

## Theme of Destitute in Shahid Nadeem's Plays: *Kala Meda Bhais* (Black is My Robe) and *Dukhini* (Woman of Sorrow)

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### ABSTRACT

For centuries women have been humiliated being considered as entities instead of human beings. They have been employed as gifts to gratify the personal pursuits and were bartered to quench the lusts under the patriarchy. They are reckoned as a tool to mollify sensual exigencies of the gentry. Asking for their wish or consensus is considered of no use. From childhood to youth they are brain washed that parent's home is not their home. They are being trained in such a way that they should not consider their parent's home as their permanent shelter. The same idea is inoculated into their minds when they are married. They are treated as a commodity which can easily be replaced with a more useful commodity when they become useless. Consequently, they are escorted from both sides and become the victim of destitute. As long as they are expedient, they are being oppressed in the name of society and religion. They are maltreated but are not allowed to complain just for the sake of family prestige and respect. A woman's survival is probable, only when, she is fecund. If she is futile, she is not worth of any sympathy. Shahid Nadeem in his plays *Kala Meda Bhais* (Black is my Robe) and *Dukhini* (Woman of Sorrow) has exquisitely rendered the same notion. He, through his characters, has tinted this idea of exploitation of women in a way that it mites the heart and mind of every equitable individual.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Destitute is about more than rootlessness and homelessness. A home is not just a physical space: it provides roots, identity, security, a sense of belonging and a place of emotional wellbeing. There are many causes of becoming homeless or destitute. Some of the major causes of homelessness into individual factors such as; lack of social support; family background, including family breakdown and disputes; etc. Destitution is a state or feeling of being without home or without shelter. Women are being exploited in the name of love and respect. But that respect is not their own respect, instead that is the respect of their father, brother, husband or any other male member of the family. They are maltreated but are not allowed to complain just for the sake of family prestige and respect. Sometimes they become victim of cruelty in the name of love and sometimes liability forces them to become victim of cruelty. And

this liability is of sharing the financial and economic burden of the family. These liabilities are imposed on them from their childhood. They are trained in such a way that they do not complain about any injustice done at their parent's home as well as at their husband's home. Sometimes they are being bartered and sometimes they are being sold to fulfill the material needs of the family. As Sundri was bartered by her husband in Shahid Nadeem's play *Kala Meda Bhais* (Black is My Robe) (Nadeem, 2008) at the time of need. Even nobody bothered to know her consent. On the other hand *Dukhini*, Moeena, Ambiya and Fatima were married by their parents in the play *Dukhini* (Woman of Sorrow) (Nadeem, 2008) by the same writer Shahid Nadeem, but in fact they were sold to provide material as well as spiritual satisfaction to their parents. And their so-called husbands were actually their agents who used them as maids, wives, sex workers and whatever they liked.

### 2. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

This research paper will explore elements of destitute and its effects in *Kala Meda Bhais* (Black is My

Robe) (Nadeem, 2008) and *Dukhini* (Woman of Sorrow) (Nadeem, 2008). Further, how feeling of destitution stimulates the women to take severe actions such as committing suicide by burning themselves or in any other way. Moreover, some implicit and explicit elements which stimulate feelings of destitute will also be explored. Focus will be on the episodes of the theme of destitute from the given literary pieces. This research paper will focus on the incidents of destitution as exploitation under patriarchy.

### 3. FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The theoretical framework presents and designates the theory that explains why the research problem under study occurs. It is that window through which a researcher can look into the research problem. I have used some filaments of feminism as a window to analyze the selected text in feministic perspective. I have taken the chunks from Simon De Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex* to elaborate the topic under discussion.

### 4. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

A woman is considered useful only when she is fecund. If a woman is futile and does not produce children, she can easily be replaced or kicked out of the house of her husband. Sometimes if her husband is sympathetic, he does not divorce her or kick her out instead he keeps her as a maid or some entity to be exploited at the time of need, in the same way Sundri in *Kala Meda Bhais* (Black is My Robe) was exploited. When Sundri does not conceive a child for many years her husband Wasaya gets marry to another woman Sohni who brings an ox as her dowry. He brings her home without informing his first wife Sundri. Not having a child is his justification for this emotional torture which he has given to his first wife. The home in which Sundri has spent many years of her life and served there, all of a sudden that home is occupied by another woman and Sundri becomes homeless. The other woman becomes mistress of her home. When Sundri totally becomes useless she remains as a commodity not a human being. (Nadeem, 2008) As in the book *The Second Sex* by Simon De Beauvoir she says, "Domestic females are sometimes exploited to the point of exhaustion of their forces as reproducers and in their individual capacities by a demanding master." (Beauvoir, p. 101) Then all of a sudden the ox dies and the useless commodity Sundri is bartered with the ox of Ditta. Maai comes and give a suggestion to Wasaya that Ditta's wife has died and he has an ox which he does not need. She says "Look. Ditta needs a woman badly and you need an

ox equally badly. If you let go of one wife and give her to Ditta, he will be happy to exchange her with his ox". (Kala Meda Bhais(Black is My Robe), p. 168). Before this she convinces Wasaya by giving the example of barter system. She says "Can't you see? The world goes around on the barter principle. The shoe maker makes shoes and exchanges them with the potter. The farmer grows wheat and barter it with the weaver." (Kala Meda Bhais(Black is My Robe), p. 165). So, in this way a woman is exchanged with an animal. Simon De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* gives example of a Bedouin tribe and tells, "She has no more freedom of choice than the young Bedouin girl exchanged for a flock of sheep." (Beauvoir, p. 508). Same notion has been referred by Claude Levi Strauss in his book *Elementary Structures of Kinship*; he gives the example of Australian culture. He describes the experience of a researcher called Frazer who closely observed Australian culture. "Frazer conceives the exchange of wives as a convenient solution to the economic problem". (Straus, p. 138). He further tells that in Australia "Men exchanged their sisters in marriage because that was the cheapest way of getting a wife". (Straus, p. 145)

In the same way *Sundri* is exchanged with ox *Maasi* says "this is how things are done. You get what you need and exchange it with what other party needs. Sundri is the price of the ox. You don't need Sundri and Ditta doesn't need the ox. It is as simple as is that." (Kala Meda Bhais(Black is My Robe), p. 168) As in Beauvoir's "She still has to live and murmurs: "No one needs me!" (Beauvoir, p. 711). As mentioned in Claud Levi Strauss "The inclusion of women in the number of reciprocal presentations from group to group and from tribe to tribe is such a general custom that a whole volume would not be sufficient to enumerate the instances of it." (Straus, p. 64) When *Wasaya* shows some humanity by saying "but let me talk to Sundri first." He is being stopped by *Maasi* with the argument "why? Who asks a woman's consent ever?" (Kala Meda Bhais(Black is My Robe), p. 169)

Sometimes women are bartered as an entity and sometimes they are sold as a commodity to get material benefit from them. In *Dukhin*(Woman of Sorrow) (Nadeem, 2008) *Ambiya*, *Moeena*, and *Fatima* were sold by their parents to the men who treacherously married with the girls and then these so called husbands sold them to agents in double amounts and those agents made maximum use of the girls. The agents treated them as servants as well as prostitutes to quench their own lusts and also the lusts of other men who were the customers of those commodities (women). It has always been done that

at the time of need parents always sacrifice their daughters. As *Ambiya's* mother argue with her father not to marry the daughter with a stranger "but we don't know him. He is a foreigner. Will our daughter be happy?" (Dukhini(Woman of Sorrow), p. 199) The father replies "she will be happy there. He has money." (Dukhini(Woman of Sorrow), p. 199) For a poor father scale of happiness is only money. Then these women were sold at *Bangalipara* (The Auction Market).

*"Women are sitting in a line and customers come to examine the goods. They check women like animals or goods at a shop. Pimps act as sales agent.*

Agent 1: the girls are all healthy with strong limbs, have no illness. Almost all are virgins. I have taken great care to protect their virginity.

Customer 1: but how can you guarantee that? There is usually breakage in such a long journey.

Agent 1: if there are damaged goods, I declare that you can trust me. There is a concession for damaged goods. If you want second hand stuff come to the other room.

Agent 1: the goods are brand new. What kind of goods are you looking for, sir?

Customer 2: I need a maidservant. She should be able to cook and take care of the children. But it will be good if she is pretty as well. You understand?

Customer 3: What I need is an obedient servant.

Agent 2: They all are obedient and servile, sir. We will give you a piece you will love. Have a look." (Dukhini(Woman of Sorrow), p. 200)

In this way these girls reach at different places and are treated as slaves, prostitutes, wives etc. Not only in present times even in past women were maltreated and exploited for different purposes in the name of religion. This exploitation was given the name of "sacred prostitution" and "hospitality prostitution". Beauvoir gives the example of Greek culture and says "In the fifth century B.C., every woman in Babylon had to give herself once in her life to a stranger in the temple of Mylitta for a coin she contributed to the temple's coffers; she then returned home to live in chastity. Religious prostitution has continued to our day among Egyptian almahs and Indian bayadères, who make up respectable castes of

musicians and dancers. But most often, in Egypt, India, and western Asia, sacred prostitution slipped into legal prostitution, the priestly class finding this trade profitable. There were venal prostitutes even among the Hebrews. In Greece, especially along the coast or on the islands where many foreigners stopped off, temples of "young girls hospitable to strangers," as Pindar called them, could be found: the money they earned was intended for religious establishments, that is, for priests and indirectly for their maintenance. In reality, in a hypocritical way, sailors' and travelers' sexual needs—in Corinth and other places—were exploited; and this was already venal prostitution. Solon was the one who turned this into an institution. He bought Asian slaves and shut them up in dicterions located in Athens near the temple of Venus, not far from the port, under the management of pornotropos in charge of the financial administration of the establishment; each girl received wages, and the net profit went to the state." (Beauvoir, pp. 124,125)

In prostitution women have no other choice except being get exploited in the hands of their agents.

"Fatima: Can't you let go of me at this time of the night?

Agent: What? But your job starts at night. You work on night shift. I have taken the advance from customer.

Fatima: Don't push me. I am getting mad.

Agent: Oh, I see. But I know how to cure the mad ones. With love, with force or, if needed, by inviting the police officer." (Dukhini(Woman of Sorrow), pp. 201,202)

Women are not less than animals as animals are sent and sold anywhere at the time of need in the same way women are replaced with some useful entity and exchanged or sold without their consent. After marriage bearing children is considered their first and foremost responsibility. If some woman unfortunately does not get this blessing of God she is considered as ill fortunate and is being maltreated by her husband and in laws. Another hit on the self-respect of the women is that when they are being blamed for not bearing the children without knowing the reason and when they are taken as the only one responsible for this. Their all merits become demerits because of lacking this particular merit. Because in our patriarchal society luck or fate is discussed only in the case of men for women there is no fate or luck. Women are considered deficient not unlucky. Then the worst feeling of homelessness and destitute is again injected when the husband gets marry to another woman and usually divorces and sometimes

leaves the first wife in some corner of the house as some defected piece. As *Opra* says "when one didn't get pregnant, he brought another one. There was no respect for Sundri in the house. Where can she go? Her parents are no more. Who should she share her grief with?" (*Kala Meda Bhais (Black is My Robe)*, p. 169). As Beauvoir says, "The reason for their existence is there, in their womb, and gives them a perfect impression of plenitude." (Beauvoir, p. 619)

In the patriarchal society woman is the one who is to be blamed for all the misfortunes. As *Mai* while talking to the grave of *Dukhini* says

"I can understand your grief, *Dukhini*. Many many years ago, I had also migrated at the time of Great Partition....When the rioters attacked.... They killed all the men accompanying us. The women were jumping in the well to save their honor. But some unlucky ones like me could not reach the well and were captured by our pursuers. It was horrible. We were repeatedly raped. When I came to my senses I managed to cross the border and reach Pakistan....I went to my husband but he refused to take me. He said I had become impure and could not stay in a respectable family." (*Dukhini (Woman of Sorrow)*, p. 211). As Beauvoir says, "A woman is shut up in a kitchen or a boudoir, and one is surprised her horizon is limited; her wings are cut, and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly." (Beauvoir, p. 731)

Such women, who have become destitute by the grace of their own dear ones, do not get any shelter or any home even after their death. Their grave becomes a controversial issue. And in this patriarchal and so-called respectable society dominated by men, they become homeless even after their death. The eternal home (grave), which is the right of every human being, that home is also snatched from them and they become homeless. As after the death of *Dukhini* the officials of both countries Bangladesh and Pakistan refuse to accept the corpse of *Dukhini*.

"Bangladeshi Official: We have no evidence that she is Bangladeshi. She could be Nepalese or Sri Lankan, or even Indian.

Pakistani Official: But she was Bengali. All her friends were from Bangladesh. And the agent, who brought them, was also from Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi Official: it is possible that she joined the group from India. After all West Bengal is also Bengal, and that is India.

Pakistani Official: But according to our law we cannot allow her to be buried. We have to deport her, alive or dead.

Bangladeshi Official: We cannot accept *Dukhini*.

Pakistani Official: We too cannot accept *Dukhini*." (*Dukhini (Woman of Sorrow)*, p. 220)

As Beauvoir says, "her helplessness is due not to her sex but to her situation within the family." (Beauvoir, p. 138)

In this way once again *Dukhini* and many other women like her become homeless and victim of destitute

## 5. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, my review of the literature indicated that little research has focused on the experiences of violence in the lives of homeless and destitute women and that what does exist provides for no clear conclusions about what factors might increase or decrease victimization risk, consequences of this violence, and interactions with the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system needs to be fair to control the trafficking of women as well as the violence and injustice against them.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR(S)



Bushra Wajahat was born in Jhelum city of Pakistan on June 18, 1982. She shifted to UAE when she was only 2 years old and completed her SSC and HSSC from Pakistani Islamia Higher Secondary School Al Ain UAE. She returned to her country to acquire her Graduation and Master's Degree. She completed her Master's Degree in English Language and Literature Major from The University of Punjab in 2005. She started her career as a school teacher from Presentation Convent School, Jhelum Pakistan. She became a Lecturer of English and Head of the English Department at Saint Francis Girls Degree College, Sarai Alamgir Pakistan in 2009. In the acknowledgment of her hard work and dedication she was promoted as the Principal of same college in 2012. Currently she is an M.Phil Scholar of University of Sargodha, Pakistan and has completed her Thesis on Bapsi Sidhwa's Novels. She has participated in International Research Conference on Pakistani Narratives in English held at UOS M.B Din Campus, on 9th and 10th November 2017, as a researcher and was declared best presenter of Drama

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