



The Quintessential – Vol. 01, Issue 01, Jan-Mar 2023. ISSN-XXX-XXX
Web: www.thequintessential.co.in

Women's Auto/biographies: The Voice for Justice and Human Rights

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ABSTRACT

Since the 'cave culture' to the digital era, woman's contributions in welfare of human beings remain valuably unique. This is the era of fast developing science and technology as a result human life, culture, thinking and practices change so fast. So Sophia, a social humanoid robot is welcomed, addressed the UN and was granted Saudi Arabian citizenship. The UN adopted the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, women's rights and elimination of violence against girls and women. The UN and the humanity worldwide wish equality, harmony and dignity of all beings without any discrimination, injustice or cruelties. But in reality, female infant from the womb of Mama, then from childhood has been persecuted by many ways, by many means in every era, everywhere. Orthodoxy based Patriarchy proves many times the prime cause of her misery. Patriarchy power exploits femininity socially, culturally, politically, religiously and makes her delicate, weaker and so victims.

In this paper considering the girl and women at the centre selected four auto/biographies are interpreted. They are *Desert Flower* by Waris Dirie with Cathleen Miller, *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* by Nalini Jamila, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* by Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb and *The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State* by Nadia Murad with Jenna Krajeski. The texts are evaluated from global feminist, socio-cultural and human right perspectives. These texts present unpleasant and painful period of contemporary human history and victimization of women.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Victimization, Global feminism, Women autobiography, The Voice for Justice, Dalit feminism

Desert Flower is the internationally bestseller book by Waris Dirie, the Somali desert nomad. The text presents the picture of a desert girl's extraordinary journey from Somalia to England then the US. It is a biography of the nomad girl brought up in the lap of nature with merits and limitations of Somali culture. The book is dedicated to her

mother, Waris writes for her mother; “Her sacrifices have been many; her complaints, few. And all along, we, her children knew she gave what she had....Her generosity of spirit and inner and outer beauty are legendary.” It shows that in Waris’ life, her mother Fattuma Ahmed Aden’s place is unique. Fattuma was brought up in Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia but because of her love for Waris’ father about the age of sixteen she ran away from city, married Waris’ father and preferred to live in the desert. She gave the birth of twelve children Waris is the middle child, one older brother and two older sisters. But out of the twelve children, six die because of hard life of the desert. Six remain alive among Waris is one of them. To survive Somali desert is a great threat to life with wild animals and lack of water. Waris’ one sister has run away.

Injustice and cruelty to girl child is presented in the text as the socio-cultural reality of Somalia. Patriarchy dominates the women world in desert life. Waris becomes victim of child abuse around her age of four years by the man, Guban, her papa’s good friend. Before Waris could tell about the incident to her mother, Guban comes and tells; “Oh, I was trying to tell her story and she got scared.”(23)

Delivering the baby without midwife or any basic medical aids is always challenging for a mother and child. In the desert Fattuma gave the birth of twelve children without anything. Life threat remains each time. At the delivery time:

“I remember when Mama was pregnant, she would suddenly disappear, and we wouldn’t see her for days. Then she would show up – carrying a tinny baby. She went into the desert alone and gave birth, taking alone something sharp to cut the umbilical cord. Once she disappeared we had to move our camp in the endless search for water. It took her four days to find us; she walked across the desert carrying the new born baby while she looked for her husband.” (27)

As a woman taking care of her family and cattle remains ever challenging for Fattuma. She loves Waris more so takes more care of her. But once when her female child was struggling to survive, she asks Waris; :Waris, run and get some camel’s milk!”(18) But as a female child Waris was staring at the baby, later on she ran for the milk. When she returned, she was late. The baby was still, died. Fattuma slapped her hard and for a long time she blamed Waris for her death. Waris’ little brother who is extremely intelligent known as the Old Man and everyman around them came to ask him for his advice, he

also died; “while he was still technically a young boy.”(19) Thus for the child birth ‘man’ remains the cause and for death nature and lack of medical facility. Food is also the great issue for the family. Sometimes without meal they have to sleep. More hands more works and more prosperity it is common thinking in Africa, Waris writes; “for providing more hands to ease the workload was increasing number of women and children, which means that having multiple wives is a common practice in Africa.”(31) After giving birth of twelve children, Fattuma tells her husband to get another wife for him. And her father got married with about seventeen year old girl. Waris was only thirteen at that time. The new wife starts to behave rudely with children she slapped “Old Man”: Waris’ little brother because he drank milk. After this incident, next day when her father went out at that time Waris and her brothers led the new wife away from their camp, tied her ankles with rope and hang her for two days. Later on Waris’ father came, brought her back and became angry. He is informed that Waris was the leader of this action. She was beaten by her father. After that day change comes in new wife.

Waris writes about practice of circumcisions. It becomes a part of their culture. It is considered as: “a good investment, since without it, the daughters will not make onto the marriage market....they are considered unfit for marriage, unclean sluts whom no man would consider taking as a wife.”(39) Thus to maintain virginity of a woman up to marriage, it is a man’s choice in marriage. In this text, circumcision is done by the gypsy woman and she is paid for that. A girl reaches in her teenage has to pass through the ritual. She suffers severally at the time and later on throughout her life even at the nature’s call. Waris has secretly seen the ritual performed on her sister Aman and later on her. About this ritual Waris says: “All I knew was I had been butchered with my mother’s permission, and I couldn’t understand why.”(44) As a matter of fact it is traditional man’s wish to have a virgin wife and so “Virgins are a hot commodity in the African marriage market.” (50).

Early marriage becomes part of desert life. When Waris’ father wishes arrange marriage of Waris with and old man, he thinks she would settle easily in her life. But Waris says: “No Papa. I’m not going to marry.”(52) But who hears her? When she realizes that there is no any option for her, she informs her mother that she will run away to Mogadishu. First her mother worried where she will go but later on she gets her up in early morning and tells to go. To escape from rigid patriarchal structure – home- is her first protest,



she learned from her mother and sister. Barefooted she runs away, on the way she saves her life from lion and the man who tried to rape her in the truck carrying stones. With a stone she attacks on him, hit to death and runs away from the truck and reaches Mogadishu. Here also before reaching her uncle and aunts place, she suffers. Then as a house maid she goes to London with her uncle Mohammed- the Somalian ambassador. She does not know English but she is with her the family. Here also she saves herself from lustful attack. As the ambassador's tenure is over they have to move to Somalia but Waris doesn't want to return. Without passport she stays there, faces plenty hurdles at her age of eighteen.

Her life changes as she enters in the modeling world. But she faces health issues due to her circumcision. She contacts Dr. Macrae did surgery and gave her new life. Waris says: "I could sit down on the toilet andThere's no way to explain what a new freedom that was." (148). She becomes normal. She becomes celebrated model meanwhile she learns a lot. She starts to talk on the tragedy of female circumcision. Her voice becomes louder and louder and the UN took notice of the issue. The African women in the USA had same issues. Considering her contribution a fight against female circumcision: "The United nations Population Fund invited me join their fight to stop female circumcision." (217-218) And she has accepted the UN offer to become a Special Ambassador, the fight against FGM. Boldly she says: "neither Koran nor the Bible makes any mention of cutting women to please God. The practice is simply promoted and demanded by man – ignorant, selfish men – who want to assure their ownership of their women's sexual favors."(219) Later on she goes to her native Somalia but she is established herself as the American Model.

In her journey from Somalian desert to the USA remains painful struggle because of the dominancy of patriarchy, though good males have helped her a lot.

The Autobiography Of A Sex Worker is originally published in Malayalam in 2005. Its English translation first appeared in 2007 and the reprint published in 2018. This autobiography is the voice of Indian marginalized sex worker. Nalini comes from the lower caste/ class of Hindu community. She is the daughter of ex-soldier. Her father was disbanded before the India became independent. Whatever money he got at that time, from that he built the house. Later he took part in local politics. Her mother had job as a supervisor in the thread mill. At that time money was not the matter in the house. She



writes: “those days a supervisor in a thread mill earned the best salary. She was dismissed on the pretext that father had become active in the Communist Party.”(5). She writes, her cousin Valyacchana has also lost the job on the same reason. She is brought up in a join family where Valyamma – her father’s older brother’s wife – controls the family. Nalini’s mother sent her to school and up to standard three she learnt but when she was nine Valyamma stopped her going to school by saying: “This girl has finished the third class, she needed go anymore.”(2) She also further says: “she has learned enough to keep paddy-account.”(2) During all this matter Nalini’s father argued once to allow her for one year more. But anyhow he fails to protect Nalini’s future. Nalini writes: “The truth was that he had no sense of responsibility.”(2) She wants to study but she has to end it. When the school emerged in her sight her eyes were filled with tears. People consoled her but she says: “I want to study, that I want to read English.” (3) Thus from the right of her childhood her father failed to love girl child and his duty. And she has to work as a child labourer at her delicate age. By the silence of Nalini’s father and Valyamma’s dominancy she and her mother became frequently victims of injustice. Nalini thinks: “I saw my mother choked in this house; and this made me realize that pride and dignity come only out of having money.”(7) She works couple of years in a clay mine as a child labourer but when she hears slang used by the labourers she thinks better to join work as a house maid. She has started work in Balettan’s house, a lawyer. Balettan’s sister’s husband Ittamash who is a teacher of Nalini’s brother Chettan and the father of four children and his one son is of Nalini’s age, thirteen, he demands water by Nalini and when she goes there he tries to molest her.

The change comes in Nalini’s life. On Chettan’s marriage registration matter Nalini was beaten by her father and ordered to leave the house. At the age of eighteen Nalini lives with Subrahmanyam. She writes: “That’s how my ‘wedding’ took place.” (21) Her husband caught in cancer and it became unbearable so he committed suicide: “he mixed poison in his drink and committed suicide.”(22) By this wedlock she had two children, a boy died at his seventeen and a girl. Nalini’s mother in law demanded five fives every day from her. It was big amount at that time. She could not earn that much amount except sex work so she has joined sex work. Her mother in law secretly collects money from her but tells her daughter that her mother had abandoned her years ago. Nalini sends money to take care of her daughter.



In a sex work she comes in contact with rich and poor client, high class also. She comes in contact with Koyakka, he proposed her, they got married and Zeenat was born. But he could accept the child: “His argument was that he couldn’t accept the child by a woman of a religion different from him.”(48) Later on she comes in contact with Shahul Hameed. She changes her name from Nalini to Jameela to convince Shahul’s relatives that his wife is a Muslim. Her life journey remains pathetic. When she was seriously ill, needed medical treatment, and went to Dr. Akabar. She tells: “I was a Hindu. I accepted the Islamic faith later. That is, I didn’t go to Ponnani to convert, so I’m not fully a Muslim. But since I join Islam, the Hindus have abandoned me. That’s how I came to lose everyone.”(71)

Throughout her life journey Nalini faces hurdles one after another. Her daughter Zeenat also faces the same. She also informs Zeenat about her sex work. When Nalini joins *Jwalamukhi*, an organization works for sex workers rights, change comes in her life. As a committed activist she takes leadership and at many places. Boldly she represents the issues of cruelties committed on sex works rapes and murders. She also took part at national and international level events of sex workers. She becomes mouthpiece of sex workers’ health issues too. She criticizes wrong promises to improve the conditions of the workers. She argues sex work is like any work which is paid. Through the organization they also explain new joiner to return back from this trade and AIDs awareness. At the end she tells sex workers contribute as the sex counselors to the clients. She emerges as the human rights activist.

I Am Malala is a life story of teenager girl who struggles to get education in Swat valley of Pakistan and she was deadly attacked. The text is unique in its kind. Her struggle, demands and actions are not for self but for all. To get education is a basic right for all. Right from her childhood, Malala is brought up and trained to live her life as a modern girl child by her parents especially by her father Ziauddin. She has the freedom as a bird to fly, with love and care in the family of Swat valley. Swat region has unique natural beauty like Switzerland, flowing river, snow-covered mountain tops and people like nature. The text presents internal unrest caused by the terrorists in recent past of Swat valley as a result suffering of human life.

Ziauddin, Malala’s father studied up to master in English literature. He is hard working committed social activist, teacher, administrator, environmentalist, leader and above all



a genuine human being, a father and a husband. As a couple Ziauddin and Tor Pekai is the happy family. The family is the follower of Islam. Tor Pekai though cannot read or write but she is a pious woman and prays five times a day. In this family Malala is born. Ziauddin is different from traditional Poshtun Men. Her birth is celebrated, and she is named as :“Malalai of Maiwand, the greatest heroine of Afghanistan.”(13). Malalai was the teenager shepherd daughter fought bravely in the battle, inspired men and was killed in fire. Ziauddin always says: “Malala will be free as a bird.”(19) Malala has two younger brothers Khushal and Atal. Ziauddin calls Malala *Jani*. Love and care had shaped Malala right from her childhood.

Ziauddin has started Khushal school because he strongly felt through education change comes in life. Malala says about her father’s thoughts about learning:

“Ignorance allowed politicians to fool people and bad administrators to be re-elected. He believed schooling should be available for all, rich and poor, boys and girls. The school that my father dreamed of would have desks and a library, computers, bright posters on the walls and, most important, washrooms.” (26)

On other hand the reality was different. As described in the text, Taliban had controlled the region and internal crisis created social unrest. During this sort of crisis to run a school remains life threat forever. Malala goes school during this time and she wishes learning for all. When she sees the scavenger girl later on she tells her father: “‘Aba, you must give them free places at your school.”(44) Taliban wished to close the schools. Attacks on girls’ school started. Malala is bold and brave she gives interview about peace and against terrorist. She says: “How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?” (74). Everybody admires her. World media took notice of her spirit and Pakistan government has honoured her by National Peace Prize. She becomes the daughter of the nation.

Malala and Ziauddin remains target for terrorists. One morning when Malala was on the way to school she was shot in head by the young man. She was shifted first in Peshawar then Birmingham, with the care and treatment of Dr. Javid and Dr. Fiona she gets new life. World leaders and media took notice of it. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and awarded. In her the UN speech she says: “Let us pick up our books and our



pens,' I said. 'They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world.'(153)

Malala is the mouthpiece of millions of girls around the world who want learning and wish to change their life, come out from cruelties.

The Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight Against the Islamic State by Nadia Murad and Jenna Krajeski is the life story of Iraqi young lady of Yazidi community who became the victim of terrorists and saved. The text present unpleasant history of Iraq 2014 when the ISIS attacked and many Yazidis lost their lives. Nadia is from Kocho village, Sinjar region of Iraq. She was in the last year of high school when the village was attacked. Two hundred families were living in the village. Nadia writes: "Yazidis have been persecuted for centuries because of our religious beliefs." (4) She further writer about Yazidi faith:

"Yazidism is an ancient monotheistic religion, spread orally by holy men entrusted with our stories. Although it has elements common with many of Middle East, from Mithraism and Zoroastrianism to Islam and Judaism, it is truly unique and can be difficult even for the holy men who memorize our stories to explain." (5)

Yazidis are poorest communities in Iraq and they do not marry outside religion and do not allow conversion to Yazidism. Nadia notes about her faith:

"People say that Yazidism isn't a "real" religion because we have no official book like the Bible or the Koran. Because some of us don't shower on Wednesdays.....they say we are dirty. Because we pray toward the sun, we are called pagans. Our belief in reincarnation, which helps us to cope with death and keep our community together, is rejected by Muslims because none of the Abrahamic faiths believe in it." (28)

Nadia also highlights the limitations of her community. Honor killing happen in her community. Du'a Khalid Aswad's incident she mentions. Du'a's relatives suspected that she wanted to marry a Muslim man and she wanted to convert Islam so she had been stoned to death by her relatives. She says we do not kill any who leave Yazidism. We were ashamed by what Du'a's family did to her. (48) This incident widens the gulf between Yazidi and Muslims.



Attack on Kocho was gradual, first kidnapping, threatening and then large scale men and old women were killed. A few could survive who ran for life. Nadia and other young girls were caught and shifted by trucks to different places. They were told to convert Islam put on traditional dresses. They were sold as sex slaves. Nadia had passed through this critical time. She converted to Islam. Once she tried to escape but failed and faced punishment. During this long painful time she also met her family girls who were also sex slaves, *sabiya*. After a long suffering she escapes from the ISIS Mosul in night in her traditional dress. She does not know where to go. At that time Mosul was under control of the ISIS. At night on the unknown door she knocked:

“I lifted my niqab over my face.

“I beg you,” I said. Help me. They were silent, and so I kept talking. “My name is Nadia,” I said. “I am a Yazidi from Sinjar. Daesh came to my village, and I was taken to Mosul to be *sabiyya*. I lost my family.”(209)

Hearing her story the father, old man says: “Have peace in your heart....we will try to help you.” (211) They were the Sunnis. Nasser was the eldest son, at his twenty five. After three days Nasser came their home with the ID card. The details were of Saffa, Nasser’s wife. They have to cross the ISIS regime by using this card and inform at the checkpoint they are husband-wife and she is from Kurdistan and going to see her relatives. Nasser put his life in danger and they safely cross the danger zone and arrived to Erbil where Sabah-her nephew- was waiting for her. After sometime when Nasser was departing Nadia says:

You saved my life.

“I wish you a happy life, Nadia,” he said. A good life from now on, going forward. My family will try to help others like you. If there are other girls in Mosul who want to escape, they can call us, we’ll try to help them.”(271)

Thus with the help of Nasser’s family, Nadia got new life. Other Yazidi girls also came safely back. Many go for re-virginization surgery. Nadia then goes to Germany. She gave the first speech in Geneva about her experiences of captivity then at many places. She talks against terrorism. The UN named her as a Good Will Ambassador for the dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking. Amal Cloony, in the forward, notes about Nadia:



“Orphan, Rape victim, Slave, Refugee. She has instead created new ones: Survivor. Yazidi leader, women’s advocate. Noble Peace Prize Nominee.”(XI)

III

By the close study of these four auto/biographies it is observed that the main cause of women’s suffering, even in 21st century is the patriarchy in the hands of traditional orthodox. Socio-cultural aspects are also dominated by this patriarchy. But in these texts, the women do not remain tradition. They emerge as brave, protesters and trendsetters for the new generation by their struggle, spirit, action and adventures. Their heroism is not fictitious but factual so they are honoured by the humanity worldwide and thus the new generation of women is shaped naturally, for the protector of human dignity.

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