

Changing Images of Pakistani Women in Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* and *Broken Verses*

Abstract

*The culture of Pakistan which is deeply entrenched in patriarchy has given rise to constructs of ideal femininity as devotion, endurance, loyalty and self-sacrifice. Literature is considered to be one of the most important means of perpetuating such images which seek to marginalize women and ensure male domination. The study of Pakistani fiction provides a fertile ground for a feminist critic seeking to unearth the political dimensions of characterization and to undermine patriarchal marginalization of women. An investigation of the ideological dynamics of portrayal of women in literature was the primary concern of the "Images of women" school of criticism. This trend particularly dominated feminist criticism in the 1970s and still remains a dominant focus of Women Studies in literature. In this research "Images of women" critical approach was used to analyze and evaluate how Kamila Shamsie, an emerging Pakistani female writer has depicted female characters in the novels *Salt and Saffron* (2000) and *Broken Verses* (2006). The critical analysis of Shamsie's selected fiction in the light of Images of women criticism revealed the novelist's keen observation and realistic presentation of Pakistan's predominantly patriarchal culture, where women are still in the process of transition to break free from the moulds of ideal femininity. Shamsie champions women's autonomy by portraying socially rebellious, strong-willed and courageous women as her central characters and deconstructs the ancient stereotypes of Pakistani women.*

Key Words: Patriarchal society, feminism, Images of Pakistani women, autonomy, independent selfhood

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1. Introduction

The current research analyzes selected fiction of Shamsie from the perspective of Images of Women School of criticism since Pakistani women are still struggling to break free from the so-called traditional roles assigned to them by the society whereby they are expected to act as submissive daughters, obedient wives and self-sacrificing mothers. Literary practice in Pakistan operates against the background of a male-dominated society and its corresponding patriarchal structures. The patriarchal mindset shaping Pakistani society has been the focus of a great deal of critical inquiry by Feminists scholars and activists. Several studies have been carried out which provide statistical evidence of discrimination and bias against women.

Shahnaz Khan in her book *Zina, Transnational Feminism and the Moral Regulation of Pakistani Women* (2006) documents that women in Pakistan face discrimination in all fields of life whether it is education, employment, ownership, or legal safeguards. She particularly highlights the low education rate among women in Pakistan and states that “on average, boys complete five years of school, while girls average only two and a half years. The rate of school enrolment for boys is 8 percent higher than that of girls which is 61 percent. In 1998, only 3 percent of the females between the ages of seventeen and twenty three had access to higher education” (p. 83). On research, Majumdar in her study entitled “Gender Disparity in South Asia: A Comparative Study of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Srilanka” (2006) explores that the “female literacy rate at the dawn of twenty first century is the lowest in Pakistan that is 27.9 percent, as compared to other South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Furthermore, few initiatives for gender development are being taken which is reflected in Pakistan being ranked 120th out of 146 countries in gender development and 92nd in gender empowerment according to Statement on Gender in Pakistan, by the United Nations Development Program” (p. 53-54).

Mumtaz & Shaheen in their significant work *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back* (1987) record that despite the difference of education, professional skills and self awareness between the educated and domesticated women in Pakistan, one thing which is common is that “(their) life is governed by the same rules of patriarchy which cuts across class and regional differences to create (a) measure of similarity and uniformity” (p.23) Under the influence of this patriarchal setup all Pakistani women find themselves being measured and judged against certain roles attached with the female gender whereby an ideal woman is considered to be an embodiment of passivity, self-sacrifice and endurance.

In this context it becomes relevant and significant to study the role literature, specifically fiction, has played in perpetuating or dismantling stereotypical images of Pakistani women. Since images in literature are an important tool to support or subvert the patriarchal ideology due to the power accorded to literature, so this research is also corrective with the aim to discourage any misrepresentation of women in literature.

Shamsie, a Pakistani Anglophone author, particularly assumes a special interest as she is shaped by a dual influence of being brought up in the patriarchal social setup of Pakistan and of education in the West where she gained an exposure to a liberal society. She is thus in a position to both understand and expose the stereotypical characterization of women in her society.

2. Feminism and Images of Women Criticism

Feminism is not a single harmonious monolithic school of thought. While sharing certain core concerns with feminine sexuality, it has undergone several permutations in terms of its critical formulations. Starting with a concern and critique of the politics of gender feminist criticism has diversified immensely with no clear limits or fixed boundaries. Diverse intellectual developments within Feminist literary theory have seen critical focus centering on the role of women as readers and later as writers and development in relation to models of Marxism, Post structuralism and psychoanalysis each having its own rationale and method of analysis. For this very reason, feminism is not a single, unified concept rather there is multiplicity of voices and approaches within in the field. Owing to this multiplicity, Robbins (2000) labels them as “Literary Feminisms”. For her feminism does not have one meaning: “It does not have one catch-all, all-or nothing meaning, but many meanings which depend on contexts, subject positions, languages, the material worlds we inhabit, and our own psychic spaces all mixed up together”(p.3).

In late 1960s and early 1970s, the feminist critics were chiefly concerned with the representation of women in literary texts especially by renowned male authors, however later on works of female writers also came under close scrutiny. This earliest school of feminist criticism is known as ‘Images of Women Criticism’. In words of Josephine Donovan (1998), one of its leading exponents, “images of women approach dominated feminist literary studies in the 1970s and is still central to the pedagogy of Women’s Studies in literature” (p. 235). Images of women criticism is mainly concerned with the representation of women in literary texts. It began as a critique of the images, particularly the stereotypical images of femininity that the literary texts presents, and thus devised an altogether new way of approaching the text from a feminist standpoint. Writers, both men and women who create unreal

female characters are in for harsh strictures in this form of feminist criticism (Guerin et al 2005; Donovan 1998; Showalter 1979; Newton 1990; Robbins 2000; Morris 1993; Frith 1993).

The images of women criticism aims at analyzing the literary representations of women to emphasize the role literature has played in ensuring male dominance and women's subordination in the society. Images of women critics label these images as powerful ideological tools and they all share a commitment to pursue the image as way of analyzing the ideological force of literature. So for them literature has played and can play a significant role in ensuring continued dominance of patriarchal ideology (Showalter 1979; Beauvoir 1993; Ellmann 1969; Millett 1970).

The re-readings and re-visions of the literary texts exposed the fact that how images of women were constructed on stereotypical sexist assumptions. On closer reading the feminist critics explored that there were two kinds of images commonly found in the literary texts, either positive or negative. The good woman stands for ideal femininity and the bad woman is the harbinger of the evil. Beauvoir's (1993) observation is that, femininity is found to represent beauty, purity and goodness but also evil, enchantment, corruption and death. Mary Ellmann (1968) on reading 1950s and 60s fiction categorized the various stereotypes of femininity as formlessness, instability, confinement, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, compliancy and the two most incorrigible stereotypes the shrew and the witch. Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (1970) explains the recurrent misogynistic images of women in literary texts as whores or virgins, frigid or nymphomaniac, chaste or licentious. Whereas Donovan (1998, p. 237) shows the dualism of images of women in texts as follows.

Spiritual	material
Spirit/soul	body
Virginal	ideal sex object
Mary	Eve
Inspiration	seductress
Good	evil

So the study of the images in texts highlighted the fact that the good woman was the one who conformed to the social norms of ideal femininity that is caring mother, obedient daughter, submissive wife and the bad women is the one who transgresses these social boundaries. The feminist critics have always been critical of these images of ideal femininity on account of the gap between the representation and the reality

because they believe that femininity is ideal but real women are not. It is a kind of confining strategy which limits women in relation to an impossible standard and it also undermines the multiple realities of women's lives. These images interpellate women into socially acceptable ideas of gender (Wollstonecraft 1792; Ellmann 1968; Millett 1970; Robbins; 2000).

Another significant finding of the 'Images of women' criticism is that the female characters are mostly presented in relation to the male characters. They are too often presented as the other, as an object. In words of Donovan (2000) they are, "of interest only insofar as they serve or detract from the goals of the male protagonist" (p.212). In her analysis of literary texts she observes that there is hardly any personal response of the female characters to the events; they are simply vehicles for the growth and salvation of the male protagonist. "Those who serve the interest of the protagonist are the patient wife, the mother/martyr, and the lady and fall in the category of good women. Whereas old maid/career women, the witch/lesbian, the shrew/the domineering mother/wife are labeled as bad woman since they detract the hero" (ibid. p, 214). Beauvoir (1993) makes a similar remark regarding the presentation of the female characters in relation to the male that,

Through her passivity she bestows peace and harmony but if she declines this role, she is seen forthwith as a praying mantis, an ogress. In any case she is seen as the privileged other, through whom the object fulfills himself: one of the measures of man, his counterbalance, his salvation, his adventure, his happiness (p.262).

The feminist critics have labeled such female characters that have been denied their essential selfhood as inauthentic characters. So it is one of the primary concerns of the images of women school to evaluate the authenticity of the character. Authenticity is an idea borrowed from the existentialist, particularly Heidegger, for whom a character is authentic only if it has its self-defined critical consciousness, whereas for Sartre authentic means the critical or reflective consciousness capable of forming projects. (qtd. in Donovan 1998, p. 236). So authentic female characters are the ones who are not only self-defined, possessing distinctive traits and qualities but also capable of self-determined action. So this school of feminist criticism analyzes female characters to see if they have been portrayed as complex and unique individuals and can they be labeled as authentic characters or not. (Morris 1993; Donovan 1998, Cornillon 1972).

Many studies have been carried out to analyze the images of women in literature. Cornillon's *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives* (1972) is a collection of twenty one essays about various nineteenth and twentieth century male and female

writers. Sushila Singh's *Feminism and Recent Fiction in English* also shows similar studies conducted on recent Indian and English fiction. *Changing Images of Women in South Asian Fiction* by Shoshana Landow (2009) outlines the changing trends in the images of women from the suffering women to the recent subversions and expansions of the traditional image in works of Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Chitra Fernando and Anees Jung. Tineke Hellwig's *in the Shadow of Change: Images of Women in Indonesian Literature* (1994) is a re-reading and re-evaluation of the texts by male and female authors in search of the images of women.

Pakistani fiction in English spans over a period of sixty years, but the number of writers is quite a few. A few writers like Zulfikar Ghose, Hanif Qureshi, Nadeem Aslam, Mohsin Hamid, Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Sulehri, Uzma Aslam Khan and Bina Shah have been able to achieve international recognition. In the recent past, a young Pakistani novelist, Kamila Shamsie (1973-) has been able to make a mark in fiction writing. So far her five novels, *In the City by the Sea*, *Salt and Saffron*, *Kartography*, *Broken Verses* and *Burnt Shadows* have been published.

A striking feature of Shamsie's fiction is the portrayal of the female characters. Three of her novels, that is, *Salt and Saffron*, *Kartography* and *Broken Verses* revolve around the tribulations, desires and quests of Raheen, Aliya and Aasmani Inqalab respectively. Being a young Pakistani writer, it is of interest to analyze her female characters from a feminist perspective.

Thus a study of images of women in Pakistani fiction becomes significant in order to highlight what kinds of images of Pakistani women are portrayed in these works of literature in order to highlight whether Pakistani literature functions as a propaganda furthering sexist ideology or is it otherwise.

3. From Traditional Woman to the Woman of Today: Analysis of Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron*

Salt and Saffron is a tale of an aristocratic Nawab family of the subcontinent, the Dard-e-Dils. The novel is particularly noteworthy for its feminine sensibility. Shamsie, a keen observer of the mind of Pakistani women under all influences, has depicted the female characters within the novel with their emotional, cultural and modern ins and outs. She has minutely observed and keenly demonstrated the situation of women in the society, revealing not only their anxiety and anguish about their own situation, but also their growing perception of themselves as individuals capable of self-willed action. The novel traces the history of the Dard-e-Dils showing the social milieu changing gradually from a strictly conservative one to that of progress and liberalism. In *Salt and Saffron* the struggle of women in family, in society, in relations and in cultural concepts is presented very subtly. The struggle of these women for existence, for honour and for freedom is the most central concern of

the novel. By reflecting on the persistent grimness of conflict in the lives of Pakistani women at various levels, Kamila advocates a reformatory outlook of the society towards its women.

The novel delineates the tale of several women across class and generation. It skilfully presents the predicament of women of different backgrounds, from elitist Aliya's confusion regarding her choices in life to midwife Taj's struggle for existence. Apart from the female characters caught in the shackles of conventions, Shamsie has also created such characters who show spirit of revolt and take strides towards attainment of selfhood, independence and dignity.

The most central concern of the Images critics is to analyze the authenticity of the female characters in a work of literature. Shamsie's female characters in this novel fall into two broad categories – daring and self-governing characters, fulfilling the criterion of authentic characters set by Images critics; and passive and submissive characters which fall into the category of stereotyped or inauthentic characters. Predominantly Shamsie's characters are assertive and rebellious in nature with the minor inclusion of a few conventional characters which primarily function as a foil for the central characters. The stereotyped characters have been presented as juxtaposed and parallel to the central female characters to draw attention to and criticize the primeval conditioning of women by a dominating patriarchal culture.

Through the narrative structure of *Salt and Saffron*, Shamsie has portrayed the inner experiences of her female characters by employing a female narrator, Aliya. Aliya – the storyteller is a young, American graduated and modern woman, who is compelled to investigate the history of her royal clan in order to arrive at truth regarding her own position and identity. It deals with the issue of Aliya's ability to make decisions in life when caught in the confusion of almost contradictory cultures; her brought up in a tradition-ridden family and her exposure to a liberal western world. It traces the journey of Aliya's education, her coming to consciousness, her search for authenticity and a subsequent development of her self.

Shamsie has skillfully depicted the confusion in the life of a modern Pakistani woman and the constrictions faced by her as far as her own life is concerned. A Pakistani woman's identity is usually connected to and defined by the societal and cultural norms of the existing patriarchal culture. Her identity is constituted in different contexts, settings and situations such as her relation to men, family, community and society. Aliya is flabbergasted to recognize the way she has been conditioned by the society which constrains her choices in life. Her view of herself as a free, autonomous being who is able to think and behave as an unprejudiced individual is thwarted in the very beginning of the novel. She is confronted with an actual conflict when she

becomes aware of dazzlingly handsome and exceptionally urbane Khaleel's origin, the man whom she meets on the plane on her way back to Pakistan and is charismatically drawn towards him. This however, proves to be the defining moment of Aliya's awakening to the fact that despite her education and independence, she is unable to shrug off the age old conditioning of her family and the society. On this complete control of patriarchal structure through a process of social conditioning, Millett states that; "so perfect is its system of socialization, so complete the general assent to its values, so long and so universally it has prevailed in human society that it scarcely seems to require violent implementation" (43). Aliya is agonized at her own reaction on knowing about Khaleel's origin. Though she wants to break free from the long standing mores of her family, but she finds herself awfully helpless. As she admits:

I wanted to shout out. I've deconstructed it, analyzed it, and I have refused to take on the attitude of my relatives with their centuries of inbred snobbery. Why can't my heart be as evolved as my mind? (32-33)

Aliya's deep entanglement in the family traditions is reflected in her belief in the myth of not-quite-twins despite her education and wide exposure. The discovery which further adds to her agony is the disclosure by Baji, a distant relative in London, that Mariam and Aliya are not-quite-twins, the pair destined to bring disgrace to the family. Aliya feels entrapped because she has passed on from the stage of observation to the path of actual participation, which is not only likely to be difficult, but may also turn out to be humiliating and embarrassing.

Despite her deep entrenchment in family traditions, Aliya keeps on striving to become an autonomous being, free from the restrictions imposed on her by the society and to free herself from her own fears and guilt. It is only through self-analysis that she is able to explore her inner self and her own potential to assert her individuality. She undertakes an arduous journey into her family's past and most importantly into herself and learns to free herself of the guilt, disgrace and humiliation she might have to face on account of her rebellious act. She emerges as a complex character and fulfills the criterion of authenticity by discovering her real self. Donovan (1998) emphasizes the portrayal of such female character to reinforce that, "Women are seats of consciousness; are selves not others" (p. 236). Her willingness to finally rebel against the taboos of the society is reflected in her final dialogues with herself when she imagines of declaring her love openly in front of her family members. "This, then, was Mariam's farewell gift to me: the courage to take Khaleel's hand in mine and say to my parents, say to Dadi,just because a thing has always been so, it does not always have to be so" (p.193). Aliya through exhaustive self-analysis attains this autonomy and her final words are a reflection of

her ability to comprehend the need to fulfill her desires and her complete faith in herself. Thus beginning her journey with doubt and uncertainty, Aliya reaches successfully to the destination of self-affirmation and self-actualization. Though confronted with uncertainty at many junctures, she is able to find her true self, her identity in a culture organized by the role system. Aliya, through strenuous effort to go against the tide, finally accomplishes the goal to assert her will and affirm her being.

Besides portraying the struggle for self-affirmation of the women from the elite class, Kamila also realistically presents the ghastly condition of the women belonging to the lower class of the society and the hideous injustices committed against them. Through the character of Taj and Taj's mother, the novelist exposes the dreadful and inhuman treatment of the poor women at the hands of the rich male members of the society. Taj's mother suffers on account of her rape by a prince of the Dard-e-Dil family. The life lived by Taj, daughter of the poor woman raped by the prince, is another abysmal account of the degrading behavior reserved by the society for such women. The prince later became a Nawab but none of his children survived the trauma of birth and he appointed Taj, his own illegitimate daughter, as the royal midwife. So the story of Taj and her mother demonstrates how women of poor classes are doubly disadvantaged in a patriarchal social order. They are the real victims of the patriarchal society.

Apart from realistic presentation of the prejudice faced by women historically, Shamsie's concern for women's freedom is manifested in her construction of the images of transcendence and authenticity for women in *Salt and Saffron*. Mariam Apa, Aliya's aunt, is the most strong-willed character in the novel. She possesses amazing self-confidence and has no confusion regarding what she wants in life and how to get it. Suffused with strength, she shapes her life according to her wishes and breaks out against all taboos and with full conviction, steps onto the road to emancipation.

Mariam is a remarkable and unique female character, in terms of her elegance and poise, her delicacy and gentleness, her resoluteness and obstinacy and above all her silence – her refusal to speak despite everyone's insistence. In spite of her great passion and sensibility for art and music, she talked not to the literate but to their cook Masood and that also to order meals. Shamsie's vision of an autonomous selfhood for women is manifested in her depiction of such characters within the novel who are able to interpret and arrive at truth concerning Mariam's personality. Aliya and Sameer's thoughtful analysis of Mariam's behaviour enables them to develop a better understanding of what she did and why she did it. While discussing her strangest stubborn streak and silence, they consider the possibility that, "her silence

was subversion” and perhaps “Mariam’s silence was a protest built into language” (214). Their insightful evaluation of Mariam’s character allows them to understand her fiercely independent mind and her unprejudiced and enlightened approach towards life. As Sameer hints that, “Do you think that’s part of the reason society was so outraged? Because by eloping with Masood she made eloping with a servant possible?” (215). By courageous act of rebelling against her royal lineage, she proved that unlike her family, she was able to think beyond her class prejudices.

Mariam, through her unconventional approach towards life symbolizes a particular kind of social change. She plays her part in altering the mindset of the society regarding its female members, offering a new kind of a woman, who is self-governing and self-sufficient. Mariam’s marriage is a proof of her truly liberated self and her conviction that her personal happiness must take precedence over her so called responsibilities towards her family.

Another female character who represents the older generation of the Dard-e-Dil family is Aliya’s grandmother, whom she calls Dadi. Believed to be a traditional woman of a patriarchal setup by Aliya, she is able to understand her Dadi’s real self only towards the end of the novel. Disappointed at Dadi’s reaction regarding Mariam’s elopement, Aliya refuses to have any communication with her Dadi for four years. It is on her return to Pakistan that Aliya finds the chance to understand her grandmother, her apparent inflexibility and her inner tragedy. It is only towards the end of the novel that Dadi becomes aware of the reality regarding her failure in love and is restored to her good humour and humanity. So, Abida Dadi finally emerges as a round and complex character who is able to raise herself up to view her own life and those of others around her in a new light.

Another female character which is quite a contrast to Abida Dadi is that of her younger sister, called as Meher Dadi by Aliya. Meher’s unconventionality comes to display in the true sense at the early demise of her husband. She prefers to lead the rest of her life in following her dreams, instead of becoming dejected or disconsolate, grieving over the arrival of an unexpected widowhood. Meher dadi is capable of changing her state of affairs if she finds them unpleasant for her and has the motivation to lead her life independently, making a joyful, richer and more intense life a possibility for a woman of her age. She is a unique female character because of her enthusiasm to discover the several possibilities of life and to make the most of them.

The most comic and hilarious female characters within the novel are the Starched Aunts. Shamsie has portrayed them with a marked touch of irony to criticize the society’s separatist attitude towards its women. They are the women who are mostly preoccupied with the petty issues of life, like going to the parties, looking young and

attractive and are extremely fond of tittle-tattle all the time. As a result of this, they turn out to be women having no intellectual pursuits, and above all the tragedy underlying their comic behavior is the absence on their part, of any kind of realization of their situation. They have been conditioned so effectively by the society that they are completely blind to their own situation. Kamila has given an ironic representation of these characters in contrast to those of Aliya and Mariam.

So *Salt and Saffron* depicts Shamsie's keen observation of the Pakistani society and the role of women in it, delineated through the portrayal of a wide range of characters. By portraying spirit of rebellion in the self-willed Mariam to the disconcerting conflict faced by Aliya, from the women like Dadi who get willingly immersed in their traditional roles to the utter brutality faced by women like Taj, Shamsie advocates a more liberated attitude of the society towards its women. Her central female characters are in the process of redefining and rediscovering their roles, positions and relationships within their given social order. Her central female characters are able to discover their potentials and they do subvert the patriarchal ideology by opting for an independent existence: that is self chosen and enables them to lead their life on their terms and not on what the society requires of them.

4. Pakistani Woman's Quest for Self and Identity: Analysis of Shamsie's *Broken Verses*

Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses* is a complex novel which revolves around the issue of women's quest for self in a patriarchal society. Through the themes and characterization, she has raised pertinent questions regarding the status of Pakistani women in the society. The central issue in this work of fiction, deals with the question of women's freedom, their aspirations and abilities to become self-determining, autonomous beings. The novelist expands the horizon of characterization by presenting such female characters who do not conform to the stereotypes. They raise their voice of dissent and express their rage and frustration with their conditions and attempt to establish themselves as free individuals who can defy restrictions imposed upon them by the patriarchal society. Shamsie has portrayed female characters that are non-conformist and radical in their attitude offering a new, alternative definition of a woman. However how far they are successful in attaining the desired autonomy in the society and what is the approach of the society towards such liberated women are the central issues to be addressed.

This novel by Kamila Shamsie is intricately woven around the lives of three modern and educated women belonging to the upper stratum of the society, i.e. Aasmani Inqalab, the protagonist and the narrator of the story, Samina Akram, Aasmani's mother and an activist for women's rights and Shehnaz Saeed, a famous actor and

Mir Adnan Akbar Khan's mother. The minor female characters are Aasmani's step mother Beema and half-sister Rabia.

Shamsie has introduced such authentic female characters in the novel who overtly transcend the damaging roles assigned to them by the patriarchal culture. According to the Images of women criticism, an authentic character "[Has] a reflective, critical consciousness, [and is] capable of self-determined action" (Donovan 2000, p.159). Samina fulfills this criterion and emerges as the most independent central female character who heroically rises up against the traditions of her society. She confidently shatters the stereotypes of a mother and wife and asserts her autonomous, decisive self and lives her life according to her wishes by crossing the so called boundaries drawn by the society.

Samina Akram, a Cambridge graduate, at twenty three, decides to work for the welfare of women in her country when she witnesses the miseries inflicted upon the women of lower classes. It is during this period of radiant youth and great passion to contribute positively to the society that Samina falls in love with the thirty six year old Poet. However much to her own surprise, she becomes a muse for his poetic creation and comes in the public glare on account of her relationship with him.

She feels thrilled at receiving such attention from a renowned poet, but it doesn't take her long to recognize the damage being done to her individuality. And in order to have "an identity that wasn't caught up in his shadow" (88), Samina decides abruptly to enter into a wedlock just to prove to the poet that she is the one who is in complete charge of her life. However, the marriage lasts for only four months as she immediately realizes that she and her husband are denizens of two different worlds. Samina's will to come to her full personhood is reflected in her decision to leave her husband and live with the poet on her own terms. Samina Akram is a truly emancipated, independent and unconventional woman – who is strong enough to assert her will and walk on her chosen path. She breaks away from the norms of the society which are plainly unacceptable for her and exemplifies a liberated, awakened and learned woman of today.

In their analysis of Pakistani society, Mumtaz & Shaheen (1987) note that traditionally it is believed that a man's life is his work and a woman's life revolves around her husband and her family. The very notion that a woman's life can have connections with her career and she has duties towards herself apart from her duties towards her family is a revolutionary idea and not a very acceptable one (20). Women who prefer their individual selves over their familial roles are subjected to severe castigation by the society.

Samina – the rebellious woman, is rigorously criticized by the society for her eccentric attitude, for following the poet during his imprisonment and exile and for

her neglectful behaviour as a mother. Her outlook towards life is extremely condemned by the society which does not recognize a woman's identity in such a relationship. Her relationship with the poet is looked upon with doubt and suspicion and she is unfeelingly derided and taunted by the society. As Aasmani informs the reader that, "Most of the Karachi society disapproved of her, of course. Running around the country for some man she wasn't even married to, leaving her daughter behind" (89). Aasmani conditioned by the cultural constructs of motherhood believes that "mothers aren't suppose to choose over their children" and calls her, "unnatural woman" (254). Criticizing the so-called cultural standards of femininity Moi (1985) states:

Patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for femininity are natural. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labelled both unfeminine and unnatural (p.108).

Aasmani Inqalab, despite her admiration for her mother, doesn't completely approve of her mother's truly liberated approach towards life. Her confused and divided self is quite noticeable, where on one hand she admires her mother's inspiring life, but on the other hand she bitterly criticizes the negligence of her obligations as a mother.

Samina is considered a misfit by the society since she dares to question the validity of the age old, retributive attitudes and oppressive norms of the patriarchal society. However, despite her extraordinary strength as a woman, she has to face the cruel strokes of her destiny and the society's oppression and indignities. Apart from all the criticism she has to endure, she is forced to lead a life of seclusion and wretchedness at the end. Society shows its utter unwillingness to accept such an untraditional woman and Samina pays a heavy price for unveiling her free thinking in her dialogue with the scholar – the poet gets killed and she after two years of acute depression commits suicide. Aasmani gets completely disillusioned by her mother's failure, whom she believes has only disappeared on account of what resulted in proving to her the absolute futility of her efforts.

After the poet's death, she herself becomes a victim of oppressive system of the society and leads the rest of her life in utter dejection and desolation. Even in her horrifying state of grief and despair, society shows no mark of sympathy and proves extremely hostile to a woman of unusual strength. Thus Samina's tragic predicament points to the psychology of oppression yet to be conquered in a strictly conservative Pakistani society, where women are still in a process of transition. Her story is a

realistic presentation of many such women who run in the insuperable opposition and face horrendous consequences for their untraditional behaviour.

Besides Samina Akram, *Broken Verses* delineates the disillusionment and disappointment of another woman with her society, i.e. Aasmani Inqalab. The novel tells the tale of an era when the feminist movement was at its peak, so it has both personal as well as political dimensions. Through flashbacks into her past, Aasmani reveals the reasons of her discontent with her society and herself. The impact of Samina's disappearance is truly agonizing for Aasmani, who is not willing to accept her death and becomes extremely disillusioned and develops some kind of obsession. Aasmani has become a hypersensitive creature on account of her mother's disappearance fourteen years ago. Her petulant dissatisfaction with life can be noticed time and again within the novel.

Aasmani's life takes a new direction on account of her interaction with Shehnaz Saeed's son Mir Adnan Akbar Khan, called Ed by his friends – whom she meets at her new working place, a television studio. Here begins the tale of love and deception. Ed is drawn to her, but Aasmani outrightly rejects his advances and annoys him. Deeply dejected and greatly angered by her irresponsible attitude, Ed seriously contemplates on how he can become significant in her life. On recognizing Aasmani's interest in the encrypted note which he originally writes for his mother to compel her to act again, Ed takes full advantage of the situation and cleverly imitates the Poet's style and writes in the code devised by Samina and the poet, the encrypted letters which can be only deciphered by Aasmani. Aasmani feels exhilarated on receiving the letters and they become a source of bringing her close to Ed – as expected by him.

Aasmani is attracted towards him because of his exceptionally concerned attitude towards her. Aasmani finds true solace in Ed's company, experiences contentment in his presence and hopes for and dreams of a blissful future. But her period of blissfulness is very short lived as she soon discovers the way she has been deceived by Ed – the writer of all the encrypted letters. Ed honestly confesses that he felt ignored and wanted to be important in her life.

She is terribly shaken and utterly shocked when she discovers the truth, and this is the moment when she contemplates over herself and experiences real metamorphosis. Aasmani struggles hard to abscond from the utterly bleak course she kept walking on for so long, but she comes out successful and manages to overcome her self-deception regarding her mother's suicide. Aasmani emerges as a real, self-sufficient woman, who begins to search for her true identity, is able to dissipate her confusion and clarify her motives in life. Though the path that has been unbearably difficult for her but she does acquire real maturity at the end. She asserts her will by explicitly

declaring to lead her life independent of a man whom she can't trust. Despite Ed's elaborate justifications and repeated declaration of his love for her, Aasmani exhibits her strong mindedness and finds no reason to forgive him. As she tells him that; "I just want you to know Ed, in case there's any confusion about this, that what you did to me was unforgivable" (333). Thus she refuses to become an adjunct of a man who is unreliable and emerges as a strong woman, unlike a stereotypical sympathetic woman who is all forgiving and ever kind.

The novel traces Aasmani's journey through a plethora of fears and doubts towards that of self-realization. Though she experiences intolerable burden which shatters her confidence and complicates her thoughts, but with amazing self-control, strong determination and independent mind she is able to comprehend what she wants and how she can attain it. She finally recognizes her heritage and defines her identity which is manifested in her decision to work for the women's cause in her country by making a documentary about women's movement and completes her journey from doubt to that of self-affirmation and self-realization.

The complexities in the lives of women who are torn between the demands of their children and the urge to pursue their own lives are highlighted by the parallel story of another significant female character – Shehnaz Saeed, Samina's friend and a famous actress of the past. It is through her interaction with Aasmani that we are introduced with another woman who is daring enough to lead her life according to her desires. Shehnaz proves to be daring woman and leads an unmasked life at the personal level, but she is not as courageous as Samina was when it comes to her dealings at the social level. It is only in front of Aasmani that she reveals the truth about her sexual life, that she is a lesbian. Kamila through the character of Shehnaz Saeed, has taken a bold step by portraying the dilemma of an individual suffering from the guilt of a socially tabooed relationship.

Broken Verses is particularly distinctive for its sensitivity and clairvoyance in the depiction of mother-child relationship. It portrays the dilemma of career women who are greatly troubled when they attempt to integrate their professional or intellectual life with that of their family life. Though Shehnaz has been successful in creating her identity outside the institutions of marriage and motherhood, yet she out of her social conditioning does suffer from the guilt of ignoring her responsibilities as a mother. She has a divided consciousness; on the one hand, she asserts her individuality by leading a life of her choice, whereas on the other she is tormented by the pricks of conscience for being an irresponsible mother, holding herself responsible for her son's secluded life.

Kamila also provides a complete contrast to her unconventional characters, by portraying the character of Aasmani's step mother, Beema – the ideal, idealized and the adored woman of Pakistani tradition. She is an all caring wife, a responsible and concerned mother not only towards her own daughter Rabia, but is incredibly loving and sympathetic towards her step daughter Aasmani. The fates of Beema and Samina are as contrasting as their personalities. Beema, who follows the norms and conventions of society and lives up to the expectations attached with a woman in a patriarchal society, is rewarded with a comfortable home and a happily married life. Samina who is unconventional and rebellious, on the other hand, suffers a lot of pain and is ostracized not only by society but also in her personal relations.

In conclusion it can be said that Shamsie has portrayed a wide array of characters ranging from unconventional rebellious figures such as Samina and Shehnaz to those meeting the standards of ideal femininity set by patriarchal norms. Her rich canvas also includes characters who are confused and lost struggling to establish their own identity and to discover their true self. She thus shows the operations of patriarchal ideology and its suffocating mechanisms which subordinate women and entrap them while also depicting the inner strength of women to counter these pressures and to liberate themselves. Aasmani's passage from doubt, perplexity, aimlessness and despair to an awakening of a realization of innate reservoir of strength, resilience and limitless ability and potential together with her reassessment of her relationship with mother is a testament to the operation of the feminine sensibility of the author. Shamsie delineates realistically, the miseries and sufferings of the non-conformist women as opposed to the contented life of those women who unquestionably abide by the norms of the society.

Conclusion

Salt and Saffron and *Broken Verses* are an evidence of Kamila Shamsie's insightful study and comprehensive understanding of the Pakistani society. In both the novels, she has skillfully resented the feelings and emotional traumas of several women from various perspectives. Her central female characters strive for their desired freedom, show extraordinary inner strength to shape their destiny according to their will and retaliate with all their force to assert themselves in a male dominated society. Shamsie's female characters do not believe in passive suffering, though tormented and condemned at various junctures, they leave no stone unturned to shape the circumstances in their favor. It is also worth noting that Shamsie does not advocate a complete isolation of such rebellious women from the society rather she favours such liberty for women which does not confine them to certain stereotypical roles but awakens them to several other possibilities in the given social order. Her female characters struggle against the prescribed patterns of their patriarchal setup, defy the

roles sanctified by the society, throw off the constraints of the sex-role system and arrive at a transcendent, authentic selfhood.

Though Shamsie attempts to give a complete picture of her society by introducing a wide range of characters both conventional and unconventional in her fiction, but she seems more interested in portraying such female characters as the central ones who are untraditional in their approach towards life and are intelligent and strong-willed to subject to scrutiny and criticize the conventions of their society. They revolt against the existing patterns of the patriarchal society in order to live on their own terms irrespective of the detrimental impact of such an attitude on their lives. Aliya's conviction to affirm her will and Samina's determination to establish a new social order for women, exemplify their liberated and enlightened selves. Samina, Aliya and Mariam come out as subjects in their own right and establish their identity by breaking through the moulds of the standard roles sanctified to women by the traditional society. Shamsie emphasizes the ingenuity and courage of such characters, and demonstrates the quality of life lived by these women and the strengths with which they meet oppression in a patriarchal setup.

One significant aspect of Shamsie's fiction is that her novels show a progression and maturity as far as her feminine sensibility is concerned. From the depiction of Aliya's perplexing journey towards self-actualization in *Salt and Saffron* to the dilemma of a truly emancipated woman in an orthodox society in the form of Samina in *Broken Verses*, Shamsie shows a discernible development in delineating women who have complete realization of their situation and are daring enough to take steps towards changing it. Samina Akram's character is the most powerful of all characters in both the novels. She is particularly noteworthy for her ability to clear away that part of her conditioning which has stressed the focus on male pursuits exclusively and considered women as ancillary for the progress of the society. She is a truly autonomous being, who shows her disenchantment with the so called norms of the society and takes initiative towards their eradication and for the complete empowerment and equality of women in the society. Though her voice is stifled but she leaves her mark and compels the society to review its norms which have no relevance in the modern world.

Shamsie's central female characters are realistic, round and vital characters, adequately complex and true to life. Aliya, Mariam, Samina, Shehnaz and Aasmani have not been created on stereotypical sexist assumptions, rather through a process of redefining themselves, they dare to subvert the patriarchal control and prove to be subjects in their own right by opting for an unmasked and free existence. They are not an appendage of men; rather out of their free will, they decide to be with men for the right reasons. They endeavor to take the un-chosen path and emerge as self-willed

women, capable of exposing the shams of the society they inhabit. Shamsie clearly discredits the ancient ideological and stereotypical images of womanhood by portraying unusual, extraordinary and self-sufficient women who refuse to mould themselves according to the standards of the society and come out as persons on their own account.

So Shamsie due to her profound feminine sensibility emerges as a thought provoking novelist in the realm of Pakistani fiction in English. She has added a significant dimension to the depiction of the women of her society. Her fiction in itself is a kind of feminist critique. She seeks to explore and not perpetuate the patriarchal practices of her society.

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