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Socio-Psychological Analysis of Desire in Honor Killing in Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy's Documentary, *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness*

ABSTRACT

*The study explores the socio-psychological aspects of desire in the Oscar award winning documentary of Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy "A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness". It discusses the phenomena that forgiveness remains a desire in the case of honor killing when it is granted on the pressure of society. The idea is that Saba does not forgive his father and uncle from his heart and mind and that unforgiveness turns into the shape of desire at her psychological level. The concept of *Objet a* of Lacan has been taken to provide a psychological context to this stance. Furthermore, forgiveness of Saba is not genuine and true because she shows unwillingness. In this way, this forgiveness is considered as unforgiveness. The study traces this angle with Derrida's concept of 'Unforgiveness' where he relates it with the false forgiveness because it is an unforgiven act. Additionally, it unmasks the ways of society which creates the myth of honor killing for its own sake. Saba's uncle and father commits this crime only for the gratification their social role. They want to gain their fake honor which they themselves had distorted earlier by attempting Saba's murder. Here, the insights have been used from Rolande Barthes' description of 'Myth' in order to expose social construction of such wicked crime of honor killing.*

Keywords: *Honor Killing, Forgiveness, Myth, Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, *Objet a**

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Introduction

The current research explores the socio-psychological perspectives of desire which is unforgiven on the part of forgiver. It further investigates that the social pressure of society forces the forgiver to forgive the act which is not forgivable. The main idea of the study is to highlight the mind set behind the act of honor killing which is most of the time done by the male members of the family. In this background, it is investigated that the victims of honor killing are murdered by their own close male family members i.e., son, father, husband or brother of that very girl or woman. While exploring the phenomena of honor killing, it also come into notice that it is not just a local act but worldwide crime. It is being observed in "Turkey, Algeria, UK, Brazil, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Bangladesh, India, Yemen, Egypt, Morocco, Pakistan, Germany, U.S and Europe" (Zia, 2010, p. 2; Bibi, 2018, p. 180; Vitoshka, 2010).

Despite the fact that it is not only domestic issue, it can also be not ignored that the ratio of honor killing is increasing day by day in Pakistan. In this context, Knudsen (2004) and Zia (2010) have counted the number almost 1000 women were killed only in the year 2004. Another research conducted by HRCPR (2008) which notices "that approximately 2000 women were killed in the name of honor in the years of 2005-08 and in 2009 it increased more than 647 in a year" (p. 1). As far as the area of KPK is concerned, Bibi (2018) mentions the number are 94 in the year 2017. It has also been researched by Bibi (2018) that the brutality is taking place in all the provinces of Pakistan with different name like "Taurtoora, in NWFP, Kara kari, Siya Kari, in Sindh and Kala Kali in Southern Punjab" (p. 172). Simultaneously, it is also a report by UNPF that "5000 women are killed by the name of honor in each year throughout the world" (Zia, 2010, p. 2) including Pakistan.

Moreover, researchers like Knudsen (2004), Smart (2006), Warraich (2005), Zia (2010), Bibi (2018) and Lari (2011) have mentioned variety of reasons which motivate the people to commit this crime. The family in general and the male members in particular do not compromise on the chastity of the girls or women. They feel humiliation and disrespect by living into the society hence to remove that shame, they become active to commit that heinous crime. Moreover, there are many other reasons for example when a girl chooses any boy for her or having illicit relationship with anyone, having sex with anyone without marriage or before marriage, going on a date with someone, having any kind of relationship with other group on the basis of caste or religion, culture, poverty, settlement of property issue, provoking, divorce, custom, jirga wavera system, watta satta or panchayt.

One of the reasons behind the increase of honor killing is the weak point in legislation of the country. The issue is that if one person of the family commits that crime, he can be forgiven by the other male member of the

same family. It is happening because 'Qisas and Diyyat' are misinterpreted and misused by the society. As a result, the murderer can come out from jail within weeks or months. At the same time, they feel more honor over their crime and imprisonment (ACHR, 2004; Zia, 2010). It is cited by Hussain (2006) as "a son could forgive his father for murdering his mother, a mother could forgive her husband for killing their daughter, a father could forgive his brother and so on, under the ordinance" (p. 232). But contrary to these loopholes, there is an encouraging factor that new laws "has increased the length of imprisonment, specifically life imprisonment which according to the Criminal law of Pakistan extend to the length of 25 years which is also prescribed as a mandatory punishment of life imprisonment, under section 311" (Bibi, 2018, p. 173).

Furthermore, the association of this crime with Islam is a wrong practice because it can be found in pre-Islamic history. In ancient times, there was a practice in the society people killed their baby girls in order to save the Chastity of the family. This dark side of that society has also been highlighted in Al-Nahl, the Sura of Quraan, Chapter 16, verses 58-59 that is mentioned by Zia as "when news is brought to one of them, of [the birth of] a female [child], his face darkens and he is filled with inward grief! With shame does he hide himself from his people because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain her on [sufferance] and contempt, or bury her in the dust? Ah! What an evil choice they decide on" (2010, p. 37). The context of this Sura examines that there is no bonding of honor killing with Islamic teaching because it was being practiced in pre-Islamic history.

The story of the documentary is that Saba, a young girl survives after her father and uncle attempt to kill her by gun. They packed her into a bag after considering her a dead body, then and threw the very packed body into the river. Westcott (2016) narrates it the girl's "father and uncle took her several hours after she married against her family's wishes; while they were initially supportive, Saba's uncle stepped in and demanded she marry his brother-in-law. Before they bundled her into the car and drove her to the river, both men swore on the Koran that they wouldn't hurt her" (p. 1). The astonishing is that Saba's father, proudly utters that "Whatever we did, we were obliged to do it and she took away our honor" (p.1). It ends on the decision that Saba forgives the culprits after the intervention of society.

The director of the documentary, that is mentioned in Chinoy-Biography that she "was born on November 12, 1978 in Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan. She is a producer, journalist and director, known for Saving Face (2012), A Journey of a Thousand Miles: Peacekeepers (2015), A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness" (p. 1). Her belief is in anger which is a stirring motion for her new activities and goals. She would like to see the same emotion of productive anger in her audience. Okewo (2018) points out that she "need

enough people who watch my stuff to be moved, and to be angry, and to do something about it" (p. 1).

Furthermore, she remains aggressive for the settlement of issues. She claims in her speech in TED (2019) as "if a door hasn't opened for you, it's because you haven't kicked it hard enough" – that is how I have lived my life" (p. 1). The reason behind this courage is the power of camera which has the ability to change the perspectives of society. She is working for the rights of women. She further talks about her "believes in the power of storytelling, and eliciting compassion and empathy by connecting audiences with people who have the courage to tell their stories. I traveled around the world shining a light on marginalized communities, refugees, women whose resilience in the face of adversity has inspired me to amplify their story" (p. 1).

Research Questions

- a. Why desire is unachievable for Saba, her father and her uncle?
- b. How do socio-psychological aspects exist in the documentary?
- c. How social pressure is the force for Saba to forgive the unforgiveness?

Analysis and Exposition

Myths associate with the meanings of ever-lasting, forever or something which cannot be changed or challenged. On the contrary, Roland Barthes does not agree with this kind of association with myth. In his book *Mythologies*, Barthes (1991) says that "Of course, it is not any type: language needs special conditions in order to become myth: we shall see them in a minute. But what must be firmly established at the start is that myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form" (p. 107).

Moreover, the running claim is that such associations are constructed with some particular discourse which converts something into myth. He highlights that "since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no 'substantial' ones" (Barthes, 1991).

In this background, it can be said that myth is a constructed phenomenon of language by proving it special discourse. It is also lime lighted that it is not natural or eternal as Barthes (1991) further describes "myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things" (p. 108). Additionally, he exposes it from language's point of view but he also describes that "consist of modes of writing or of representations; not only

written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity, all these can serve as a support to mythical speech" (p. 108). Like Barthes, Chinoy also deconstructs such taboos which are associated and regarded as myths. She first of all make the people aware of these constructions and then she hits hard to deconstruct them. The selected work of this research is the significant example this exposition of such construction and deconstruction.

"A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness" is a real-life incident which is faced by Saba, the victim of honor killing. The reason behind the selection of Saba's story is that she survives and stands head to toe against the brutality which she has faced. She is the living example who challenges the so-called honor of the society. Chinoy does expose the context of this honor first of all then she suggests the plausible solution of the problem. But by doing all this effort, she remains impartial. She only covers the event and incident through her camera. By shooting, she raises the questions for audience that what was the issue and how it is associated with honor killing. Saba's father arranges her engagement with Qaiser but on the provoking of Saba's uncle he plans to break it. Saba's uncle claims that "they were inferior economically" (Chinoy, 2015). After hearing this planning, Saba leaves her father's home and starts living with Qaiser. They get married but the issue comes into the fore front which Chinoy narrates that "her father and uncle got her back with the promise by putting their hands on Qura'an that they will not harm her in any case. By coming back, they shot her at head and threw her in the river after putting her packed in a bag" (2015).

Moreover, Chinoy unmask the feelings and thinings of people because they try to justify the attempt of killing. For example, Saba's sister Aqsa is of the view by living in a constructed society which Chinoy narrates her that "who could tolerate such betrayal from a daughter who ran away? People taunt us who feared before". Same is the case with her mother Maqsooda who says that "Saba left no respect for me" (2015). In addition, the main culprit is her uncle who considers "everything is about respect. Whatever he did was absolutely right" (2015). The situation is pathetic that people are talking about the result but no one is discussing the cause behind it. The central point is investigated by Chinoy that the family rejected her the engagement with Qaiser which they themselves settled. This factor can also be not ignored that the argument behind this rejection was the inferior status of Qaiser's family.

After the attempt of murder, Saba does not only survive but she decides to fight against her father. She chooses the path of law and files a case in police station. Chinoy narrates it as "even if someone powerful asks me, I

will not forgive them" (2015). Her uncle begs her forgive but she discards his request. Contrary to this courage and determination, she becomes the victim of social pressure which instigates her to forgive her uncle and father. She expresses her view as "sometimes, we have to listen the advice of these men. Qaiser is against the settlement. But his elder brother handles everything so we will have to follow his lead and has the ultimate decision". This mythical construction that such crime is a part of life and can be forgiven is reflected through Qaiser who talks as "so if we ignore them, why would they ever cooperate with us?" (2015).

After, all of this mishandling and mistreatment, Chinoy decides to hold this situation in order to break this false construction. She brings Saba's case to the fore front through her camera and presents the whole story. She records all the events and feelings of all characters. Her efforts were recognized and the prime minister of the country initiated necessary amendments after watching the documentary. The deconstruction is so much powerful that it wins Oscar for her.

In addition, the psychological aspects of documentary are explored through *Objet a* term which is discussed by Lacan that is "perceived as missing piece, and shows that Other is not clearly distinguished from self". Moreover, "its main task is to keep itself circulating". The chase of *Objet a* explains "the enjoyment of other". It creates lack that's not sure whether it is there or not? In this way, Sheikh (2017) "it was not necessarily ever missing. It's just a perception" (p. 9).

Real stage contains this lack which is created by coming back from Symbolic stage. The very return is called *Objet a* which is in fact a lack. The reason of this return "faded behind the master signifier". The main purpose of this desire is "to accomplish the missing part". Moreover, "the *Object a* is precisely the return of the jouissance or part of being which is left from the subject when it is shaped by discourse". It reminded there while body was in the process of forming "which is not embodied the master signifier". Additionally, Sheikh (2017) describes it as "the *Object a* represents metonymically the total being that was lost when the concrete being faded behind signifiers" (p. 9). The more description is provided by Sheikh (2017) as the "desire in any form is caused by concealment or suppression of something" (p. 9). Additionally, Bracher (1993) has divided the process in basic four categorized. The first categorized is "Passive narcissistic desire. One can desire to be the object of the Other's love (or the Other's admiration, idealization, or recognition)". Second category is "Active narcissistic desire. One can desire to become the Other—a desire of which identification is one form and love or devotion is another". The third category is "Active anaclitic

desire. One can desire to possess the Other as a means of *jouissance*” and the fourth category is “Passive anaclitic desire. One can desire to be desired or possessed by the Other as the object of the Other’s *jouissance*” (pp. 20-21).

The psychological perspectives work in the documentary which force the characters to achieve others *jouissance* or willingness. Lacan’s *objet a* is the very embodiment which exists in the documentary. From this view, the central issue is desire in the documentary and to hold other’s desire. Saba and her father and uncle are striving to gain the control of other’s desire. The first attempt is proceeded from saba’s uncle who desires to break her engagement from Qaiser in order to propose her for his own brother-in-law. Saba defeats him in this Master/Slave competition because she desires to be married with Qaiser. The next attack to capture her desire is to kill her but again she wins. The process of holding other’s desire moves on, in this way. One of the key stances of this research is that forgiveness turns into desire when it is not granted. It comes back as a pursuit towards lack because it is associated with something missing. The documentary presents this case after the imprisonment of Saba’s uncle and father. Saba holds the power this time and does not forgive them. In this way, she is desiring to become the Master of their desire. It becomes visible when Chinoy narrates her that “even if someone powerful asks me, I will not forgive them”. Moreover, Saba desires that “they should be shot in public in an open market so that such a thing never happens again” (2015). Her desire is the effort to hold that power which possessed by her uncle and father they attempted her murder.

The focusing point of desire is that it cannot be achieved because it remains a trace, lack or pursuit. The participants of documentary are also trying but all efforts are proving futile. Here, forgiveness is taking the shape of desire which is gained by each party. As the case of her father and uncle, they are unable to get it and Saba also surrenders at the end on the social pressure. The true desire remains there because no one is getting it by its spirit. Her father utters as “she took our honor. Why did she leave home? So, I said no, I will kill you myself. You are my daughter; I will kill you myself. If I had seen Qaiser, I would have killed him too. I have gone and killed my daughter as per my desire. I am ready to spend my whole life in jail” (2015). Her father would like to be sole proprietor of his efforts and decision. The case of Saba’s uncle is no more different. Chinoy narrates him that “everything is about respect. Whatever he did was absolutely right” but Saba claims that he “begged me to forgive in the court and I said, I will not forgive you” (2015).

The reason behind Saba’s surrender is the socio-psychological pressure as Chinoy narrates her as “Sometimes, we have to listen the advice of these

men. Qaiser is against the settlement. But his elder brother handles everything so we will have to follow his lead and has the ultimate decision". Although, she forgives them but the chase of her desire to not forgive is not ended. She says as "everyone knows that I forgave them for society's sake. But in my heart, they are unforgiven". On the other side, her father also lacks that pursuit. He utters as "I have forgiven them and she has forgiven me. We have started a new life again. After this incident, everyone says that I am more respected. They say I am honorable man" (2015). At the end, this fight moves in grudge which holds Saba in her inner level and her father assumes his honor at outer level in the society but no one able to gain one another's desire.

This research discusses the aspect of forgiveness from Derrida's point of view as well. The purpose of this perspective is to get more understanding of the issue of honor killing. By adopting Derrida's view, it is to sensitize people that some crimes are supposed to be ended at forgiveness because forgiveness itself is not true in its spirit. In Chinoy's documentary, she proposes that the ratio of killings in the name honor is going upward due to the practice of forgiveness. The reason behind is that people are aware of the consequences of this crime that it'll be ended at forgiveness on pressure of society or by gaining the plea of law.

In this context, this part of the study takes insights from Jacques Derrida's book *On Cosmopolitan and Forgiveness*. The book was published in 1997 but available for English reader in 2001. He explores the multiple shade of forgiveness in this book. The main claim is that "forgiveness forgives the unforgiveness" (p. 32). It means the act of forgiveness is not true. He further divides it into unconditional and true types of forgiveness. Derrida claims that:

I shall risk this proposition: each time forgiveness is at the service of a finality, be it noble and spiritual (atonement or redemption, reconciliation, salvation), each time that it aims to re-establish a normality (social, national, political, psychological) by a work of mourning, by some therapy or ecology of memory, then the 'forgiveness' is not pure – nor is its concept. Forgiveness is not, it should not be, normal, normative, normalising. It should remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality. (Derrida, 2001, pp. 31-32)

In addition, he is unwilling in the possibility of forgiveness. He says that "forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable. One cannot, or should not forgive; there is only forgiveness, if there is any, where there is the unforgivable. That is to say that forgiveness must announce itself as

impossibility. It can only be possible in doing the impossible" (pp. 32-33). For the establishment of this stance, he mentions Hegel that "Hegel, the great thinker of 'forgiveness' and 'reconciliation', said that all is forgivable except the crime against spirit, that is, against the reconciling power of forgiveness" (p. 34).

Furthermore, he shows his concerns over the issue of forgiveness and says that "if I say, 'I forgive you on the condition that, asking forgiveness, you would thus have changed and would no longer be the same', do I forgive? What do I forgive? And whom? What and whom? Something or someone? This is the first syntactic ambiguity which will, be it said, occupy us for a long time. Between the question 'whom?' and the question 'what?'" (p. 38). In this context, it can be said that the possibility of true forgiveness lies nowhere. It'll further create doubts if it is applied somewhere in any condition.

Although, no forgiveness lies anywhere but Derrida again investigates the phenomenon that there are sharp chances of wrong contamination when third party appear in it. He is strictly against it because it makes the process more away from its true spirit. He says that "as soon as a third party intervenes, one can again speak of amnesty, reconciliation, reparation, etc., but certainly not of pure forgiveness in the strict sense" (p. 42). The intervention of third party spoils the concept because it is based on the unconditional consent of two party. In the case of intervention, he says "a 'finalized' forgiveness is not forgiveness; it is only a political strategy or a psycho-therapeutic economy" (p. 50).

In this background, it is easy now to get the main idea of "Price of Forgiveness" by Chinoy. She is against this kind of forgiveness which increases the ratio of killings across the globe. In the selected documentary, Saba shows her determination by filing a case against her father and uncle. For the sake of fight, Saba claims is narrated by Chinoy as "even if someone powerful asks me, I will not forgive them". She utters it because she knows that this crime should not be forgiven. She is committed for their punishment and says that "they should be shot in public in an open market so that such a thing never happens again. With God's will, I am going to fight this case" (2015).

But contrary to her wish, she is forced to surrender on the social pressure. Although her uncle "begged [her] to forgive in the court and [she] said, I will not forgive you" but Saba discorded him in the beginning. As far as there were two parties, this process remained pure. Had he been forgiven during this process it would have been a true forgiveness. After the intervention of third party i. e. society or social set up, the process is contaminated because it becomes conditional. Saba agrees to forgive the unforgiveable on the

consultation of Qaiser. Chinoy narrates her submissiveness as “sometimes, we have to listen the advice of these men. Qaiser is against the settlement. But his elder brother handles everything so we will have to follow his lead and has the ultimate decision” (2015).

Qaiser’s elder brother spoils the process as he intervenes and says “two, four, ten years? There is no alternate except compromise. We need to compromise. We are living in a neighborhood”. Qaiser agrees with the suggestion and utters that “So if we ignore them, why would they ever cooperate with us?”. As a consequence, Saba acts according to the pressure of society and forgives her father and uncle. She reaches a point where she has no other option except to forgive. She utters at the end which is narrated by Chinoy as “everyone knows that I forgave them for society’s sake. But in my heart, they are unforgiven” (2015). In this context, Derrida (2001) can be quoted that “forgiveness forgives the unforgivable” (p. 32).

Conclusion

To sum up, the research has explored the act of forgiveness in respect of honor killing which is an unforgiveable crime. Moreover, it has investigated that the myth of honor killing is constructed by society which is associated with forgiveness. In this respect, it is claimed that the forgiveness is the central factor which is the reason behind the rise of honor killing. Furthermore, the study has lime lighted the act of forgiveness is encouraging the people to take it because they know that law and society will favor their act. Simultaneously, it proposes that honor killing can be reduced by giving proper awareness to the masses through several platforms. At the end it has mentioned that it is a worldwide issue that should be encountered at national and international levels.

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