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Female Bonding in Salma's *The Hour past Midnight* and Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy*

Abstract

Living in an unfriendly religio-cultural environment the women of these tradition-bound societies could not exercise their religious faith or social cultural interference. The gender imbalance shrouds their personal as well as social identity. The general lack of acceptance by the patriarchy make the women look at each other for emotional and moral support. This paper analyses the relationships between women in Salma's *The Hour Past Midnight* and Tehmina Durrani's *Blasphemy* In each of these novels the man-woman relationship is often traumatic and hence the women are closely bounded. The theme of sisterhood runs from the beginning to the end in the novels. This paper also looks at how the relationship among the women has an impact on their individual lives.

Keywords: Women, Patriarchy, Mother- Daughter relationship, Freedom, Bonding.

Women receive from each other what has been denied to them by their own men.

Women tend to stay together in the family. Clenora Hudson Weems notes:

Given that we know all too well how comforting sisterhood is, we must welcome it and its rewards for others as well as for ourselves. Thus, for the moment, let us reflect on how much more beautiful our world would be if all sisters simply loved each another. Our children would be more secure, for they would have not just one female guardian, but many to attend to their needs.

(73)

Familial relationship is an important part that holds society together and it has traditionally been regarded as one of the key determinants of the social structure. The family as a basic social institution has always been regarded as a core component for the development of the individual as well as for the society and mankind. There develops a unique bonding in spite of the fact that there still exist women of patriarchal mindset.

According to early radical feminists,

Female Bonding meant that all women were a single class oppressed by men. Female Bonding can be perceived as a harbinger of women's movement as it augurs new social consciousness. This bonding rests on the deep sympathy women have for one another. The impact of Female Bonding induces women to shed all sense of otherness that they have internalized. This bonding provides new avenues for them to liberate themselves from their suffocating conditions and emerge as new beings. (qtd.in Jandial)

Indian women writers often discuss the concept of female bonding in their novels. Family is seen as the essential moral centre of the society of which women are usually the silent participants. In *Blasphemy* and *THPM* one finds women strongly attached to each

other. Heer is attached to kaali. She is consoled by Kaali whenever in pain or agony. She says,

I found myself rushing out to be with her... Electric sparks flew every time we stood together... Fireworks burst instead of smiles... Kaali's reflexes were mercurial... when I heard Kaali's laughter from far away, the tinkling sound of bells in her throat momentarily drowned out the wailing inside me... Kaali was what I longed to be... Kaali and I began to communicate... even under Cheel's constant watch... we had mastered the language of chores to such perfection that when I churned the ladle in the cauldron faster and louder I was sure she understood what I said and Cheel understood nothing. (Durrani 53)

Heer form a sister's affection in Kaali. But the sudden death of Kaali shatters Heer and she feels helpless. She struggles to cope with the loss of kaali. Later Guppi becomes her only confidant and fights hard to save her from losing her identity.

Zohra and Rahima are closely connected to each other and lends support and comfort to one another in hours of trial. When Zohra was worried about Firdaus, Rahima consoles her by saying,

Idiot, why are you crying about all this? She was remorseful that the conversation had taken this turn and ended in Zohra's tears. She muttered, Allah should grant women a good destiny... They both felt surrounded by the sorrow and helplessness of those words, and fell into a deep silence. At hast they climbed down, as the chores still waiting be done pressed down upon them like binding chains. (Salma 161)

Being suppressed in a patriarchal society and having been denied the rightful space, a mother remains powerless and silent. So, she seems to assert her individuality and seeks respect from

her children, especially with the daughters. She exercises power and control over her daughter and thus gains a sense of authority and derives confirmation that she too exists.

Women play an important role in moulding the younger generations and also in maintaining the domestic comforts. The future of the society depends on the woman in the way she brings up her children. A Mother plays a vital role in the growth and development of her children's personality. Aparna and Bhaskar Jyoti in *The Woman Question in the Contemporary Indian Women Writings in English* say about the internal conflicts in mother-daughter relationship, "The process of a women attaining the status of a mother is not merely biological but a socio-psychological one . . . and overshadows all the other aspects of the concerned woman's individuality" (191).

In the life of a girl child her relationship with her mother plays a major role. Mother-Daughter relationship is a long lasting connection that has the potential of influencing an adult's development. The concept of mother-daughter relationship came into prominence with the Black-American female literary tradition. Writers like Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and many others realized the significance of female bonding as an alternative to the historical reality of their situation. Gilbert and Webster observe "Each mother has to transmit the rules of femininity to her daughter(s) to help them survive in the world she knows" (qtd. in Daniel 1). Fingerman, an assistant professor of human development and family studies explains that, "The relationship between mothers and their adult daughters is one in which the participants handle being upset with one another better than in any other relationship" (qtd.in Daniel 2).

The writers like Anita Desai, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Shobha De, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, Bharati Mukherjee, and Tamil writer Sivakami wrote on their experience as a mother or daughter and tend to redefine the mother-daughter relationship through their novels. Salma in her fiction had portrayed the inner turmoil of a woman both within herself and from the surrounding. Often one find both mother and

daughter struggle between tradition and modernity. Mothers are found forcing their daughters to follow the traditions in order to maintain the honour of the family. And the daughters struggle to take the directions shown by them.

In Salma's *The Hour Past Midnight*, there is mothers who force their daughters to follow tradition in the patriarchal society. Rabia is forced by her mother to follow the social and religious ethics strictly. She is a passionate girl, who dreams of living her life to the fullest. But her mother Zohra restricts her daughter. She believes that a daughter should be brought up firmly. Though Rabia is a small girl her mother instructs her to wear the dawani which is the traditional attire of Tamilians. She gets irritated when her daughter came home wet in rain exposing her body. On the death of Zunaida Kuppi, Zohra chides Rabia for being outside in the company of men.

Zohra is a typical Muslim mother. She is always afraid that the society may think ill of her daughter Rabia. Similarly Amina is afraid of the gossip of the town about her daughter Firdaus. She says. "You don't know anything. We mustn't ever give any cause for people in this town to gossip. Don't you know that they are waiting for any chance to make up stories about you, knowing how vulnerable you are? You just stay inside and get on with your work; that's enough." (72)

Analyzing the mother-daughter relationship one understands the complexity of it. Kritika Tiwari points out,

Most problems with the mother daughter relationship start with a breakdown in communication. Sometimes, the daughter is headstrong and won't listen to her mother's sage advice. Other times, the mother is a little bit too controlling and won't give the daughter room to breathe. More often than not, there is a little bit of both aspects going wrong when mother daughter relationships break down. (12)

The mother-daughter relationship ruptures usually when the mother is unwilling to change and the daughter yearns for freedom.

Among all the relationships the bondage between mother and daughter is considered to be the most privileged one. A mother who is bound by the patriarchal values complicates the life of the daughter who does not want to confirm. Firdaus' feeling of being unwanted and rejected is so acute that she begins to hate her own existence. Her mother instead of protecting the interests of her daughter becomes instrumental in torturing her. Firdaus, who wanted to live life to the fullest, is denied her right to live. Her final attempt to connect herself to her mother fails and so she accepts the poisoned drink. The death of Firdaus generates a feeling of guilt in the psyche of the mother.

The mother-daughter relationship built on trust and affection is one of the most beautiful familial relationships. Heer and Rahima stand apart from their fellow women in wanting to have their daughters properly educated. Rahima asks, "Why should a girl get married immediately after her SSLC examination she asked; is it written in her fate that we should give her away when she is so young, as if it were the olden days still?" (Salma 50). The mother shares her own experiences and understanding with her daughter because the mother sees herself in her daughter and becomes protective. The mother takes up the responsibility of her daughter's life.

In the novel it is distressing to see the sorrowful plight of Sainu who has two mentally retarded daughters. She is the mother of two insane daughters Rabiakka and Siddakka. Sainu has to face the difficulty of taking care of them and face the criticism of the people around. Because of the crazy children, her other child Farida does not get married. Every mother's desire is to marry her daughter to a well-to-do groom. But Mumtaz feels bad that she has married her daughter into an insane family. Sainu has to wash her daughters and their clothes, comb their hair and feed them. It is difficult for her to keep the surrounding fresh since the

bad odour that emanates from the girls spread easily. She becomes annoyed and Salma explains it as, "... all that time, in her despair, she never ceased scolding Allah. Won't you take them away,' she would plead and pray. She took some comfort in the thought that her husband died without witnessing all this" (130).

Salma has portrayed the mother-daughter relationship with all its complexities. The conflict arising out of the tense relationship between Zohra and Rabia is typical of a mother-daughter relationship. Understanding this bond can provide a deeper insight into the generation gap that separates parents and their children. It also shows, how in a patriarchal society, the younger generation of women are moulded according to the existing social norms, leaving little space for the self. Though this relationship is bound by love, it often leads to conflicting situations due to the fear of being excluded from the mainstream of the community. According to Signe, the mother-daughter relationship is "for any daughter, the relationship with her mother is the first relationship in her life, and may also be the most important she will ever have" (Hammer 1). It is to be one of the most emotional as well as psychological bonding between two women. This bond seems to be a source of energy for women.

It is through a mother that a child realizes the emotions like affection and sympathy. A child is guided by his or her mother in its transformation into an adult. A mother nurtures a daughter in every way. Zohra tries to inculcate the traditional values in the mind of the small girl Rabia. She becomes severe when Rabia fails to follow her instructions. Hence the child is overcome by fear whenever she feels that she has made her mother angry. Once Rabia went to the theatre during Ramzan without her mother's permission and she was caught by her mother and duly punished. Mother is supposed to be the root and daughter is the fruit of their relationship. Zohra's treatment of Rabia only testifies the fact that the former wants the latter to be well-trained in the societal norms.

If a mother fails to teach the good manners to the children the society would blame the mother. Kader, the uncle of Rabia complained about the way of her eating from the middle of the plate. It is said that one should eat from the corner. And also one should cover one's head while eating. Once when Rabia didn't cover her head her uncle complained about this to her mother. He told her to teach necessary manners for her. A mother is very particular in transferring the values she acquired, to her daughter.

In a traditional Pakistani family, the wife is typically dependent, submissive in all ways to please her husband and her husband's family. Women are entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the home and caring for the children and the elderly people in the family. In fact, a women's position is depended on their husbands in the household. Young wife in the family were expected to be dutiful and obedient. Self-assertion, even in bringing up their children is a kind of blasphemy.

As a typical mother Heer does not want her daughter to undergo the same trials and tribulations she has faced in her life. Marriage is considered as a blessing by many. When a girl gets married and goes to live with her husband to form a family, a mother takes great pleasure in it. But Heer doesn't feel that happiness when she marries off her daughter Guppi. She feels sorry that Guppi too is going to have an unhappy life like her. Heer knows that marriage is considered as a sacrifice, sacrifice of mind, body and soul. It only proves that marriage is a curse than a blessing to Heer and her daughter.

The portrayal of woman in Indian English fiction as silent victims and upholders of the tradition and traditional values of the family and society has presented her as a passive character. Mothers are under the perception that they have the sole right to their daughters' life till they get married. They expect the daughters to be grateful and be glad to do whatever the mothers want them to do. And they want the daughters to obey them without resistance.

The values and norms they learned are transferred from the mothers to their daughters, generation after generation.

People who live together in harmony learn more about themselves and their identities in the world around them. Women share their emotions and sufferings together. Durrani points out a particular incident of Pir sain's death during which the courtyard is filled with women and Heer says,

But they saw me and with shrill cries of sorrows gravitated towards me. Servants of our household, old, middle-aged and young. So many of them had seen me walk in here as a bride. Some had helped me bear my children, some had raised them and some had played with them.

All of them had known my times of joy and sorrow. They clung to me and wept, and I was drenched by their tears and their stale, spicy sweat.

(Durrani 12)

Salma also describes the same at the death ceremony of Zunaida Kuppi, all women were gathered together and Rabia says, "Amma had gathered Nafiza Macchi into her lap, and was patting her back to comfort her. Don't cry, Nafiza. This was all that was ordained for us. Don't cry" (Salma 6).

Salma and Durrani depict the relationship between two little girls whose isolation binds them together. "In the absence of close bonds with one or both parents, a child seeks some other person who will satisfy the need for a deep, abiding emotional attachment" (Rubenstein 134).

Rabia and Madina are close friends in *THPM*. Rabia trusts her friend, she does whatever Madina tells- "... she did as she was told, believing that if Madina said so, there would be good reason for it. Between Madina and herself, nothing was hidden or kept secret" (Salma 14). Rabia and Madina had no secret between them. They were so intimate that,

If ever anything happened in their family, or if ever they cooked something special she would come racing across to the house opposite, to share it with her friend. At times the older people would laugh amongst themselves and declare they would have to find a single bridegroom for the two girls; only that would work. (Salma 54)

Rabia's relationship with Madina keeps her childhood fantasies alive and her interests active. "Madina explained. Madina approved profoundly of every movement that Rabia made. She wanted to do everything she bought. Farida knew this very well. The close friendship between the girls quite astonished her" (Salma 54).

In *Blasphemy* Heer's life before marriage as a student was happier with her friend Chandi. She even fell in love with Chandi's brother Ranjha. Heer says,

... my friend Chandi shouted from behind me and I turned. From under the transparent veil of a burqa my eyes locked into the magnetic gaze of a man sitting behind a steering wheel... Do you like him? He is my eldest brother... Pushing an envelope into my hands... Nodody will know. I promise not to tell. He sent a letter with his photograph for you.(Durrani 21)

After marrying Pir Sain, Heer could not get into any lasting and steady relationships with other women. She could not even have a hold on her daughter's life. Heer wanted her daughter educated and happily married. But Guppi was married early and taken away from Heer.

Amina's relationship with her daughter strains when the daughter refuses to accept Yusuf as her husband. She shouts saying,

Shut your mouth, di. In this entire town you are the only woman who actually insisted on getting a *talaq*! Who would have courage to marry

you? Will any decent man from a good family ask for you voluntarily? Won't they wonder what sort of impudent girl you must be to reject your own husband and leave him? You may be beautiful, you may be young; but you are still a used pot. Who would want to buy it? (143)

While Firdaus wants to free from the social fetters her mother forces her to confine. The struggle in their relationship leads to alienation of the daughter from the mother. Firdaus seeks the denied love and affection in a married man, Siva. Though Amina could not accept Firdaus' deeds she feels sorry for her. Whenever she opened her eyes in the midnight she would check if Firdaus is beside her. She mourns, "Ya, Allah! For how long must she carry the burden that Firdaus had become? The thought made her choke with sorrow. She could not sleep for fear that despair would drive the girl to destroy herself (37). Firdaus' suppression makes herself vulnerable to the pressures of the world outside. Firdaus becomes more adamant, determined and rigid in her decision not to listen to the words of her mother.

Gossiping is common among women who live together in a community. While gossiping the women exchange their views and feelings. In *Blasphemy* women lives in an enclosed household and have less chances of knowing what is happening outside. They gossip with what little they get to know. Heer is often informed by Kaali of the outside world. Whenever the women meet there is a lot of gossiping, laughing and teasing. Gossiping spreads news faster. If a woman knows anything she will share it with another woman. Amina and Sabia are the neighbours who go to the river together; sharing the happenings with each other. It makes their job less tedious. The women are not supposed to go out unnecessarily. If the women are free they will sit together in a place and share their knowledge about the things around them. Wahida's marriage is arranged suddenly and it is not announced to anyone. On a festival day, Sherifa come and asks about Wahida's wedding and then Nafiza asks about it. Even Mumtaz also enquires about the wedding. Zohra is

astonished that the news has spread so quick. This shared bondage strengthens the society.

However the fear of an object of gossip in the public makes the women keep what happens to them as a secret.

The condition of women seems to change very slowly. The early Indian women novelists have portrayed woman as a silent sufferer, the upholder of traditional values and ethics, a strict observer of social taboos, an essence of tolerance and patience, an exemplar to their successors, a being with no space for herself, a woman without an identity, a worshipper of their counterparts, unfortunate and ignorant about her rights as human and so on.

Although, critics and scholars have taken up and discussed various problems faced by women in the contemporary male dominated society in which gender discrimination, inequality of sexes, and male chauvinism still exist.

Festivals like Ramazan are occasions where women come together in large quantities. Food and its preparation is the central activity of women who enjoy the togetherness while cooking. The unemployed Muslim women who are bound to their household chores look at festivals as occasions where they feel their importance.

Rahima and Zohra had agreed on the menu the previous day... They must fry vadais and bhajjis to break their fast; boil some beans for a sundal, make a payasan. There would also be the ninbu Kanji, as well as dates, apples and oranges. That would be enough! After that, for the evening meal they would make idiappam and serve it with chicken kurma and fried chicken. There would also be iddlis, dosai and a meat soup. They thought they should toss the idiappams lightly in oil. If they began on their cooking immediately, they would have to include them in the preparations for the next morning's sahar meal. (Salma 105)

Apart from festivals and weddings even deaths bring women together and share the joy and sorrow of the fellow women.

In comparison to man-woman relationship, the relationship among women is remarkable. Unlike the men who have little respect for women in general and their own wives in particular. This bond is so strong that it has the potential to be a social power.

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