



IQBALUNNISA HUSSAIN'S PURDAH AND POLYGAMY: LIFE IN AN INDIAN MUSLIM HOUSEHOLD: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Women were rarely seen in public in a typical Muslim culture. Outsiders, with the exception of husbands, seldom saw them. As if they were slaves, Muslim women were held inside the four walls of their homes. They were also subjected to cruel treatment. There were plenty of items to irritate them. Iqbalunnisa Hussain revolted against the aforementioned activities. She railed against the purdah system, polygamy, and mistreatment of women. Muslim women writers mostly defend their sex as they lift their voices. Female characters predominate in Hussain's novels, despite the fact that male characters play an important role in the novels of men authors. That is, their novels are more focused on heroines. These female novelists, in reality, round out the image of pre-independence Muslim literature. This paper is a study of Iqbalunnisa Hussain's Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household interms of women point of view and in comparison to other novels.

KEY WORDS: *Muslim women, purdah, polygamy, suppression, patriarchy*

INTRODUCTION

Women's cultivation of literature, especially in English, is an important part of the history of pre-independence Indian writing in English. The idea of Indian writing in English has been enriched by many female authors. Muslim women authors, while not as numerous or as impressive as Hindu women writers such as Kamala Das, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, and others, do exist. Iqbalunnisa Hussain is a pioneer of pre-independence Indian women's literature.

We all know that Indian Muslim English writers such as Ahmed Ali, K. A. Abbas, Aamir Ali, and other male writers wrote about contemporary hot topics such as the fight for independence, Hindu-Muslim riots, imperialism, and partition. Muslim women novelists such as Iqbalunnisa Hussain, on the other hand, did not cover as many topics as their male counterparts. Rather, they portrayed the circumstances of Muslim women in their families and in society, depicting her as a caged pigeon. Women's domestic issues, relationships with men, purdah, and polygamy all find a spot in their works to be proud of.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain:

Iqbalunnisa Hussain, a pre-independence Indian English Muslim scholar, is Bangladesh's Taslima Nasreen. Iqbalunnisa Hussain, a Bangladeshi journalist, revolted against the Indian Muslim community's evil practises. Purdah and Polygamy is her most well-known book, in which she vehemently condemns the evil rituals of purdah and polygamy. These activities, she believes, are inhumane. Iqbalunnisa Hussain was the first pre-Independence south Indian Muslim woman to write in English.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain was a Karnataka native. She was born in Chikkaballapur, near Bangalore, on January 21, 1900. She came from a good family and followed the Sunni cult of Islam. Gulam Mohinuddin Khan, her father was a well-educated gentleman. He served as a police inspector. As a result of his service as a police officer, his daughter felt secure. The father of Iqbalunnisa Hussain was a fan of the western way of life. Iqbalunnisa Hussain inherited a sense of liberty from her maternal side, and he was a European in outlook. Her mother, Zaibunnisa, was a descendant of Tippu Sultan, a freedom fighter in India.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain was born into a family of patriots. They pushed their daughter to learn as many



languages as she could. She was fascinated by the English language since she was a child. Her parents even assigned a female teacher to instruct her in English literature.

In 1914, Iqbalunnisa Hussain married Sayed Ahmed Hussain. She was only fourteen years old at the time. Sayed Ahmed Hussain was a young man as well. In Bombay, he was a student of engineering. The wife, of course, resided in Bangalore. Iqbalunnisa Hussain's academic activities were boosted as a result of this. In 1922, Iqbalunnisa Hussain passed her Intermediate Exam. She was admitted to Maharani College in Mysore for B.A. studies with her elder son Bashiruzaman. Both the son and the mother received gold medals at graduation. She was also excited to continue her education in England. In 1933, her husband sent her to Leeds University in England with his eldest son. She was the first Muslim woman from Karnataka to receive a bachelor's degree from Leeds University.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain gained a unique perspective on the female sex in the Muslim culture as a result of these experiments and accomplishments. She devoted herself to the cause of social service and advocated for widows and divorcees to be included in society. She was a strong supporter of women's education and campaigned for parents to send their daughters to school. The rigid Muslims, on the other hand, did not react appropriately. Their response was a bit of a mixed bag. Iqbalunnisa Hussain was widely regarded as a degenerate in her culture.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain worked as an assistant teacher at Vani Vilas High School in Bangalore after completing her education at Leeds. She went on to become the Head Mistress of an Urdu school in the city. She travelled across the country with Kamamma and Nanjamma, social activists from Bangalore's Mahila Seva Samaj, promoting women's education and welfare schemes. She dressed up as a Hindu woman and travelled to Hindu pilgrimage sites such as Banaras and Haridwar.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain's life changed in 1931 when she stopped wearing purdah. It was a valiant effort. Iqbalunnisa Hussain's daredevilry was opposed by the entire Muslim community. People wrote articles about her, slandered her reputation, and considered burning her alive. She, on the other hand, did not budge. As a friend and philosopher, her husband defended her and directed her. He agreed with her. Both were content with their lives and believed in intellectual enjoyment.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain was a social reformer and a talented journalist. She had a large number of intellectual acquaintances. In 1931, she established a

handicraft school for widows and orphans, and she enrolled her first daughter Malika Hussain there to keep her safe from evil people. Sir Mirza Ismail, the then Divan of Mysore, and Iqbalunnisa Hussain had a strong relationship. Pearl S. Buck, Yusuf Ali, Aamir Ah, Humayun Kabir, R. K. Narayan, and others were among the great contemporary authors and thinkers with whom she corresponded.

Purdah and Polygamy: Life in an Indian Muslim Household (1914) by Iqbalunnisa Hussain is a document of evil social practises in the Muslim culture. Iqbalunnisa Hussain has only written one book, but her work has its own weight and validity in the tradition of Indo-Anglian literature in the 1940s and 1950s. Iqbalunnisa Hussain is forthright and honest in her assessment of contemporary Muslim culture. She raises concerns about fundamentalism, fanaticism, and unsanitary practises.

Purdah and polygamy, as we all know, reflect the orthodoxy of the Muslim faith. A conservative society is defined by a strong desire to maintain the status quo, and such societies are resistant to change. Traditions, rituals, and religious traditions that further human development have no place in this world. Religious groups are typically divided into two camps: liberal and conservative. The second group includes Islam. Women are not able to stand up to purdah and polygamy because they are treated like animals. It has the appearance of an octopus. Attia Hosain and Iqbalunnisa Hussain, two Indian women writers, had progressive ideas and wanted to rebel against patriarchy. This is a subtly anti-Islamic revolution. *Purdah and Polygamy* is a play about such cases, with a heroine who has a lot of radical ideas. In this way, it looks a lot like Taslima Nasreen's Lajja.

The Muslim community was not prepared to accept such a work when Iqbalunnisa Hussain published *Purdah and Polygamy* in 1944. As a result, her culture viewed her with malice, as though she would be excommunicated. Naturally, not everyone shared her social values and activities. As a result, "Iqbalunnisa Hussain is our last serious social writer," as the saying goes. ¹ She is also the first Muslim feminist. The first critical Muslim social novel is *Her Purdah and Polygamy*. *Purdah and polygamy* represent Muslim faith, domestic, and sociocultural observations.

Women, as we all know, are not given the respect and status they deserve in the Indian Muslim community. She is handled as if she were a toy. According to a young Muslim researcher from India,

The Quran grants liberty and equality to woman, but the clergy curtails them. Clergy exists in every religion. Then, how could the Hindu woman be liberal? It is not only the



clergy but the entire society is responsible in making woman, what she is today. Having said all this, a mute question still remains to be answered. How long the Muslim woman should wait for her liberation? The question is rather absurd. Why should Muslim woman wait for a Messiah to come from somewhere to liberate her? Ahalya waited for Rama's touch to regain her human form or legendary flower Nargis waited for a man with an eye to appreciate its beauty. However, no miracle of this kind can happen in the case of Muslim woman. She must have to start the movement of her liberation by herself. That is what the Bhagavad Geeta says, 'One must uplift oneself.' She should have to venture herself to get liberated from the essential other tag that she has borne so far.²

As a result, women are mistreated in every aspect of life, including marriage, divorce, property rights, access to education, purdah, and polygamy. Purdah and polygamy are erroneously regarded as central Islamic institutions. The Quran, on the other hand, states,

Fa wahidatan (then marry only one) that is you cannot treat your wives equitably, then marry only one. The Quran permits polygamy under extraordinary circumstances, but does not enjoin it. In ordinary course, it is not a matter of right for a Muslim male to marry four wives.³

Many religious groups and countries around the world practise purdah. Many people have misunderstood it, and its practitioners are baffled as to why. They simply state that purdah must be followed. According to studies,

Purdah is a Persian word which connotes, guarding one against others' evil eyes or it is a sign of respect shown to elderly persons. However, Purdah cannot be used as an instrument of segregation. Other Islamic countries have started using Purdah as a dress item. In a landmark judgment on 15th July 1999, the Supreme Court of Egypt ruled that the women going to colleges and universities should not be compelled to wear Burqah, because any type of segregation of woman from the rest of the society is unIslamic.⁴

Similarly Taslima Nasreen observes,

The disease of religious fundamentalism is not restricted to Bangladesh alone and it must be fought at every turn. For myself, I am not afraid of any challenge or threat to my life. I will continue to write and protest persecution and discrimination. I am convinced that the

only way the fundamental forces can be stopped is if all of us who are secular and humanistic join together and fight their malignant influence. I, for one, will not be silenced.⁵

Lajja by Taslima Nasreen tackles the universal issue of fanaticism and fundamentalism. The issue does, in fact, necessitate immediate attention.

Women were treated with great reverence and consideration by the founders of Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. They couldn't imagine keeping her apart from the rest of society. As a result, they regarded women as equal to men. However, during the socialisation period, misinterpretations occurred, and lawmakers misinterpreted it for their own selfish purposes.

So, during the Indian independence movement, when the entire Indian society was experiencing a sea shift, writers like Iqbalunnisa Hussain saw the need to change women's attitudes in Muslim society. *Purdah and Polygamy*, by Iqbalunnisa Hussain, satisfies this need of the time. Hussain's thoughts, when compared to those of contemporary novelists, are a sincere and genuine presentation of truth. Iqbalunnisa Hussain also believed that non-Muslim novelists were unable to portray what had actually occurred in the case of Muslim women. To put it another way, Hindu writers' portrayals of purdah and polygamy are not accurate.

Purdah and Polygamy by Iqbalunnisa Hussain tells the tale of three Muslim generations of a business family. Not to mention the fact that the family is totally orthodox and traditional and resides in one of India's cities. Umar, the novel's protagonist, is wealthy and traditional. He's still a businessman. He has rented out six of his large home's rooms. In such a congested place, four families live. They lack adequate lighting and ventilation. Umar, on the other hand, succumbs to cancer one day. His son, Kabir, succeeds him as the family's head. Kabir, on the other hand, is uneducated and clumsy.

As a result, the family expands. It now utilises all eight of the rooms. Kabir marries a girl from a wealthy family without informing his mother, of course. He has a lot of faith in his wife because she is honest. His mother, on the other hand, despises the newlywed because she was not chosen by her. When the lady is about to give birth, Kabir appoints a doctor, a measure that his mother dislikes. The delivery continues, and the doctor tells her to rest fully. Kabir's mother, on the other hand, torments his wife by advising her son to remarry. This demonstrates that Muslim culture is not just when it comes to women. That is to say, the woman is not armed. She is powerless in the face of gender issues. As a result,



Kabir's wife becomes a survivor and a bystander to all of his life's upcoming events. Following that, Kabir's mother arranges for his marriage to a girl of her choosing. His first wife later becomes ill and travels to Kashmir to regain her health.

What's more surprising is that Kabir marries for the third time after his first wife goes to Kashmir and his second wife goes to her mother's home. His third wife is attractive, intelligent, and straightforward. Her parents are by her side. Any superstition is used in this case. The third wife is her parents' third daughter, and Muslims believe that having a third child is unlucky. As a result, the girl was forced to marry Kabir.

Kabir's first wife returns home one day. She is taken aback when she discovers her husband's third wife. Furthermore, the novice is arrogant. She is a poet who publishes her work in magazines. She prefers books to her husband. Kabir is a poet, good or bad. He naturally encourages her to write. Kabir's mother, on the other hand, sees it as a pointless pursuit that is degenerating the family.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain continues to tell the tale. Kabir grows old as time passes. His first wife's eldest son is now an adult. It's no surprise that he's a relic of the past. He's having an affair with a widow and is licentious. Surprisingly, Kabir marries for fourth time. His three wives, on the other hand, refuse to acknowledge his new wife.

In Muslim culture, women are looked down upon. Polygamy is an inhumane and unjust phenomenon that has resulted in the deaths of thousands of young Muslim women. Despite the fact that Kabir's third wife is a sensible writer with a certain amount of guts, she is unable to confront the problem. Iqbalunnisa Hussain vividly portrays her defeat.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain is a believer in hope. She criticises society's evil activities in the hopes that things will change. In his book *Nationalism in Indo-Anglian Fiction*, Gobind Prasad Sarma writes,

...attack on the society, so that a better, happier society may evolve. The author however has not neglected the art of her work. Though the story is structured with a specific purpose in view, and though it is long, winding and complex, it is never boring or dull. The main characters have also been vividly drawn so that they come alive. The novel is thus successful both in the execution of its theme and as a work of art...It is an analysis which is intellectually convincing as well as emotionally stirring.⁶

Iqbalunnisa Hussain's writing is stronger in its contribution to feminism than Attia Hosain's work.

Purdah and Polygamy, on the other hand, aren't as varied in terms of theme as *Sunlight on a Broken Column*. Even so, there are several parallels between the two. Both books, for example, are about Muslim culture, with the novelists pushing for social change. *Sunlight on a Broken Column* by Attia Hosain is a four-part tale about two generations, while *Purdah and Polygamy* by Iqbalunnisa Hussain is about four women and two men. The novel *Iqbalunnisa Hussain* is about two generations of women revolting against patriarchal practises.

As previously mentioned, Iqbalunnisa Hussain's novel is strikingly similar to Taslima Nasreen's *Lajja*. *Lajja* is a powerful critique of fanaticism and fundamentalism. According to S. P. Swain,

Lajja is a moving story of protest, passion, principle and persecution. It is the story of humanity's struggle to assert its innate and inherent rights in a society torn asunder by the forces of religious fundamentalism and blind fanaticism. Taslima Nasreen raises her voice against the draconian rulers of Bangladesh who are ideologically allied with Pakistan in treating the Hindus in their country as a slave race. Under the rubric of Islamic fundamentalism the mullahs and the deranged lumpens of Bangladesh have been meting out all sorts of physical and mental torture to the Hindus.⁷

Indeed, as a humanist writer Taslima Nasreen observes, I detest fundamentalism and communalism. This was the reason I wrote *Lajja* soon after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6th December 1992...It is disgraceful that the Hindus in my country were hunted by the Muslims after the destruction of the Babri Masjid. All of us who love Bangladesh should feel ashamed that such a terrible thing could happen in our beautiful county...*Lajja* is a document of our collective defeat.⁸

Iqbalunnisa Hussain reveals life's double standards. She claims that men worship women as goddesses despite the fact that they mistreat them in truth. Her novel does an excellent job of developing the theme. In the name of the Quran, the author believes that Muslim fundamentalists exploit women.

Iqbalunnisa Hussain uses a pleasant narrative approach to convey her themes. She uses the instrument of dialogue to carry out the ethos inherent in the storey on occasion. This is done to increase the ideological effect. She avoids turning her characters into a jumble of memories. She is able to consider it as part of a larger whole, transforming the entire



landscape of transformation into a symbolic and meaningful whole. Finally, one of the distinguishing features of Iqbalunnisa Hussain's novel is the effortless ease with which she has created an excellent Indian English style.

In India, there are very few female novelists who write in English. In the pre-independence era, there were only two Muslim female novelists working in English. Their contribution is insignificant as well. However, in terms of content and strength, their novels make major contributions to the field of Indian English literature. These authors aren't pretend novelists in the first place. In fact, without these two female novelists, any analysis of pre-independence Indian Muslim writers would be incomplete.

To summarise, Indian English Muslim female novelists have portrayed women in relation to culture, current politics, rituals, and customs. Finally, the authors acknowledge that Muslim society is highly patriarchal, with women being mistreated. Their aim is to solve social issues as well as portray the current state of society through their fiction. They work to improve the status of Muslim women. As a result, many critics believe *Purdah* and *Polygamy* is more than a novel; it is a tool against male tyranny.

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