



Amalgamation of Pain and Passion in Anna Quindlen's *Black and Blue*

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Abstract

The paper highlights the struggle of women in the patriarchal society as seen in the novel Black and Blue written by Anna Quindlen. Anna Quindlen is an American author and journalist whose writings were always related to women and their importance in family and society. She has won the Pulitzer Prize for her commentary on Public and Private in 1992. Anna Quindlen has written eight bestselling novels in which three are made into movies.

Black and Blue is the third novel by Anna Quindlen which was published in the year 1998. The novel is about the survival of a young woman, Fran Benedetto who bears the bruises given by her husband, Bobby and takes a bold decision of leaving him just for the sake of her son, Robert. She shifts to a new place as Beth Crenshaw where is in search of her own identity. Thus the novel is a feministic work as well as a work that emphasis on the need of identity for a woman.

The paper focuses on the ill treatment of women by their own partners. It highlights how women undergo violence both mentally and physically and bear all the bruises in their body. Though they are beaten up black and blue they still strive to survive in this male dominant society for the upliftment of their family.

Key Words: Violence, Suffering, Patriarchy and Oppression.

Listen to the Women For women no longer search for a space To be heard: they are lowly Creating new spaces.

Women in literature play a vital role in defining their status in the society. Though society is an integral unit of people, it always treats women as 'other'. As Simon de Beauvoir states, "Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being... She is defined and differentiated with reference to men and not he with reference to her, she is the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (16). Therefore, to change this situation, she started to put all her emotions and sufferings in papers through her pen. They did not wish to imitate their counterparts but could not escape the changing times. They wanted some solutions for all the atrocities they face and the only solution for them was to write. Women no more remained behind the "purdah". They did not wish to go against men or the norms of the society but they just wanted a good rapport and relationship between men and women where both live with mutual understanding and trust.

According to the Holy Bible, God created man from the dust of the ground but he created women from the rib of the man so that she is not behind or ahead to a man but equal to him. But the patriarchal society has changed this completely where man have an upper hand on

woman and the even the spokesman of male chauvinism are not prepared to accept this picture of woman. They always expect a woman to be tolerant and digest all the ill treatment given to them. They fail to realize that like those people even women are made of blood and flesh. Thus to make these men realize the above fact, women held their pens as a weapon to fight and to defend themselves. Their writing has questioned the patriarchal writing that already exists. This also made them to create their own world.

Similarly, so many women have taken to read women's writing because it gives them a sense of self identity and also to identify themselves with the range of characters and a variety of existence. The major point that strikes the reader is the fact that, while man is free to follow their own ways and individuation; woman is tied to responsibilities as a moral and psychological imperative.

The patriarchal dominancy of women cannot be confined to one particular country since it is same all over the world. Women are being oppressed and subjugated to various kinds of abuses irrespective of class and color. They are confined to the four walls where the men defined her status and showed authority on her. Lord Tennyson in his poem *The Princess*, draws a true picture of the status of women in the society. He says,

Man for the field and women for
the hearth:

Man for the sword and for the
needle she:

Man with head and woman with
the heart:

Man to command and woman to
obey;

All else confusion. (427-
431)

God has bifurcated sex into male and female whereas man has named it sex and "weaker" sex. The gender inequality has created an unlawful authority of men over women. Women were confined to domesticity and were treated as an object of pleasure. Their sole responsibility is to look after the family. And this authority has made women to be a mere servant of the patriarchal world. Their chief task was child bearing, rearing and to fulfill all the desires of the men in the family. If the women failed to do so then they were harassed physically and mentally. They are even beaten-up to death. There are many cases where even if the women fulfill all their duties and responsibilities they are beaten up black and blue.

The prime motive for the protest of women was against domestic violence. Therefore Feminism is not only about equality and rights of a woman but it is all about compassion, respect and understanding from the male counterparts. For centuries women has been subjugated to various evils but now with rising self-consciousness these tribulations are brought to limelight and there seems to be a strong will power to crack all the cuffs of stale tradition.



Women writers have explored the stance of male chauvinism and the atrocities committed against women. They discussed the theme of domestic violence, sexual abuse and many other issues in their writings. Anna Quindlen, is one among these women writers who mainly focused on the suffering of women and how it could change their life.

Anna Quindlen, Pulitzer Prize winner, is an American author and journalist who is born on July 8, 1952 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She was primarily a journalist but then in 1995 she left journalism and devoted herself completely in becoming a novelist. But she won the Pulitzer Prize for her commentary on *Public and Private* in 1992. Quindlen has written eight bestselling novels in which three are made into movies. She has also written children's books and many articles. She, at present lives in New York city with her husband and three children.

Anna Quindlen mainly focuses on women and the treatment given to them in the family. She vividly picturizes the pain and the sufferings of women which makes them strong to live all alone in the society. As said in Kirkus review, Anna Quindlen, "writes about women as they are- nether helpless victims nor angry polemicists, but intelligent human brings struggling to do what's right for those they love and for themselves".

Women are self-less beings. They are sentimental, emotional, caring, loving and so on. They do anything and everything for the well-being of their family especially when it comes to their children. *Black and Blue* (1998), is one such work of Anna Quindlen that describes the pain and suffering of a woman. She becomes

weak on being a wife but when it comes to her son she emerges as a super woman and breaks all the norms of the patriarchy.

Fran Benedetto is the protagonist of the novel who has been shattered by her husband, Bobby for eighteen years. She hides all her bruises from her other family members and also from her own son, Robert. But one day everything comes to light and seeing the fear in her son's eye she decides to leave Bobby forever. Though she loved Bobby in spite of everything that he done to her, her love for Robert made her leave him. Women usually never cry out their pain to others and Fran was best in it. She has been tolerating Bobby for eighteen years just because she wanted her son to have a father, and she loved him so much.

Love is the only thing that makes a woman goes weak. Fran's love for her husband made her to live with him in spite of all the bruises that he gave. And the love for her son made her to leave her husband forever. In any point of time she did not think about her own well being. This sacrificing nature of women allows men to take advantage over them. Fran leaves her husband and moves to a new place with a new name and a new identity. She changes her name as Beth Crenshaw and begins a new life there but still with the fear that one day or other Bobby will find them. Though she is in a new place she is not able to forget the days she spent had with Bobby. Each time she thinks about him she remembers how he would whisper her name, "Frannie, Frannie, Fran..." before he strikes her.

Fran becomes so much used to the blows of her husband. She says, "If it hadn't been my

nose on a Wednesday in late July, it would have been my jaw on a Saturday in September. I suppose that's true. I like a cloud to a storm to a hurricane the thing between us had gotten bigger and blacker every day, until maybe it was bound to pick us up, smash us down, leave us all in ruins."(161) But the pain and bruises that Bobby left in her body made her more and more strong to face the creepy world.

It is not only about Fran Benedetto, but there is also another strong character in the novel who emerges as a super woman in the society. Patty Bancroft is one more important character in the novel who is also harassed physically by her husband who was a banker. She was beaten to the extent that her complete face was rebuilt by the plastic surgeons. Dobash in his essay *Violence Against Wives* rightly states that the patriarchal assert that, "... man who assault their wives are actually living up to cultural prescriptions that are cherished in western society- aggressive, male dominance, and female subordination- and they are using physical force as a means to enforce that dominance" (24). So just to show the world that women are under their control these men force themselves on her. But all these behavior of men cannot shake women completely.

In spite of all the torments that she underwent Patty Bancroft did not give up on her life. She also leaves her husband and becomes a torch bearer for many women who have been shattered by domestic violence. She had a separate group working for her to safe guard the suffering women who leave their husbands. She

is the one who helps Fran to settle in a different place. She supported and encouraged the suffering women to face the world with heads high.

The two characters from the novel show that women are no longer slaves or servants to men. Though the Manu Smiriti says, "in childhood a woman should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's and when her husband is dead, under her sons, she should not have independence..." (77), when the violence is unbearable she need not withstand and live there instead she can take an independent step and leave her dominating husband. And nowadays women are not dependent on men since they are well educated and they also become the bread winners of the family.

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