

The Brutalities And Violence Of War On Afghan Womenwith Special Reference To Novels Of Siba Shakib And Batya Swift Yasgur

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War has always a deadly threat to any society. The most dreadful part of it is the post-war consequences. In a civilised society, war is to be prevented than to be experienced. However, in some parts of the global landscape, war is ever imminent. In countries where the terrorists or the activists have always in war with the rulers or the government, war stands as a symbol of agony. Such a society is depicted in the novels of the contemporary Afghan writers.

The impact of war on Afghan women is well exposed through the works of Siba Shakib such as *Afghanistan Where God Only Comes to Weep* and Batya Swift Yasgur's *Behind the Burqa*. In the light of these novels, this paper presents how during a critical phase in the history of Afghanistan, the conditions of violence and conflict tend to intensify the oppression on its women. By contextualising the Afghan women's experience in a specific set of historical, political and social factors, this would hopefully offer an alternative view of the status of the contemporary Afghan women rather than the usual stereotyped descriptions.

The civil war in Afghanistan that began in the late 1970s has interrupted the rhythm of daily activities and forced many Afghans to abandon their homes and land. By engaging in the process of restructuring and re-establishing themselves as a group in Pakistan refugee camps, Afghanistan refugees have succeeded in transcending space and place through time within the context of their temporary dislocated situation. This paper also argues that the common features of religion, cultural values, memories, sufferings, challenges and experiences of dislocation

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experienced by Afghan refugees in foreign lands through the select novels. The different accounts of Afghan refugees express the various circumstances that forced them to abandon their homes and to live as dislocated people in a foreign land. The economic and mobility constraints imposed on Afghan women refugees in Pakistan have severely limited their economic contribution to household income and thus reduced their living conditions and positions within the family. The process of reproducing and modifying traditions and customs in host countries serves to recreate a sense of belonging and reconnect Afghan refugees to their homeland. As Malkki says:

The study of forced migration in the form of refugees provides important insights into how people interpret and construct space and place. The complex relationships between identity and place have been examined by scholars from diverse disciplines (e.g., anthropology, sociology, social geography, and history). Within the anthropology discipline, refugee studies provide new ways of thinking and understanding about borders and the connection between people, identity, space, and place. (HG 61)

This new thinking and understanding allow anthropologists to pose new challenges to the naturalization of the association between people and places and rework ideas of home and community.

Kushner & Knox has quoted; in 1951 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines:

Arefugeeasanyone who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or public opinion, is outside of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. (RG 10)

This definition clearly applied to Afghan refugees migrating to Pakistan during the late 1970s soon after the Soviet occupation. Mandel says that:

Attempts have been made over the years to extend the definition of refugee to refer to those who are forced to flee from persecution and conflict, consumption beneath the subsistence level, and natural calamities

such as floods, earthquakes, famine and drought. (PT 79)

According to this definition, disruptions must be paramount to life-threatening situations. This change effectively eliminates refugees' eligibility in events that are not life threatening. For the purpose of this paper, the term refugee is used to refer to individuals who are forced to emigrate out of their homeland by a broad range of conditions that includes warfare, political persecution, economic deprivation, and environmental degradation.

Both novels take place in Kabul, Afghanistan and the stories deal with forced migration, separation from family, difficulties in asylum seeking, refugee struggle and challenges faced by the women in host country. Heroines of both the novels faced utmost cruelties of war. They are displaced inside their own country many times and migrated to Pakistan, Iran, Germany and America. Shirin Gol migrated to Pakistan and Iran. Sulima migrated to Germany and America. Both of them struggled to lead normal life in their host country. Both Shirin Gol and Sulima led their life by doing menial jobs like domestic help, laboratory assistant, and laundry work.

Shakib in *Afghanistan Where god only comes to weep* has illustrated the day-to-day struggle of Afghan women in war torn land through Shirin Gol. It is the moving story of a proud, brave and admirable woman in constant search for a better life, a life where her children have a chance of a future without poverty and fear. Shirin Gol faced utmost cruelties of war. She got displaced inside Afghanistan numerous times and has gone to Pakistan and Iran as refugee and separated from her family members. Her life comprised of migration and displacement only, she led her life by temporary stay in displaced place or host country and struggle for survival, which includes first displacement to Kabul as school child, getting married and with her two children migrated to Pakistan, and then migrated to Iran. Again came back to Afghanistan, in search of her daughter in opium village, then to Kabul. Finally she has gone to her native village and she completed her life journey in a mountain village where her brother worked as commander in chief.

Kabul is converted in to a place of all sorts of atrocities like

battles, missile attacks, mines and parade of tanks. It became unfit place for the habitation of people, so Shirin Gol migrated to Pakistan with her daughter, son, mother and twin brother by walk. Shirin Gol imagined refugee border is clean place, where refugees are welcomed warmly with tea but her imagination is shattered when she saw two police man stand on the sides of the gate with lengthy stick to wave it to hit the refugees who are entering the through the gate. After entering Pakistan as refugee to reach the refugee camp, they have travelled the mountain path where the drug dealers are ruling their own regime.

In refugee camp, Shirin Gol said they were visitors. A policeman insulted her by saying they are refugees. Though they have reached Pakistan it looks like Afghanistan Shirin Gol is scolded for conveying her family details, the officials asked the Shirin Gol's twin brothers to take in charge of the family. They have given a plastic tent surrounded by foul smell. Shirin Gol's twin brothers started dominating. Shirin Gol left her family in the tent; she searched for the food van. People clamoured and struggled to get food. Shirin Gol did not have food card or vessel. She got food and card and some vessel from the neighbours.

Shakib has exposed the sorry state of Afghan refugees in Pakistan. She captured the struggle of Afghan refugees to get the basic needs like food, clothing and shelter in an alien land and also the wretched state of the people who migrate to foreign country without proper documents. The Pakistan refugee camp is more or less like Afghanistan; Shirin Gol faced all sorts of restriction she faced in Afghanistan. She is scolded for teaching her children and her husband is insulted in street. When her husband is severely injured in an accident she did not have enough money to treat her husband .She is pushed to the state of being mistress to the wealthy Pakistani smuggler chief, under whom Morad worked. Shirin Gol delivered a girl baby to the smuggler chief. There is no safety for refugees in Pakistan. Shirin Gol is raped by three police men when she went to buy groceries in Pakistan market. She has delivered a son due to this rape Shirin Gol has moved to Iran in the hope of giving good education to her children. She entered Iran without any legal papers. Shirin Gol's family reached Iran by walking for many days.

Initially, Shirin Gol is welcomed by Iranian people, they have offered her job as domestic help; gave her the old clothes of the children and also the leftover food. She has got a hut to live, left by Afghan refugees. Shirin Gol admitted her son in Iran school, he also studied well. After a period of time when refugees started over flowing, Iran government has become rigid in allowing the refugees and also providing facilities to the existing refugees. Iranian people also started ill-treating the Afghans. Iran government asked permit for everything like school, university, purchase, examination, doctor, travel, exit, work, hospital and her husband Morad was imprisoned forty days for gambling and also again imprisoned second time for selling opium. When Iranians refused to offer job Morad involved in these activities to earn money. Shirin Gol felt once Iran is safe place for them but now it is not so. Shirin Gol decided to leave Iran.

Yasgur has portrayed the plight of two sisters from Afghanistan to foreign countries to save their life from the communists and Taliban regimes. She has exposed the struggle educated Afghan women in foreign countries. The novel exposes the sorry state and also their endurance. In *Behind the Burqa* Sulima is forced to leave the country to save her life. Sulima born as an elder daughter to her father got good education in the midst of her father's strict vigilance about her activities. Sulima has become woman activist in spite of her father's objection and faced confinement in house for her action. Sulima continued her activist work secretly. Sulima has come out of her family vigilance after marrying Ibrahim by undertaking a dangerous risk. Sulima is free to work, her husband is supportive for her all activities. Sulima has conducted campaigns on the importance of education to village people by travelling widely and working as teacher. She has made women to realise the importance of education.

Sulima's life becomes dangerous when the leader of communist party is succeeded by Hafizullah Amin after Taraki's death. Hafizullah Amin triggered out continuous complaints about her communists principles and suspects that she is not true to communist. She got arrested and released on the plea of some influential friend of an Amin's government. She is arrested for three times and finally she is in situation to leave the country from the torture of Amin's government. Situation of sulima is

expressed in the novel by her husband Ibrahim as “We have no choice. You can’t go to jail and be raped or killed.”(BTB 111)

Sulima migrated to Germany along with her husband and daughter. In Germany Sulima stayed in her brother-in-law’s small apartment for few days. Yasin, Sulima’s brother-in-law has found a room for rent, where they have to share bathroom and kitchen with the other tenants who are staying there. Sulima, felt happy to have room of her own. After getting a room, Sulima searched for a job, language is biggest hurdle to get job in Germany, though she got a degree in biology, she could not get job for her qualification. Sulima has to face the struggle all alone, because Ibrahim her husband has not completed his degree and also he is not interested in looking for job. Step by step Sulima got promotion as a research assistant and then as a researcher in university but her dominating husband spoiled all her progress by forcefully threatening her to leave America.

Yasgur has exposed the fate of Afghan refugees in foreign land. Even though Afghan refugees are educated, they are not able get job for their qualification; they have to lead their life by doing menial jobs. Sulima has travelled alone to America with her little daughter. In America, Sulima is received by her sister -in-law, she stayed for one night in her house. She is chased out of the house by her mother-in-law, when she expressed her wish to have a house of her own. She is not well versed in English; she is walking half way in the street carrying her daughter, Sulima is stopped by her sister-in-law who helped her by arranging a room in a motel for a low cost and she also helped her with American currency. Every morning Sulima’s sister-in-law came and took her children to her house from morning to evening,

During that time she searched house for rent, after a frantic search a land lady has given her house with a bedroom, living room and kitchen in basement. Sulima did not have the deposit money, the land lady was kind and she has given her house without getting any deposit. Next day, she went in search of job by travelling by bus to the suburban area. By stepping in to the house one by one, she got the laundry work for 3.25 \$ for an hour. Sulima has become flower decorator, but to start a

business of her own immigration process has to be cleared. Sulima started a flower shop with help of American friends.

Yasgur, mentions several situations where women are forbidden to go outside alone, and if they do, they will be beaten. It is difficult not to state that women unfortunately are oppressed, since it is so wrong for a woman to go outside the house all by herself according to the Taliban. Hala the second heroine of *Behind the Burqa*, like her sister Sulima she also faced threat for her life in Afghanistan for running school for neighbourhood children during Taliban regime. To save her life, some well-wisher helped her to migrate to America. Hala has boarded the flight as a wife of some unknown person from Pakistan. A feeling of Hala when the flights take off is expressed in the novel as: "As I watched my country get smaller and smaller, I silently prayed for Madarjan, Surya, and all my family. And for my country itself." (BTB221)

Hala migrated to America without any proper travel documents. Hala imagined that she is warmly welcomed by her sister Sulima, but she is taken to the enquiry room. In the enquiry room she is not able to communicate with airport officials about her identity. Sulima reached the enquiry room after facing great struggle to explain Hala's situation to the airport officials. After a brief enquiry in airport, Hala is sent to prison and informed till she clears her trials regarding her asylum; she has to stay in prison. She is informed that she would be sent to Pakistan if the judges found that her explanation is not satisfactory. Language is a barrier to explain her status. Airport officials did not allow Sulima to be her translator. She is not able to explain the circumstances which forced her to travel without any travel documents. They are not aware of the situation prevailing in Afghanistan and also the native language of Afghanistan like Dari, Pashtu to arrange a translator for Hala.

Yasgur portrays a horrible daily life of women with abuse, brutal husbands, the horrible Taliban regime and the loss of their loved ones. Despite many terrifying events in the women's lives, the novel also projects stories about friendship, love and hope for a better future. Hala is given 427 as prisoner number. Inside the prison, she is given room which is shared by three other prisoners. Hala managed to communicate through

sign language and also using her broken English. Hala has endured the prison by hearing the pathetic stories of other prisoners and struggled to get permission for her prayers and fasting. When anyone of their prisoner's plea for asylum is refused, Hala is psychologically affected deeply. Sulima struggled a lot to find a lawyer for Hala, she has approached lawyers in Human Rights committee and they have arranged a Farsi translator to explain the story of Hala for her interview. Hala has explained the Afghanistan history and the rigid rules of Talibans against women in interview.

After interview a Master Calendar Hearing is arranged, in that meeting judge would set a date for next hearing. Lawyers who appeared for Hala said, to get asylum Hala has to get a letter from her relative in Afghanistan about her state. The lawyers have appealed for parole of Hala but it was refused. Sulima somehow approached the INS (Immigration and Naturalization service), local members of congress and also the Vera centre for justice. After a great struggle, parole was sanctioned to Hala. There are many prisoners staying for years in prison facing their continuous hearing Hala is lucky enough to have sister like Sulima, it is because of her effort Hala's parole is sanctioned .Hala stayed in prison for three months and fourteen days and she is summoned to the court after fourteen days of her parole, one by one the same questions are asked about her background story. The session took one hour twenty minutes and finally asylum is sanctioned to Hala.

It is to be concluded with the evidences to be found in the novels *Afghanistan Where God Only Comes to Weep* by Siba Shakib and *Behind the Burqaby* Batya Swift Yagur, that the prolonged conditions of conflict in Afghanistan have brought severe cruelties and adverse impacts on the women. The extreme violence they have been enduring in Afghanistan, coupled with a very less limited opportunity in the "host" countries has left many women refugees emotionally and psychologically bewildered.

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