

MALE DOMINANCY INTO PUBLIC SPHERE: AN ANALYSIS OF DIRTY PICTURE

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Marwah is an evolving contemporary Indian Woman English novelist. Anuradh Marwah tells the readers in a blog, about the origin of the novel:

This novel is based partially on facts, some of which may already be known to the reader via media coverage. My novel, however, is intensely personal. The characters took birth instantaneously when the nude photograph of a young girl crashed into my life-on May 16, 1992 by way of 'Dainik Navjyoti'- a local Hindi paper published from Ajmer. Her eyes were blotted out. Fully dressed men with lascivious eyes flanked her on either side, fondling a breast each. Her hair was plaited into neat braids. Dirty Picture is about that girl; the eyes I created for her; the two men in the photograph; what I read in their expressions; and other imaginary characters. Some events described in the novel did take place. In April 1992 'Dainik Navjyoti' broke the story of a 'sex scandal' in Ajmer. (Blog)

Dirty Picture traces the personal narratives of two girls Reena and Bharti. Reena and Bharti live very difficult lives yet their narrative absurdly merge into each other's forthright question about notions of love and consent. The society depicted in Dirty Picture is hugely patriarchal which acts as the manifestation and institutionalisation of male dominance over women and children in the family. In general, it is also the extension of male dominance over women in the society. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society, and women are deprived of access to such power.

It is a world in which women are defined as submissive, passive and virtually inert. Their sexual definition is one of 'masochistic passivity': 'masochistic because even men recognise their systematic sadism against women; 'passivity' not because women are naturally passive, but because their chains are very heavy and as a result, they cannot move. In this society, the norm of masculinity is phallic aggression.

Male sexuality is, by definition, intensely and rigidly phallic. A man's identity is located in his conception of himself, as the possessor of a phallus; a man's worth is located in his pride in phallic identity is that worth is located in his pride in phallic identity. The main characteristic of phallic identity is that worth is entirely contingent on the possession of a phallus. Since men have no other criteria for worth and identity, those who do not have phalluses are not recognised as fully human. In an interview Marwah herself tells about:

In Dirty Picture it is clear that the sex scandal didn't take place only because of a handful of criminal men-majority of who happened to be Muslim; it took place also because society imposes an unrealistic code of sexual conduct on women and allows too much leeway to privileged men. As I understand it, the real story of the Ajmer sex scandal is neither about communal prejudice nor sexual perversions; it is about gender iniquity and class exploitation. (India Writes interview with Nair)

The story of Dirty Picture is related to two sisters. Bharti is neither a good girl nor bad. She looks at the all-pervasive world of patriarchy from a progressivist's perspective. Bharti says, "I want to do something for our family, in fact for the whole of Ajmer. The world is moving into the twentyfirst century whereas here there is no movement except backward: our roads,

civic facilities, and above all people's mind seem to be regressing to the nineteenth century." (25) Bharti knows that the realms of public sphere in a hugely paternalistic world are easy and rewarding. In Ajmer Bharti lives a life driven by idealism and a desire to make a difference to the parochial town and its regressive outlook. Bharti understands this harsh reality about a daughter as she thinks over:

Papa makes too much of his older daughter, thought Bharti. Reena was considered the beauty of the family. Although Bharti was supposed to be quite a looker in school, according to family legend she was the 'responsible' one. Her father called her the 'son' of the home. Of course a son who also did everything a daughter is traditionally expected to do-cook, clean, serve. There's no escaping a daughter's destiny in Ajmer, Bharti complained to herself. (11)

She befriends local politicians' Anees and Sarosh to gain clout in college politics. But Reena, her elder sister understands the masculine order very well. So she decides to protect Bharti from the onslaught of masculinity. Bharti was still young and unschooled in the way of the world. It was her duty to prevent those politicians from taking advantage of her sister's innocence.

"Who are these men you've been seeing?" Reena asked "Sarosh and Anees." Sarosh's father has an export business. Anees is doing full time politics.

In school I got elected as Vice-Captain of the Red house even though some teachers wanted Nisha Sharma." (24) Bharti said.

Reena replied that one of them Anees is a muslim boy. To have a friendship with a muslim boy is a dangerous thing. So she suggests Bharti to keep herself away from such people. But Bharti, after hearing the words of her sister Reena, becomes angry and replies:

Look at the way people treat woman, especially in small towns. If I am seen with two men even you begin to ask questions. More so, because they are Muslim. As though Muslim aren't human beings. Would such things be allowed to happen anywhere else in the world? Would they happen even in Bombay?"

Reena muttered, "There is injustice and iniquity everywhere, Bharti," but she was perplexed. Why was Bharti sounding so vehement?

"It's rather strange that you, of all people, are ticking me off for meeting Muslim men," she was saying.

Male dominated society is always ready to take advantage of women. But Bharti was too young to understand this. She now understands that being a woman in a socio-cultural context where women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by others is a greater challenge than her aspirations. As Bharti was innocent and she does not learn the harsh realities of the paternalistic/male dominated world, until she is subjected to its horrendous face, the day she is date-raped by Sarosh who, along with Anees, has lured her into the world masculine enterprises:

Sarosh was sitting on the bed. He was examining a huge knife moodily, running his finger along its edge.

"I knew you wouldn't reject me just because I am a Muslim."

He began kissing her face, arms, neck. Bharti was feeling desperate. "Please take me home," she said.

He stroked her arms and breasts. His hands began to descend towards her salwaar.

"No, don't do that to me again," he said angrily and knocked her back. In a moment he was on her. She shrieked but he was deaf to her.

When it was finally over, she collapsed on the pillow sobbing. (33-34)

After her rape Bharti realises that the entry into the masculine world, this public sphere demands a huge ransom from a woman, she can't roam here independently. After this incident, slowly and slowly, she entered into the world of scandals. They demanded sex whenever and wherever they wanted. Sarosh falsely said to her and let her believe that he is in love with her. She is so sad that now Bharti thinks herself as complete sex worker. "Did all these have separate rates? Would Bharti become an accomplished sex worker? She- Bharti-a prostitute!" (241) After the incident of rape she commits suicide.

The orthodox and patriarchal world never accepted her radical and transformative ideas. While on the other hand these are the prerogatives men enjoy. Present novel narrates the ugly realities of paternalistic societies. This operates through strategic exploitation of women. The story of Bharti's elder sister Reena is different. She is a divorcee. She divorced from a man who was struggling with substance abuse. She lives in Mumbai. She lives a very comfortable life, having a relation with her boss Suhas, a middle aged man.

Suhas is a promising businessman. Reena finds an emotional mainstay with him. With Suhas she dreams of a new and settled life. On the other hand Suhas, who does not get along with her wife, turns to Reena. He finds an emotional and physical recourse with her. Reena is happy because Suhas has promised a wonderful life with her. She was so much in love and faith of Suhas Mehta that when Bharti asks if her wife doesn't divorce him then.

But slowly and slowly Reena feels change in the behaviour of Suhas. Their frequent meeting also shrunk. All that seemed a happy and satisfying ending ended badly. Reena discovers the harsh realities of patriarchal world. So she questions with him:

"Suhas, you don't love me anymore," she said

"I love you much more than you think,"

"I don't believe you. We're meeting after a month." "Darling-" he began.

"Tell me why haven't we met for a long?"

"Do you want the truth and nothing but the truth?" "Yes," she said her eyes wide. (231)

Lastly they left each other. Take care, he said alighting and walked away. Suhas immediately returned to the flat, changed the key of the house, and threw away all the belongings of Reena.

Bharti's loss of voice and her inability to narrativise traumatic experiences can be attributed to the fear of being singled out by men, their agents, and their culture as a troublemaker. Her isolation is real in that she is avoided, or ignored, or chastised, or denounced. Her victimization leads to her silence and she puts an end to her life. Both Bharti and Reena are victims of intimate partner rape which spells disaster for them. Bharti fails to raise her voice, but being raped does grant Reena a voice-the voice of the victim. Bharti's unspeakable truth finds an alternative voice in Reena as her speech becomes much more verbose and wandering as she ponders the consequences of her victimisation. Reena is not silenced as her speech shows an example of how charged female language can challenge gender power relations in a very political manner.

In *Dirty Picture*, particularly Marwah has managed to bring all her interests together in a narrative that is both disturbing and persuasive. This is a story that needs to be told, but

because of its complexity, it is not an easy story to tell. But Anuradha persisted, and we all owe her a debt of gratitude that she did. This particular incident at least will not be covered by the dust of ages. While most contemporary feminist writers see no reason to transcend their comfortable urban locations to engage with poverty, male domination and issues that trap middle class women in India's forgotten, small dusty towns.

In *Dirty Pictures*, the author uses a foundation of solid fact to create her most believable scenario. She empathises so much that the most memorable segments comprise the use of stream of consciousness as a literary device to mentally box Bharti in so completely that she is helpless in the face of the circumstances that overwhelm her. Left with no option, fire becomes a way out. Even so, when it happens, it is a shock.

Anuradha Marwah presents an unflinching picture of two sisters 'who become a victim of their own mindset' to weave the fact and fiction, biographical and imaginative elements and structure a story that would hold the readers' interest could not have been an easy task. There is ambition, desire, politics and much more in this novel about small town India. Well-crafted narrative and perfectly moulded incidents make this novel a must read. Blame it on the novel being sufficiently disturbing or on the fact that the lives of the protagonists in the novel could be. She used it well in her first book, she employed 'authority' in her second, and the fact that her own background is very different proves no obstacle at all in fleshing out the characters of Bharti and Reena, two sisters who are exploited in different ways.

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