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Destruction of Female Sexuality : A Study of Female Genital Mutilation in Waris Dirie's
The Desert Flower

From an early age , women learn to resign themselves to the fact that violence against women are part and parcel of their natural environment , as related practices has been woven into the fabric of society to such an extent that even battering, sex slavery and Female Genital Mutilation are seen as legitimate [Larson, 2010].Female sexuality includes a broad range of behaviour and all the processes related to female sexual identity, physiological, psychological, social, cultural, political, religious aspects of sexuality activity. A women is born free and she has complete freedom to choose her sexual partner . A women has the right to live her sexual life as the way she want to. But in Islam, Africans where male chauvinism prevails in an extreme form, the case is different where sexuality is allowed and encouraged between married hetrosexual couples and discourages a women from seeking sexual pleasures from other man except her husband. All these perceptions and orthodox views are prevalent because of customs , traditions and rituals which play a significant role in an individuals life and in community as well . These norms are a part and parcel of any culture . Encyclopedia defines rituals as “the performance of ceremonial acts prescribed by traditions”. These people who practise FGM believes these rituals to be holy and sacred . This is not culture but a torture. Female Genital Mutilation is one such ritual which is fatal and anti women in nature. It should be tackled in such a way that girls should be given the right to speak which can retrieve women from their forced , muted mutilation and restore their integrity.

WHO defines FGM as any procedure that involves partial or total removal of external female genitals or other injury to female genital organs for cultural or non cultural reason . FGM involves removal of parts of clitoris, labia minor-a , labia major-a, etc. WHO estimates that 100 million women in Africa, Middle east have undergone FGM .The myth that lies behind this practice is that African people think tha clitoris is an extreme sensitive organ and plays an important role in sexual sensations. Removal of clitoris is considered as maintaining feminine by taking away clitoris that may grow and resemble like penis if not cut . Natural vagina is considered to be monstrous. Female circumcision is seen as a laudable practice that is worth the pain because it is designed to diminish a women’s ability to revel in sexual pleasure and therefore she will be less likely to commit adultery and will always remain pure, chaste and honourable. This is a practice done to defranchise women of sexuality and rights thus keeping them fettered in subordinate positions. Dorenkoo(1995) shares her views on FGM telling from the perspective of Africa , Kenya , Somalia where there is a belief that if women are mutilated they are likely to be faithful to their husbands. Men are allowed to visit the family of the girl who has undergone circumcision in the hopes of marriage while in case of those not mutilated is vice versa. Young girls choose to be mutilated to avoid social pressure from their peers. “Cleanliness and beautiful were mentioned as cultural beliefs that support FGM and the women who does not undergo it are considered as traitors.

Writers like Alice walker in her work *Possessing the secret of joy* , Ayaan Hirsi Ali in *Infidels*, Waris Dirie in *The Desert Flower* shows the dark side of FGM that ruined millions of life . Waris Dirie , the Somalian model , author and rights activist known for her efforts to eliminate FGM . She has experienced the most extreme form of FGM called infibulation. Her procedures were performed under most unhygienic conditions without anesthesia with excruciating pain. “I heard the blade sawing back and forth through my skin . I did not move telling myself the more i did,

longer torture would take”. Waris tells about the plight and sufferings faced by Somalian women by telling her experience as a desert nomad and her journey from nomadic life to a super model. She was like many of the desert children who spent life taking care of cattles, goats. “ Our greatest pleasure was pure joy at being a child in wilderness, at freedom to be a part of nature and experience(17)”. At a young age of five she had to undergo FGM. Dirie explains “ The prevailing wisdom in Somalia is that there are bad things between a girls legs, parts of our bodies that are born with, yet are unclean. These things need to be removed- the clitoris, labia minor-a, labia major-a are cut off, then the wound is shut(37)”.

Somalian women not just faces the deadly circumcision but they are treated as commodities in the African society. Waris ran from her home to avoid an arranged marriage with a man of 60 years. She says “Virgins are hot commodity in African market , one of the biggest reason of FGM (50)”. Her father said “ He is too old to run around. He is not going to leave you. He will look after you. And besides all he is giving me five camels”. From there her journey begins serving as a maid to his uncle, working in MC Donalds and an Ambassador to UN . A renowned photographer Terence Donovan launched her career and she became a super model .

FGM is practiced in Africa in 28 countries, 130 million girls and women are mutilated and 6000 a day gets mutilated. Waris raises a question that if clitoris is to be cut down then why God created it. One has the right to feel like a real women whether in tribe or alone. How inhuman a person can act by letting the bleeding little lamb left alone, betrayed by her own family? Molsa(2004) a Somalian born doctor , tackling the issues on immigrants that come from

countries where FGM still goes on to be practiced .

According to him the problem of circumcision has manifold impacts and its consequences are disastrous . Female body suffers deadly pain at the time of cutting clitoris as well as the pain increases after the process is done for many days.

Waris explains” The first drop came out and stung as if my skin were being eaten by acid”. Women suffers traumatic stress, infection due to tools , urine retention, painful sexual intercourse, complications in labor and painful periods. Phycological stress of the procedures may change behavior, loss of confidence , depression etc. Waris decides to relief her pain by going to doctor for surgery, she found a Somalian man there. “ Right away i could see the Somalian man was not happy. He pressed his lips and glared at the doctor. Between the fact that i did understand some English and the Somali man’s attitude, I sensed that something was not right(145)”

God has created men and women to be different , possessing different skills and responsibilities, however, these differences have created an asymmetrical relationship between men and women and this relationship is a product of dogmatic societal beliefs and practices which give absolute power to men , whereby men dominate, exploit women . Consequently , women learn to negotiate and accept patriarchy as a norm because religious patriarchy forces women to enslave themselves to male domination.

The main reason for a female to let circumcised their daughters , sisters is because of family and social pressure . “Social pressure is one of the factor among many communities in which most girls are circumcised(Boyle 2001)”. Waris tells about her mother that she made Waris to undergo

circumcision for the sake of her being accepted in the tribe . “Mama positioned me on the rock. She sat behind me and pulled my head against her chest, her legs straddling my body. She placed a piece of root from an old tree between my teeth to bite. Try to be a good girl, Baby”.

According to Amnesty International(1997) FGM is a gross violation of human rights. The practise of FGM is a big threat to women’s health and rights. Apart from physical, psychological and sexual consequences, the mutilated women has to face embarrassment through out her life. Waris was embarrassed to visit gynecologist because of the way their organs look due to disfigurement caused by FGM. “ I did not tell the doctor that i had been circumcised, since he did not examine, he did not find out my secret”.

Dirie inspired a widespread and managed in hand in hand with Non Governmental Organizations(NGOs) to get rid of FGM. Dirie represent a women on whom society has imposed a husband of her fathers age but later she regains in herself and realizes her ability to find happiness alone. Dirie is successful in dealing with crucial themes of identity crisis that is the one which tribal people want to give her through FGM and the other which is her real identity which she attained in the end .

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