arise from social restrictions. Almost every woman faces harsh criticism like that of Durrani, who writes in a courageous manner about the male dominated society as well as by protesting against it. Every woman must learn to confront the contentious tenets which have been considered truths since centuries. Her Blasphemy is a serious comment on the challenge about dying self identity faced by Muslim societies especially by women. It is a blend of fact and fiction, it has been studied as an exposure of the Pakistani Maulanas and shown to the whole world how the Muslim religious ministry exploit the Muslim masses behind the concealment of Islamic religious traditions.

Emotional death is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless and vulnerable in a dangerous world. She has to sacrifice her emotions, desires, identity and education and sometimes even parents also.

The novel is a tragic heart rending tale of the helpless victim.

Tehmina has in her novel revealed to the whole world how this class of religious apparatus indulges in all sensual pleasure behind the peripheral of Islam. Durrani introduces a world of deep seclusion, erotic exploitation and spiritual duplicity. All female characters of the novel have no individual personality for their own self. She describes the secret lives of the Muslim clergy and spiritual leaders. She declares that the story is factual, with some names and events altered to protect the identity of the woman, Tehmina, being an educated woman and from a privileged class milieu dares to break the age-old silence that is expected of every woman in a patriarchal society of Pakistan.

Pakistan, like many other developing countries in the 'Third World' is experiencing rapid economic changes, swept up in the current of globalization. As urban industrial centres become overcrowded, people spend longer hours at work for minimal wages, and an individualistic rather than community based attitude towards life becomes more prevalent.

The marginalization of women's experience in 1947 is baffling considering the systematic way in which they were brutalized by men of the rival Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities. Durrani finds strength in speaking out and has become a source of inspiration to abused and battered women in Pakistan. Durrani has emancipated herself as an individual without sacrificing her faith in her religion Islam and her nation Pakistan.

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