

Treatment of Women in Nadeem Aslam's Novels

Qutib Ali Rind

Mphil Scholar- Department of English- Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari, Karachi, Pakistan

Prof.Dr. Assadulla Larik

Department of English-Iqra University, Main Campus, Karachi, Pakistan

Abstract

Nadeem Aslam, Pakistani-born English writer has penned down four novels so far that mirror, crystal clearly, the social problems of Pakistani, either living in the country or abroad. He, even, talks equally well about the predicament, pathetic and appalling condition of *women in* Afghanistan, the neighboring country. Thus, the festering issues of women are vividly portrayed in his novels with equal sincerity. Generally speaking, the women in Pakistani-society as well as in Afghanistan fall victim to societal injustice due to a male-dominated, and a patriarchal system of society. Moreover, the sufferings of Pakistani women living in Pakistani community in England have not been alleviated. Thus, Manacles, and shackles remain the same everywhere. Honor killing, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, marriage without consent, gender-discrimination, financial deprivation, psychological, and emotional trauma are the foremost issues of women and have been the fate of the most of them living in Pakistani community. And in Afghanistan's case, it is observed that an educated woman is vulnerable and her awareness is considered as a threat to the religion and social fabric. Nonetheless, the depiction of woman as a sufferer reflects many phases; but it is often seen that the Achilles heels and the wrongdoings of men result in the unearned sufferings for them, and thus, they have to bear unspeakable trauma in countless ways. This paper will finally conclude how women living in Pakistani community and in Afghanistan are being exploited and how they, intensely, experience physical, mental, emotional, and psychological trauma inflicted on them in a patriarchal and a male-dominated society.

Keywords: Treatment, predicament, patriarchal, Trauma, Exploitation

I. Introduction

Women suffer in silence in Pakistani community, and Afghanistan. They are subjected to violence; mostly, husbands and dear ones are responsible for their pitiable lot. But besides domestic violence in Afghanistan, the women had been suffering the pains and pangs at the hands of soviet soldiers after 1979, and the Taliban during their take over in 1996. Mostly, suffering women hail from the lower strata, but the circle of violence is almost stretched to all the sections of society. They have been abducted, brutally killed in the name of honor, sexually assaulted, even raped, threatened, and deliberately been subjected to unspeakable violence. Societal norms, callous attitudes, dehumanizing behavior, and extreme marginalization--- these can be the causes, but can also be the various stimuli for stress and trauma of women. The violence on women has remained worst so far in Afghanistan. It is estimated that thirteen years after the fall of the Taliban, the women of Afghanistan continued to suffer oppression, and abuse.

Women had been publicly cursed, bearing demeaning and degrading images and even stoned to death for violating the --so called standards and canons of morality set by the males. Social norms, taboos, cultural restraints, discrimination based on gender, marginalization and customary practices cause the sufferings of the most of women. Absence of swift justice system in the machinery of administration in Afghanistan condones and vindicates the criminals to be at large or go with impunity. The human rights violation and the violence against women have been reported in many newspapers and in the reports of national and international organizations so far.

Nevertheless, in Pakistan, the Majority of women are marginalized; they suffer isolation, alienation, helplessness, emotional and psychological stress and trauma due to injustice including brutal practice of honor killing, forced marriage, rape cases and domestic violence.

Western women also have been mired into the vortex of violence. After realization of the enormity of the situation, the problems concerning the women have been taken up by many western writers in the various genre of literature. However, they have been branded as Feminist, for example Virginia Wolf's 'The Room of One's own', and Henrik Ibsen's 'A Doll's House' depict the domestic and conventional problems of the women. This consciousness was further enhanced by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1953); while Julia Kristina, Luce Irigaray, and Helene Cixous are the significant women writers who have discovered new dimensions in the field of feminism.

Many modern Pakistani writers: Muhammad Hanif, Bapsi Sidhwa, Mohsin Hamid, Zulifkar Ghose, Talat Abbasi, and Qaisra Shahraz have inked down the novels; they have highlighted the issues of the women.

‘A thousand splendid suns’ by Khalid Hosseini deals with the problem of sexual abuse, and a pitiable lot of women in Afghanistan.

Nadeem Aslam, in his work, adroitly delineates the conflicting ideas, customs, constraints, and social taboos that fetter women; his work shows women to be in the first chapter of the problems and a lot to be confronted ahead as the more pages will turn over.

Elizabeth, remains the victim of violence in ‘Season of Rain Birds; whereas ‘Maps for the lost lovers’ mirrors the predicament of Kaukab, Suraya, Mahjabeen, and Chanda---- these characters are the victims of physical, and mental torture in a male- dominated society.

Qatrina has been stoned to death by the Taliban; Zameen, her daughter is subjected to rape by one of the soldiers in Russian Army in ‘The wasted Vigil.’ The brutality of the Taliban and warlords towards women are heinous and horrible; pugnacious attitude is echoed in the novels.

Naheed, the central figure of, ‘Blind Man’s Garden’ is bearer of injustice as decision of forced marriage is thrust on her. And this decision shows the girls are mere speechless animals in the taboo- dominated society for parents seldom consult them about the critical decisions including marriage.

2. Literature Review

Feminism is basically a movement that demands equal rights for women. But any writer can be branded as Feminist by depicting the predicament, and the pressing problems of women in his work. ‘Feminism, the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in a equal manner, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state.’(Cambridge Dictionaries). The writing about the problems of women and reflecting the stigma concerning them also fall in the category of Feminism. Ibsen’s ‘The Dolls House’ is an example of Feminism, though the playwright disclaimed it and uttered that his task had been the description of humanity. Bernard Shaw is also called the champion of women’s rights; his work speaks volumes of the emancipation of women, and thus, the freedom of women from the shackles of conventions has also been portrayed in the different genre of literature.

As women gained more rights than ever before in the early part of the twentieth century, the postwar era represented a paradigm shift in the conception of woman for they were focused and absorbed in affairs other than the domestic one. Friedan’s ‘The Feminine Mystique’, a book that, as the New York Times put it, "ignited the contemporary women’s movement in 1963 and as a result, permanently transformed the social fabric of the United States and countries around the world." Betty Friedan was an American housewife who, in 1960’s, described the malaise that she and her fellow housewives experienced. She discovered and named “The Problem that Has No Name” and through her book she gave a voice to millions of women who had been suffering in silence (Shriver, 2010). She expressed in writing a feminine ideal that affected so many women, yet that no one had articulated before. In addition, her efforts sparked the second wave of feminism and her work is considered one of the most influential nonfiction books of the twentieth century (Meyer & Rohlinger, 2012).

Virginia Wolf’s contribution is marvelous both as modernist and Feminist. Her work reflects woman’s freedom regarding financial affairs as well as space; these two elements have been the cause of woman’s problems as her creativity remained subdued due to these. She mentions these problems in, ‘A Room of One’s Own’; whereas Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1953), and writings of Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Helene Cixous are significant in the acclamation of the rights of women. These women writers discovered new dimensions in the field of feminism. And no doubt, these dimensions had increased the consciousness, and awareness among women. Though only image and problems of the western women had been depicted in the work of above mentioned writers, and no doubt, the impact and impression created by them spread all over the world due to colonization as English literature was flourished vastly in the colonial era ; Pakistani writers also got influenced.

The Victorian period is prominent regarding the emancipation of women; it can be called the dawn of the liberty of women and the glow of its spark shone all over the world. Thomas Hardy, Jane Austin and Bronte Sisters depict the misfortune, social, emotional problems of women in the plot of love against the norms and convictions of society, and their contribution enormously boosts the confidence of women as these writers appeared successful literary persons in the annals of literature. Most importantly, the post-modern writer, Maya Angelo delineates the dilemma confronting women in the poem, ‘I know why the Caged Bird Sings’, Angelou uses her autobiography to explore subjects such as identity, rape, racism, and literacy. She also writes in new ways about women’s lives in a male-dominated society.

‘A thousand splendid suns’ by Khaled Hosseini is about Afghan women. The novel focuses on the sufferings and predicament of women of Afghanistan in a male-dominated society, and he depicts the desperate plight of them in the war-hit country where men resort to exploit and derogates them in brutal ways. In the novel, Mariam and the laila’s plight have been portrayed wonderfully well.

Dear Zari: Hidden stories from women of Afghanistan by Zarghona beautifully tell the stories of women of Afghanistan. After reading these stories, the readers easily comprehend as how women’s condition is

fragile and stigmatized. The painful stories reflect the women's repression is unabated in certain parts of Afghanistan. The stories are drawn from the radio program 'Afghan Women's Hour', produced by Kargar from 2004 to 2010, and they cover such controversial issues as the "exchange" and sale of child brides, rape, honor and virginity, and the compulsion on women to produce a son. Some of the most poignant stories are those of the widows and divorced women, who find themselves shunned by their own families: "Becoming a widow in a traditional society like Afghanistan means you lose the right to talk freely, you lose the right to put on makeup and dress up." (Independent, Sunday 23 October, 2011).

Mumtaz Shahnawaz in her novel, 'The Heart Divided' discusses the problems of women; this has been considered the starting point of Feminism in Pakistan. 'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti' is an interesting novel by Muhammad Hanif. It is about the life of a nurse and it also reflects the overall life, and tragedy of women. He narrates how women are tormented, hacked, strangled, poisoned, hanged, and burned alive.

Bapsi Sidhwa's 'The Bride' is about Zaitoon, who was forcefully married, and never consulted about this critical decision. After marriage, the dictator and brutal kind of husband put her in unbearable and incessant sufferings. Zaitoon's character also shows the contrast between the lifestyle of Punjab, and the mountainous areas of Indus River. Her second novel, 'The Ice-candy Man' is about the woman, Shanta; she was forcefully pushed into the business of prostitute. Being ruined and molested, she represents all the beleaguered minority women of the subcontinent who bear sufferings in a rich and an affluent class. By experiencing all those pains, she, finally, learns how to survive.

Zulfiqar Ghose, in 'Murder of Aziz Khan', depicts the psychological problems faced by women in Pakistani society. The character of Razia displays a strange behavior; this is due to social taboos and restlessness she suffers though she is the wife of the landlord. This novel reflects female social psychologies. Even women, living in an aristocratic family, rarely own and enjoy satisfaction. The writer is trying to show how women act in the shackles of Pakistani socio-political system where they seldom find space and room for deciding on their own. Mental agonies pester them a lot in a falsified feudal system.

'The Moth Smoke' of Mohsin Hamid depicts the life of Mumtaz, her psychological sufferings and dilemma is due to the negligence of her husband. Neglect brings a lot of awkwardness in social and sexual behavior of her as she feels a sense of loss after being neglected.

Aamir Husain's 'Cactus and Other Short Stories' depicts the pitiable lot of women due to unfavorable social and political conditions of the country. Tabinda, in the story, 'The Needle Woman's Calendar' suffers enormously due to the wrongdoings of her husband, Sohayl. Her husband has even left her and gone to England, where he married an English girl, and brought her with him. She decides to quit, and soon picks up the confidence to challenge and says goodbye to her sufferings.

The Pakistani writers portray pestering problems of women in Pakistani community. Though the emancipation of women is only possible through education, awareness and the struggle, the women will still endure a lot. The psychological development depicted by the novelists help bring more awareness to them and the dawn of change may seep through the window of change. The inking of innovative ideas for constructive change in fiction surely will be the beacon of hope and iota of change in the lifestyle of women in practical life.

3. Scope of the Study

The study carries an analysis of the treatment of women by Nadeem Aslam in his novels. The writer depicts the emotional, social, Psychological and financial problems of women living in Pakistani and Afghani community. His women characters are lively and realistic. Kaukab, Asghari, Elizabeth, Suraya, Naheed breathe in Pakistani society; whereas Qatrina, Zameen, Dunia are the part and parcel of the society of Afghanistan. This study will be helpful to provide in depth analysis of the treatment of women as well as it will juxtapose, to some extent, with treatment of same by western, Pakistan and Afghani writers of the Fiction. This study will also shed light on Feminism and analysis of women's predicament in South Asian society as it has been portrayed by Nadeem Aslam in his novels.

4. Research Methodology

The Qualitative Research Methodology has been adopted to critically analyze Nadeem Aslam work and also to evaluate his depiction of women. Though he portrays Pakistani society and Afghanistan, he depicts emotional, psychological problems related with their existence, and survival in the society they breathe in. This research tries to answer the following questions:

- i. How does Nadeem Aslam depict woman in his novels?
- ii. What are the problems pestering the woman in Pakistani society?
- iii. How does the woman fare in the society of Afghanistan?

5. Women in 'season of RainBirds'

This novel, generally, sheds light on the condition of women. Zebun, Ex-Courtesan is depicted as a religious

woman but was the prostitute in the past. She could remember she was about to marry a man, but had been abandoned by him. He considered her the woman of Hera Mindi (the terms used for prostitute) and decided not to marry her. Basically, that man got Zebun pregnant, but was facing resistance from his family not to tie in a nuptial bond with her. And presently, it seems the society doesn't accept her. Her assimilation is a hard nut to crack as prostitutes seldom find room to be absorbed and assimilated in the society.

Asghari, the wife of a judge, Anwar Ali is another woman-sufferer in the story. Once, she visited the house of Nabila, Mujeeb Ali's wife when her husband was alive. She was distraught, and requested her to take her to the clinic. She complained about her husband and it looked she hadn't slept the whole night. She said:

'I pleaded him to leave me alone just for tonight but he wouldn't listen, Nabila', She said through tears. 'I don't want another one at my age. And anyway, it will probably be a girl again..... Only Allah Himself knows why He decided to punish us both this way.' (P. 50)

Anwar Ali has been killed in a mysterious murder, leaving his wife with seven daughters and it appears the sufferings will continue for Asghari for an indefinite period of time; she has to shoulder the responsibility of her daughters in chaotic and a topsy-turvy sort of world. It is pertinent to mention that the women have demeaning status when they don't give birth to sons. Mostly, the daughters are considered a burden and curse. And, that is why, the future looks bleak for them.

Alice, Zebun's Christian servant started crying one day before her. Zebun asked her about her tears. She said she heard her father saying to her mother that she had given birth to an ugly daughter. He said every time he looked at her and wondered what kind of Dijon or Bhoot she was. And she heard him spit in the corner of the room. She said:

'And he did mention marriage. He said he wonders how he'll ever get rid of me. He said: We're so poor we can't even tempt anybody with a large dowry.' (p. 149)

This shows how girls are considered ugly and burden on parents; marrying away becomes nightmare where ghosts of poverty and problems bother the destitute exceedingly.

The worst victim in the story is Elizabeth Massih, the daughter of Benjamin Massih. She lives with Azhar, Deputy Commissioner as his mistress. Her relation with Azhar is considered sinful, and their affair becomes the talk of the town. Even Maulana Hafeez, clerk of the town went to her father to complain about her relation out of wedlock. Her father said her daughter was reluctant to listen to his prohibitions. Then, on one Friday, the sermon of Maulana Hafeez about the illicit relation added fuel to the fire and the frenzied mob attacked the house of the Deputy Commissioner in his absence.

On the other hand, Arshad Ali, the brother of Mujeeb Ali, the landlord, indulges in merry-making and even, immoral activities due to his powerful clan. In a patriarchal society, the women are considered weak and vulnerable and those who hail from lower strata are easily exploited and abused; whereas the rich and powerful go with impunity and are rarely punished for their wrong doings. Mujeeb Ali confidently said to the doctor:

'We had planned a mahfil for tonight. A roast, hemp, and cane liquor. And, of course, a whore.' (p. 181)

Even Zafri, the butcher and Nabi, the barber discuss the preaching of Maulana Hafeez. He said:

'What annoys me is the way these maulanans never preach to the rich people. They are always asking us to come to the mosque.' (P.121)

6. Women in Maps for Lost Lovers

Kaukab is the central figure in the story; lives with her husband, Shams in England and seems to be nestled under the burden of responsibilities. Religious values stick to her mind, even if her husband is secular minded. Moreover, her children never see eye to eye with her due to her inherently conventional mind. Hailing from the religious family; and father, being the clerk of the mosque, her personality was hewed in religious orientation and the values were assimilated in the very blood of her veins. On the contrary, she considers her father responsible to choose for her irreligious in-laws for her father in law had been Hindu, hadn't embraced Islam with heart and soul. Moreover, her husband's secular views agonizes her and almost the cause of her mental torture. She held religious ideas firmly even before her marriage.

She is a stereotype, the love of her children, Charag, Mahjabeen and Ujala, is the alchemy of her existence; she possesses her sons enormously, seems adamant not to allow them to befriend or to marry white girls. Unfortunately, one day, her dreams proved to be floundered when Charag, the elder one, became friend with Estella; made her pregnant before marriage and then got entangled with her in the knot. The marriage of Charag made her boggled, and flabbergasted as well; she felt as if someone had pulled earth from her feet. That is the reason, mostly, she remains hooked in a strange land where her sons vanish in a vortex and lead a blasphemous life. She also becomes the victim of domestic violence. Nevertheless, her sufferings are due to her inner conflict, but the strange and callous attitude of her sons puts her in an incessant mental agony and her husband, once beaten her. It was during the month of Ramadan, shams insisted her to feed Ujala, a mere kid. The child was crying non-stop; she refused to comply by insisting that she would feed her the time the fast breaks.

But untoward happened, which she never expected:

‘By grabbing her neckline he tore open her Kameez with both hands to reveal a soaked brazier which he pulled at here and there until one of the cups ripped and spilled its load like weights in a sling. She had resisted and he had dragged her across the floor, he exposed breast bloody from her fingernail...

Inert and apparently insensible, she hadn’t moved to connect the baby to the breast and he had slapped her face: ‘Feed him, you haramzadi.’(p. 141)

Apart from this, she is usually at the horns of a dilemma as her sons reluctant to follow her; and she often broods over marring away her only daughter, Mahjabeen to a respectable person in Pakistan even though her first marriage with her first cousin was an epic fail. The novelist depicts Mahjabeen as a sensible, liberal minded, tolerant and compromising by nature. There is a gulf of difference between the ideas and mode of thinking of the mother and the daughter; but both remain each other’s confidant though she treats the conventional ideas and attitude of her mother with contempt. Mahjabeen is so positive, convivial and compliant that she agrees to marry another person in Pakistan as her mother desires. Though torn in between her mother’s values and the modern life ahead of her; yet unlike her brothers, she complies.

Suraya is another sufferer in the novel; being groomed in the ambience of England, she exudes a great amount of confidence. She is depicted as a gorgeous, had been married to a person in Sohni Dharti, Pakistan. Unfortunately, Tragedy unexpectedly seized her when her husband divorced her in a drunken state and fit of anger despite being a mother of his son. After divorce, she has arrived in England so as to find a suitable man to marry her temporarily, then to divorce her and be able to go back to her husband again as Islamic law ordains. She hunts for a temporary husband in England; in that desperate struggle, she interacts Charag, then Shams whom she develops sexual relations. But shamas refuses to marry her on the temporary condition of marriage. Being a religious woman and considers herself wicked for an immoral act of adultery with Shams; she hopes against hope that all her tribulations and desperation will end one day. Her predicament and umbrage reflect in the pages:

‘At home she had burst into tears at that. Dear Allah, Why can’t I understand the reason behind your laws? It’s man deserves to be punished if he has uttered a word divorce as an idle threat, in anger, or while intoxicated and yes the punishment for him is that he has to see his wife briefly become another man’s property, being used by him. But must the divorced wife be punished? Nothing is more abhorrent to a Muslim woman than the, thought of being touched by the man other than her husband. She hides her body like a treasure. But if she wants her husband back, she has to let another man touch her. This is her punishment: a punishment she deserves, perhaps, because she didn’t know how to teach her husband to be a good man, how to teach him to control his anger and be a good Muslim, stay away from alcohol?’(p. 166)

One day, Suraya while living in Pakistan, took a risk by going to the house of men who had enmity with her in laws on learning that one of the men was raping the niece of the family. The family would not seek justice because proving rape or adultery needed four witnesses. The risky adventure, going to enemy’s house with her overweening confidence put her in mortification for all men clustered round her. Though she was left unharmed and her honor was intact; they said they would spread the rumor that she was raped and this would disgrace her family.

Finally, in the novel, after going through mental trauma including the loss of honor; she has been married to a man who desires a child as he has no child by his first wife. Even in this stipulation, the future seems bleak and will hang in balance for her, because it is up to this man now either to divorce her or not in the future.

Chanda is the main victim, killed by her brothers. She married third unsuccessful times, and her fourth attempt of marriage with Jugnu (the brother of Shams) is considered illegal for she hadn’t got divorce from the previous husband. Throughout the novel, the people discuss the couple’s mysterious disappearance, though police have arrested Chanda’s brothers in the suspicion of the murder. The writer solves the riddle of the disappearance of a couple in the last pages of the novel; Chanda’s brother Chota killed Jugnu near his house and then, he accompanied by Bara went to the house to cruelly put their sister to death. And this is an honor killing, for Chanda has disgraced the honor of the family. Generally speaking, this event of the novel reflects the society of Pakistan as we observe the cases of honor killing reported in Pakistan and the women are being killed cold-bloodedly. ‘according to statistics, in one Pakistani province alone, a woman is murdered every thirty-eight hours solely because her virtue is in doubt’ (P.136)

The novelist, vividly, narrates the stories of the suffering women. The quandary of women can be viewed from this that two girls from the neighborhood approached Kakub once and told her about their miserable plight. The husband of one of them wanted ‘to do from the back ‘and the other told her that her husband wanted to discharge in her mouth. Mahjabeen remembers Kaukab, s regrets and remorse regarding the affairs of the girls. Even, she never tells her mother about her own life in Pakistan that her husband called her a ‘wanton shameless English whore.’ There was another episode in the novel when the Muslim girl was brutally murdered by exorcist for she wanted to marry a Hindu boy. The girl was suspected to have been controlled by

Dijon, and the parents handed the girl over to the exorcists and they inflicted every cruelty and she died succumbing to the injuries.

Violence against women can be viewed from the conversation of Chanda's father when he prohibits his wife revealing some important bit of evidence:

'Keep your mouth shut! This woman is complete haramzadi! The kanjree woman didn't say anything when it was time for her to raise her bad mash kutia daughter properly and now she cannot hold her tongue!' (P.139)

7. Women in the wasted Vigil

This novel mirrors the pains and pangs of the human beings in Afghanistan. The fictitious city, Usha near 'Tora Bora Mountain' is the central focus of the novel. Women suffer a lot, especially those who desire change, educate the children, help the sufferers or voice against injustice, and brutality.

Marcus and Qatrina are husband and wife, doctors by profession, living in a perfume factory near Usha. They have been imparting their help by providing relief to sufferers of war and performing their duties in the war-hit country; this makes them legends of sacrifice. But unfortunately, Qatrina was mercilessly stoned to death by the Taliban after Friday prayers. She was condemned to death due to her twenty nine years of sin living with Marcus though he was converted and embraced Islam. Taliban considered their marriage void because the ceremony had been conducted by a woman. A rain of rocks, and bricks hurled at her and the microphone was placed to her so that her shrieks should be heard by everyone. The brutal act of murdering Qatrina was witnessed by many people. It is imperative to mention that the heinous and barbaric act of stoning women to death had been carried out by the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the past since the videos clips were released.

Recently, an Afghan woman Farukhanda has been lynched by frenzied mob on Dec 27, 2015 in Afghanistan. She was stoned to death after blaming her that she burnt the Quran. The act was excruciatingly horrendous and dreadfully vile by the mob enacting the law of Jungle.

Zameen the daughter of Marcus and Qatrina is another victim of brutality. She was picked up from her house by Soviet soldiers in the suspicion that she was helping the insurgents. She was assaulted, and raped by the soldier named Benedict, the brother of Larissa Patrisha, another character in the story. Larissa, nicknamed as Lara, resides with Marcus, has arrived in Afghanistan in order to find her brother who had disappeared during the war. She can be considered the luckiest woman not to fall into the cruel clutches of Taliban.

Benedict also helped Zameen to escape from the captivity of Russians. Then, she was brought to Afghanistan from Peshawar by Gul-Rasool, the warlord by assuring her that she would be handed over to her parents. But he betrayed her, kept her with him; then, she was given a task to plant a bomb to kill Christopher, CIA agent. She was ready to do the act because the warlord promised her to bring her son back as he had been missing during the raid of Nabi Khan, another warlord, at the house Gul Rasool. When American caught Zameen red-handed planting the bomb, she was shot dead by Gul Rasool then and there in order to show Americans that she was not anything to do with him. But Zameen had been seduced, kept for sexual pleasure, was deceived and exploited by Gul Rasool.

During Taliban rule, the women were whipped in the streets for showing their faces. They ordered that the windows of houses should be painted black so that no one could see the glimpse of them. Earning a living was declared inappropriate conduct for females, resulting in an arrest for insubordination of Allah's will. The women were whipped publically if their feet were not properly covered. The Schools for girls were closed. Marcus and Qatrina were beaten in their house by the Taliban because they started teaching the children. Qatrina inserted nails into the books and pinned these to the roof so that the Taliban might not destroy the reservoir of knowledge. In this novel, the Taliban terrorized the children also:

'Children- leave now and if you ever come back we'll burn you alive' (P.265)

The atrocious act of Taliban of Pakistan also brought the country a bad name when they sprayed the bullets indiscriminately on Malala Yousafzai, an innocent girl in Swat on Oct 9, 2012 when she was travelling from school to her home in a school van. Later on, she was awarded 'Noble Peace Prize'.

Dunia, a young school teacher had been disappeared and probably been picked up for punishment of opening and running a School. Before her abduction, Taliban threatened her to close the school. Besides the brutality of the Taliban, the domestic violence and cruelty is equally depicted. One of the clerks wanted to uproot the school of Dunia and he publicly accused her of being dissolute, but the same person also desired to marry her.

'Last month the cleric – he is the son of old clerk, the one banished from Usha for having killed two of his wives -had expressed the wish to marry her, take her as his third wife, but both her father and she had turned him down. Perhaps this is his revenge' (P.287)

8. Women in the Blind Man's Garden

Sofia, the wife of Rohan helped her husband in opening the school, the Ardent Spirit. Her husband withheld her medicines at the hour of death, and due to that she died of a heart attack. But Rohan thought that her wife would

be in hell due to her apostasy. She suffered a lot on the death bed in the state of agony of death, and her husband was only thinking in the context of her apostasy. She would have survived if Rohan had shown clemency by providing her medicines.

Naheed is the main character in the novel. She had been married to Jeo, the son of Rohan, but she loved Mikal, the foster son. Her mother, Tara approached Rohan for her daughter's marriage with Jeo. Tara blatantly refused marrying away her daughter to Mikal by saying that Jeo, being doctor would provide her better future as compared to the poor person, Mikal.

Naheed suffered unspeakable trauma after the death of her husband in Afghanistan. She conceived pregnancy, but did something to cause miscarriage as her mother compelled her to do so by saying that no one would accept her as a wife; a widow with a child would only have a bleak future. Her mother, being very poor couldn't, afford to take her to the doctor. Generally, Naheed represents all women of Pakistan who have lost their dear and near ones in the war in Afghanistan.

Tara, herself, also suffered due to poverty and the death of her husband. Sharif Sharif, her neighbor and the husband of two wives, had sexually exploited her and then, threw her aside. She was once raped by another man; she went to the police to seek justice. Yet, she was to produce the four witnesses, according to the prerequisite of Islamic law; failing to do so, she was jailed for adultery. Tara, being poor and helpless, represents all the widows who bear inescapable trauma in the male-dominated society.

Naheed became resilient and saner after the death of her husband. She started reading books; got diploma and became a teacher at Saint Joseph. She is depicted as an impervious character in the novel

Yasmin, the sister of Jeo lost her husband, Basie during the siege of terrorists at Saint Josef. The siege of the terrorists at Saint Josef reminds the readers the carnage when the terrorists attacked the school in Peshawar on 16 Dec, 2014; innocent children were put to death horrendously by terrorists.

Naheed conceived a baby, and gave birth to an illegitimate child, this act is an outcome of her amorous sex with Mikal; this also shows the hypocrisy and Achilles heels of the society where everything happens behind the curtain. The couples resort to illicit ways in society when the critical decision especially marriage is denied to them.

The parentage of Mikal and Naheed's son is a secret from the neighborhood. Halfway through the pregnancies, Naheed and Yasmin went away to a distant village and returned after the birth, with the claims that Yasmin had had twins. It's a lie no one would rather tell, but there is no alternate and again they remind themselves that they are more fortunate than many in this country.'(P.414-415)

Conclusion

Treatment of women by Nadeem Aslam, in his novels, can be viewed in broader perspective. The novels offer a comprehensive and a detailed canvas in narrating psychological, domestic, social, and emotional problems of women. Though the sufferings of women have been highlighted by both western and Pakistani writers, they surely contribute in bulk to their empowerment and survival for the fittest in the society. Women suffer and by realizing their stigma, the writers realistically portray them, their predicament, ordeal, and tribulations. The thorny problems related with women are honour killings, sexual abuse, abduction, alienation, marginalization, forced marriage, injustice; moreover, they are considered weak, and are vulnerable, easily to be exploited in the society where males dominate. Nadeem Aslam, as a representative novelist among the other Pakistani writers, adroitly portrays women and their predicament in an artistic manner. In short, women fare a lot in a patriarchal and a male-dominated society. They are victim of maltreatment --- seduced, molested, abused, ignored, stigmatized, beaten, abducted, isolated, divorced, lynched and enslaved by men--the work of Nadeem Aslam, indeed, replicates the miserable plight of women suffering in the society of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

'She mustn't despair at her predicament, she tells herself; this is not the end of her life; it is a chapter' (Maps for the lost lovers.P.151)

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