



Aggression and Women: Shodh, A Story of Woman's Retaliation by Taslima Nasrin

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Abstract : *Violence is a prominent issue in today's world as the world has seen two world wars and numerous civil wars in one or the other country which become a reason of devastation all over the world. The theme which resolves the mind of the writer in the novel Shodh is gender bias which eventually results in revenge. Being herself a victim of the patriarchal structures Taslima Nasrin has seen things very closely that how women are given the role of subordinate where they cannot, in any way assert their right to freedom, right to equality. The most controversial novelist, Taslima Nasrin shodh clearly reveals that she believes in the theory of "art for life sake". Not art for art's sake. She writes with a purpose and gender this purpose is to oppose and fight against injustice, oppression and gender bias. An attempt has been made in the paper to analyze different dimensions of violence and their impact on the female protagonist Jhumur who eventually takes a stand for establishing her own identity in the patriarchal set up.*

Keywords: Transfiguration; Oppressed; Violence; Maltreatment.

Taslima Nasrin does not write to entertain the idle reader, instead she writes with a purpose and this purpose is to oppose and fight against injustice, oppression and gender bias. She became a voice of the marginalized and the victims who endeavour to survive in the cult of violence and anonymous authority which is probably be named as social, religious or patriarchal. The theme which preoccupies the mind of the writer in the novel Shodh is gender bias which eventually results in revenge. Being herself a victim of the patriarchal structures she has seen things very closely that how women are given the role of a subordinate where they cannot, in anyway, assert their right to freedom, right to a healthy life and right to equality. Moreover this issue obsesses Nasrin's mind so

much that in almost each of her novels she takes up this theme either directly or indirectly. Eventually, it is obvious to say that a woman is the subordinate and man is the other who has all the rights to oppress, subjugate and violate therefore, a woman becomes the victim of violence. It is important to understand the concept of violence which is enforced most frequently now and then by their male counterparts or the other. Violence can be of mental or physical nature, inflicted at subjected, interpersonal or collective levels in the social, political, religious or domestic domain. Usually women have been the greatest sufferers in domestic violence and that is a major problem in the society of every nation. Violence against women is an "act of gender based violence that

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results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or sufferings to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty of her occurring in public or private life.

Shodh is a story of revenge, dealing with a young woman Jhumur who is an educated girl and marries the man whom she loves. She breaks the news of her pregnancy to her husband, Haroon hoping to make him happy but to her utter dismay he accuses her of cheating on him by saying that it was not easy to conceive in six weeks and he puts an allegation that she wanted to get married to him hurriedly because she was carrying someone else's seed in her womb as he says, "...it's not possible to become pregnant in six weeks. He forces her to get the child aborted which casts a deep psychological impact on Jhumur, so that she becomes vindictive and decides to avenge herself. In spite of being an educated, courageous and open minded woman her voice in the house-hold matters is suppressed. Radhika Coomraswamy says in her book *Violence Against Women*, "the refusal to recognize women's economic independence and empowerment is one of the main reasons for violence against women, accentuating thereby, their vulnerability and abuse. Similarly, Jhumur whose independence, dreams of happiness in marriage and child bearing are shattered when her husband Haroon forced her to abort her first offspring. This left a menacing and dark impact on her psyche which was impossible to heal. Usually in the patriarchal society it has been witnessed that "women are terrorized and even killed for being unable to produce a male child.

Parental preference for son gives rise to female foeticide. On the contrary Jhumur's case is entirely different but the irony occurs when she conceives early and is accused of carrying some other man's child in her womb. This allegation and mental wound kills her spirit to live and shatters all her preconceived notions. Thus, through the character of Jhumur, Taslima Nasrin exposes the ugly face of sophisticated elites of society and who under the cover of material well being rob their women's happiness and mental peace. Nasrin lays emphasis on a woman's perpetual struggle against all odds to create a niche for herself. Jhumur cannot cultivate a sense of belongingness to the home of her husband, Haroon because there is lack of love, harmony, mental peace and mutual understanding.

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 egocentric, suspicious and chauvinistic male supersedes the lover Haroon. Nasrin very closely examines the negative impact that such disharmony in married relationship creates upon the woman concerned. Eventually in order to avenge herself Jhumur gets intimate with Afzal, a paying guest in her house, and finally gives birth to a son, labelling him as Haroon's son. Haroon's loving of the baby ardently, thinking him to be his own son is highly ironical and serves the novelist's purpose of casting a shattering blow to the hegemonic patriarchal set up where a woman's fidelity is constantly under the shadow of suspicion and doubt thereby

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subjecting her to physical and mental anguish and pain. Jhumur feels happy and doesn't harbor any guilty feelings about bringing Ananda, her son into the world of Haroon and his family. She adheres to her action and says:

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." She goes on to say, "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.

Children are orphaned and women are not only widowed but also become victims of rape." Like Taslima Nasrin some other literary writers have explored this issue of violence against women in their works. During the cataclysmic event i.e. the partition of India, women were abducted, raped and killed brutally. Therefore, the partition and post partition writers like Khushwant Singh, Amrita Pritam, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Amitava Ghosh have portrayed the plight of women and their unimaginable sufferings in their novels. Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan is a vivid portrayal of women's misery and savage killings whereas Amrita Pritam's Pinjar is a revenge story set in the wake of partition. Pritam has shown how women become the prime victim of violence and prone to unimaginable torture and humiliation at the

hands of the people belonging to the other community.

The story reminded me of one of Amrita Pritam's short stories where the maid sleeps with the groom to avenge all insults. The maid and the daughter of the house are of the same age. They grow together but the daughter never forgets to remind the maid of her lower status. On the wedding night amidst all hustle bustle the maid slips into the groom's room. All her life she has been eating the leftover of the daughter of the house. Now it is the daughter's turn to taste the leftover husband. And if I remember correctly the name of the story is Joothan (left over). These are chilling tales of the revenge of the female. Whether one finds them of good taste or not depends on the personal inclination of the reader.

But then these cunning mechanisms devoid of any ethical obligation have always been part and parcel of women's world. Why? Getting even with the family and establishing superiority have always been important to women. To inquire as to why it is so we will have to turn to the phenomena of female subjugation. Anthropologically speaking, the female of the species has a better survival instinct. Her instinct for a suitable mating partner is sharper than the male because she has been entrusted by Nature with the task of carrying the race forward. This very basic fact generates a sense of insecurity, jealousy, and doubt in men. The woman is not only a mother figure but also a potential threat to masculinity. She is capable of betraying and therefore of destroying the ego of a

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man. Most men in India believe in this cunning intelligence of a woman. A simple explanation follows that all this purdah system, house-imprisonment sort of living arrangement, escorting while moving out and various other restrictions imposed on women are an expression of this basic distrust.

A woman in her isolation in a house develops the tools to survive, to live, breathe, create and recreate. The passage to her dreams goes through the men in her family. There is no direct access to life. Ethics or no ethics, religion or no religion, she has to withstand life. Also, the women unconsciously accept the male view of themselves. It is interesting to watch how women through centuries of practice develop a male view of themselves. Simon de Beauvoir says, 'It follows that woman sees herself and makes her choices not in accordance with her true nature in itself, but as man defines her.'

She accepts the role of a woman as the prime mover in family politics. Victimization on one hand and revenge within the four walls of home on the other are the two poles between which the narrative of 'Shodh' moves.

'Lajja' can be compared to taslima's "shodh" portrays a young girl played by Madhuri Dixit. She is carrying the baby of her lover. Both work in a roadside drama company. Finally the chap doubts whether the baby is HIS own or not and refuses to marry the pregnant beloved. Madhuri is broken. As the evening deepens, Ramaleela begins. The guy plays Rama and Madhuri, Sita. Rama asks Sita to go through the fire to prove her chastity. Sita refuses to comply. She says that she has been made a victim of character assassination that

Rama should also go through the fire test as he too has been away from her for an equal number of days, that if she could have gone on the wrong path, so could have Rama. Ramaleela goes haywire. Madhuri decides to go on with her pregnant status. The movie, though somewhat crude, presents a more acceptable form of defiance than what Jhumur does. The answer to male distrust should be more direct and open. Anyway I cannot change the text of the novel.

'Shodh' is said to be having autobiographical elements, If so, we have all sympathy for Taslima. In fact, bitter experiences produce bitter feminists. But then a thinking mind has to decide how far it can allow the negative side of life to dictate thinking. Jhumur turns all her qualifications, her education, her exposure against her happiness, against her own self. She declares, 'Wives and daughters! Pay heed! Academic skills don't count with the in-law.'

Taslima condemns the sense of settlement in marriage. According to her one should not take the partner for granted. In effect it implies that the partner should always be kept on toes, tense and worried. There should be no mental peace. Similarly she compares the condition of Jhumur with that of the maid, Rosuni and comes to the conclusion, 'In a sense Rosuni, the maid of the house and I, the bou, were in the same boat. Rosuni cooked so did I; she tidied the rooms, I did as well. But at times I felt Rosuni was the luckier one. She could lift her veil whenever she pleased. I had to keep my head covered, whether I liked it or not.'

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Taslima also has problems regarding the custom of touching feet of elders of the family. The old tradition of not calling one's husband by name (which feels so romantically ticklish to our present sensibilities) irritates Taslima. She is, in fact, infuriated, 'So I stopped calling him Haroon and can't bring myself to refer to him by name even to this day my throat had become voiceless.'

When we look at the revenge of Jhumur, a new face of womanhood is exposed. Jhumur cheats her husband so calculatingly. It is absolutely freezing. At the end, the same cruel husband who got her aborted, starts looking like a buffoon. She reduces him to be a puppet in the hands of her cunning ploys. Taslima writes, 'I made up my mind to be pregnant with Afzal. I didn't want to offer Haroon a body ready to receive his sperm. I wanted him to sow his seed in fallow land and wait foolishly, a day after day, to see it sprout. I didn't have any sense of guilt about it. I wasn't a loose woman. I wasn't deceiving him. I was merely paying him back.'

Thus to conclude, it is apt to say that patriarchal system in the society is the root of male hierarchical order where power is enjoyed by them only and as violence accompanies power-it does nothing except giving torture to a person who is powerless. Foucault has also supported this concept of power as he has said that power is dominating and imposing its rationality upon the totality of the social body and it is aptly associated in the case of Jhumur, where she is compelled to get the child aborted because Haroon has power to which Jhumur is subjected and surrendered. It has been witnessed that a relationship of violence acts

upon a body or upon things it forces and results in harmful and devastating actions. Nasrin's focus is laid upon the drastic impact of the abortion case on Jhumur i.e. how she becomes vindictive and eventually succeeds in avenging herself to the best she could do. Hence, it has been experienced universally that "male violence exceeds female violence and exploiters, oppressors give way to the exploited and oppressed to counter violence. The suppression of Jhumur's voice and her desires compelled her to act in a diverse form which ultimately gives her courage to establish her own identity and regain her self respect and individuality besides being a wife, mother, daughter in law. Jhumur's words are actually motivating for every woman to take a stand in order to maintain her own individuality and respect.

I feel I'm strong. That I am someone, separate and distinct from me as Haroon's wife, Ananda's ma, Ma-in-law's 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.

Thus Nasrin has expressed her experience regarding violence, exploitation, oppression, subjugation and discrimination of women in the patriarchal society.

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