

EDUCATION AS THE GATEWAY OF CREDESCENCE: REFLECTION ON AZAR NAFISI'S READING LOLITA IN TEHRAN: A MEMOIR IN BOOKS

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Abstract

Teaching is certainly not about imposing ideas but is the ability to make one adaptive to reflect upon ideas. Teachers form the most crucial section of our society since they determine the future of generations by giving out the best of their own knowledge. This paper deals with the contribution of teachers in making students realize the veracious forms of enrichment that education imparts by linking the literary world with real lives. Azar Nafisi's Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books extraordinarily links up classic novels with real-life Islamic-Iranian situations through a wonderfully drawn student-teacher duo. This book expresses the adversities that students, as well as teachers, undergo under oppressive educational systems. Briefly, it motivates both the teachers and students as they acknowledge the constraints of achievement. Teachers must hint upon these aspects of analysis in order to make students realize the essentiality of scholarship. Similarly, teachers must themselves realize the fact that teaching should always target towards an accomplished living.

Keywords: *suppression, experiences, sexuality, identity, liberty.*

INTRODUCTION

Born in Tehran, Iran in 1948, Azar Nafisi is a Persian writer holding remarkable contribution in the field of English literature. She is widely known for her 2003 masterpiece *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* that won several literary awards for being in the list of one of the bestselling books of the time. As the title cites, the book enlists Nafisi's experiences as a female counterpart under the Islamic workforce prevalent in Iran in the 1990s. She narrates her experiences under the educational system in co-relation with her students and the literary texts by various western authors so vividly that it brings out the challenges of edification.

The book narrates the biography of Nafisi's stay in Iran during The Iranian Revolution or The Islamic Revolution of 1979 and finally her shift from Iran in 1997 after much hassle

by the ruling authorities. Meticulously divided into four sections, each of the sections metaphorically connects with the wider literary world. The first section “Lolita” derives its presence from the title of Vladimir Nabokov's so-called 'erotic novel' *Lolita* depicting a middle-aged literature professor's sexual preoccupation with Dolores Haze, a twelve-year-old adolescent girl. The second section, named to be “Gatsby” after the American author F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* parodying 'American Dream' is about the crushing of dreams under suppression and austerity. The third section “James” derives its name from the author Henry James, famously known for his works stressing social contexts. This part stresses on war situations and Nafisi's expulsion from the University of Tehran. The last section “Austen” hints at Jane Austen, the English novelist whose works primarily deals with 'marriage' as a powerful social institution, acting merely as a 'veil' and giving respite to womenfolk. Marriage brings with it social fame and economic security is what defined by Austen in his works and is here perhaps the reason why it came under severe inspection at all times.

ANALYSIS

- **Literary Connotations**

The book wonderfully tackles the theme of 'oppression' by bringing several brilliant connections between Iranian society and texts discussing dreams, sexuality, identity, and existence. She brilliantly digs at the social resistance that women faces in an authoritarian system by bringing various connotations of texts like *Lolita*, *One Thousand and One Nights*, *Invitation to a Beheading*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Daisy Miller*, *Washington Square*, and *Pride and prejudice*, among others. All these texts seriously bring into notice all forms of violence, hardships, repression, and inhumanity prevailing everywhere. Therefore, through these Nafisi brings out a prominent distinction between living as a free spirit and working under an obnoxious condition of despotism and hideous subjection.

- **Justification of the Title**

The title of the book is stringent with a metaphorical rereading of Nabokov's *Lolita* under the repressive condition of Tehran. The connections are immensely between *Lolita's* protagonist who is obsessed with the fulfillment of individual cravings and suppression of others' wishes with that of the social complexities working at crushing the residents' dreams under the conventions of Islamic injunction. Nafisi brings out these relations to narrate how she is been forced by fundamentalists to emigrate. Through the

thorough assessment of Western literature by seven of her female students who met at her house regularly, she brings forth a convincing description of how living has been traumatizing for female folks at various social sections. Her disagreement to wear veil led to her expulsion from the teaching post of the University of Tehran. It depicts the complex living conditions under which the people struggled. The veil, in this case, decided the life of the female folk and questioned the larger aspects like 'liberty'. Therefore, denial of the veil or headscarf represented the pushing of the womanly limits. Finally, through these Nafisi brings two very important condemnation; the first being the diplomatic policies of the Iranian government and the second being self-criticism targeted at the mind-sets of the people.

- As a Memoir Inspiring Factualness

Being a 'memoir', it naturally brings out the veracious events and incidents that marked Nafisi's life. It is because of the empathetic graphical representations that Margaret Atwood praised the account of Nafisi's struggle as one of the most enthralling of all narrations. It teaches the gravity of situations by talking about the perils of pursuing education. By talking about the challenges imposed in teaching and learning, Nafisi prepares the students to understand the dynamics under which education gets disseminate at certain places. Students faced with similar austerity can relate to the ways and can get respite from it. It also generalizes the fact that literature is a mouthpiece for all kinds of situations throughout generations and can be a solace for people trying to recognize through them. Nafisi directly prompts the greatness of literature and thereby the vitality of education and understanding, largely needed for a dignified living. Nafisi's literature students namely Manna, Mahshid, Mitra, Nassrin, Sanaz, Yassi and Azin discussing the then prevalent issues like suppression and confinement hints at the broader issue of 'sexuality'. Thus, the author finds respite in section "James" that succeeds the dream section "Gatsby" through the marvelous works of Henry James namely, *Daisy Miller* and *Washington Square* that presents outright defiant women characters like Daisy and Catherine in the text. Ultimately, she ends with a very noteworthy analysis in "Austen" when she pinpoints on the ponderings of marriage as an institution of social identity and establishment as concluded from the discussions of some of her students. Through this, what she wants to highlight is the fact that the members of society should have consciousness and that it would be unfit to blame society entirely, as 'changes' comes from within.

IMPLICATIONS

Thus, the episodes exposed from Nafisi's life can be moments of awakening for millions of teachers and students who find situations to be stressful in their daily lives. It teaches the lesson of risings above limits courageously and wholeheartedly. Such exploratory texts should be part of ones reading list both as a teacher as well as a student as it encourages and inspires students with a better understanding of living. Nafisi's holding of special meetings with few of the interested students assessing the notability of literature can itself be seen as a formidable stance of 'identity' formation and success. The denial of the conservative Islamic dress code ruled out the other possibilities of domination as well, implemented during the time. Mahshid's imprisonment of five years for acting against authoritarianism and Nafisi's emigration are complementary digs of 'selfhood'. The issues that Nafisi brings out as a teacher, writer and member of the society vibrates exceptional messages of efficacious sustenance. Similar to Nafisi, it is the duty of every teacher to make students relate to matters of texts and create a healthy wholesome environment. As Immanuel Kant famously said, "It is beyond a doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience", we all must try to aspire to it.

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