

2. Power, Privilege or Right: A Radical-Feminist Evaluation of *Attar of Roses and other stories* of Pakistan

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Abstract:

The present research paper is an evaluation of power, privilege or right enjoyed by the men in Pakistani Patriarchal society in Attar of Roses and Other Stories of Pakistan, a collection by Tahira Naqvi. Naqvi is an emerging female Pakistani writer in English, who has used her fiction to radicalize the marginalized position of Pakistani women. The objective of this paper is to pinpoint the social and political position of patriarchal society through which woman subjugation by men becomes a power, a privilege or a right to be exercised. Radical Feminism will serve as a theoretical and conceptual framework for the apt exploration of the problematic. Naqvi has a well-organized stance to present in her stories and there is a true depiction of woman subjugation, patriarchal oppression and sense of insecurity in housewives and working ladies as well. However, Naqvi has delineated her female characters rebellious of set norms and traditions which show seeds of radicalism in our society. The tentative conclusion of this research will hint at the changing social position of men and women in our society.

Keywords:

Power, Privilege, Right, Radical Feminism, Pakistani short stories, Patriarchal position and women marginalization



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"Masculinity is part of a binary and requires its opposite, since, in the absence of femininity, masculinity would have no meaning." (Jeffreys, 2008)

Tahira Naqvi is a Pakistani female Diasporic writer of short stories in English. Short Story is a genre, much ignored in Pakistani literary circles and least attention is paid to this rich and fertile field of studies. This Research paper is an attempt to invite the attention of the learned community toward this field of studies which has very deeply and vividly addressed some serious issues of our society. Originally from Pakistan, Naqvi is a Senior Urdu language lecturer at New York University. Author of two collections of short stories titled 'Attar of Roses and Other Stories of Pakistan' and 'Dying in a Strange Country', has also extensively translated works of Urdu fiction and prose. She is also known for her translations into English of an extensive list of stories, novels, novellas and essays of prominent Urdu author, Ismat Chughtai, as well as other well-known writers of Urdu fiction, including Premchand, Khadija Mastoor, Hajira Masroor and Ahmed Ali.

This research paper is limited to her one collection of short stories, namely *Attar of Roses and Other Stories of Pakistan* (Naqvi, 1999), which is a collection of twelve stories. All stories have Pakistani setting and pastiche. Characters are taken from various areas of Pakistan living in rural as well as urban localities and appropriately given their roles in the stories. Mostly the language and dialogues given to the characters are reflective of Urdu language and as many as seventy distinct Urdu language phrases can be counted in these stories and characters are given appropriate Pakistani names and appearances to fit them in the themes which the writer wanted to explore. Most of the characters are doctors, school teachers or Professionals and are well elaborated and presented in their usual stereotypical roles except female characters, which are challenging and rebellious to the set values and stereo typicality of their gender roles. This challenging nature of the female characters



delineated by the writer made me inclined to take up the issue of Radical Feminism for this research.

At the outset, it is necessary to have a deep look at the basic term, Feminism. It is the word of the year 2017 (Meriam Webster, n. d.) as in this year this word has been used many hundred percents more than the previous years. The first known use of this word is in the year 1841. (Feminism, n.d.)

Feminism or more appropriately "Core Feminism" is defined as it is the theory that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially and on this basis this theory as an umbrella term is further classified into various specific sub-categories (Though the boundaries between these sub-categories are sometimes blurry and overlapping) as Cultural feminism sees women kinder and more sophisticated than men and it is claimed by the cultural Feminists that if women ruled the World there will be no wars and that " Woman's way is the better way". Eco-feminists believe in resisting the plundering and destroying of mother Earth by Patriarchy. Individualists or individual feminists focus on the presence of barriers that both men and women face due to their gender roles. Marxist Feminists attribute women's oppression principally to the capitalist economic system where global corporate power prevails. Black Feminism argues that sexism, class oppression, gender identity and racism are inextricably bound together. The way these concepts relate to each other is called intersectionality. Visionary feminism is a wise and loving politics. It is rooted in the love of male and female being. (Tuana & Tong, 1995)

Radical feminism is the breeding ground for many of the ideas arising from feminism. Radical feminism was the cutting edge of feminist theory from 1967-1975. (Stone, 1975) It is no longer as universally accepted as it was then, and no longer serves to solely define the term, "feminism." This group views the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change, change of rather revolutionary proportions. Radical feminism questions why women must adopt certain roles based on their biology, just as it questions why men adopt certain other roles based on gender. Radical feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically-determined behaviour and culturally-determined behaviour to free both men and women as much as possible from



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their previous narrow gender roles of traditional stereotypical behaviour in which man was supposed to be the final authority for making any decision of the fate of a woman. (Nachescu, 2008). This assumption rested on the assumed power privilege or right of being a male. The term often refers to the women's movements emerging from the civil rights, peace and other liberation movements at a time when people increasingly were questioning different forms of oppression and power. Radical feminists, seeking to understand the roots of women's subordination, have provided the major theoretical understanding that has served as the basis for the inspiration and analysis guiding women's movements around the world. Radical Feminists question and challenge the following assumptions:

- 1. Sexual objectification of women
- 2. The patriarchal subjugation of women
- 3. Radical Egalitarianism
- 4. Stereotypical gender roles
- 5. Politics on Woman's body
- 6. The personal is Political and
- 7. The Sisterhood is Powerful.

Radical feminism thought of itself as addressing the root causes of the feminist question because they thought that patriarchy and biology set men in an advantageous position compared to women. (Sasu, 2008) Patriarchy has organized families historically according to dependence, male lines of inheritance and imbalance of power between men and women. Therefore, they reason that feminism would be the base of any revolutionary change since male supremacy thought to be the basis on which all other domination systems have been modeled. However, women of colour challenge the shared oppression assumption that's based solely on gender and criticize the notion of sex as being the most essential factor in the division of power. They argue this perspective could only be developed by women who did not suffer from race or class oppression. The prominent Radical Feminist Critics like Ellen Willis, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Shulamith Firestone, Catharine MacKinnon, Carol Hanisch and Judith Brown are practitioners of these ideological assumptions.



Yorke has aptly referred to Adrienne Rich's book *Passion, Politics and Body*, in which she has given a much balanced and thought-provoking idea of Radical feminism when she says that in a world dominated by violent and passive-aggressive men, and by male institutions dispensing violence, it is extraordinary to note how often women are represented as the perpetrators of violence, most of all when we are simply fighting in selfdefence or for our children, or when we collectively attempt to change the institutions that are waging war on us and on our children. In reality, the feminist movement could be said to be trying to visualize and make way for a world in which abortion would not be necessary; a world free from poverty and rape, in which young girls would grow up with intelligent regard for and knowledge of their bodies and respect for their minds, in which the socialization of women into heterosexual romance and marriage would no longer be the primary lesson of culture; in which single women could raise children with a less crushing cost to themselves, in which female creativity might or might not choose to express itself in motherhood. Yet, when radical feminists and lesbian/feminists begin to speak of such a world, when we begin to sketch the conditions of a life we have collectively envisioned, the first charge we are likely to hear is a charge of violence: that we are "man-haters. (Yorke, 1997)

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Sheila Jeffreys in her work *Beauty and Misogyny* (2015) has talked about the "personal"; that is, the behaviours of this "private" world were indeed "political". Recognizing the "personal as political" allowed women to identify, through consciousness-raising groups and the exchange of experiences, that what they took to be their own personal failings, such as hating their plump stomachs or feigning a headache when they wanted to avoid sexual intercourse without their male partner getting angry, are not just individual experiences. They were the common experiences of women, constructed out of the unequal power relations of the so-called "private" world, and very political indeed. (Jeffreys, 2015)

Andrea Dworkin in her book *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics* has termed misogyny as an agony and declared it a brutal power in the words "Many women, I think, resist feminism because it is an agony to be fully conscious of the brutal misogyny which permeates culture, society, and all personal relationships." (Dworkin, 1981)



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Bell Hooks in her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* has given a very critical and significant stance on the radicalization of the patriarchal right of dominance in the following words:

Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Therefore, it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels, as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires. (Hooks, 2010)

Gloria Steinem, in her book *The Trouble with Rich Women* (Steinem, G., & Fraulo, 2017) has given a very bold statement about feminism in the words "Feminism...is not 'women as victims' but women refusing to be victims." Coleen Kearon in her *Feminist on Fire: A Novel* (2015) has declared that man-hating is not the objective of Radical Feminism rather it is a struggle to get human autonomy back from the clutches of its depravity and expresses her desire in the lines, "The common perception is that man-hating is solely a radical feminist practice. In my essay, I maintain that is neither radical nor particularly feminist. It's a human response to having your autonomy restricted, and in some cases, destroyed." (Kearon, 2015)

However, Jessa Crispin in her "Why I Am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto" (2017) has questioned the Radical feminism in the following lines:

We have to imagine something before we can build the infrastructure that will allow it to exist. We have failed here on both fronts: in imagination and in reality. Our great weirdos, from Emily Dickinson to Simone Weil to Coco Chanel, are seen as outliers, as not relevant to the way we think through what we want out of life. It's the same way we discuss radical feminist writers like Dworkin and Firestone. Dworkin is unhinged; Firestone is too eccentric to be taken seriously. (Crispin, 2017)

Conscious of prevailing feminist criticism in the world and aware of the situation of womenfolk in Pakistani patriarchal society, being one of the female members of the community, Naqvi has explored the themes mentioned above very carefully and truthfully. Her collection of short stories has dawned upon us that the writer is adamant to teach us



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that in the present scenario of the awakening consciousness of women about their rights of equality and sisterhood, Pakistani women are no exception and they are, too, heading towards liberation from male dominance which was previously termed predominance.

In *Attar of Roses*, (Naqvi, 1999a) a married school teacher, Saeed, while looking at a magazine on a bookstall came across a veiled lady with beautiful white fingers, adorned with Attar of Roses. Charmed by her and unconscious of the social surroundings, he followed her in the bazaar and then it became an obsession for him. He always tried to find her and followed her in the bazaar and in the bus and one day to his great confusion he followed her till the very near of her house and but could not even ask her name. She was lost to his view in the street because of some distraction and "He felt Like an animal that had been trapped and wanted to be free" (P. 28) Finally he purchased from the bazaar the same Attar of Roses and presented it to his wife, Razia, to her great amazement. "Gingerly Razia picked up the bottle."Attar of Roses", she said, looking at him incredulously. (p.28). This shows that the school teacher's obsession with an unknown lady resulted in his love and affection for his wife. Resultantly Naqvi wants to teach us that every woman is not a magazine or a fruit which can be purchased from the bazaar, but you can find it only through the respectful way of your marriage institution.

"Love in an Election Year" (Naqvi, 1999b), the very first story in the collection, told by a young female narrator Shabo, is a story of her cousin Sughra and Javaid's failed love. Sughra and Javaid are in love with each other but Sughra's parents are against their marriage. Sughra is heart-broken and expresses herself to Shabo:

"Oh Shabo, my life is finished, I'm going to die, "She said brokenly", Abba and Amma have arranged a match for me, they had been making plans all this time and I didn't know...........This was just like in the movies. Cruel society and equally cruel fate" (p. 10)

And Then Sughra said:

"I'll kill myself if they force me to marry someone else, Baji Sughra wailed" (p. 11)

Then at another place:

"Oh Shabo, my life is over, I'll kill myself, I'll be a corpse instead of a bride, they will

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see." (p. 11)

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But despite all this, she was married to Salman Ali and Shabo was sure that she had not killed herself as they were going to attend her Valeema and no unwelcome news had reached them. But what is interesting here is that Dada Jan, Abba and other elders of the family are privileged and have power as well as the right to decide according to their will but the voice which Sughra has raised against this oppression is notable and admirable. Her voice, in other words, is the voice of all female-folk against the patriarchal hegemony.

The other strand in the story is the Election of Fatima Jinnah and Ayub Khan in which Ayub Khan won to the great astonishment of Shabo's family and years later Shabo and Sughra are discussing Benazir Bhutto's Election in which Sughra says:

"Well Shabo, she wants too much. Just think, you can either be a good wife and mother or a good leader. And she wants to be all three. Now tell me Shabo is that possible? How is that possible?

"Do you ever think about Javaid Bhae?" I asked." (p. 17)

And thus, the story remains open-ended which shows that there are new vistas for the women to come out of patriarchal subjugation.

"Note Book" (Naqvi, 1999c) is another story which reflects male power, privilege and right along with a rebellion against these assumptions at the one and the same time. This is the story of a mismatched couple, Salma and her husband. Salma is hardly literate but is highly creative, whereas her husband is a materialist and a calculated personality. Salma remains lost in her thoughts and writing couplets when her husband returns home and he had to wait for Salma to come and open the door, which he does not like. There are differences between them on petty issues and she is beaten by him many times. Once he had beaten her on cooking *Dal Chana* while he had asked to cook *dal Mash*. He had given her a note book to put accounts on that carefully, but she starts writing couplets instead. Once she was beaten and wounded but she didn't feel pain as:

"She was surprised, she didn't feel pain. There was warm red blood on her hand where she touched her forehead with it. Slowly she got up and went out to the veranda:



I had longed to find love in a stony heart See a glimmer of light in the dying eyes" (p. 56)

"Salma didn't mind the beating much. He had been a good husband. He had held her in embrace so many nights and told her she was beautiful" (p. 57)

The above-said quotations reflect that Salma acknowledges her husband's power, privilege and right to oppress her. Another such kind of evidence is found when she visits lady doctor for pregnancy and the doctor declares her fit and suggests that her husband needs check-up but she conceals it from him. Then near the end, the story takes a turn when it is found that note book is used for poetry instead of accounts and her husband abuses her and is about to hit her, she reacts and says:

Salma rose from the chair and pulled down the edges of her kameez with trembling hands, " I am not barren, she said adjusting the dupatta and pushing back a strand of her hair: and if you hit me today, I will open the door and walk out into the gulley and you will never see my face again" (p. 59) and at the end she called out "Sabziwala o Sabziwala, You have any fresh Cauliflower today? (p. 59)

This story too remains open-ended and we have heard the voice of rebellion against the oppression.

And finally, to wind up the discussion it can safely be said that Naqvi has sown the seeds of liberation of women from patriarchal subjugation through her fiction. It is up to women to take the precedent of Sughra and Salma and break the stereotypical gender roles but within the social, ethical and moral norms. One thing which I would like to recommend for women at this forum is that men are not in favour of enslaving their women, but they want to see them their queens and themselves want to be kings. So, it is a matter of mutual harmony and not subjugation which can make this world a heaven for us. A genuine feminist politics always brings us from bondage to freedom, and from loveless-ness to love.





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