

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN JEAN SASSON'S WORKS

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ABSTRACT

Jean Sasson presents the social condition of women in the Middle East quite graphically and vividly in her works. Her works are replete with Intimate Partner Violence, its grimness and its impacts in the popular culture of the Arabian society. The paper explores how the women of the society suffer the physical and psychological violence in Intimate Partner Violence. This pastern of vilence affects their physique and psyches both to lead them to the suicidal tendency in the real life patterns. This paper aims to project the grim realities of spousal life in Arabian peninsula which requires an amelioration by the thinkers of the societ.

Keywords- Harassment, Humiliation, Exploitation, Ipv, Batterers, Etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women in almost all societies have been victims of ill-treatment, humiliation, tortures and exploitations in their intimate partner relations for as long written records of social organization and families are available. These records are replete within incidents of rape, abduction, murder and torture of women. There is no Woman who has not suffered at one time or another harassment, humiliation, exploitation and violence that shadow her sex. A woman's life lies between pleasure at one end and danger at the other end. In daily life, women are routinely defined by sex, and even if not all men are potential kidnappers, rapists, batterers, molesters and torturers of women, all women are potential victims.

But regrettably, female victims of violence have not been given much attention. Thanks to the feminist writers who have lain bare the factual conditions of the female victims. Jean Sasson has truly portrayed the grim realities of women victims in her books- Princess, Daughters of Arabia, Desert Royal, For the love of A Son, etc.

II. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMAN IN JEAN SASSON'S

1. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children, marital rape, child rape, female genital mutilation / cutting, and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.
2. Physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse and sexual harassment and forced prostitution.
3. Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated by the State wherever it occurs.

Domestic violence- It takes between intimate partners as well as between family members (for example: mother-in-law's daughters-in-law, brothers and sister, fathers and daughters. Domestic violence may include sexual physical and psychological abuse.

Intimate Partners- Intimate partners may or may not have cohabitation, and the relationship need not involve sexual activities. It includes current or former spouses and non-marital partners.

Sexual Violence - This term includes an attempt at or a completed sex without consent or involving a victim unable to consent or refuse abusive sexual contact or non contact sexual abuse (acts such as voyeurism, verbal or behavioral sexual harassment, threats of sexual violence to accomplish same other end.)

III. SPOUSAL VIOLENCE

Physical Violence against Intimate Partner

Slapping is the most common act of physical violence seen in spousal violence. It may be followed by being struck with a fist. Apart from slapping, pushing or shoving the spouse, there are severe acts like hitting with fist, kicking, threatening with a weapon, or dragging the female partner. Jean Sason has portrayed physical violence in lurid colors in **For The Love Of A Son, Princess, Daughters of Arabia, and Desert Royal**. In **Princess**, there is a scene, how Noorah, Sultana's mother-in-law provoked her son against his new bride. This is what Sultana narrates in the following words:

“When she (mother-in-law) saw her son, Noorah widened the twilight war with her new daughter-in-law by sobbing and loudly proclaiming to Kareem that I (Sultana) was filled with disrespect for his mother and that for no apparent reason, I had started the brawl with her.” (P-181, Princess) The mother-in-law hinted darkly that Sultana was an outfit wife, and on investigation Kareem would be prompted to divorce his wife. In black mood, Kareem rushed to meet violence with vengeance. Sultana further narrates the quarrel in the following words:

“Since no Arab will ever contradict his mother, Kareem slapped me three times across the face. They were slaps meant to insult, since they accomplished little more than to redden my jaw----- the battle was on. I swung at Kareem with a rare and priceless vase-----He saved his face by a quick move to the left----the crashing and banging, along with our shouts, alerted the household-----by this time Kareem realized that I was going to destroy the room-----to stop me; he punched me in the jaw. Inky darkness surrounded me. (P-182, Princess)

Psychological Violence Against Intimate Partner

In the same context, Noorah, Sultana's mother in law, looking with contempt, threatens her: “Kareem has promised me he will divorce you. He agrees that who grows up on a habit will die with it (Arab Proverb) and you have grown wild. There is no place for such a one as you in this family.” (P-183, Princess)

At another moment, Kareem declared, “Sultana, I am going to wed another. As the second wife, she will be there to provide children. I need nothing further from her, only children. My love is always with you.” (P-246, Princess) Sultana, on listening to the proposal, discovers herself in darkness as she said, “No sound could be heard because of the pounding in my head. I was trapped in a dark reality that I did not believe. Never, never, never had such a consideration entered the realm of my possibility.” (P-246, Princess) After a fierce battle, mentally & physically, both were united again and started leading a normal life as husband and wife.

Another case of spousal violence is brought in **Daughters of Arabia**. Jean Sasson presents the horrified case of Saleem & Reema (Sultana's sister). Reema tells her eldest sister Nura,

"That she feared she would soon be divorced, separated from her two youngest sons, for Saleem had threatened to liberate himself from Reema, insisting that was the only way to free himself from unhappiness." (P-271, *Daughters of Arabia*) Sultana's sister, Reema was a great victim of physical as well as psychological violence.

Muslim men perpetrated all the three physical, psychological and sexual violence against their spouses. Sultana's narrates how Reema was attacked by Saleem when refused sex, in following words:

"Saleem, in a drunken state, became angry at his wife's condition and refusal----- Reema was badly beaten and then Saleem raped his wife in a region of her body not all owed to her husband. The physician at the private clinic informed father that Saleem's attack was so violent and brutal that emergency surgery was performed." (P-275, *Daughters of Arabia*) On listening to this sexual assault on Reema by her husband, Sara, another sister of Sultana had fled the room, for she was herself subjected to that same type of sexual abuse when wed against her will to her first husband, a man who was sick in his head.

Jean Sassoon's **For the love of A son** is fully replete with multiple violence. Maryam, the narrator of the novel suffers the traumatic effect of

physical, psychological and sexual violence at the hands of her first husband, Kaiss. In the beginning, Kaiss wooed Maryam's father with exaggerated courtesy and repeated promises. He agreed to with all her father's conditions for the marriage to move forward. Once married, Kaiss showed his real violent-self hidden under the garb of his so-called courtesy to Maryam. Maryam herself admits:

"My marriage to Kaiss was a merciless struggle. My husband was mean and brutal; my daily life was a miserable round of house work restaurant work and rape. My husband worked, etc and raped his wife. That was his life. I sometimes bore the secret and frightening thought that perhaps my father's eldest brother Shair Khan had been reincarnated into Kaiss."(P-162, *For The Love Of A Son*)

After the pregnancy test, Maryam felt happy about the new guest to their family. She hoped that her husband would be happy too. But she found her husband very wild. As after leaving the clinic, Kaiss began cursing: "The greedy son- of- a bitch doctor. He is not taking my money. You are going to go to that son -of- a bitch and open your legs to him every month."(P-163, *For The Love Of A Son*) Kaiss needs only a son, as he declares to Maryam, "If it is a girl, Maryam, I hope it dies in your stomach. I only want a son. -----I will only accept a son." (P-164, *For The Love Of A Son*)

Even the birth of a son was not sufficient for the conjugal happiness of Maryam and Kaiss. Kaiss was a man of rigid and backward opinions. The use of swim suit by Maryam could flare him to the extent of beating and raping her. Physical assaults and sexual assaults on Maryam were frequent as she explains in the following words. "The following morning Kaiss awoke in the same foul mood. He got on his knees in our bed, grabbed my face in his hands, slapped me again for a few minutes, and then forced himself on me. His only sexual pleasure seemed to come from raping me. ----- When he started choking me I gave up and submitted to his indignities." (P-162, *For The Love Of A Son*)

On the use of tight slacks by Maryam, Kaiss flared up and with a knife slit her trousers down the back. Kaiss further rolled his fist and punched her as hard as he could in her stomach. She explains, "He kicked me in the

stomach, screaming-----Here is my law, Maryam: My wife will not show her butt to other men. He kicked me a second time. God knows how many men thought of sticking their dick in you.” (P-175, For The Love Of A Son)

Maryam compares herself to a neighbor, a lovely lady Jamila in Afghanistan. Jamila had undergone physical tortures in her home as Maryam says, “One the day of her wedding, Jamila had been beauty, but marriage had aged her terribly. With each year of married life, her face had coarsened. Now every part of Jamila’s face was swollen and her soft flesh was horribly bruised. Poor Jamila had endured a terrible beating.”(P-171, For The Love Of A Son)

And above all, Afghan women would excuse their men. Maryam narrates the custom of the land in the following words: “If a woman was beaten up, it was her fault. If a woman was killed, she must have been a prostitute and it must be her own fault. Nothing was the fault of males. Women bore all the blames.”(P-171, For The Love Of A Son)

In the same novel, Jean Sasson grimly explains how Shair Khan perpetrates violence against Maryam’s grandmother after his father death. Shair Khan arranged a forced marriage of his half mother Mayana, as he said, “The day has come. Your marriage has been arranged your husband is old, but he is rich enough, and that is what matters.” (P-27, For The Love Of A Son)

It was a great shock to Mayana and she attempted suicide, as Maryam narrates:“Burning with determination, Mayana reached for poison she still carried in her snuff box. The moments the gourds and the servants realized her intent, they all jumped on her, attempting to knock the arsenic from her hands. But Mayana was resolute and she clung to the poison, twisting, shouting, fighting with all her strength. However she was finally overpowered by the men and they snatched the poison out of her hands.” (P-27, For The Love Of A Son)

Maryam’s grandmother Mayana was so sick of Shair Khan’s violence that she attempted to make suicide. After her attempt to suicide, Shair Khan screeched, “Confine her to the room.”(P-27, For The Love Of A Son) Mayana’s attempt to kill herself to avoid marrying an old man was considered a serious rebellion. Shair Khan swore, “I will not accept revolt from within my own household.”(P-27, For The Love Of A Son) In a heated rage he declared that Mayana would be stoned for her disobedience.

But Maryam’s father reached in time to stop the stoning episode. He pleaded his brother Shair Khan, “Brother! Do not kill my mother. I will take my mother and three sisters away from the galah (castle). You will never see us again----- I will give you all my inheritance, my brother. Only let my mother live. You cannot kill her. You have no right under Allah to kill her for such a thing.” (P-29, For The Love Of A Son)

Maryam further narrates, “That without waiting for his brother’s response, my father sprinted to the courtyard and wrapped his arms round his mother, shouting for his sisters. Come to me, sisters! We are taking our mother and leaving the galah (castle) forever.” (P-29, For The Love Of A Son)This is how the tragedy was averted in galah(castle) and the honor of ladies was restored and maintained.

In the Middle East, there is great violence against women. Forced marriages in Afghanistan and other countries occur for many reasons, including settling feuds, compensating for a crime by giving a young girl to the victim’s family and compelling a widow to marry a man from her deceased husband’s family.

III. IMPACTS OF IPV AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women has far reaching consequences. Women who experience violence suffer a range of health problems, & their inability to participate in normal routine. Female victims of sexual abuse are often unable to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies & sexually transmitted diseases. Physical violence is often accompanied by emotionally abusive behaviors such as belittling, intimidation, humiliation & prohibiting women from seeing friends & family.

IV. PHYSICAL IMPACTS OF IPV AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women results in major health problems. Impacts of Violence include physical injuries, such as bruises, cuts, broken bones, wounds, functional disorders, reduced physical function as well gynecological problems and mental health disorders. Jean Sasson, in **Daughters of Arabia**, has presented a grim picture of Sultana's sister, Reema who suffered a lot as a result of beating and maltreatment (raping her in a region of her body not allowed to husband) by her husband. Nura, Sultana's elder sister sorrowfully expresses her fears at the impact of violence against Reema in the following words:

"The physician at the private at the private clinic informed Father that Saleem's attack was so violent and brutal that emergency surgery was performed. For the remainder of her life, Reema will be forced to wear a colostomy bag."(P-275, DA)

V. PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF IPV AGAINST WOMEN

Women, who are abused, tend to suffer from anxiety, depression, low self esteem, phobias, and post-traumatic stress disorder and alcohol/drug abuse. Jean Sasson throws light on psychological effects of violence against women in **Princess and Trilogy (Daughters of Arabia and Desert Royal)** in detail. In **Princess**, Jean Sasson shows us the pent-up emotions of Sultana and Kareem relations in the following words: "Six years ago, Sultana was stricken with venereal disease, after much distress, Kareem admitted that he participated in weekly adventures of sex with strangers -----after the scare of the disease, Kareem promised that he would avoid the weekly tryst, but Sultana says she knows that he is weak in the face of such a feast, and that he continues indulge himself without shame. Their wonderful love has vanished except in memory; Sultana says, she will stand with her husband and continue her struggle for the sake of daughters.(P-38, Daughters of Arabia)

All women in Jean Sasson's works suffer anxiety, low-esteem and various phobias. Consequently, Sultana becomes alcoholic, as she explains the secret of life and confesses how she became alcoholic in the following words:

"We were well-stocked (alcohol), indeed, I thought. My mind then drifted into dangerous arena-----My vow of abstinence was easily dismissed. I tucked two bottles of Scotch whisky under my loose gown, and pledging that I will allow myself only a single drink-----once inside, I locked the door and lovingly caressed the bottles I had seized. Then I began to drink."(P-60/61, Desert Royal)

Sultana further admits in *Desert Royal* that she was not only alcoholic, she was smoker also, as she commits in the following words: "I threw back the bed covers and move towards that bottle as one bewitched. It was nearly full, and I happily grabbed it tightly. I then searched for a cigarette. Although I am a heavy smoker, I had not smoked a cigarette since the hour dawn-----with the trembling hand I lit my first cigarette of the day, after drawing the pleasing fumes into my lungs I removed the silver stopper from the wine bottle and filled the glass alternately, I sipped Asad's (Her brother-in-law) wine and enjoyed his cigarette. For a small moment, life was good once again" (P-83, *Desert Royal*).

In the same book, Jean Sasson shows us how Sultana's cousin, Huda enjoyed alcohol. Sultana narrates: "One day in New York Huda declined to join shopping party. -----instead, she announced, she planned to remain in her suite and indulge herself in fine food and drink. In fact she had ordered three large tins of Beluga Caviar already-----drinking champagne and watching American soap operas on television." (P-171, *Desert Royal*)

There were clinics of royal families for the treatment of alcohol and drug abuse. Sultana narrates clearly how royal women became alcoholic as a result of stress and violence in the family, "the clinic was one often frequented by royal family members when confidentiality was desired. I was acquainted with three princesses who routinely entered the clinic for treatment of alcohol abuse."(P-284, *Daughters of Arabia*)

VI. SUICIDAL IMPACT OF IPV AGAINST WOMEN

Jean Sasson shows her women under the impact of violence in the family leading them to self-immolation, attempt to suicide and their emotional behavior in their families. In case of Sultana's beautiful sister, Sara, it happened. She turned to self-immolation, since she was unhappy due to the brutal and violent behavior of her husband. Sultana declares about Sara's suicidal attempt in the following words, "five weeks after her wedding, she attempted suicide."(P-65, *Princess*) Sultana further narrates, "That we were distraught to discover that she had tried to take her life by placing her head in the gas oven."(P-68, *Princess*) The family could find why Sara attempted suicide and this is what Sultana narrates:

"Mother had discovered the source of Sara's agony. -----Sara's new husband was sadistic. He had subjected my sister to sickening sexual brutality, until she felt her only escape was death."(P-69, *Princess*)

Similarly, Jean Sasson puts the case of Maryam's grand-mother, Mayana's suicidal attempt in **For The Love Of A Son**. Shair Khan, Mayana's half-son forcibly arranged her second marriage after the death of his father. As a result, she tried to take poison and end her life, but the situation was averted as Mayana's own son, Ajab Khan saved the tragic situation.

In **Desert Royal**, Jean Sasson delineates a tragic picture of a maid, a victim of violence through state law. The impact of violence against her was so strong that she had no other way left for her except committing suicide. The protagonist, Sultana's sister, Sara had a very caring and considerate maid, Afaaf. She had only one sibling left in the world, her sister. Afaaf's sister was found guilty of talking to strange man and was sentenced to fifty lashes. In this context, Sultana related: "Afaaf had been forced to witness her beloved sister being tied to a pole and lashed with a leather strap. She had nursed her wounded sibling back to health, but the poor woman was so

aggrieved at the turn her life had taken that she swallowed a large amount of rat poison. Since women were banned from hospitals, she had died in Afaaf's arms."(P-161, *Desert Royal*)

Sultana's niece, Munira also explains her sad life in the suicidal note/poem detailing the life of a girl in the Middle-East countries. It is not Munira, it is the painful predicament of a common woman in Jean Sasson's novels as Munira's poem speaks of a helpless woman love to be buried alive in youth where youth is without hope, without color, without love, and with infinite turbulences and tortures.

Jean Sasson has portrayed females as shadows only. There is no feeling of humanity in Jean Sasson's books for fragile females in the eyes of their husbands. Sultana's brother Ali married his daughter Munira to the despised friend Hadi whose children were older than Munira. On the issue of Munira's marriage with Hadi, Sultana narrated her true feelings. "What had happened? Had Ali threatened Munira? -- had the terrorized Munira simply gone mute?" About Munira's mother, Tamam, she says, "As a woman who had never known the power of hope, Tamam didn't appear surprised or upset on the issue." (P – 285, **Desert Royal**) It seems that Jean Sasson's women could only suffer, or lay down their lives in the end when there is no way left for the materialization of their aspirations.

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