

From Pir Sain (Saint) to Lucifer: A Critical Study of Spiritual Abuse from Tehmina Durrani's Novel 'Blasphemy'

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Abstract--The present study is a comprehensive critical account of "spiritual abuse" perpetrated by a spiritual leader "Pir Sain" (the saint) and the horrible picture of Piri-Muridi (Saint-Disciple) culture practiced specifically in rural Pakistan, from Durrani's novel Blasphemy. Spiritual Abuse is an abuse that occurs at holy places like shrines, churches, mosques, madrassahs etc that goes unquestioned as the victims, out of reverence and religious fervour do not speak up (Ward 2007). The course of events have been critically analysed against the critical ideas of various spiritual abuse theorists. The study unravels "Pir Sain" as a religious hypocrite, manipulator of the religious texts, an extreme sex addict, paedophile, and wife abuser, seducer of her own daughter and the murderer of his own son. As according to (Heil 2017), the Spiritual abuse works with thought reform or brainwashing to usurp the individual's own way of thinking and holding control over his thought process, various elderly women like the mother of Pir Sain and his mother in law, being well aware of the Pir's real character remained silent and also urges Heer (his wife) to be even more submissive as the submission to the Pir Sain would be rewarding in the life hereafter. The study discloses the worst modulation and usage of religion as per the wish and desire of the so-called man of God specifically in Pakistani society. The study concludes that the Pir Sain was not a messiah rather a Lucifer who exploited myriads of poor souls and devoured many lives.

Key Words---Spiritual Abuse, Piri Muridi (Saint-Disciple culture), religion, exploitation

I. INTRODUCTION

The Background of Spritual Abuse, the Piri Muridi (Saint Disciple) Culture

The term Spiritual Abuse is rarely appeared in literature and according to Ward (2007), it's been ten to fifteen years that the term is being used otherwise it was only restricted to Christian tradition. Ward (2007), while tracing the historical development of the term reveals that the phenomenon is not new, years and years back there came some material that discovered and explored the presence and working of some unhealthy spirituality but it was not given any term. It is actually a type of abuse perpetrated by the spiritual leaders in a religious settings like churches, Madarssahs, Mosques, shrines etc. As such, abuse is characterized by distortion and manipulation in the religious texts, physical and emotional exploitation of the disciples, silence and concealment of the abuse, utter obedience to the abuser as the abuser has a divine spiritual standing, isolation of the victims especially from the ones who are outsiders to the spiritually abusive system (Oakley & Kinmond, 2013)

From Pir Sain (Saint) to Lucifer: A Critical Study of Spiritual Abuse from Tehmina Durrani's Novel 'Blasphemy' has been undertaken to highlight the centuries old Piri-Muridi culture practiced in Pakistan especially in rural areas. Pir is a

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Persian word which means ‘old man’ (Ewing, 1983), while in Pakistan, “Pir” is a title bestowed upon a person who is revered as a holy man, a spiritual guide or a healer. A Pir is believed to be spiritually enlightened and who is capable of guiding his Murids (disciples) in their spiritual and religious matters because he is spiritually pure and has endowed with the religious knowledge (Pinto, 1995).

Background of the Novel ‘Blasphemy’

Tehmina Durrani, a Pakistani literary author, a social right activist and a renowned feminist, for the very first time dared to show the dark spirituality of the so called Man of God in her third literary work Blasphemy. Blasphemy is inspired from a true story, carries chilling accounts of brutal evils like rape, murder, molestation, distortion of religious scripts, hypocrisy and much more, done by Pir Sain, a saint at the shrine located in southern part of Pakistan. “For Blasphemy is a raw, disturbing and heart-wrenching tale of religious exploitation and the distortion of Islam by predatory religious leaders or *Pirs*, as they are known in Pakistan” (Desai, 2018). It was feared that would be banned as it carries crude truth behind the religious imposters the fake Pirs who are ruling the minds of the people for centuries (Mubarik, 2015). Raza (2011) highlights that the novel carries the most shocking depiction of a Pir who in Heer’s (the wife of Pir and narrator of the story) words *“To me, my husband was my son’s murderer. He was also my daughter’s molester. A parasite nibbling on the Holy Book, he was Lucifer,. He was the rapist of orphans and the fiend that fed the weak. But over and above all this, he was known to be the man closest to Allah, the one who could reach Him and save us.”* (Raza,2011).

II. THE REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Ward (2007) attempts to define Spiritual Abuse as bullying or maltreatment of individual by a spiritual leader in religious and spiritual settings. He (2007) religious places like churches that carries Holy Scriptures, are cultic while such leaders use manipulation and brain washing as their tactics to perpetrate the abuse. Henke (1996) brings forth a definition of spiritual abuse as the misemployment of power by the leadership to gain some personal benefits and further one's own interests. "It occurs out of a doctrinal position, or of legitimate personal needs of a leader that are being met by illegitimate means" (Henke, 1996).

Henzel (1997) brings forth it is Jeff Van Vonderen, who coined the term spiritual abuse by studying the tactics that the clergy and clerics use their spiritual positions to dominate the church members and the locals. Shupe (1998) throwing light over spiritual abuse inflicted on followers by their spiritual leaders in a religious settings, calls it „Clergy malfeasance“.

Henke (1996) throws light on system characterised by spiritual abuse presents Authoritarianism as the most distinctive feature. The spiritual leaders claim to have all the authority to rule and command over their followers. "In this abusive system unconditional submission is often called a “covering,” or “umbrella of protection” which will provide some spiritual blessing to those who fully submit" (Henke, 1996).

Like other abuses when a powerful person inflicts harm on the other person by employing that power. Spiritual abuse carries the same tactics yet the effects are different than the other forms of abuses. “Physical abuse means that someone exercises physical power over another, causing physical wounds. Sexual abuse means that someone exercises sexual power over another, resulting in sexual wounds. And spiritual abuse happens when a leader with spiritual authority uses that authority to coerce, control or exploits a follower, thus causing spiritual wounds” (Blue 1993 p12). Oakley and Kinmond (2007) adds that spiritual abuse differs from other forms of abuses in setting and context in which it is inflicted. Spiritual abuse is perpetrated in "orthodox religious" context (Oakley and Kinmond, 2007).

Fortifying the concept of spiritual abuse, Enroth (1992) highlights that no matter whether spiritual abuse is done Intentionally or unintentionally, it is perpetrated by those individuals who have great honour and respect in society on the basis of their status as a religious leader or spiritual authority West (2009) quotes Ward (1997 p50) while studying the

victims of spiritual abuse concluded that spiritual leaders believed that they have been recruited by God in the leadership positions so they can speak and do anything with authority. Ward (1997p50)

Henke enumerates the distinctive features of the spiritually abuse systems as

Employing spiritual abuse as a means of coercion is not new. Heil (2016) maintains that coercion has been fortified via spiritual abuse. Brown (2003) highlights that slave masters in 17th century used to get control over the slaves by “trying to terrorize the spiritual imagination of the enslaved”. The exploitation of religious sentiments and beliefs used a method of oppression and maintain authority over the subjects claiming that the leaders are the divine representative of God and abiding them is abiding God.

Thomas Szasz (1987) quotes Sir Robert Filmer’s justification of absolute power. According to Szasz (1987), “kings were entitled to absolute power over their subjects who, in turn, owed their rulers absolute obedience ... because both the king’s wielding of power and the subjects’ yielding to it were decreed by God ... How did Filmer know this? The Bible told him so”.

According to Heil (2016), most of the research in spousal abuse now a days is carried on the way spiritual abuse is employed in justifying spousal abuse. As Martin and Younger-Lewis (1997) assert that the many of the culprits of spousal violence “religious precepts to justify abusive actions,” (Younger-Lewis 1997). Purcell (1998) reveals that most of the women continued their relationships despite of all the verbal, emotional, psychological and physical abuse they were suffering in their marital relationship with their spouses because they were taught to tolerate all the abuse with a reward in afterlife.

According to Heil (2016), spiritual abuse works with thought reform or brainwashing to usurp the individual's own way of thinking and holding control over his thought process. Damiani (2002) adds in the same idea as, the more identifying characteristics of this spiritual abuse work via mind control are, unquestioning following, incessant reverence and blind devotion to a leader, belief or belief system. Reformation in thought is used as a handy tool strengthen the group of devotees in terms of number and also to maintain the control over the existing members. An excessive reliance, blind trust and dependency on leader. A totalitarian mentality. A concrete belief that the leader has a comprehensive understanding of life and hereafter and he can answer all the questions. Thought of leaving the group brings immense fear and sense of detachment.

No matter whether the spiritual abuse is inflicted on the victims with predetermined mind or unintentionally, it is perpetrated by the people who enjoys reverence and honour owing to their religious status as a leader and idols of religious authority (Enroth 1992). “..From what literature is available on spiritual abuse, the primary component appears to centre on the misappropriation of designated leadership that does not consider the best interests of the group. It also occurs in an environment that has some form of spirituality at its core” (Ward 2007).

Biblically the leaders are supposed to serve as an incarnation of Jesus; they must be interest free and self-sacrificing. Contrary to this, study conducted on spiritual abuse victims found that the spiritual leaders believes that they have been placed at such spiritual apex and have been entrusted the leadership so whatever they say and do has got divine license. Henke further highlights as leadership stands for authority as god, in other words obeying them is obeying and disobeying them is disobeying god. Leaders being at the pinnacle of that spiritual system, can breach trust. In order to maintain their authority they use or abuse any one (Enroth 1992).

Leadership brings the followers in a discourse belittling them and inducing shame. Such negative discourse via shaming the followers, hurts their psyche and then they are easily manipulated (Skedgell 2008). “The powers of discourse to induce shame, and the power of shame, are the methods used to oppress the victim, who then remains submissive to the abuser”’s demands, enabling the abuse to continue over a long period of time” (Skedgell 2008). Such method swiftly pushes the

followers in an allusion, in which they take everything as normal and readily start believing the words of the spiritual leader as the words of god (Skedgell 2008). “The fear of shame and ridicule can be so strong that people will risk serious physical injury or even death to avoid it, because it shows damage to social acceptance and a breakdown of social relationships” (Gilbert 2003). This shaming game is induced in the leader follower relationship to manipulate and control the psyche of the followers and the victims submits themselves readily to the commandments of the spiritual leaders. When the victims comply with everything which is dictated to them, they gain them acceptance which inculcate a certain social behaviour that helps booting the culture of abuse (Ward 2007).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is qualitative in nature, while textual analysis and close reading have been used as a tool for analysis. The course of events have been critically analysed and interpreted against the critical ideas of various theorists on spiritual abuse.

IV. DISCUSSION

The novel *Blasphemy* (1998) by Tehmina Durrani is inspired from a real life story narrated by a woman Heer, who recounts her doleful and extremely horrific account of her life with a brutal and inhuman Pir who was commonly revered as a Man of God, a messiah for the troubled souls. Heer an exceptionally beautiful girl of fifteen got married to the Pir aged forty-five, who instantly asked for the marriage when he saw Heer with her widow mother. As the Heer entered Pir's haveli, she realized that the Hvaei is a dungeon and liberation from the sky touching walls of the haveli is merely a dream. The next morning of the marriage, she realized that Pir Sain who always appear to be a holy man, a man capable of doing miracles saviour for the tormented souls is actually a religious imposter.

The Pir Power

The Pir Power refers to the complete spiritual hold that the Pir Sain had over his people. As Damiani (2002) asserts that Spiritual leaders inflicts abuse on the disciples as they are considered to be at the apex of spirituality and they are given incessant reverence and blind devotion that none can even think to question them. Durrani (60), highlights that the Pir Sain enjoys incessant reverence as he claims himself to be the direct descendent of the Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) and his spirituality cannot be questioned.

The shrine, which is believed to be the blessed place as the saints from Pir's holy family were laid to rest there. The shrine is thronged with the disciples who pay visit to the Pir Sain believing that he is bestowed with heavenly spiritual powers who can cure or better their problems. “Considered to be the direct link between the Almighty and the wretched, people believed that his intervention could even alter what Allah had fated for them” (Durrani 61). The narrative highlights that the Pir with his various tactics keeps his disciples enchanted and psychologically hypnotized that none can even have a tint of suspicion over his powers.

People would bring their sickly children to the shrine and struggle to get the water that Pir has used for his ablution believing that the used water can cure their children. They fell over each other to collect the bones that the Pir had thrown after chewing so that they may grind them in to a sacred powder that has all spiritual essence which can cure their diseases like a heavenly medicine.

Being clad in a green coloured shawl on which the ninety nine names of Allah were embroidered, the Pir's persona appears to be heavenly. The Pir exercises an unimaginable extent of power over the people that visitors to the shrine would run to collect the mud that Pir had stepped on, to put the same in to their door steps of the homes for protection. “They

even salvaged his sputum when he spat” (Durrani, 62). People believed him as a mediator between God and them, a Messiah who has all the power to bring them relief from any adversity and a prophet who can foresee what they cannot.

Religious and Psychological Manipulation

Spiritual abuse is inflicted via manipulation of] religious scriptures as Ward (2007) highlights that manipulation in the text, brainwashing and so called thought reformation are used as tactics by the spiritual leaders to keep the disciples in control. Durrani in the voice of Heer depicts the exploitation and distortion of religious scriptures by the spiritual imposter Pir Sain via psychologically crippling the disciples. Wearing a shawl with ninety nine names of Allah inscribed over it, sitting on a raised place, murmuring the verses and eyes full of light give his disciples, a glimpse of a heavenly figure. People beg in the feet of the Pir Sain to pray, all the answered prayers are called “The Miracles of the Pir Sain”, while those of unanswered people were made believing that there is a delay in the fulfilment. It was put in the mind of the people “those who did not appease him (the Pir Sain) were soon destroyed by Allah’s wrath” (Durrani 63).

The Pir Sain exhibits his extreme bigotry via manipulation and distortion of the religious text. Durrani unsnarls that how the Pir justifies his vicious actions on the grounds of Haram and halal. He brutally beats his wife Heer, when she came in front of her six years old cousin. He explains that, it is haram for a woman to come in front of a male whom she could marry no matter if he is six years old. It is disobedience to Allah, not to observe purdah from a six year old boy. (Durrani 43).

Pir Sain induced severe and intense fear of God via distortion of the real message of Islam. Pir’s laws for women were so inhumane, and according to him, all his laws were based on Islamic teachings. He had locked the women of his house in the section Zenana, additionally the women guards were deployed to keep a strict eye over the womenfolk. Even the Tom cat was not allowed to enter the house. “I saw a billa daring to sneak down the chimney in to the women’s quarters, he was set ablaze in the fire” (Durrani 49).

Pir Sain: A Sexual Lecher

Under the guise of a saint, a sacred man of god, Pir Sain was a sex maniac. Being overly indulged in hyper sexuality, his unrestrained sex drive does not know any boundary. Apart from his wives including Heer, all the female servants of the haveli kaali, Yathimiri, Cheel, remained his silent victims. Looking at the unmatched beauty of fifteen years minor, he married poor orphan Heer, whose mother found Pir’s proposal as social elation for the whole family. Heer’s narrative of the first night details about the lack of genial emotion but over occupation of sexual hunger, “he had commenced our wedding night with an animal haste for food and ended it satiated” (Durrani, 39).

Pir Sain was a sexual psychopath. Apparently a holy man of God, he was fond of watching porn films and forcefully keeps his wife and three other attendant girls in his room even during the month of Ramzan. He does not only resorted to watch the porn films but was fond of filming the porn and sell to earn excessive money. In the secret, unseen chamber of the shrine, he used his own wife Heer to be with different men, whom he used to call for such purpose. “Pir Sain was filming us...he was orchestrating, directing, losing his temper, repeating his orders and arranging our bodies” (Durrani, 161).

Pir Sain, a man who was believed to be the saint was actually a souteneur, he got Heer his own wife clad in revealing cloths, and then wrapped in a burqa used to take her to the city’s influential and introduced her as Piyari. The Pir earns money and personal gains from such people via presenting his own wife. As per Heer’s narrative “the custodian of the people revered for adherence of the faith concealed his sin under my burqa. It allowed him to introduce me as whore because no one had ever laid his eyes on the venerable wife of Pir” (Durrani, 164).

Pir Sain: A Paedophile

Leaders being at the pinnacle of that spiritual system, can breach trust. They can use or abuse any one (Enroth 1992). Pir Sain, being the revered man, a saintly figure among the masses actually a barbaric abuser of not only women but of minor girls. He was the molester of his own daughter Guppi who hardly turns twelve. Heer narrates that she listened Guppi's scream and in the next morning when Heer enquired her she in a tremble reveals that her father tried to molest her, "he put his hand inside my *Shalwar*, he also put it in my shirt and pressed me hard" (Durrani, 111).

Pir Sain maintained his stone heartedness towards everyone, even the little girls visiting the shrine with their mothers or working in the Haveli. The orphan minor girl Yathimiri who was even younger than Guppi was raped by the Pir. "A wounded baby deer with frightened eyes lay on the floor, his mouth was stuffed with his handkerchief, her torso was naked and her child like breasts bore teeth marks" (Durrani 112). The Pir satiated his animal lust with another child of hardly ten whose mother brought her two young daughters to the shrine as they need some work to earn their livelihood. Pir got the little girl in the midst of night and made her drink a sedative potion. The girl when got her consciousness back "vomited from the drink and trembled from her restored memory" (Durrani 128).

Pir Sain: A Religious Imposter

Exalted to the status of a prophet and famous for being the descendent of the holy family of Prophet (P.B.U.H), the Pir outside the shrine, was a ferocious monster. Outwardly the fervent preacher of religion, inwardly was the real exploiter, a religious hypocrite. A man who beat her wife savagely for not observing purdah from a six years old cousin, in the darkness of night, forces her in prostitution. During the holy month of Ramadan, he observes fast and revered by the visitors of the shrine and in night he remained involved in the sexual persecutions on Heer and other female servants. On 26th night of Ramadan, which is one of the Holiest night as in Islam, Heer narrates that when the whole world was resonating with the holy and divine verses of praise of Almighty and his holy Prophet (P.B.U.H), Pir Sain declared that all nights are same and she can pray in some other night and the "holy night turned in to a drunken orgy" (Durrani 170).

Draped in a shawl embroidered with ninety names of Allah, giving the people a saintly sight, while he himself used to consume fresh goat's milk, he drugged his wife Heer, Yathimiri and the other child victims of him to be involved in sexual orgies. On twenty eighth Ramadan, he took Heer to the rich men of the city, clad her in dark black burqa. The rich man did not identify Heer as the wife of Pir, as no one had ever dared to find a glimpse of Pir's wife due to her Burqa. Heer criticises her burqa as she feels that it had allowed the Pir to conceal his sins under her burqa (Durrani 1640). Proclaiming himself as the follower of the holy religion, he brutally beats his son for sexually assaulting Yathimiri, while he himself raped the same child several times.

V. CONCLUSION

The discussion discloses the inhumane and beastly sight behind the Pir-Mureedi (Saint-Disciple) system which is intricately woven in to Pakistani culture. The critical analysis via lens of spiritual abuse unsnarls the savage abuse perpetrated on the innocent disciples, attendants and even on the blood relatives of Pir in the spiritual setting of the shrine or in the haveli of Pir Sain. The analysis brings the darkest side of Pir's character, who remained concealed from the world. The study provides evidence from the discussion and via textual references that Pir Sain was the murderer of his own son, molester of his daughter, a paedophile raping the attendant girl children, a pimp who pushed his own wife in to prostitution and earned money and favours from the elites. The discussion highlights that how such fake and criminal minded Pirs are thriving in the societies and maintaining their business via brainwashing and thought reform process. The study reveals that how religion and spirituality are used as a garb by such Pirs to hide their criminal self. The study proves that the Pir Sain was not a spiritual guide or messiah rather a Satan or Lucifer who exploited myriads of poor souls and devoured many lives.

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