

FEMINIST READING OF BEING RESHMA

Sachin B R *

ABSTRACT

This dissertation- Feminist Reading of *Being Reshma*, is an attempt to overlook the ongoing oppression and marginalisation women had to face in the patriarchal society. Reshma Qureshi is an Indian model, vlogger, and anti-acid activist . In India she is the face of make love no scars. Her foray into modelling in the United States came when she walked the catwalk for Archana Kochhar at the 2016 New York fashion week .Reshma was born the youngest daughter of a taxi driver from eastern Mumbai, India. At the age of seventeen, Reshma was attacked with sulphuric acid by her estranged brother-in-law. The book *Being Reshma* was written along with Tania Singh. It is an inspiring story of an acid attack survivor who took the world by storm. It is a very emotional and inspiring story of a teenage girl going through acid attack which is nothing but a worst nightmare to anybody. Coping up with her condition and become a true inspiration to millions of people is really heart warming, there is a strong need in the society to change its perspective and treatment of victims of acid attack, sexual abuse, domestic violence and many more. So many NGOs are working to help those victims but it's not enough in vast nation like India. Now and international anti-acid-sale activist, vlogger, model, and the face of make love not scars, Reshma tirelessly works towards empowering other acid attack survivors like herself and has become a beacon of hope for millions. Reading Reshma's story from when she was a young girl to the person she is today presents the reader with the journey of many conflicting emotions. The account of the attack itself and subsequent road to recovery is harrowing in the extreme. However, through the agonies of

* Department of English Swamy Saswathikananda College, Poothotta

her recovery, a light begins to shine for Reshma and it is evident that a new life is beginning for her. Her story is extremely relevant in today's world where acid attacks are becoming a global problem. With numbers rising across the world, acid attacks are a problem that must be tackled swiftly and fast. Reshma's memoir highlights the brutal effects of surviving an acid attack and compels one to face the fact that acid attacks are not just a statistic-but a deeply personal struggle faced by thousands. A feminist reading of this book enables us to reveal the cruelty and suffering a woman has to undergo and her final evolution as an empowered woman. The reflection of the journeys of millions of survivors of gender based abuse. Gender based violence is a story that hits close to home for many. The story itself shows the reflection of the patriarchal norms of the society. The story of Reshma's sister and how she is forced to get married at her young age and how she was raped, abused by her in-laws and husband shows the existence of patriarchal norms in the society. Post her attack the journey of Reshma to become a great inspiration for millions of girls across the globe shows the empowerment of a woman hence feminism theory is apt for this book.

Keywords: Feminism, Reshma Qureshi, acid attack, empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Reshma Qureshi is an Indian model, vlogger, and anti-acid activist. In India she is the face of 'Make Love No Scars'. Her foray into modelling in the United States came when she walked the catwalk for Archana Kochhar at the 2016 New York fashion week. Reshma was born the youngest daughter of a taxi driver from eastern Mumbai, India. At the age of seventeen, Reshma was attacked with sulphuric acid by her estranged brother-in-law.

The book *Being Reshma* was written along with Tania Singh. She is the CEO of a non-profit organisation called Make Love Not Scars. She has a background in

business management from Singapore management university and has previously worked in a technology start up in Malaysia. She then returned to India to help rehabilitate acid attack survivors. Her organisation has raised almost two crores for acid attack survivors through crowd funding alone and has been the only organisation to win the CNBC TV-18 India business leader award for brand of the year. She is the co- author of the book, '*Being Reshma*', a memoir of an acid attack survivor, Reshma Qureshi, who also happens to be the face of MNLS.

Being Reshma is an inspiring story of an acid attack survivor who took the world by storm. It is a very emotional and inspiring story of a teenage girl going through acid attack which is nothing but a worst nightmare to anybody. Coping up with her condition and become a true inspiration to millions of people is really heart warming.

The book "*Being Reshma*" is an extraordinary story of Reshma Qureshi an acid attack survivor, model, vlogger, and anti sale activist who took the world by storm. On may 2014 as seventeen year old Reshma Qureshi left home for the examination centre, everything happened in a flash. The men rushed towards her. Grabbed her. Tugged at her hair. Poured acid on her face. Soon she started to burn like a living corpse. The acid ate through her skin and aimed for her bones, but it could not quell the fire in her heart.

Rising from tragedy and suffering, Reshma soon made global headlines by becoming the first acid-attack survivor to walk the runway at the New York fashion week. Now an international anti – acid attack activist, vlogger, model and the face of make love not scars, Reshma works tirelessly towards empowering other acid attack survivors like herself and has become a beacon of hope for millions.

Throughout the book we can experience marginalisation and oppression running in Indian patriarchal society towards the women's. The book is all about a great inspirational story of a young girl from the slums of Mumbai and how she overcome insurmountable odds in an adjust world and dared to change it. The book itself shows how the women's in India are always considered unimportant than boys. We can see how Reshma and her sisters could never gain equal importance in her family that their brothers used to get.

"The word 'bhai' in itself laid out a hierarchy within siblings." (Qureshi.2)

Through these lines itself Reshma shows the male dominated power in Indian family. We can see how Reshma's father had big dreams for his two sons to have a respectable white collar jobs and how he wanted his daughters to be happily married and to have a well settled family. He wanted to educate his daughters so that they could find well educated, respectable husbands. From this it is clearly visible how Indian patriarchal society treats Indian daughters. For every Indian family the most important thing a girl should have is a good husband and family. We could see how Reshma's sisters Gulshan and Nargis had to stop their education in order to look after their family, when Reshma's mother had been diagnosed with stomach cancer. This clearly shows how the girls always had to sacrifice their dreams and education in order to full- fill the so called family dreams and needs.

Through all these scenes it is clearly visible how women's are always forced to look after their family, other than following up their dreams. Here Gulshan and Narjs couldn't returned back to school in order to assist their mother and manage the house hold activities. Their main duties was to take care of their younger sister Reshma who was just 8 years then. Reshma and her sisters had to drop their education many a times in order to clean, cook, and take care of their mother.

Then we can see the life of women's in Indian small town villages. Reshma and her family had to move to Mau Aima a small village in Allahabad India. Since they were having financial crises they couldn't afford the daily expense in Mumbai. Here we can see how Reshma's sister Gulshan had to get married at the age of fifteen. From this we can see how Indian society still follows child marriage. In many places in India child marriage is still considered as fair. Here Gulshan was not even matured when she got married to Jamaluddin. For every women the most beautiful phase of her life is teenage, were she could live her life without any tension and worries, the phase were she wants to play, run, scream without any barrier.

In the twenty first century too there are many such young innocent girls who had to sacrifice their life by getting married so that they could make their family happy and tensionfree, like how Gulshan had to sacrifice her happy life in order

to full fill her family dreams. Gulshan's child marriage is a great example on how women's are still ill treated in Indian society and how they are forced to get married and have children. From this we can also witness how the villagers of Mau Aima cut short the education of girls so that they could prepare the young girls for a family system. Reshma shares her experience of how young girls sometimes fall victim to assault and rape when they go out to the fields to relieve themselves. Still in most parts of the world women's are not even safe to get out of their home. Women's are being raped in every single day no low no government could give a proper protection to them till date. The book being Reshma is a great evidence on how women's are still treated brutally by the society and how they are being blamed for every single reasons. Gulshan's marriage was a great example of how women's are being treated by her husband and in-laws after marriage.

"In our community ,women's are appreciated only twice in their lives : first , when it is time to get married , and second , when they give birth to a male heir".(37)

This line from the book itself gives us the image of how women's are being treated in India. In India the most essential thing a girl should own is a good husband, and giving birth to a male heir. India is a country where giving birth to female heir is considered as a sin, and there are many places where women's are forced to kill their baby girl just because they are not a boy. This shows a clear image of male dominated society.

Women's are always treated like a private property of men to whom they can do anything they want to. Every woman across the world had to undergo sexual exploitation, assault, rape and harassment once in their life time. The society is not even ready to give a woman her importance and respect that she deserves.

We can see Reshma and her family had to give dowry to Jamaluddin's family even after their low financial status. Even though it is illegal every woman in India are married by giving dowry. These systems are the main reasons of why women's are always considered as in every family. We can see how Gulshan announces her pregnancy soon after her marriage. Gulshan wasn't permitted to meet her family just because she was a married woman now. This is another orthodox mentality of patriarchal society. Where women's are considered as a private property after her marriage and she is treated however they want to. Sometimes she will be stopped to meet her own parents and family and will be forced to look after the family and house. It is a common ritual that women's are always considered to live to fulfil some one's desires she will not have a dream of her own that she could follow. Just because of these things Reshma and family weren't appreciated to meet Gulshan after her marriage.

"I was witnessing the rebirth of someone I had known in a previous life. She had never covered her head in front of her family, and this new practice seems odd to

me." (40) Another clear cut image of how women's are treated after her marriage. This shows how women's does not have any rights on her family and how she is forced to cover her face even after in front of her family. These tradition of covering women's face in public and family is common thing in many parts of the worlds. Even though we are living in twentyfirst century still muslim woman's are forced to wear burkha. This shows the double marginalisation in muslim women's had to undergo in the society.

"They had no reason to upset with her, now that her first born was a son that had arrived in good health." (41) It is a reality that gender disparity still exists in India. Women generally have less economic independence and lesser say in family and social affairs. The horrifying practice of female foeticides – identifying the sex of the foetus still exists in India. While we have come a long way and this ill practice is losing around. Here we can see hoe Gulshan's in-laws tries to identify the foetus but they failed. There are still numerous families which consider the girlchild s burden and have no qualms in preventing the birth. This stems from the mindset that the male child will go on to become a source of income from the family and will carry on the family lineage while the girl will have to ultimately, married off to another family.

Here even after Gulshan give birth to male heir the behaviour of Jamaluddin's family towards Gulshan was becoming worse. Gulshan was forced to leave the hospital the same day she gave birth. This shows the lack of concern towards women by their own family members. The way Gulshan's in-laws treated her shows the extreme level of harassment and brutality a women had to suffer. Gulshan was been denied water and food because she was too tired to cook for the family. This shows the importance of economic independence a women should always have.

Suffering had become the permanent partner of a women. Women's always have the tendency to suffer every thing done to her for the sake of her family. Especially Indian women's always tends to cover up her pain and abuse, just how Gulshan covers all her pain. The way how Jamaluddin harass Gulshan for money is a normal scene in every Indian family.

"Riza's birth had not been celebrated because of her gender, and with her birth Gulshan's power in the household had been diminished as she was now the mother of a daughter." (50)

After giving birth to a male heir Saufi Gulshan gave birth to baby girl named Riza. In order to protect the family Gulshan never shared her troubles with her family to a great extent. Later we can see how Gulshan's in-laws tries to kill her. She was drenched from head to toe in kerosene her in-laws tried to burn her alive just because she refused to give them more dowry. They paused the attack when Gulshan hold Saufi in her hands because they were afraid of losing their grandson. Violence against women is on the national agenda. The women of the patriarchal society of India continues to be oppressed and ill treated. She is dependent weak exploited and faces gender discrimination in every sphere of life.

A dowry death is the murder or suicide of a married women caused by a dispute over her dowry. Husbands and in-laws will attempt to extort a greater dowry through continuous harassment and torture which sometimes results in the wife committing suicide. When a dowry death is done by setting a women on fire, it is called bride burning and it a very common tradition in Indian marriage system. After the attack Gulshan was rescued by her family but it is only possible in rare cases. In most cases women's always lose their life in this dowry system. Like Gulshan numerous girls in India are being mentally

abused by their in-laws for various reasons. On 28 April 2014 Jamaluddin called Gulshan and screamed "talaq talaq talaq".

"once they slammed my head against the wall. For the next week they made me cut wood for hours without any help. My arms hurt and my feet were swollen. When i came back inside i was forced to cook, and if i sat down for even five minutes they would deny me the chance to spend time with my children." (53)

Until 2017 triple talaq was recognised as a lifetime method of effecting divorce among muslims. The husband has to utter the word talaq thrice and he would be legally free from his marriage. All the muslim women were married between fourteen and fifteen just like Gulshan. Marriage at such an early age decreases the possibility of acquiring education or being financially sound. Triple talaq is another form of women oppression. By this the man again proves his power over the women. This form of divorce is another way to tarnish women's reputation. For every divorce happens in Indian women are always brought blamed even though there is no fault of her.

"The panic, the uncertainty, the shock of it all, made me lose precious moments. The nephew and the cousin had already grabbed me from behind; they were tugging at my hair from over my sister's niqab and pushing me down to the ground. The men were heavy and strong, but still i tried to fight them off, clawed them with my bare hands, but my physical strength was at best feeble shadow compared to those monsters. I was, after all, just seventeen," (71)

The date 19 May 2014 was when three men poured acid on Reshma's face. Jamaluddin with his two cousins brothers grabbed her from behind and tugged her hair and pushed her down to the ground. The men were heavy and strong even though she tried to fight them of her physical strength was weak compared to those monsters. The men were on top of her, they grabbed her hands and pulled them over her head so that there was no way she could fight. Without

even removing her niqab they emptied over her face the contents of a flask they had been carrying.

"My attack happened faster than lightning itself, but the thunder has gone on and a heavy cloud of pain still hangs over me." (75) They treated her like an animal. She clawed at the melting niqab like rabid animal. There were over a hundred people bore witness to her pain, but no one have the courage to stop the attackers. This shows the level of oppression assault and humiliation a women had to under go in a male dominated society. Today, acid attacks are reported in many parts of the world. It is a dominance of female victims who are assorted by males. Here the attack was actually aimed at her sister Gulshan, but Reshma was mistaken to her.

While Reshma was in hospital she shows us various examples of women who were abused tortured by their in-laws. All these are the examples of the level of oppression women had to under go after her marriage. This is due to the unrealistic tradition of women being considered as a private property of her husbands family. After the attack Reshma tries to kill herself many a times. She lost her left eye permanently, her forehead had become exposed.

During her journey through the hospitals Reshma met many women's who become a great inspiration and pillar for her. Reshma also shows the story of "Nirbhaya" who was brutally gang raped in a moving bus while returning home from the cinema with a male friend. There were six men including the driver .All drunk. They proceeded to destroy her life. They moved her to the back of the bus were they took turns to rape her repeatedly. The case of Nirbhaya is well known for every Indian citizen. Reshma and nirbhaya are only some example of the brutality of men. Even though our newspapers are flooded with such horrific story every single day there is no end for these inhumanity act. India

is a nation where millions of women are victims of this atrocity. Women often remain silent, hiding behind ashame that is not theirs to bear.

A woman's worth in our country, and in so many places around the world is often judged by her looks and her ability and willingness to be a dutiful wife and mother. After her attack the society insulted her situation by suggesting that no man would marry her. This is ananother examples of patriarchal society. In this social system men hold primary power. After her attack Reshma met an another acid attack survivor who was also been attacked by a family member.

After getting some surgeries Reshma started to empower herself to great level. She started working as an anti-acid sale activist and working for other acid attack victims like herself. The stories of other victims lead her towards her own inner strength. Many channels, newspapers, magazines and advertising companies approached her for sharing herstory with the entire world. Make love not scars was medium for Reshma to help and empower other women. Her #endacidsale campaign was a great success through which sheinspire many women's across the globe. Thus Reshma Qureshi an acid attack survivor become the first ever survivor to work on the ramp of New York fashion week. She made headlines across the globe.

"For a country that claims to be one of the strongest moving economies, we are perhaps the weakest when it comes to women's right. The acid attack survivors in India are shamed. We live in a culture of victim-blaming. Many of us never leave our homes because of the hostile stares, gestures, comments directed at us, and because of how differently we are treated from everyone else. Only a handful of us ever find jobs and even if some if us do, it is in government-sanctioned projects that require as to be hired under quotas.

Thus being Reshma is very powerful and inspiring story of a young Indian girl whomade headlines across the world even though the world around her tries to

put her down. Reshma is a great inspiration for every single women across the world who is beingsuppressed and tortured by the male dominated society.

CONCLUSION

In book Being Reshma, Reshma Qureshi and Tania Singh njnpresents before as the picture of patriarchal society and how women are being attacked, raped, abused and assaulted by the male dominated society. The book is written by Reshma Qureshi along with Tania Singh. Reshma Qureshi is an acid attack survivor who become a pillar of inspiration, and strength. Tania Singh, she is the CEO of a non-profitable organisation called Make Love NotScars.

The book Being Reshma is an inspirational and emotional story of a teenage girl going through acid attack. Coping up with her condition and becoming a true inspiration to millions of people is really heart warming. Through the book can see how Reshma and her sister was exploited by the man who where their family. The book presents the panic and pain occurs after Reshma's acid attack. The dissertation aims to study the feminist philosophy in Being Reshma. The feminist reading on the book is very significant.

The whole book shows thee extend of women suffering and how they had to hide their pain and had to sacrifice themselves for the family. The journey of Reshma from a young girl, from the slums of Mumbai to becoming the first ever acid attack survivor to walk the ramp of New York Fashion Week. Society must be trained on how to treat women and nature with equal respect. Women must be given education sufficient enough to make them aware of their basic rights. Such necessary measures must be adopted to avoid further exploitation of women.

References

1. About the Author(s) Reshma Qureshi is an Indian model. *Being Reshma (Malayalam)* - Malayalam, <https://manjulindia.com/malayalam/being-reshma-malayalam.html>.
2. Krithika, R. "R. Krithika Reviews Being Reshma by Reshma Qureshi with Tania Singh." *R. Krithika Reviews Being Reshma by Reshma Qureshi with Tania Singh* - The Hindu, 5 Jan. 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/books/books-reviews/being-reshma-review-nothing-to-hide/article25911513.ece>.
3. Sankalpita. "Being Reshma: Reshma Qureshi with Tania Singh: Book Review." *BookGeeks*, 30 Jan. 2019, <https://www.bookgeeks.in/being-reshma-reshma-qureshi-tania-singh-book-review/>.
4. Tania, Qureshi Reshma Singh. *Being Reshma: The Extraordinary Story of an Acid -Attack Survivor Who Took the World by Storm*, PAN INDIA, S.I., 2019.