Research Article

PSYCHODYNAMIC DIMENSIONS OF ADOLESCENT FEMALE MENTAL HEALTH UNDER PATRIARCHY: NARRATIVES OF GIRLHOOD IN NASRIN AND DURRANI

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Abstract

Adolescent girls in South Asia face patriarchal stressors that affects their mental health, early marriages, exploitation, mobility restriction, body shaming and domestic violence exposure. The feminist writers are trying to probe the psyche of the women folk directly by writing about the gender issues faced by them in their respective culture. Girlhood is not a natural stage here, it is a psychic training in fear, shame and obedience. The problems of gender biasness and identity crisis do have a reflection in the literary texts produced by these selected feminist writers. Through this paper, psychodynamics has been used as an approach to work on the inner conflicts faced by these writers who are writing so violently in the works produced by them. It also tries to find out how language and culture can correlate the common issues faced by the women in different nations. It also focuses on translation as a medium to connect with the issues of women outside the nations.

Keywords: Psychodynamics, Feminist, Patriarchy, Gender Issues, Translation.

Introduction

In the words of George Steiner, “Literature is by essence thematic.” While comparative literature on the other hand is giving a broader reach and a clear perspective to the world of literature. Comparative Literature has always understood itself to be concerned primarily with the relations among literatures of different languages and cultivates reading across the set linguistic boundaries in order to highlight everything so that the exclusive focus on the national literature tends to obscure. Comparative literature also traces the transformations and travels of literary genres and texts across time and space. It tries to explore the relation of literature with philosophy, history, politics and literary theory etc while these intersections of literature on the other hand give a new outlook to a particular problem or patterns.

While gender is not merely a biological difference, but a social and psychological structure that frames how a girl identifies herself and is seen by the world. In patriarchal societies, this structure often turns into oppression, where the female self is silenced, controlled and fragmented. The people across the globe are interconnected with one another making it a global village despite having tremendous variations of culture, colour, race, religion, language etc. The deviation of language is the most important factor which affects in bridging the gap. Due to multilingualism across the world, the researchers are trending towards translational studies as the important media. As literature reflects the culture, thoughts and ideology of a particular region thus, translation is proving one of the important comparative approaches to literature. While a very important question gets raised when we talk of translational studies and that is regarding its ‘originality’. This limitation of translational approach drags the researches under questions in many of the cases. Although it’s very artful to say that even a single sentence in any language is ‘equivalent’ to its translated version which we do understand is never justified. Amiya Dev (2000) has also examined a lot regarding the commonality and differences of comparative literature in India. With the help of such philosophers and researchers, one can determine the possible patterns of togetherness and may underline the various aspects of inter literariness. Dev (2000) in his article, "Comparative Literature in India," compares the unity and the diversity thesis, and identifies the relationship between Indian commonality and differences as the prime site of comparative literature in India. He argues the fact that due to great diversity in different states of India, it is a foolish act to compare India as one unit. But as far as translational studies are concerned, they act as a bridge to understand the literature in a good manner and keeping in mind the originality and ethnicity of the producer of the text so that less of the essence is lost while adapting translation method for comparison.

Psychodynamics: Understanding the Inner World

Psychodynamics helps us understand how external oppression becomes an internal conflict. It studies how unconscious fears, desires, shame and defence mechanisms shape a person's mental life and behaviour in social

interaction in South Asian nations specifically. Historically, South Asian region which is a home to different cultures and values and where beliefs and ideology can be seen in a particular region hence making it a diversified whole. Thus, the modern concerns mesh with the traditional values and people feel hard to accept the change which is leading to different issues, primarily the gender issues. Patriarchy usually works inside the mind first where the girl learns to punish herself before anyone else punishes her. These gender issues in patriarchy have engrossed in almost every niche and corner of the society since long now. The disparity on the basis of gender may be seen in our homes, workplaces, study zones, research places, society and most importantly psyche of the individuals. As defined by Webster, gender oppression is "*unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power*."

The reasons for this inequality may be a conscious attempt or an unconscious move in many situations. As postulated by Drew Westen in his concept of Psychodynamics, our surroundings play a great role in constituting the psyche of an individual. He postulates, "People's social interactions are impacted by their mental understanding of themselves, other people and relationships." These social relations and the environment impact the mental and emotional processes of the mind thereby adding to the issues of gender inequality. As per the research conducted by ILO, Bureau for Employer's activism, the women are underrepresented globally in the workplaces. The inclusion of women declines gradually in the hierarchy of the different workplaces. They face gender-based discrimination as well as unconscious gender bias. Twenty first century expected such biased atmosphere to be evacuated from the root but still these roots are hard enough to be driven out of this social structure. This unconscious gender bias pertains to an unintentional, abrupt and automatic mental reactions associated with gender which originates from the norms, values, culture, tradition and experiences of men in the social structure. Mckinsey and Co. (2020) deduced in their research study that, "invisible barriers are holding women back, rather than overt sexism alone." Thus, the mangers in the workplaces and elsewhere are unconsciously considering the social roles of women as being mothers, wives, homemakers, cooks etc. and are leading to the reasons of biasness at workplaces. Further J.Bush and L.Yee (2011) opined that the gender biases in the mindsets of managers prevent women from advancing into leadership positions. Thus, in the patriarchal setup, it is true to say that men treat women as commodities and try to subjugate women in every possible way with or without reason which is again unconscious most of the times. Such a psyche of people is actually leading to gender issues which are not specified to some particular place, area or a particular nation but across nations. Many women are facing physical and psychological issues as a result of this oppression just due to patriarchal mindset of the folk. While as per the reports of UNICEF South Asia, it could be deduced that "in all the South Asian countries, the patriarchal values and social norms play a great role in keeping the gender inequalities viable."

Another reason for such unconscious bias attitude may be due to the assigned social roles of men and women. The women were given the roles to cook, clean and look after others in the family while the men were supposed to earn for the family. But, in the present time, when women are even the bread earners of the family and are doing jobs in almost every sector, they are expected to do all the previously defined roles now also. And the males are still earning as their role with no change. This marks another condition in the inequality parameters.

Another issue comes up regarding the domestic violence faced by the women in the society. Recently the *Family welfare* figures clearly show the adverse impact of COVID on the lives and psyche of many families in India and abroad. An abrupt rise in the cases related to domestic violence and harassment have been reported during the lockdown period because men try to suppress women as they feel themselves as dominant being and when the situation had made them to stay together all the time for several days and months even, men were actually disbursing all of their frustration on women which further led to conflicts and in extreme cases leading to divorces as well. According to UNICEF South Asia reports, 37 percent women experience physical or sexual violence mostly in the hands of their intimate partner. Findings from the *World Economic Forum* indicate that India is one of the worst countries in the world in terms of gender inequality. One of the set reasons may be the tradition of considering women as the weaker sex who is born to be suppressed under the hands of men. Here patriarchy is playing a vital role which has imbibed such Cognitive content in the minds of men. The exploitation of women has been an age long phenomenon especially in these south Asian nations and in almost all parts of the world. However, this research paper is limited to the gender issues within south Asian nations where the patriarchal values and the norms of the society incline more towards men or boys, who enjoy more access to opportunities and the available resources.

In the South Asian countries like India, women and specially girls are actually worshipped as goddess in Hindu tradition but still we see cases where they are deprived of basic human rights. Women were and women are considered as the 'marginalized group' or we may say, 'the second sex' as pointed by Simone De Beauvoir despite covering nearly half of the proportion in the population of any nation. According to United Nations Development

Programme, the Human Development Report presented the Gender Inequality Index in the year 2020 where India ranked 112th among the 153 nations while Bangladesh had a better rank being 65th and Pakistan on the other hand had more deteriorated condition having 151th rank. Thus, this disease of Gender Inequality is not limited to any one area or any sector rather it has spread like a pandemic all over the global sphere which is ultimately trying to exclude women from the basic social opportunities and hence will deeply affect the prospects of the future generations. If we look south Asian societies, the families prefer boys to girls because the psyche has been framed in such a manner that this distribution is related and is taught to every single individual since birth. Even female foeticide is tragically very common in south Asian Nations, where the laws have been made for ones who go for determining the sex before hand and then opt for abortion later if there is a girl child. After various legislative measures, the sex ratio in India at present is 108.18 males to 100 females and is nearly same for Bangladesh and Pakistan as well. One of the key factors driving gender inequality is the preference for sons because they are considered more beneficial than girls in many cases like economic management, income utility, and practice of the funeral rites which are supposed to be performed by the males of the family, etc. They are given the rights to inherit the family names, the rights to inherit property and boys are actually considered as additional status for their family. Another practice of sending the daughter to other house along with dowry is also one of the reasons for not preferring a female child. Although the practice of dowry has been reduced to certain extent but it still exists in the society where many parents of the brides feel helpless to meet the demands of the groom's family.

Patriarchy and the Fragmented Female Gaze

As the social scenario is changing and now the women are not writing by hiding their identity or under any pseudo name rather the ways of expressing the ideas have become really bold and clear, and the ones who are actually responsible are being ultimately targeted as well. Thus, the veil of oppression and patriarchal influence is getting shed off with the weapons of feminist writings. The female gaze is not free but is fragmented by the patriarchal gaze that judges and corrects it. A girl as an individual learns to see herself not as she is, but as patriarchy wants her to be where she becomes obedient, silent and pleasing. In the exploration of gender violence, oppression, influence of patriarchy and intervention of politics, all the select three writers selected for the paper i.e. Meena Kandasamy, Taslima Nasrin and Tehmina Durrani who belong to different nations though but all the three feminist writers have exemplified the women who have gone beyond the boundaries and are then maltreated by the society.

In 1993, Taslima Nasrin was issued fatwa for writing a piece of work 'Lajja' for the oppressed women of Bangladesh. Her way of expression was criticized by a group of people. Later government also sided and supported the protestors and tried to suppress the voice of the brave among meek. In the same manner Tehmina Durrani had to face the censorship for raising the voice against patriarchy and feudalism in Pakistan. She had to face severe violence and blows at the hands of her husband who was a feudal lord and considered himself be an epitome of power politics. Moreover, Meena Kandasamy, a Chennai based Indian writer had to write another book named *'Exquisite Cadavers'* (2019) as a response to her novel, *When I Hit you (2018)* where she has presented an auto-fiction portraying the violence she had to face in a four months long marriage. Although she had to face a lot of criticism afterwards because she thought that the readers might have read it wrong way. The expression which she used in her recent book was more of like rage-filled notes and a work of consciousness rising in which every influence mentioned there is referenced and documented.

Taslima Nasrin's Split: A Life - The Split Self

If we talk of Bangladesh as a nation, the wide publicity about Taslima Nasrin across nations within a short span of time deserves closer attention and analysis. In an interview with '*The Quint (2018)*, Nasrin claims of being a symbol of freedom and the one possessing the rights of expression and the one who will keep on talking and fighting regarding the women's rights for whatever the consequences may be. Looking at all this a question arises, 'Do standing against the wrong should be the target of the society'? Ethically the answer is 'No' but practically the same happens. This is where the minds and the psyche play their role. The environment where we are brought up, where we live and what all we see around us gets imbibed and imprinted in our minds for long and the individual tries to incorporate the learnt experiences in their own lives whenever he/she gets the opportunity. In this context, Drew Westen, a psychodynamic theorist postulates that, "*People's social interactions are impacted by their mental understanding of themselves, other people and relationships."* The evolution of the construct of the abrupt actions and behaviour by an individual from the psychoanalytic origins to its current psychodynamic definition can mainly be due to the social structure and the environment around. We may even relate psychodynamics here, that the mental distress is a normal response to abnormal control. Taslima Nasrins quotes many girls who have suffered a lot and where their distressing situation is usually related

to the patriarchal control faced by them in their surroundings. But Taslima Nasrin becomes the voice of all and quotes, *"When I write, I don't allow the fear of consequences to interfere with the writing process. I have in the past paid for my commitment to the truth and the way I live my life. I am prepared to pay more if I have to" (p.213).* She is living in India at present due to a fatwa which has been issued against her by the people of her own country. She has been banished from Bangladesh (Her own country) and even West Bengal (Part of India). She lucidly tells the real situation though in a vicious tone when she says, *"The enemy of our country's freedom was also in charge of our lives and a writer's freedom to write what she wished to and her freedom of expression were being crushed under his corpulent ass." (p.413)* she feels outrageous of the point that how media sometimes brings in the pseudo image with the political interventions. Politicians in Bangladesh got a point for their vote bank on the name of Taslima. Nasrin's autobiographical account of exile, girlhood, love, body, illness and writing serves as a ground of her unconscious expression. Here, Girlhood returns as memory which is fragmented, painful and unresolved. Their agenda became, she quotes *"Come together in a movement against a fallen woman, a sexual fiend and sinner, an anti-Islamic atheist like Taslima Nasrin" (p.428).* Later at a point in her life, Taslima gets to know from a report that, one *Maulana* named Maulana Habib-ur-Rahman; the then chairman of Sahaba *Sainik parishad* addresses an open public gathering where he declares prize money of 50,000 taka for the one who brings her head to him. She had to face many such death threats for the stake of her quest for freedom of expression. But the fearless body cells in Taslima didn't stop her from doing what her psychic forces intended her to write. Very few women may feel courageous to this extent, where they have death warnings and threats all around and you try to escape from life and still work on what poisons other social beings while enriches your soul. Sandhya Yadav (2014) opines that, "*Taslimas every novel is a testament of revolt and resilience. Her woman characters do not surrender to men or to social and religious institutions because they don't identify themselves with them. Family values are dear to them but not the taboos. Her characters believe in breaking away from the family fold for better human values*."

Moreover, Taslima Nasrin's works have been translated from Bengali to 20 different languages which have provided accessibility to the people worldwide so as to understand the psychological and emotional makeup of women living in Bangladesh. In the words of Shipra Mishra (2020), "*Literature is, by many critics, said to be the mirror of society, while some others regard it as a powerful medium which not only „mirrors reality‟ of social life, but also „shapes reality‟ by contemplating on and reflecting its preferred ideal versions."* Thus, translation as a medium helps in elucidating the reality portrayed in the literature of that particular nation. Through the title, *Split: A Life*, she has talked about the split between body and mind, desire and duty, writer and woman. She has even discussed the transition of Split between the girl she was and the woman she became which made her a strong woman psychologically. *Split: A Life* is not just a memoir; it is a psychic attempt to join the split pieces since girlhood. To narrate the story directly links to a situation where Taslima Nasrin is reclaiming the self.

Tehmina Durrani's My Feudal Lord - From Girl to Property

While on the other hand, another female contemporary author, Tehmina Durrani, who is a Pakistan based author and narrates her own life, not behind the veil of a man's name but as the protagonist of her debut novel, *My Feudal Lord*. In doing so, she knowingly sheds off the shackles and expresses the tedious life she has gone through, in her autobiography, *My Feudal Lord: A Devastating indictment of women's role in Muslim society"*. Tehmina Durrani's autobiography tells the story a daughter of a feudal family who got married at an adolescent age of seventeen years to Ghulam Mustafa Khar, Punjab's feudal lord and a politician where her Girlhood ends abruptly in this marriage. In this autobiography, she tells the readers as how her adolescence is cut short where she is not allowed to become a woman, she is made a wife. The influence of power politics could be seen in her life with her second husband Mustafa Khar, where she had to bury her feelings, her fury and her pain, under the veil of a dignified life. Mustafa Khar controls her space, time, body, speech and even her thoughts. She learns to anticipate his anger as he used to assault her both mentally and physically. Many a times he behaved ferociously and would beat Tehmina for petty reasons. Once she adds in the book, 'My Feudal Lord' that, *"Night was the time when I had to face him alone. Night was when he had no other distractions and could concentrate his fury upon me. Darkness was accompanied by evil." (p. 181)* Later, a time came in Tehmina Durrani's life when she started running out of patience. She narrates, *"When someone asked why I was wearing glasses, I simply avoided an answer. Mustafa was nervous, knowing that he could no longer predict my behaviour, and his anxiety was well founded." (p.216)* Her capacity finally gave way, when on one occasion she at last retaliated and broke her thirteen years long silence and telling everyone that Mustafa Khar beats her. Tehmina recollects, "*At dinner I coolly removed my dark glasses, exposing my husband's fury. Someone asked me what happened and I replied stoically, Mustafa hit me" (p. 216)*. This is how for the first time she raised her voice and revealed his camouflaged brutal face. She exposed her pain of those thirteen long years, the pain given to her by her feudal lord. This is how such conditions create trauma bonding, learned helplessness, and dissociation in a relationship.

Tehmina exemplifies the fearless women who disregard being silent on the oppressiveness they face in their respective lives. Silence according to her, "*condones injustice, breeds subservience and fosters a malignant hypocrisy. Mustafa Khar and other feudal lords thrive and multiply on silence." (p.375)* South Asian society believes women to remain silent until it is bearable. But this silence later configures men to be more violent than before as they begin thinking women as meek and weak. When any woman suffers in her life, there are very few who take her side and support her for the same. Here in Tehmina's case as well, she was not even supported by her parents from whom she was expecting help at first. She says in the text, "*My Father gave a written notice to the press disowning and disinheriting me. He ordered me to refrain from using his name." (p.381).* Her father disowns her because, it is usually believed in South Asian societies, that if girls do not have a settled married life, and if in any case leaves her husband's house, such acts bring bad name to their family and they might have to feel ashamed accepting their daughters with broken marriage in front of the society. The Tehmina once under the shackles of her husband turns out to be 'lioness' when she celebrates her victory with the last line of her autobiography and writes, "*Well Mustafa, now the world will soon know you only as Tehmina Durrani's ex-husband." (p.382)* Here, writing as a genre had given wings to Tehmina and today she is the voice of many suffering women and is a leading human rights activist of Pakistan. She is working as a social activist under *Tehmina Durrani Foundation (TDF).* Thus, we may say that the psychic energies whether conscious or unconscious lead to the personality we dwell in. Sometimes the individuals experience conflicting thoughts and feelings towards a person or a situation leads to contradictory motivation which may in some cases lead to mental compromise. In this discourse, emancipated women like Tehmina Durrani also tried leading a submissive life as learned and experienced since her childhood but her psychic energies and emotional injustice didn't led her to be meek in the society and reacted against the norms of her respective society. Tehmina Durrani rightly says, "*We shared a fascination for Freudian and Jungian analysis. He believed in the talking cure, and he helped me make a tentative beginning at unveiling some of the mysteries in my mind." (p.281)* she hardly cared about the consequences which she had to face after the divorce. Tehmina lost everything even her kids initially. She says, *"I had lost everything-even the children. I walked through the corridors of my former home and realized how completely he had stripped me. This was the difference between man and woman." (p. 284)* Tehmina chose to divorce her husband so as to lead a new life devoid of humiliations and beatings. Tehmina gives words to the questions in the eyes of numerous women when she says, "*Mustafa, do you realize that you have taken away everything from me- thirteen years, my family, my children, my youth and everything I believed in?"*. *(p. 284)* The above stated line prolifically brings forth the fears that women hold close to their heart and mind, which often leads them to be silent victims.

Comparative Analysis: Split vs. Feudal Lord

Rekha Pande (2010) is of the opinion that South Asia has a family-oriented culture where interdependence is valued more than independence. The gender inequality faced by the women of selected nations is entirely different despite these nations having common historical roots. Although India, Bangladesh and Pakistan have common cultural values which would have dwelled similar societal influence among these nations. But the reports showcase a different picture. The women have lower education levels than men. They have fewer job opportunities and are more socially isolated where most of them are the victims of domestic violence. They have less access to the assets and don't possess inheritance rights as their constitution provides inheritance rights to men only. The major reason behind all this ends up with deeply rooted social norms about gender in the psyche of individuals which restricts the growth patterns. The attitudes towards gender in South Asian countries tend to be more towards conservative side as compared to other nations. Here the girls are more likely to be exploited, excluded, discriminated, less educated and seen as a burden on their family. Sometimes they are not even allowed to take birth and are murdered within the womb only. All this pertains to psychological issue embedded within the minds of psychopaths who frame such norms in the society. Poverty is another reason which is proving as a barrier in growth and development. These results in early marriage sometimes and the figures state that 5.8 million girls get married before the age of 18. Sex ratios remain highly imbalanced and many girls are exploited because of patriarchal psyche carried by the men in the society. Many women in South Asian Nations also die of preventable maternal deaths which again tend towards ignorance on the part of others. The grounds on which such things happen is mainly due to the reason that they don't value women and their lives. Gender inequality is not limiting to the problems faced by women in the society, rather it is a hindrance in the growth and development of a particular nation.

India compared to other two countries enjoy freedom in issues related to voting, basic rights, reserved positions in political system, equal opportunities for schooling, equal job opportunities etc. and the only problem lies with the patriarchal psychology of the society. In south Asian Nations including India, family plays an important role

in framing the mental constitution of an individual and there are differences in the familial structure of both joint and nuclear families which in turn affects the psyche of the growing child. The process of socialization at this stage embarks the prospects of future and may further lead to physical or psychological tension and do have imprints in the later stage of life. But in countries like India, if one considers woman's independence as a part of modernisation, then it is usually affected with the traditional values leading to inequality and violence in the society. Despite the efforts laid down by the government in India such as *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP)*, *Beti Anmol, Working Women Hostel (WWH), Mahil Shakti Kendra (MSK), Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (SSY), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs),* the cases of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, rapes, child domestic work, poor education, sexual abuse, girl trafficking, poor health etc are still there, mainly due the psychic manifestation of valuing girls less than boys in the society. In India Section 498A in Indian Penal Code (IPC), punishes the criminals who are embroiled in any crime concerning family violence mainly torture of brides, dowry death, suicides, mental harassment etc. But then also if the cases of violence spring up in the society, then the seriousness of the punishment offered comes under question and even sometimes the politics of saving the criminal due to power of influence and money have been reported which marks a wrong practice and later encourages evil doing. The *World Economic Forum* (WEF) ranked India at 135 out of 146 countries in its *Global Gender Gap* (GGG) Index for 2022. Although India has marginally improved in its score for *Gender Gap Index* from 0.625 (2021) to 0.629 (2022) but a lot needs to be improved to bring both the sexes at par.

Conclusion

Gender inequality is one of the major concerns in today's society despite so many laws and schemes pertaining to the same. The list of these legislations as well as the extent of discrimination may be endless but the change can be expected only if the psyche of the people in the society changes. Krawczyk (2017) in his research study opines that, "It is ten times more common for female authors to be incorrectly cited as males than for male researchers to be misattributed as female." Another, in a study comparing promotion patterns, it was established that "despite the similar productivity of men and women at the level of associated professor, men were more likely to get promoted to full professorships" (Carter et al., 2017). Such studies prove that it's the cognitive which plays an important role in individual's emotions and experiences, hence marking the gestalt's holistic acceptance of a particular object or a concept where women's underrepresentation is somewhere marked in the psychology of the people where they may process unconsciously resulting unequal atmosphere. In this context, Drew Westen postulates, "*a great deal of mental life is unconscious, meaning people's thoughts, feelings and motivation are unknown to them.*"

Another major issue behind the gender disparity in the society lies with the weak judicial system which takes nearly years together to give justice to the victim that too if the sufferer lodges a complaint by mistake. But due to this time taking process of the judiciary, the rate of committing such crimes is aggravating in the society. While in countries like India, the time taken by the judicial system for the criminal to prove guilty of his mistake usually leads to depressed state of mind where the psychic forces of a woman may go beyond the patient level and in many cases, they put an end to their life. Here gynocritics are playing crucial role to unveil the flaws under the sheath of a civilized twenty first society where men and women must be treated equal.

The essence of literature lies with unveiling the truth hidden under social norms. Else severe and stronger laws by the judicial system may help women come out of this discrepancy and fight with the system which is although lacking in this society at present. Feminism which believes in equality of men and women brings these types of discrimination to light and provides solutions. Thus, these feminist writers are showcasing a responsible attitude towards society by being the voice of the suppressed and the meek. But 21st century is still not post-patriarchal and now a strict need is there to weed it out from the society. Thus, in Nasrin's *Split: A Life* and Durrani's *My Feudal Lord*, adolescent female mental distress appears as a psychodynamic split between the obedient self and desiring self, silence and speech and even the autobiographical narration functions as the process of reintegrating that fragmented girlhood into a speaking subject.

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