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THE JOURNEY OF SUBJUGATION TO LIBERATION

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ABSTRACT

The conventional perception of gender roles in a socio-cultural setup cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive beings thereby casting women as emotional, irrational, weak, nurturing, and submissive. Therefore, women are expected to fit themselves in this frame, where in every sense they are inferior to men and lose their personal identity. Thus, women remain as mere object or property to men. Taslima Nasrin as well as Qaisra Shahraz on account of their personal experience of the deteriorating status of women in Bangladesh and Pakistan respectively, contributes considerably to the feminist thought. In most of their writings, Nasrin & Shahraz give evidences of their feminist leanings as both of them delineates situations pertaining to subjugation and marginalization of women by men who have patriarchal mind set.

The female characters in *their books* are all compelled to behave as per the patriarchal norms, wherein the writers aim at highlighting the situations of the women who are eager to breakthrough the *cage of patriarchy*.

Taslima Nasrin and Qaisra Shahraz exemplifies the women who breaches the patriarchal code, and are thus maltreated. *Nasrin and Shahraz* deal with several feminist issues. In fact, Nasrin demonstrates the ways how patriarchal mind set challenges individuality and self-respect of women. Both of the female diasporic writers state that whatever they have written is for the oppressed women of Pakistan & Bangladesh. Nasrin further stated that **“she has wrung her heart out into her words”** (*Quiglay* 24). One of the most important feminist issues that have been dealt within the novels is the treatment of women at the hands of various patriarchal institutions like family, society and state, headed by a patriarch who either looks down upon women or marginalizes them.

Keywords: Subjugation, Liberation, Feminism, Patriarchy, Taslima Nasrin, Qaisra Shahraz

Literature Review

Taslima Nasrin

“ Religion is now the first obstacle to women's advancement.”

Taslima Nasrin, an award-winning writer, physician, secular humanist and human rights activist, is known for her powerful writings on women oppression and unflinching criticism of religion, despite forced exile and

multiple fatwas calling for her death. In India, Bangladesh and abroad, Nasrin's fiction, nonfiction, poetry and memoir have topped the best-seller's list.

Nasrin mostly talks about treatment of women as objects of lust, physical and psychological violence. She does the same with tremendous vehemence as she depicts in *Lajja* how women are sexually harassed, abducted and subjected to varied kinds of torture and dominance that may even result in their deaths. The novelist demonstrates how the abduction of Hindu girls has been common in Bangladesh and how the hooligans do not have any kind of fear. Whenever they wished, they would abduct a woman and rape her brutally. That was the reason that most of the Hindus sent their daughters to India for their education and security.

The main objective of Taslima Nasrin focused on the vindictive attitude of men, where they tend to ravish women on the basis of the latter's religious background, and then reducing them by terming them as 'good' or 'bad' according to their suitability gets reflected in the novel. The society depicted in her novels is deeply patriarchal. Here, discrimination on the basis of sex or one's gender identity is a norm. To discriminate, it is necessary to first 'otherise' women. There are innumerable examples of gender discrimination in the novel. Taslima Nasrin's own life narrative stands as an evidence to prove how a woman is discriminated against patriarchy and how attempts are made to choke her voice by those who cannot see women articulating their thoughts and resisting to the injustice done to them by those who are stuck with patriarchal mind set.

Qaisra Shahraz

Most of her works have women as protagonists—women victimised by society, but who fight back with an unyielding spirit. Shahraz's stories reflect the effects of invisible, sometimes unnecessary barriers that human beings tend to build. The issues of *inequality, feminism and the empowerment of Muslim women* feature heavily in her works, as well as the need to bring people together in harmony.

Literature truly depicts life and society to tell stories of the real world and the truths prevailing over there.

Shahraz's works introduce her readers to the *captivating, interwoven* narratives of three dimensional characters whose lives unfold in worlds marked by contradiction and cultural contrast of Patriarchy. She also states similar to Nasrin that It is patriarchy that prevents women from reaching their true potential and creates hurdles for them. QaisraShahraz's Novels portray **the strong female characters in them, and about how she balances patriarchy with feminism. In her books, there is a theme of feminism running side by side with patriarchy in Pakistan. The strong women protagonists conform to the rules set down by men, while having their say at the same time.**

Introduction of the Novels

Lajja

In 1993, the writer Taslima Nasrin created a sensation in her native Bangladesh with *Lajja*, her novel about the travails of a Hindu family in Dhaka in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in faraway Ayodhya in 1992. The author soon confronted torments similar to those facing her characters, as her book was banned for its radical empathy with a minority in her homeland. Targeted by fundamentalists, Nasrin fled her homeland for India, where for many years she has been subject to equivocal and often expedient treatment from various governments, both in the states and at the centre.

Lajja is a moving story of protest, passion, principle and persecution. The novel *Lajja* portrays the horrendous and horrifying experience of a minority family, the Duttas- Sudhamony, Kironmoyee and their two children. Suranjan and Maya have to face so many trials and abuse without any rhyme or reason- just only because of their Hindu identity in Bangladesh. Sudhamoy an atheist, still believed with a native mix of optimism and idealism that his motherland would not let him down.

Amar Meybela

This ground-breaking book throws open a window on a world unknown to most Westerners. Taslima Nasrin revisits her early years — from her auspicious birth on a Muslim holy day to the threshold of womanhood at fourteen — in a small rural village during the years East Pakistan became Bangladesh.

Set against the background of the fight for independence, Nasrin's earliest memories alternate between scenes of *violence* and *flight* and images of innocent pleasures of childhood in her extended family.

A precocious child, Nasrin's acute awareness of the injustice and suffering endured by her mother and other Muslim women cause her to turn away from the *Koran* in early adolescence, and to begin a journey to redefine her world.

Amar Meybela also talks of the sexual abuses she went through during her early adolescence days. And also states that no man can be trusted – specially ones from the *Family* itself.

NarirKono Desh Nai (Women have no Country)

Taslima has always been writing against the patriarchal society and its various norms. The patriarchal system has been oppressing women for centuries. Taslima tries to break the patriarchal society and build a new one where there would be no male domination. *NarirKonodeshnai (Women have no Country)* discusses the following themes.

Thoughts on male

Taslima actually writes against the typical male behaviors that oppresses, discriminates or dishonor women. As most male are behaving like the typical males it is thought that she is against the males. According to her writings she portrays that man always tries to satisfy their own need which is mostly physical sexual need. They never think about whether their partners' needs are satisfied or not. Some men which show morality and ethics are doing so just for show off. Deep inside they are also the same typical men. They do not have the idea of loving one woman for life, but they want to have relationship with many women. Just like traditions of the kings and emperors 'Harems' where the wives of kings and emperors used to live. But if the women want to do so, if they want to have multiple relationship they are thought to be characterless.

Female Body

Female body has always been seen as a satisfying machine for the males in the patriarchal societies. Mostly in the society females are thought to be a sexual object, a product for physical pleasure. In some cases women don't know that she is being oppressed. She can't come out of this circle in the patriarchal society. According to the society norms Men are the one who are allowed to have sexual urges. Women should for bad themselves from having that. Women are there to satisfy the men, not the other way around. She claims these thoughts should be changed. Women must come out of this circles. They have to express their desires as the way those satisfies them. It's her body, she has the right to do what she wants to do with it, not decorate it like the way men like to see it.

Beauty

What is beauty? Who defines what beauty is? In a patriarchal society the way men likes to see it is beauty. One of the best torture of patriarchal society is making women run after becoming 'beautiful'. This should not be the thoughts of beauty. Women should make herself beautiful the way the like to be beautiful, not the way males wants them to be beautiful.

Woman's Will

Women in patriarchal society do not have freewill. They cannot do whatever they want. But they have to do those things that the men want them to do. But women should have the right to practice freewill. Not only women but also every human being should have their freewill.

But what if someone's freewill is to rape someone? Should that freewill be practiced? Of course not. The freewill that hurts someone else should not be categorized as freewill.

Men have freewill in patriarchal society. They can have sex with anyone they like, whether it's secret or knowingly. But women don't enjoy half of the will that men can do. Men's freewill often hurts women. Such as rape, torture etc. Women should have the right to practice freewill. They should get independence to do whatever they like just as males do. Taslima stated that she does whatever she feels right. She practices her freewill, but it doesn't harm anyone. That should be the thought of freewill both for male and female.

Women's Room of Her Own

In a patriarchal society a women cannot live on her own. She has to live with her father, husband brother or any other male member. Even when a women has the financial independence and can afford to live without any male person on her own she doesn't get to do so.

It sums up that this society doesn't let women live alone, to do so the males dominate them. Even when the women manage to afford to live alone the society thinks that is being adamant and often do not let

her do that. She doesn't get a room of her own. A woman is never allowed to be the way she wants, because it hurts the male ego or the patriarchal society.

NarirKono Desh Nai focuses on the struggle a woman faces somehow or the other no matter where she dwells or resides.

The Holy Woman

The book centres on the notion of patriarchy and the fact that its many manifestations, irrespective of caste and class, are aimed at establishing one age-old dictum — that a woman "...is like a ship on a journey, and doesn't know which way she is heading... Like all ships, hers will eventually have to return to its harbour" (page 508). And the much cherished harbour is the husband and family.

Qaisra Shahraz's *The Holy Woman* (2002), belongs to the trends of Pakistani fiction in English which depicts the inhuman treatment meted to women in the society. It is an example which shows similar trends pertaining to women and feminism in Pakistan. ZarriBano and her mother Shahzada are among the chief characters. ZarriBano is forced by her father to become a 'holy woman' to protect the land and honour of the family. ZarriBano sacrifices all she had in her life including her love and freedom. She becomes a 'holy woman' to challenge this custom and fulfills its requirements but ultimately wins in defeating the myth of the custom. Not only ZarriBano but also Firdous, Kaneez, and Shahzada undergo similar kinds of circumstances. This is Shahraz' particular way: to show common women how they can learn from the lives of rich women and change their lives for the better.

Revolt

At the centre of this story are Gulbahar, Rani and Mehreen, three wealthy sisters who live by traditional values. Their dress is expensive but modest and they confine themselves to the women's quarters of their homes, the only men they meet without a chaperone being their husbands and sons. But, one of the lessons of this novel is that families sending their children to the city or overseas to be educated, should not expect them to return with their values unchanged. Problems arise as the younger generation casts off the accepted etiquette of arranged marriage; Gulbahar's family has already been torn apart by the actions of her daughter and there's more trouble when Mehreen's son flies in from England to marry his cousin, a secret already in tow.

This division between eastern and western values is reflected in more humble village families too. *Revolt* is viewed largely from a female perspective. Dialogue is not 'said' but 'scoffed', which initially seems intrusive. But then, flying through the pages, readers are absorbed by the feeling of the struggle a woman that she faces if she raises her voice.

Revolt focuses upon the domestic oppression that the younger generation face due to uncertain faiths on blind religious beliefs and the customs of arrange marriage. This novel raises fundamental questions about women rights.

Fated to Love

Should She Choose Her Father S Legacy Or Listen To Her Heart?

ZarriBano is the glamorous twenty-eight-year-old daughter of a wealthy Muslim landowner, Habib Khan. She falls in love with Sikander, a business tycoon and plans to marry him, but her father takes an instant, irrational dislike to Sikander and vetoes the match. When his only son is killed in a freak riding accident, Habib Khan decides to make ZarriBano his heiress, resurrecting an ancient tradition which decrees that an heiress must remain celibate. ZarriBano is thus forced into marriage to the Holy Koran and becomes her clan's 'Holy Woman'.

This Novel focuses on the dilemmas of a Woman which she faces when she has to choose between society and her own desires. She gets oppressed by her closed ones yet still society refuses to give her the desired freedom to live her life on her own terms.

Conclusion

In the referred Novels, both Taslima Nasrin & Qaisra Shahraz has highlighted the sufferings of women and the response to these oppressions.

While receiving the prestigious Simone de Beauvoir prize, Nasrin averred: "I have written on the need women have to understand why they are oppressed and why they should struggle against that oppression"

These selected novels of Shahraz & Nasrin exemplify the issue of gendered self-representation and feminist concerns. Reading these novels make readers realize not only the diversity of women but the diversity within each woman.

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