

Book Review

The Holy and the UN Holy

Critical Essay's on Qaisra Shahraz's Fiction

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The Holy and the UN Holy: Critical Essays on Qaisra Shahraz's fiction is a fine collection of essays seems to be the outcome of literary effort to portray the contradictory images as well as comparison of dual standards with stereotypes in society. Qaisra Shahraz is the author of two novels The Holy Woman (London,Black Amber:Arcadia Books,2001) and A Pair of Jeans (discovered by Leisel Hermes in a 1988 volume Holding out : Short Stories by Women published in Manchester by Crocus .These novels are translated in to numerous languages. The Holy Woman introduced the reader to the traditions of a vibrant world of four Muslim Countries.

As Ma Shikui, (Associate Professor, English, Minzu University China) appreciates the strong plot of the novel and speaks out that what is striking and shocking is the conflicts between the tradition and the modern spirit depicted in the novel as well as the tragic way of settling them. The editors of the book have done really good work to choose a Muslim woman novelist belong to Pakistani origin for their analytical research and criticism and compiling a collection of essays which proved that era of literary criticism has been started in the Indian subcontinent.

The contributors are from the Western world as well as from Asian Subcontinent. There seems to be two major opinions in the reading of Shahraz's work: one which is with a western point of view and the other category is post colonial and feminist reading.

The contributors from Asia are Abdur Raheem Kidwai and Masoodul Hasan (Aligarh Muslim University) discuss various aspects with orientalism which shows the myths and mysteries about Islam and Muslim culture, created not only by orientalists but also the social and cultural representatives are responsible who misinterpret, exercise religious commands and order according to the cultural feasibility to implement unequal laws and illogical practices leading to steep gender disparity. According to Abdur Raheem Kidwai the Holy Woman questions about the complicated gender relations in a traditional Muslim society which is trying to deal with the effects and pressure of Modern and

globalized world and of gender justice and female sexuality. He also revealed that the novel presents the female characters as a thoughtful and strong will contrary to the stereotype of a speechless Muslim woman. As the mother of Zarri Bano Shahzada is a bold career woman and feminists as Firdous, Professor Nighat Sultana and most importantly Zarri Bano who enjoys “greater freedom” thanks to her new status as the Holy woman.

Masoodul Hasan appreciates Shahraz to disclose a strange practice of wedding a woman to Quran in the novel *The Holy Woman* and after marriage announced her a Holy Woman. The practice is very common in some of the rural areas of Pakistan influenced by the feudal lords.

Muhammad Ezroura (Mohammad 5th University, Agdal, Rabat, Morocco) focus on “female body, sexuality, and women’s dress code” as good practices of with logical expansion of the of Islamic traditions in his reading of “A Pair of Jeans” by taking into consideration the point of view of the Moroccan students in Rabat. Akber Joseph A. Syed applies a Marxist feminist analysis on the Holy Woman especially Zarri Bano.

Sana Imtiaz and Shirin Zubair Haider review the Holy Woman in the context of how media represents of Muslim women globally subjugated by Islam. They also point out that there are basically two classes of women in South Asia first belong to the rich and powerful class, these women have seclude status. Whereas women from the working classes usually called as ‘Kammi’ work in the field alongwith males and do not wear “Purdah” or veil and are more mobilize.

Seemin Hasan and Shuby Abidi review Shahraz’s work by focusing on the third world culture influenced by the post colonial framework which also develops issue of identity. Seemin Hasan (Aligarh Muslim University) said that the problem with the Asian women is that they often refuse to accept the grand narratives of liberation as local culture and norms are more powerful than Zarri Bano resolves the tension between a woman’s desire to exercise choice in order to define herself as an individual and the pressure of the patriarchy that she could conform to its dictate by becoming Shahzadi Ibadat and uses veil as the agency through which she can function without male protection become more mobile and aware, physically and mentally unrestricted and essentially individual.

The second category is of western point of view included Karin Vogt (University of Education, Heidelberg, Germany), Angelika Hoff (Southern Oregon University, USA) and Leisel Hermes (University of Education, Heidelberg, Germany) analyze Shahraz’s works to create a better understanding of Muslim culture and society depicted in Shahraz’s fiction. Karin Vogt applies reception theory and analyzes it from the point of view that it would enhance the understanding between the readers having average

understanding from different cultures. Angelika Hoff discuss that Shahraz's Typhoon (London, Black Amber,2003) creates an awareness about cultural differences between the Eastern and Western World among the non Muslim and Non Asian concerning the issue of adultery which provides multiple opportunities for inter cultural learning.

Liesel Hermes who included Shahraz's short story in her 1991 anthology Writing Women: Twentieth Century Short Stories intended for German High School students discuss about the problems faced by the people in exile especially for adopting values and integration or formation of identity". She supports to use multi perspectives, change of perspectives and adoption of perspectives through literature".