

Literature of (not) Their Own: a Study of *Shame*

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Abstract

Elaine Showalter wrote *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Bronte To Lessing* in which she discussed how the literature of women writers is their own. This paper aims to show how the literature produced by women writers in general and Taslima Nasrin in particular is not their own and they are writing from someone else's point of view. Nasrin herself claimed that her novel *Shame* was going to be about the rape and suffering of women and for this she has created women characters – Parveen, a Muslim woman, Ratna and Nilanjana (Maya), Kironmoyee, Hindu women and a Muslim prostitute, Shamima Akthar. Out of these five women two are raped. The paper emphasizes that it is important for a woman writer not to write a feminist novel but to create women characters from her own point of view.

Keywords

Gendered subaltern narrative, Andro-centric, Female tokenism, Culture's boundaries, Invaded woman's body

In February 1993, Taslima Nasrin published a novel titled *Shame*. This novel immediately sparked a controversy. In an interview in a Calcutta newspaper, *Ajkal Kgoj* (1994), Nasrin said that in *Shame* she had attempted to write a “factual novel” - that she got all the information about communal violence against Bangladeshi Hindus and Muslim men raping Hindu women from actual newspaper stories and then created the characters and fictionalized the narrative (quoted in S. M. Shamsul Alam). Nasrin had to flee her country, Bangladesh, in 1994 after Islamic fanatics took to the streets demanding the death penalty for her because she had recorded the plight of Hindus after the demolition of Babri Masjid in her slim novel, *Shame*. Her call for reforms in Islam and increasing popularity among Bangladeshi women had further angered the mullahs. Immediately after Nasrin was hounded out of her country following the controversial *Shame*, Annadashankar Roy, the revered thinker and writer, had told her, “Keep writing about women’s emancipation; that’s not against Islam”. After looking how others took this novel it is required to see how she herself looked at this novel. According to her own claim this novel is going to be about the rape and suffering of women and for this she has created women characters – Parveen, a Muslim woman, Ratna and Nilanjana (Maya), Kironmoyee, Hindu women and a Muslim prostitute, Shamima Akthar. Out of these five women two are raped, even in the case of Parveen her physical relationship with her husband can also be treated as rape because she is in love with Suranjan all the time but still the sufferings of male characters and communal riots form the central theme of the novel confessed by the writer herself “*Shame* protests religious conspiracy and fundamentalism. When religion becomes more important than humanity, then I feel responsibility to protest... [Shame] is a protest, a protest of Suranjan’s decadence, his failures and his rape.” (Nasrin, quoted in Yasmin 1994, 113). Now it can be said that it is not necessary for a woman writer to write a feminist novel. But the women characters created by the novelist demand elaboration that will make it a feminist novel. Her writings including this novel are described in Bangladesh by her detractors in a manner of astonishingly simplistic caricature. According to them “She advocates free sex and open marriage. A woman should be allowed to have as many as four husbands... Religion is a great oppressor and should be abolished” (Anderson 1993, 3). But we should not forget that the argument picked up by Anderson was forwarded by religious fundamentalists of Bangladesh supported by political compulsions of the trouble ridden nation state. This novel sold over 60, 000 copies in the five months before it was banned and a fatwa issued against its writer’s life. The book was banned on grounds that it disturbs communal peace. The sale of this book shows that general public was interested in the subject matter of this novel. And when people are interested in any progressive novel it means that there is some hope. If she had shown some hope it would have been better because this type of creation brings in all positive powers together and people get something to imitate. Otherwise when a writer just only questions or depicts some situation then the debate is confined to whether the questioning/ depiction are genuine or not. The reader doesn’t get the idea how to think or react in a particular situation. The argument that *Shame* is not a feminist novel is rooted in the assumption that if you are writing a novel about rape you must give voice to the victim, but in this novel only the victimizers are vocal. Undoubtedly it shows that women are oppressed in the society of Bangladesh but it doesn’t provide any voice to the

victims and furthermore the authorial comment go against woman characters that renders it a failure in case of the woman characters.

Before going into the details of the argument why this novel is not a feminist novel it is necessary to understand the function of literature, which is considered a “life substitute”, a means of putting people in a state of equilibrium with the surrounding world that is why different societies in different ages produce different kind of literature, to maintain equilibrium with the ever changing outer world. Applying this theory S. M. Shamsul Alam puts the entire Nasrin affair into a broad historical and political context and “explains Nasrin’s writings as a possible *gendered subaltern narrative* within the context of debate between Islamic fundamentalism and modernity” (Alam 1998, 430). But according to me she fails in this project because works of art and literature construct some possible self in the individual auditor or the collective audience, by changing emotional content of consciousness and by enabling them to react more subtly and deeply to the world, and *Shame* fails in these terms. Works of art and literature do not merely reflect the world, rather they construct it, and therefore they fall under the category of literature of power. There is a power politics that shapes all works of art as S. S. Praver says:

Literature too, it might be thought, should be looked at, not as an inertly faithful reflection of something outside of a ‘material’ reality, but as a union of the objective with the subjective, of a world apprehended through the senses with a particular cast of mind, temperament and character (Praver 1976, 103).

Shame in the words of the author herself is “an inertly faithful reflection” of the communal riots. But it does not apprehend and create the world through the senses with a particular cast of mind, temperament and character that is why her woman characters are flat characters. When it comes to works of many of the women writers, where they do not create strong woman protagonist, their “cast of mind, temperament and character” in many cases is determined by the pre-existing rhetoric of expression propagated and maintained by andro-centric mode of artistic creation. In the name of high art they are made to follow the concept of negative capability. This apprenticeship in negative capability results in self-hatred and self-doubt as Showalter says:

Women are estranged from their own experiences and unable to perceive its shape and authenticity. They are expected to identify as readers with a masculine experience and perspective, which is presented as the human one.... Since they have no faith in the validity of their own perceptions and experiences, rarely seeing them confirmed in literature (Showalter 1971, 856-57).

Taslina Nasrin’s portrayal of women characters in *Shame* confirms this observation. She does not rely on her own perceptions and experiences as a woman who is also a feminist rather she identifies herself with masculine experiences and perceptive and present them as if they are universal one. Therefore it will not be wrong to say as far as this novel is concerned that she belongs to the category of woman writers who “do someone else’s-man’s-writing, and in their innocence sustain it and give it voice, and end up producing writing that’s in effect masculine.” (Kuhun 1981, 52). The women writers or only

those works of women writers that confirm to the patriarchal ideology are popularized and highlighted by using various methods such as public discussions, criticism, raising controversies etc. for example Taslima Nasrin's poetry where she takes strong feminist position is not popularized. On the other hand the works that do not confirm to or strengthen the patriarchal system are obscured and forgotten. This situation is described as "female tokenism" by Adrienne Rich when she says:

There's false power which masculine society offers to a few women who "think like man" on condition that they use it to maintain things as they are. This is the meaning of female tokenism; that power withheld from the vast majority of women is offered to few, so that it may appear that any truly qualified woman can gain access to leadership, recognition and reward: hence that justice based on merits actually prevails. The token women is encouraged to see herself as different from most other women, as exceptionally talented and deserving; and to separate herself from the wider female condition; and she is perceived by "Ordinary" women as separate also: perhaps even as stronger than themselves (Rich quoted in Spivak 1988, 106-07).

Many women writers fall prey to this politics of appropriation. These writers consider themselves more enlightened and the male dominated literary market projects them as leading representatives of women's voices. Women readers also pick up their books to find reflections of their own muted voices. But these books have none; they misled women readers by entrapping them further into the andro-centric ideology. Therefore if a woman writer wants to represent the muted voices of women, then the advice given by Showalter can be of great help to her:

Before the woman writer can journey through the looking glass toward literary autonomy...she must come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass, with, that is, those mythic masks male artists have fastened over her human face both to lessen their dread of her "inconstancy" and by identifying her with the "eternal types" they have themselves invented to possess her more thoroughly. Specifically, as we will try to show here, a woman writer must examine, assimilate, and transcend the extreme images of "angel" and "monster" which male authors have generated for her (Woolf 1942, 236).

In the portrayal of women characters, Taslima Nasrin fails to come out of the extreme images of "angel" and "monster" because she portrays them following the andro-centric ideology without placing herself into the position of the women characters. She does not let her female characters speak, it is either the male characters or the writer herself who comments on them, and in both cases the point of view adopted is male-centric. Now two questions arise, first is it necessary for a woman writer to take feministic position, second how Taslima Nasrin hampers the development of woman centric discourse by not taking feministic point of view. To understand this problem it is necessary to know the relationship between culture and literature because;

To create a new understanding of our literature is to make possible a new effect of that literature on us. And to make possible a new effect is in turn to provide the conditions for changing the culture that the literature reflects. To expose and question that complex of ideas and mythologies about women and men which exist in our society and are confirmed in our literature is to make the system of power embodied in the literature open not only to discussion but even to change (Fetterley 1978, 566).

Taslina Nasrin though exposes and questions “the complex of ideas and mythologies about women and men” she does not create new ideas that can be confirmed through literature. On the other hand like the society and government of Bangladesh she treats the raped women as a victim of circumstances and keeps them flat characters as if she is writing for some newspaper. That is why when a woman reader takes this novel she finds nothing for herself except if she is ignorant of riots. The novel raises so many hopes in a woman reader but shatters them because she cannot find any hope, aspiration, ambition and individuality reflected in this novel.

Analysis of women characters will reveal how they are portrayed to suit the patriarchal society. There are five woman characters: Maya, Kironmoyee, Shamima, Parveen and Ratna. All these women are portrayed as mentally passive, even the riots do not break their passivity, they merely suffer, remain busy in routine life, never think about social, religious and political problems of the day, as if they were robots that are made to follow the instructions of their male masters, despite the fact that their creator has all these qualities. This novel projects that women in Muslim countries are too weak to think but it is a misrepresentation because the writer, the Prime Minister and the Leader of Opposition in Bangladesh all are women. This misrepresentation helps both the fundamentalist groups and patriarchal system because it does not set an example before the women readers to assert their individuality.

Traditionally women are considered as object of exchange for solidifying social ties. This business of social exchange denies subject hood to women, they have no say in the matters related to matrimony:

The exchange of women articulates the culture’s boundaries; the woman’s hymen serving as the physical or sexual sign for the limen or wall defining the city’s limits... the woman’s chastity is surrounded by prohibitions and precautions. Both are protected by political and ritual sanctions; both are sacred. But female chastity is not sacred out of respect for the integrity of the woman as person; rather it is sacred out of respect for violence. Because her sexual body is the ground of the culture’s system of differences, the woman’s hymen is also the ground of contention. The virgin’s hymen must not be ruptured except in some manner that reflects and ensures the health of the existing political hierarchy (Klindienst 1984, 618).

All women characters in the novel reflect this cultural assumption, which denies all chances of subject hood for women. No woman in the novel revolts against this assumption though at many places they can do so. All women old or young, married or unmarried need to be protected from being conquered. Kironmoyee's case is a good example in this regard. Her husband Sudhamoy is rendered sexually cripple during the War of Independence that he fought for Bangladesh, but still he finds it necessary to protect her chastity as the author herself comments:

For the twenty-one years he had slept beside Kironmoyee... quite literally slept, for there had been nothing else to speak of, he had been guarding her chastity, and help her to be the faithful wife (Nasrin 1993, 158).

This comment is not made by any of the characters in the novel and there is no narrator in this novel so it is made by the author herself. This comment at one level shows that the writer is questioning the male authority but she never gives an insight into the needs of Kironmoyee, the woman except the need for sex. On the other hand the same writer portrays multidimensional male characters. The writer gives a peep into the mind of Sudhamoy, who feels extremely sorry for his wife with whom he cannot consummate physical relationship. Here the process of sexual intercourse has two connotations, first it refers to the natural act, a pleasure giving act, necessary for procreation, and secondly it stands for a ritual, a cultural symbol of conquering a woman through vagina, which is considered as the only means of controlling women. Sudhamoy's biggest fear is that as he cannot perform the ritual of sex on his wife, she may leave him because as per male dominated ideology woman's destiny lies in her being conquered. Under this fear he tries to know the heart of Kironmoyee:

He would often say to her, "Kironmoyee, I think I have cheated you, isn't that right? "

.... And Sudhamoy would say with a despairing sigh, "Are you going to leave me and go away, Kiron? You know I feel very scared sometimes" (Nasrin 1993, 114).

Sudhamoy says "I think I have cheated you" but in reality he himself feels cheated because he cannot enjoy sex, along with this fact traditional male views about woman also trouble him. Though all women characters are more faithful then their male counterparts still they are doubted because male dominated society denies them any subject hood and takes them for a thing to be penetrated and conquered and who ever do so possesses them. Here the author questions the male attitude towards woman but she does not look into the matter from woman's point of view by making the woman characters speak. Kironmoyee has devoted whole of her life, her wishes, her ambitions and pleasure for the sake of her husband whose first love is his ideology. In this whole affair Kironmoyee is denied any subject hood. Nowhere the author tries to look into the heart of this woman to know what she feels, because as per male dominated ideology to be a woman is not to be universal and the author looks at the problems of this woman from male point of view and gives a journalistic portrayal of Kironmoyee's sexual longings:

It would be incorrect to say that Kironmoyee had never felt desire. When Sudhamoy's friends come to visit, and they sat talking, their shadows would sometimes fall on Kironmoyee's lap, and almost involuntarily she would wish that those shadows were real. And how wonderful it would be, she would think, if a shadow made of flesh and blood could rest its head on her lap.

However, Kironmoyee's physical cravings did not last very long. Her body soon became used to deprivation... Kironmoyee understood from all this and more that this straight forward, simple soul really and truly loved her. If one was to lose some small pleasures in life, perhaps even major pleasures, and in exchange be given the opportunity to love such a person there would be no question about which was the better deal (Nasrin 1993, 114-15).

Very ironically this "such a person" doubts the integrity of Kironmoyee, his wife, and never cares about her opinions, sells the large house without consulting her, migrates to another city but refuses to migrate to India for the safety of his wife and family, more or less a dictator in his behaviour, only an angle can love such a person and Kironmoyee is portrayed like an angle, a goddess on the earth, an ideal woman. All other women characters are portrayed against this background. She serves as a kind of yardstick to judge other women in the novel. But there is no such yardstick to judge male characters. Very much like the traditional social setup the author uses different standards of morality for man and woman. Had Kironmoyee developed physical relations with some one she would have been denounced. But the same author seems to justify a Muslim girl, Shamima's rape by Suranjan, a Hindu. She portrays it as an act of retaliation on the part of Suranjan, but biologically it is impossible to rape a woman without having sexual desire. It proves that Suranjan had sexual desire for a woman, which he could not fulfill because his former love, Parveen is forced to marry a Muslim, and his newly found love, Ratna has not yet consented to marry him. The writer makes women carry the weight of culture and let male character unburdened, which is clear from Kironmoyee's recoiling at the mere thought of sex and Suranjan's act of raping Shamima in his own house without any fear. It reveals the extent up to which women are oppressed in an orthodox society but does not show the path how a woman can resist this oppression. Further more Parveen who remains faithful to Suranjan at least mentally is projected as a betrayer. If Parveen's marriage is a betrayal then Suranjan's having sex with Shamima is also a betrayal, but following the traditions of negative capability the author has diluted this incident to such an extent that neither it seems sex nor rape. This escape from personality to achieve the effect of negative capability is a betrayal to woman's cause. Projection of Parveen's marriage to a Muslim, as a betrayal to true love is actually a misrepresentation. Without going into the details the novelist declares not through any of the character but through her own authorial comment that Parveen in particular and all girls in general are freaks, and hence they cannot be trusted. The following passages from the text with my own emphasis by putting authorial comments in italics will my point:

It galled him to think that at one time she had been in love with him. Often she would come running to his room to say, “Come let us run away...”

“Where to? ”

“Far away to the hills”

“Where are the hills? You have to go to Sylhet or Chittagong to get Hills. ”

“We’ll do that. We’ll make our own house. ”

“What will we eat? Grass? ”

At this Parveen would laugh and throw herself down on Suranjan and say, “I won’t be able to live without you. ”

“These are the kind of frivolous things that girls usually say. Actually they don’t die.”

And Suranjan had been right (Nasrin 1993, 101-102) (Emphasis is mine).

Author’s comments on the nature of women come from the trend propagated by literary schools governed by andocentric ideology, otherwise how a writer can write these lines about women after creating a faithful woman like, Kironmoyee who sacrificed everything for the happiness of her husband. These lines can not be justified even when said about Parveen because she loves Suranjan from the core of her heart and plays more active role than Suranjan for materializing their marriage, which becomes clear from the following passage:

Two days before she was to be married, she had come to tell him that her family wanted him to convert to Islam. Suranjan had laughed and said, “You know very well I don’t believe in religion. ”

“No you must become a Muslim. ”

“I don’t want to be a Muslim. ”

“Which means, I want you. But why must I become a Muslim just for that? ”

Parveen’s fair face had instantly reddened with anger (Nasrin 1993, 102).

It is very clear that Parveen did not agree to marry a person other than Suranjan without any protest. She tries her best to make both her family as well as her lover understand her point of view. She does not lose her hope up to “two days before she was to be married. ” She breaks down when along with her religiously orthodox family her orthodox non-believer lover denies to become a human being, becoming a human being does not stand for becoming a Muslim rather it means becoming a human being who can do anything for his beloved including conversion. But her sorrows do not end here. Her relationship with Suranjan shadows her married life perhaps it has become difficult for her to adjust with any other male that leads to her divorce, which is equivalent to death in an orthodox society. When the writer herself or the invisible narrator who stands for the writer says, *“These are the kind of frivolous things that girls usually say. Actually they don’t die. And Suranjan had been right”* raises some doubts on the point of view of the author because it is not right to

say these words about Parveen, because she is ready to leave her parents and family but her lover does not agree to leave a very insignificant thing called religion, in which he has no faith. He is unwilling to adopt a Muslim name for the sake of his beloved, as his parents once did for the sake of safety. Undoubtedly he is a non-believer, but he can be the same even with a Muslim name, because no one can be converted to any faith internally by these superficial things. Further more, once married there are possibilities that Parveen might start following the traditions of his family. Suranjan also has no right to criticize Parveen because he refuses to shun his tag of non-believer to marry her but becomes a Hindu under the pressure of circumstances. Further more both Haider, Parveen's brother and Suranjan knew that, Parveen might divorce her husband. Suranjan becomes very happy at this news:

He had elided Parveen from his mind, but the news of her possible divorce had gladdened him and revived memories of her. Had he kept the name Parveen gently, ever so carefully, wrapped in the safety of moth balls in the vault of his heart? Perhaps, how long had it been since he had last seen her? Nostalgia drenched him, and with an effort he turned his thoughts now to Ratna. Ratna Mitra. She was a beautiful girl, and she would suit Suranjan well. So Parveen was going to become a divorcee... How was that supposed to affect him? (Nasrin 1993, 102).

Parveen is the only girl whom Suranjan loved from the core of his heart and he turns his thoughts away from her only "with an effort", he thinks of loving Ratna only out of racial affinity, but still he does not try to go back to Parveen. He is under the influence of male dominated ideology that takes virgin girl, "As the sign and currency of exchange, the invaded woman's body bears the full burden of ritual pollution." (Klindienst 1984, 619). In Suranjan's views Parveen, as she is *used* and invaded by another male has become polluted and hence unfit for marriage that is why despite intense love he turns away from her and goes towards Ratna who has unquestioned chastity in his eyes. It shows that divorce is equal to death in orthodox Bangladeshi society. In real society the situation of widows and divorcees is not so bad, they get remarried in most of the cases, but the author has restricted any such possibility. This detachment of language from reality serves the orthodox society that wants to enslave women. Further more the author is also partial towards Parveen. Though Parveen suffers no less than Suranjan, she is given no voice and no insight into her troubled psyche is given. Therefore the author has stopped a feminist narrative from being formed, it satisfies the reader whose sensibilities are structured as per male ideology, but feminist reader feel betrayed because a novel written by so called feminist writer silences women's voices.

Ratna, a Hindu girl is another woman character who is used by the author to shatter the last hope of Suranjan. She is also portrayed as a fickle minded girl who changes her colours like a chameleon. At one time it seems possible that she would marry Suranjan as following lines indicate:

There seemed to be a distinct look of infatuation in her eyes.

Are you still firm on your decision not to marry? Ratna asked with a smile.

Suranjan took some time before he answered. “Life is like a river, did you know that? Does the river stop at any point? Decisions also change once in a while. They do not stay unchanged all the time” (Nasrin 1993, 118).

This enquiry about his decision of marriage arouses hope of getting married to Ratna in Suranjan’s heart that is why he indicates that he is willing to get married. His hope of getting married to Ratna further strengthens when, “Ratna saw him off down the stairs and said, ‘Please come again. Because you come, we now have the reassurance that there is someone to stand by us. At least we are not alone...’” (Nasrin 1993, 119). Up to this point Ratna is portrayed as a lady with strong character by the novelist but all of a sudden just only to achieve her end i. e. to win maximum sympathy for Suranjan, her protagonist, she sacrifices this strong woman character and transforms her into a fickle minded, opportunist woman, who after arousing hopes in the heart of Suranjan on day fifth comes with her husband on day twelfth and surprises him with the following words:

Ratna smiled and said, “Guess who I’ve brought with me?”

Suranjan had not met Ratna’s brother and wondered if he was the young man. Ratna’s voice tinkled like the bangles she wore as she said, “This is Humayun, my husband” (Nasrin 1993, 211).

This piece of information brings out complete break down of the protagonist, all his moral strength, his ideals and his resistance to communalism leaves him as the novelist herself describes:

A turbulent hurricane swept across his heart. The last tree he had hoped to cling to for survival had been uprooted right in front of him. He had been hoping to make up for his wasted life by settling down with Ratna and here she was with a Muslim husband! Suranjan’s face darkened with anger (Nasrin 1993, 211).

Biggest jolt to Suranjan who is turning communal is that Ratna has married to a Muslim. It seems to him that Muslims are going to conquer them through force as in the case of Maya or by persuasion as in the case of Ratna furthermore he himself fails to conquer Muslims as shown by his failure to register his win over both Parveen and Shamima that is why he feels frustrated because his male eyes see “the woman’s hymen serving as the physical or sexual sign for the limen or wall defining the city’s limits...” and this outlook on the part of the author denies any voice to female characters. In order to do justice to the character of Suranjan the author has done injustice to the character of Ratna. A deconstructive reading of the text shows that Ratna is not a fickle minded girl firstly she does not know Suranjan for a long time, secondly the author does not give any details of relationship between Ratna and her Muslim husband. It seems to be a love marriage as indicated by liberty and upper hand enjoyed by Ratna. But the author willingly suppresses the details of their love affair and in this way suppresses the possibility of a hybrid culture, where love and respect for other cultures is possible and she does so despite her own humanitarian concerns. Her saying, “The last tree he had hoped to cling to for survival had been uprooted right in front of him”, is merely an attempt to channelize whole sympathy for Suranjan and to produce aesthetic effect in a hitherto journalistic novel, otherwise Ratna cannot be projected as a

fickle minded girl. Secondly projection of Ratna and Parveen as fickle minded also serves as a means to dilute fickle mindedness in male characters. It is actually Suranjan who is fickle minded because he is unable to forget Parveen, wants to marry Ratna, does not want his sister Maya to marry a Muslim and rapes a Muslim girl Shamima. He enjoys the sufferings that has befallen Parveen mainly due to his own orthodox stand and sexually abuses her in his dream on the very day she is divorced:

Suranjan made no comment. He was not in the least sorry that Parveen was divorced. On the contrary he was quite pleased about it. They had insisted on marrying her off to a Muslim instead of a Hindu and see where that had led them! Suranjan had already sexually abused Parveen in his mind. This early in the morning especially while one was brushing his teeth, sexual abuse held no attraction whatsoever. But in this case, as it was all in the mind it still had its attraction (Nasrin 1993, 205).

Though he himself is responsible for this miserable life of Parveen, whose only fault is that she loved a Hindu, he considers her divorce as God's justice. He still has longing for her body but does not go forward to share her sorrows. The thing that denies this novel to be a feminist novel is the condemnation of woman community by the author in her authorial comment, and furthermore if some claims that this novel is a feminist novel then the reader has to read the novel against the narrative.

Suranjan's relationship with Shamima has been depicted as a case of weak culture's conquering weaker part of strong culture. Throughout the history women have always been used as a means of conquering other cultures because as per andro-centric ideology they have a passage known as vagina through which they can be conquered. A large part of cultural politics revolves around the strategies to conquer it or around the strategies to protect it from such attempts. Suranjan, a frustrated Hindu when finds himself unable to retaliate against Muslim violence decides to conquer them through 'this passage' and therefore brings a Muslim girl Shamima. He rapes her, scratches her and hurts her; very ironically the author equates rape of this innocent girl with Independence Day of Bangladesh:

Shamima left. Suranjan relaxed. He had promised himself he would not feel sorry for himself today. Today was victory day. Everyone was enjoying the fruits of an independence that was won twenty one years ago. Today, another milestone had been achieved as well. Shamima Begum had come to Suranjan Dutta's house and had been conquered (Nasrin 1993, 202).

Here the author seems to suggest the attitude of male community towards female community and shows how the concept of chastity is propounded and imposed on female community by the patriarchal society. In this social setup rape is like military conquering that assumes meaning and glory only if there is resistance. A woman must try to protect her chastity otherwise what is the meaning of male victory over female body. When Suranjan looks at his rape of Shamima from this point of view, he finds himself a failure and feels ashamed:

He should have felt angry and empowered but he did not. In that case, what kind of revenge had he taken? One could even say that this was a kind of defeat for him. Was Suranjan in fact defeated? Yes, of course, he was a loser, because he had not succeeded in tricking Shamima. As it was she was tricked by her social status. To her there was no difference between sexual intercourse and rape. Suranjan cringed in his bed, as he realized this truth. He suffered as his shame swamped him (Nasrin 1993, 203).

Irony of this statement lies in the fact that the woman author of these lines cares more for the defeat of manhood than the sentiments and sufferings of the woman, who is cheated by the society that converted her into a prostitute, her customer, Suranjan who uses her body for both sexual pleasure and as a symbol of revenge against Muslims and above all by the intellectual, the author who gives her no voice. Shamima is given no intellect and no sentiments and is portrayed more like a mechanical sex toy. Dogged by the concept of manhood Suranjan feels ashamed not because he raped an innocent girl but because he failed to pollute her as she is already polluted. Undoubtedly this instance exposes the male community that takes woman as an object to suit various purposes but it would have been better if she had given voice to the female characters and in this way had looked into all these things from the point of view of a woman.

One more victim of writer's double standards is Maya, Suranjan's younger sister. Throughout the novel except the last pages, Suranjan is a kind of person who is proud of being a non-believer. He even sacrifices his beloved Parveen for the sake of this tag of non-believer but he dislikes the idea of Maya's falling in love with Jahangir, a Muslim. And the writer who condemns Parveen says nothing about double-standards of Suranjan who is against Maya's affair with Jahangir:

"I am really worried about Maya. What if she suddenly decides to marry Jahangir?"

"Good God, Suranjan-da! Is that right? Please stop her before it is too late. You know how it is... we often make hasty decisions when we're pressured by circumstances".

"Let's see. May be on my way back home I'll pick her up from Parul's house. You know, I see a definite change in Maya. Perhaps the desire to survive will compel her to change her name to something like Farida Begum... It is very selfish" (Nasrin 1993, 74).

Maya like her mother Kironmoyee sacrifices her pleasures for the well being of family but very ironically, for her only wish to live, she is branded "very selfish". A close study of all women characters drawn by Taslima Nasrin in *Shame* reveals that her women characters exist only as a background to highlight her male characters. It seems that she sketched her male characters first and then worked on her female characters and drafted them just only to complete her male characters. Her women are the women as they are found in classical

texts not in real life. When she presents a picture which does not correspond to the real life, she silences the emergent voices and serves both the orthodox society that exploits women and the First World which wants to see Third World as backward place on the base of these grim pictures because, “The detachment of language from observable reality is what makes it possible for a political party to maintain an orthodoxy among its followers and in the most extreme cases to dupe those it wishes to enslave.” (Joseph 2004, 351-52) In this way through her *Shame* she excludes her women reader, especially Bangladeshi ones who tries to find some powerful fictional characters that can serve as a kind of ideal characters. It plunges them into a new type of experience,

... a peculiar form of powerlessness-not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one’s experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly the powerlessness which results from the endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male which being reminded that to be male-to be universal... is to be *not female* (Fetterley 1978, 562).

Shame belongs to the category of feminist literature that arouses pity for Bangladeshi women in the heart of non-Bangladeshi reader. Its major weakness is that it fails to create fictional woman characters that can fight their own battle like the author herself rather it tries to show the outer world what is happening to the Bangladeshi women and they must be saved. All literature is reader oriented and its survival depends upon its ability to dupe or awake its reader. So a feminist reader hopes that a work of literature by a woman writer will not only question the assumptions of male dominated orthodox society but also create powerful characters that can fight against it because,

Such a closed system cannot be opened up from within but only from without. It must be entered into from a point of view which questions its values and assumptions and which has its investment in making available to consciousness precisely that which the literature wishes to keep hidden (Fetterley 1978, 566).

This novel though questions the andro-centric “values and assumptions” it does not provides the alternative ways to counter them through the creation of fictional characters. It is not a case just only with this particular novel, in many cases the literature produced by women writers, silences or misrepresents the women voices, but their writers can not be blamed because after all “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” (Beauvoir 1949, 295) Most of the writers either man or women have their sensibilities structured, that is why though the women writers write literature it is (not) their own, because except in some cases where they invent their own aesthetics of writing and the rhetoric of fiction they have to follow is male centric rhetoric of fiction . It is the need of hour to evolve a new aesthetics of literature for both reader (common reader as well as critic) and writer so that diverse experiences of hitherto others: women, gays, minorities, lesbians, blacks etc. can be given a voice and this can be done by creating active all round fictional characters belonging to the marginal sections.

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Öz

Onların Ol(may)an bir Yazın: Shame Üzerine Bir Çalışma

Elaine Showalter, Kendilerine ait bir Literatür: Bronte'den Lessing'e İngiliz Kadın Romancıları adlı eserinde kadın yazarların literatürünün nasıl bu yazarlara ait olduğunu tartışmıştır. Bu çalışma, genelde kadın yazarlar ve spesifik olarak Taslima Nasrin tarafından oluşturulmuş literatürün bu kadınlara ait olmadığını ve bu yazarların başkalarının bakış açısından yazdıklarını göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Nesrin Shame adlı romanının tecavüz ve kadınların mağduriyeti üzerine olacağını belirterek beş farklı kadın karakteri yarattı: müslüman bir kadın olan Pervin, hintli kadınlar Ratna, Nilanjana (Maya), and Kironmoyee ve müslüman hayat kadını Shamima Akthar. Bu beş kadından ikisi tecavüze uğramıştır. Çalışma kadın bir yazar için önemli olanın feminist roman yazmak değil, yazarın kendi bakış açısından kadın karakterler yaratmak olduğunu vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Cinsiyetçi Madun Anlatı, Erkek-merkezcilik, Kadın Tokenizmi, Kültürel Sınırlar, Gasp Edilen Kadın Bedeni

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Yazar Hakkında

Jai Singh, İngilizce ve Yabancı Diller Üniversitesi İngiliz Milletler Topluluğu İngiliz Edebiyatı bölümünde yardımcı doçent olarak görev yapmaktadır. J. Singh'in başlıca araştırma alanlarının bazıları çağdaş teori, sömürge sonrası teori ve edebiyat, İngilizce yazılmış Hindu yazını, feminizm ve kültürel eleştiridir.

