

Subjugation and Marginalization of Women in Taslima Nasrin's "Revenge"

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Abstract: *The present research paper attempts to portray the image of subjugation and marginalization of women in Taslima Nasrin's novel "Revenge" with an emphasis on men's pride, incompatible marriages, and conventional norms of behavior and patriarchal social system as the existent forces to diminish and exploit the women. As a matter of fact, the women have been playing multiple roles, in all societies, as mothers, wives and sisters, governed by patriarchal society but it is a bizarre situation if her role is not recognized and is always seen with despise and doubtful way. The focus of this paper will be on the exploitation, oppression and belittling the importance of its central character Jhumur. Jhumur marries for love with Haroon and has imagined the fantasies will continue much as it did when they were in their courtship period. But everything has been turned against her expectations once she steps in the house of Haroon where she has expected to be a traditional Muslim wife with head covered and averted eyes. Taslima Nasrin here draws the attention of readers toward women's exploitation, discrimination and commodification. The women are treated with double standards. They are never considered as autonomous being. In our society, women are physically abused and exploited instead of showing love, admiration and understanding for their own satisfactions.*

Key Words: *Marginalization, Subjugation, Oppression, Exploitation, Belittling, Patriarchal, Bizarre.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Taslima Nasrin is a prolific writer, physician, feminist, secular humanist and activist. As a Bangladeshi by birth she has faced a forced exile from her native country for her outspoken writing against the oppression and suppression of rights and equality of women and her criticism of Islam. She has started her writing career from a very tender age and till now she has published nearly thirty books of poetry, novels, essays, short stories and memoirs and many of her books have been translated into English language including her famous novel "Revenge". The original title of the novel is "Shodh" in Bangla language. The novel is translated into English language by Honor More who is an award-winning author of many books.

This research paper is devoted to depict the deplorable condition of Jhumur in the hands of her husband Haroon and her In-laws. Before her marriage with Haroon she was an independent girl in her parent's house. She was always free to make her decisions and rarely cares about the way she dresses and eats but everything has changed once she crosses the threshold of Haroon.

Jhumur as a wife of Haroon has been warned by her in-laws that being a woman and bou (daughter in-law) of this house she has to follow the traditional values, code of conduct and certain rituals very strictly. She was not allowed to call her husband behind him whenever he steps out of his house for his duties. "I had been warned never to call after my husband when his back was turned, that doing so was inauspicious, and so I followed the tradition..... So as not to bring him harm". (7) By this one can imagine very easily that it was not only where her rights and equality had been curtailed but simultaneously her emotions as well as her feelings were suppressed. Through this Taslima Nasrin tries to depict that only women are bound to follow all the customs, rituals and traditions. Jhumur becomes the victim in the hands of Haroon and his family under the illusion of love, perfection and marriage. Haroon's patriarchal bent of mind has totally shattered the expectations and happiness of Jhumur. There was a time when Haroon was infatuated and excited of her love before their marriage. He was fond of her beauty and her sense of humor. But after marriage everything has been drastically altered by keeping in mind the sacredness and respect associated with a woman. Know she was not allowed to stand on the balcony and to stare at the people in the street. Her voice has been diminished merely to murmur. Jhumur has released the requirements of married life. She has to remain loyal to her husband and to follow "wifely obligations either in the bed or at the stove". (10) Jhumur started feeling like she is a caged bird and without any hope of getting out of this prison. All her free days seemed to her a distant dream. She couldn't sit freely, move freely or even think freely as she was being strictly trained to forget her earlier identity because she is now married. Haroon's instructions are worth quoting here:

"Why can't you make out the difference? You no

longer carry your old name. You are now Mrs. Haroon Ur Rashid. You are Hasan, Habib and Dolon's bhabhi. Your address was Dhanmundi, not Wari. You can't gad about the whole day; you are the bou of the house". (9)

Her choice of Haroon had been resulted into an unpleasant experience. She felt so dejected that she even started comparing herself with the maid of the house, Rosuni. She felt that there is no difference between the role of their maid and her. Both are on the same position as they both shared the same work. Both of them cook the food on daily basis and it was mandatory for bou to serve the food to whole family herself. Her role has been diminished from a princess to mere a housewife and her character was glorified in such a way that she has to remain inside the house and is expected to be gentle, polite and considerate. The spirit which defines the character of Taslima Nasrin is unflinching against all kind of odds and obstacles in the ways of woman in society. Her personal experience of exploitation and the deplorable status of woman in Bangladesh contribute considerably to the feminist thought. Jhumur is presented in such a way that it seems to be more real story of a neighborhood and not a fictitious one. Jhumur got shocked on the response and gesture of Haroon when she informed him about her pregnancy. Instead of enjoying this good news from the side of Jhumur he blames her by saying that it was not possible to conceive within a month of their marriage. He starts exploiting her both physically and mentally. It was the time when she needs a lot of care, love and support but she was being ignored, tortured and harassed by Haroon. He accused her of her infidelity and carrying someone else's fetus in her womb and that was the reason why she was in hurry to get married, as he says that "it was not possible to get pregnant in six weeks". (62) Instead of taking proper care of both the mother and fetus Haroon forced Jhumur to abort the fetus. This patriarchal mind set of Haroon has totally shattered and suppressed the hopes and voice of an educated Jhumur. Radhika Coomorswamy in her book "Violence against Woman" she asserted that "the refusal to recognized women economic independence and empowerment is one of the main reasons for violence against woman accentuating thereby their vulnerability and abuse". Taslim Nasrin through the character of Jhumur left an indelible mark on a section of society which discriminates with women on the basis of their gender. It is only the women which faces the consequences on both the fronts either to conceive against the will of her mail partner or fails to conceive in spite of her partner's weakness.

This ugly and painful face of society is exposed by Taslima Nasrin through the Character of Jhumur. Her life in the house of Haroon is presented as a woman's everlasting struggle against all the impediments in the way of creating her place and identity in the society. But in spite of her all the tireless efforts she fails to cultivate her identity and belongingness in the family of Haroon and the reason behind this was of a lack of mutual understanding, respect and love towards woman.

Through the story of Jhumur and Haroon, Nasrin lays stress on the need for love, harmony and a little freedom in relations, while before marriage Jhumur and Haroon seem to be a perfect couple, the relationship loses its charm once the self-centered, mistrustful and dogmatic male overtakes the Haroon. Taslima Nasrin examines deeply the deleterious impact that such bitterness in married relationship creates upon the woman worried. Ultimately in order to retaliate herself Jhumur gets close with Afzal, a paying guest in her house, and finally gives birth to a son, marking him as Haroon's son. Haroon loves the baby fervently; thinking him to be his personal son is highly satirical and serves the novelist's purpose of molding a crushing blow to the hegemonic masculine set up where a woman's loyalty is frequently under the shadow of suspicion and doubt thereby imperiling her to physical and mental torment and ache. Jhumur feels contented and doesn't bear any embarrassed feelings about bringing Ananda, her son into the world of Haroon and his family. She sticks to her action and declares: "I took recourse to that to avenge the indignity I suffered. I'm not so insignificant, or of no account, that I'll swallow my utter humiliation in the hands of my husband and remain forever beholden to him." (5) She further says that, "my heart swells with happiness when Haroon cuddles Ananda and calls him Baba". I have doused the fire of suspicion that had raged ferociously in Haroon's heart and left mine charred, with waters from the fountain of joy that has bedewed me from within. (6) There are numerous examples of women's oppression and torture and through ages they have been the prime victims of violence in every communal strife, riots and wars. Dr. Archana Sinha rightly said that "it has been quite distressing experience all over the world that in any conflict, a war, civil strife, communal riots or disturbances women and children became the prime victims of violence". (7) Like Taslima Nasrin some other literary writers have discovered this issue of violence against women in their works. During the disastrous event i.e. the partition of India, women were kidnaped, raped and killed brutally. Therefore, the division and post partition writers like Khushwant Singh, Amrita Pritam, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Amitava Ghosh have depicted the predicament of women and their unbelievable woes in their novels. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is an intense representation of women's wretchedness and brutal slayings while Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* is a revenge representation set into the wake of division. Amrita Pritam has displayed how women

become the principal victim of ferocity and prone to inconceivable distress and embarrassment at the hands of the people belonging to the other community.

Therefore, to conclude, it is appropriate to say that male-controlled system in the society is the root of male hierarchical order where power is enjoyed by them. Micheal Foucault has also supported this concept of power as he has said that power is dominating and imposing its sagacity upon the entirety of the social body and it is rightly connected in the case of Jhumur, where she is forced to get the child aborted because Haroon has power to which Jhumur is subjected and submitted. It has been observed that an association of violence acts upon a body or upon things it forces and results in hurtful and devastating actions. Taslima Nasrin's emphasis is laid upon the severe influence of the abortion on Jhumur i.e. how she becomes unkind and finally succeeds in avenging herself to the best she could do. Hence, it has been experienced generally that "male violence exceeds female violence and exploiters, oppressors give way to the exploited and oppressed to counter violence." (8) The overthrow of Jhumur's voice and her desires forced her to act in a different way which eventually provides her courage to create her own individuality and recuperate her self-esteem and identity besides being a wife, mother, daughter in-law. Jhumur's words are true inspiration for every woman to take a position in order to uphold and preserve her own individuality and reverence. She states that:

"I feel I'm strong. That I am someone, separate and distinct from me as Haroon's wife, Ananda's maa, in-laws Bouma, Dolon, Hasan, Habib's Bhabi...No. I'm Zeenat Sulatana, Jhumur, a teacher. I am not something to be flung away, I'm not a thing, something, anything to add grace to a house, to embellish a family.... Haroon recognizes I won't tolerate his cruelty; that I am no his slave; that I dare. I have remade my own life. I love Haroon without surrendering myself, without doing away with all my aspirations. (9)

Nasrin has expressed her experience regarding violence, exploitation, oppression, subjugation and discrimination of women in the patriarchal society. Examining deep into the psyche of her characters, she explicitly explains the painful impact of violence on the central character by the other family members. Nasrin's novel attempts to make the people conscious of the significance of love, geniality and harmony which is indispensable for the progressive and peaceful life of the human existence.

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