



The Language Of Loss: Dreams, Silence, And Mourning In Atiq Rahimi's *Earth And Ashes* And *The Patience Stone*

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Abstract: The current paper examines the sufferings and the trauma faced by the Afghan people due to war and the aftermath of war with reference to Atiq Rahimi's novels *Earth and Ashes* and *The Patience Stone*. Both the novels depict the mental and physical pain and distress of the characters which is meant to be fictional but reflects the reality of the people who are in the war zone. The quest for identity is seen in all the major and minor characters. This paper throws some light on the reasons for the war in Afghanistan and its effect on the life of the people of all age group. The psychological distress of the characters in both the novel portrays the burden of oppression of social, marital and religious norms along with the individual trauma of surviving, after the loss of their loved ones. This shows the reality on how war creates the situation of the people for a forced migration as refugees.

Keywords: *Afghanistan, Refugees, Trauma, War.*

I. INTRODUCTION

“If we don't end war, war will end us.”

-H. G. Wells

Afghanistan is known for its war and violence for the past few decades. Starting with the civil war between the communist and the anticommunist parties, the country came to the glare of publicity after its September 11 attack on the United States. The several external and internal sociopolitical invasions made a collateral damage for the country and for its people. The people of Afghanistan have undergone many physical and mental trauma due to the lack of stable ruling party and various ups and downs of the regimes such as the Soviets, the Mujahedeen's, the Talibans and the Americans. People's lives are never made peaceful by war, and it leaves a lasting impression on them and to their generation.

Bilukha Cardozo claims that people who experience war and conflict suffer from a number of effects that have an impact on their mental and physical health (49). The culture, social life, and environment of those affected by war are reflected in war literature. Writings by refugees and veterans of war provide fresh outlets for society's multifaceted conscious and unconscious issues, which seek toleration and understanding in the real world. Atiq Rahimi has experienced such war and conflict in his life and has expressed the sufferings and pain of the Afghan people through his works. Both the novels *Earth and Ashes* and *The Patience Stone* portray the loss of dreams and the socially restricted cultural taboos.

II. DISCUSSION

This paper aims to explore the dreams and loss of the characters in war land and its impact in their lives. All the characters chosen for the study reflect the people of the country who were in war. This paper uses qualitative approach with new historicism theory, in which the writer is influenced by the war and hence it is reflected in his writings. Despite knowing that violence is a threat to humanity, people have continued to incorporate conflict into their daily lives. According to Clausewitz, "war is not merely a political act but a real political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, a carrying out of the same by other means," (Clausewitz 280). He states that war happens for a political reason and it affects the people's mental and physical condition. The same is seen in the both the novels of Atiq Rahimi.

Earth and Ashes expounds the emotional and physical trauma experienced by an elderly man named Dastaguir and his grandson Yassin in which their family was killed by a bomb blast by Soviet troops. Dastaguir wanted to tell this to his son, who worked in the nearby mine. "I hear the Russians reduced the whole village to smoke and ashes last week. Is it true?" (Rahimi 12). The father who has survived war is affected mentally as he encountered the loss of his family in front of his eyes. He starts to hallucinate whether to inform his son or to get himself killed or to take revenge on the people who were responsible for the blast. The effects of war on people are numerous in a war-torn nation and it is very well projected in these lines by Dastaguir as he thinks of his son in the middle of a conversation with the shopkeeper.

A sword? No, you haven't wounded anyone yet. A bomb? You're still living. You can't describe your sorrow; it hasn't taken shape yet. It hasn't had a chance to show itself. If only it wouldn't take shape at all. If only it would fall silent, be forgotten. . . It will be so, of course it will. . . As soon as you see Murad, your son . . . Where are you Murad? (Rahimi 16).

The old man is not in his original state and he is desperate about the situation. He had a loving family and his life was moving as normal as any other person's life with dreams. All of a sudden, his life got collapsed and he lost everything he had before. War and conflict not just destroy the land and people but also the dreams and strength they had. According to the UN, "Gender-based assaults are on the rise globally, while homicides are rising in some regions of the world." According to National Institutes of Health, A war can result in a wide range of traumatic events. Therefore, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are more common among adults. Survivors of loss are comparatively traumatized when they lack emotional support. Studying the emotions of Dastaguir, it is found that war has altered his mental and physical health. One of the most compelling characters is Yassin, a young child who lost his hearing after his village was bombed. He believes that everyone around him has lost the ability to speak which indicates that their dreams are lost. Rahimi maintains that the Afghan people and youth have forfeited their right to speak out against those in positions of authority who are wreaking havoc on their nation by waging war. The youth of the nation, who grew up in a war-torn environment, also lack knowledge of peace and power of dream. People in the war-torn nation do not understand how helpless they are in this conflict. A micro action is set against a macro action because every action has a corresponding reaction. The lines below capture this juxtaposition well

At your feet, your grandson is busy playing with an ant attracted by the naswar you have spat out onto the ground. The insect squirms in the green mud. Yassin digs with his jujube stone at a footprint left by the soldier. The ant is no longer there. Ant, mud and naswar are stuck to the boot of the departing soldier (Rahimi 27).

He is also concerned about the repercussions of telling the truth to his son Murad about the incident. Dastaguir wants his son to avenge those who destroyed his dreams. Hence it is witnessed that revenge is the ultimate goal when people suffer for losing their loved ones and *Earth and Ashes* has well portrayed revenge as the theme after surviving the war. When Dastaguir reached the mine, he was shocked to know that Murad already got the information about the bomb blast and the loss of his family. Dastaguir made up his mind that his son Murad has changed and lost his dream in the process of war and he leaves the mine without seeing him. The dream of Dastaguir was to lead a happy life with his family but everything got vanished and he is left with nothing in hands and heart. The same happened in the other novel *The Patience Stone*, which says about the struggle faced by the unnamed women in the place of war who had a vision for her life.

“Afghan women are struggling that they have no help and are victims as they are facing enlarged levels of violence. In spite of being four years beyond conflict and into peace in Afghanistan, violence against women appears to be increasing” (Abirafeh, 2006). In the strict sociocultural nation of Afghanistan, gender power dynamics have an impact on whether a person identifies as a man or a woman. In a struggle between life and death, the protagonist of this novel waits for her own identity. The unnamed woman in *The Patience Stone* is a casualty of religion, culture and war. Violence is a malicious thing which do not bring any goodness in life but can shatter people’s emotions and dreams. “The violence destroys a few houses perhaps, a few dreams”. (Rahimi 4). The unnamed woman looks after her husband who is bedbound. He went to fight with the army in the name of his religion and when he got shot in his neck, no one from his group helped him. “After all, he fought in your name for so long. For Jihad!” (Rahimi 16). This shows how the people believe in myth. The establishment of myth was a sort of investigation.

“People confided in myths that helped them to connect with their reality. Thereafter they were imparted to the next generations - initially through word of mouth and then in written form. Nevertheless, there are also some remote possibilities of myths getting replaced by other myths or being forgotten” (Brunel 110).

As this study focuses on how the battered Afghans, who attempt to negotiate their dreams on a war-torn land, it is crucial to examine the concept of “self” as mentioned by Said. “The self is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented,” claims Erving Goffman (152). The woman confides with her husband about her dreams, intimate desires, and secrets as he cannot react. John Charles Turner, a British social psychologist propositions that, “Self is an outcome of cognitive processes and an interaction between the person and the social context” (49). Exploring one’s inner self can help a woman achieve her dreams. Identity further motivates to pursue their life’s purpose and to accept it. The unnamed woman was mistreated by her father and husband. They raised their family in an impertinent and unadorned way. Her father liked placing wagers on the quail competitions. This gamble even led to his second daughter marrying an elderly man. “He had no money left to honour his bet, so he gave my sister instead... I was scared. Scared that I too would become the stakes of a bet (Rahimi 58).”

Her marriage was even worse than her early ages. Her goal was to be independent and self-sufficient, free of her husband. In addition, she makes an attempt to murder her husband without treating him. “Why doesn’t God send Ezrael, to finish you off once and for all?” (Rahimi 63). She was therefore worn out from her life in male-chauvinistic society. Because they were less strong and more defenceless, they were accused of being a damsel in distress. They were viewed as mere pawns in the hands of men. The protagonist of this book claims that she feels empty in her life with losing all dreams. “I felt as if something was missing. Not in the house, but inside of me . . . I felt empty”

(Rahimi 65). The main character criticises the patriarchal system for stifling women's creativity and identity at its core. She was brought up in a traditional family and raised according to rules and morals of her religion, but she is unsure of who she is. She dreams to live a life free from oppression, whether it comes from her own family or her surroundings. The dreams of all Afghan women are reflected in this book. No woman enjoys being a slave and the novel confirms that gender discrimination and suppression destroy their dream.

III. CONCLUSION

Even though she takes care of her family's needs, the novel shows that the unnamed woman experiences emotional and mental pain due to gender inequality. Rahimi claims that Afghans are linked to their homes; an Afghan is a member of their faith. Only if it is clear that this person belongs to a single household. "Thus, when we discuss a single Afghan, we are talking about all Afghans. The female character in *The Patience Stone* discusses her life and her experiences. I make an argument for individuality rather than for individualism." (Amiri 209). The need for the unnamed woman's identity and dream is thus established. Women are obligated to perform roles and responsibilities without their consent or understanding. As a result of the distress and psychological dilemma, the woman starts exploring her dream and place in society. Her only opportunity for freedom is to leave the place or either die without tolerating the situation where she is locked in the mid of war. Both the characters- Dastaguir and The Unnamed woman wanted to live in peace with their families and loved ones, but their dreams were lost in the war zones.

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