

Nexus between Masculinity and Culture in Cyrus Nowrasteh's *The Stoning of Soraya M.*

This research work basically deals with the relationship between masculinity and culture in Cyrus Nowrasteh's *The Stoning of Soraya M.* It explores the relationship between culture and women in Iran. This work also shows how women are cruelly treated in Iranian society in the name of culture. The suffering of woman is represented in the movie. No matter whether the women commit mistakes or not they have to accept the terrible punishments. The Iranian Muslim culture shown in the movie is very strict. Due to male hegemony women have to suffer a lot. At any cost women have to accept punishment.

The story takes place in Kuhpayeh, Iran in an Islam community on August 15, 1986. The movie is about stoning culture in which the protagonist, Soraya Manutchehri, is stoned to death. The protagonist of the movie is stoned to death suspecting that she is in relationship with another man. She is blamed for adultery and unnecessarily tortured by her own husband, Ali. However, he is in relationship with a fourteen years old girl named Mehri. That's why he wants a divorce from his wife Soraya, to marry that girl. He convinces village's mullah to give Soraya a divorce threatening to tell the story to the whole villagers. But Soraya refuses to give him a divorce. Her aunt encourages her to refuse a divorce. Neither her husband nor the other villagers are in support of her. Her two sons also do not support her and have turned against her. Only Zahra, her aunt, supports and understands her. Soraya starts working for a widower (Hashem) and her husband Ali starts spreading rumors that she is unfaithful to him. This is because Ali thinks that Soraya will be stoned to death and he might marry another girl. Ali drags her through the streets and beats her publicly. Finally, the stoning incident occurs. Soraya's father is given stones to throw but they

do not hit her. All the women including Zahra, shout that Soraya is innocent and has not committed any unfaithful things so that the stones are missing. This missing of stones are the sign of Soraya's innocence. But none of the men listen that. Now, it is the turn of Soraya's husband Ali, to throw stones. After he throws stones they hit Soraya. Soon everyone, turn by turn involves in stoning. Finally, Soraya is stoned to death.

The Stoning of Soraya M. is an American Persian language drama adapted from French journalist Freidoune Sahebjam's book *La Femme Lapidee*. The book is based on a true story of a woman who is accused of adultery and stoned to death by a village community (Kupayeh, a small village in southwestern Iran on August 15, 1986). Sahebjam is the son of a former Iranian ambassador, French-Iranian journalist and war correspondent. Freidoune Sahebjam has also reported on the crimes of the Iranian government against the Baha'i community in Iran. He was travelling through Iran, when he came upon Soraya's village, where he learned from her aunt Zahra about Soraya and her cruel fate. Zahra narrates the whole story about the stoning to the journalist Sahebjam to reveal the true story that happened in her community intending to know by the people all around the world.

Cyrus Nowrasteh is the director of the movie. He is an Iranian-American moviemaker, screenwriter and director of theatrical films and television shows. He is best known for his involvement in the controversial docudrama *The Path to 9/11*. Nowrasteh has also worked on independent films.

This research work focuses on the relationship between women and culture in Nowrasteh's movie *The Stoning of Soraya M.*, a story about stoning culture in a village named Kuhpayeh in Iran. The female protagonist named Soraya Manutchehri (Mozhan Marno) is buried in soil up to her waist and stoned to death. The movie

revolves around Soraya (the central character) as well as other characters such as Zahra (Shohreh Aghdashloo, Soraya's aunt), Freidoune Sahebjam (James Caviezel, a journalist) and Ghorban-Ali (Soraya's abusive husband).

Another main character Zahra (Soraya's aunt), seems to be a very bold and robust. She advocates for each and every right to Soraya and she is very helpful to her. Zahra is a narrator and a witness of the event. She narrates the story to the French journalist, Freidoune Sahebjam. Though she is a female, her every action she performs seems to be like male's work. She is presented as an enthusiastic, courageous and very helpful character in the movie. In every difficulty she appears to provide help for the needy people. Zahra's roles and actions in the movie seem appealing. She never fears to speak against the dominations of the male characters. Rather she participates actively. In comparison to Zahra, Soraya seems quite innocent. She cannot freely express the dominations done upon her. She is unnecessarily tortured by her own husband Ali.

The real story of the movie *The Stoning of Soraya M.* touches the heart of people especially females. It reflects the pathetic situation of Soraya when she is stoned to death. But she seems very bold and courageous to face the stoning and easily faces it. Being a Muslim woman, Soraya has to face pains due to strict norms of the patriarchal society. She can't go against the norms and values nor can she raise her voice against domination. But without doing any crime she has to accept punishment. She is accused of adultery without being involved in it. While working in Hashem's (Soraya's neighbor) house, Soraya's husband hates her. Her husband spreads lies that she is unfaithful to him and involved in adultery. Every day she is tortured by her husband.

Nowrasteh's *The Stoning of Soraya M.* is a very sad story about female protagonist who becomes the victim of stoning. It is all about the treatment of a culture towards women in Iran. Women are bound to limit themselves within the household work. In Muslim communities, women are confined within certain boundaries and household works so that they cannot participate in decision making activities. These confinements can be truly understood as the masculine dominations. Male believe themselves as if they are in the super power and can have rights to control female. Even though male and female have equal roles and responsibilities in the society, they are not provided a proper chance. However, they have to become the victims of male hegemony. At the beginning of the movie when Zahra speaks to the journalist, Sheik Hassan(Mullah) and the mayor (Ebrahim) calls her insane. The mayor asserts, "Ignore her. She is old and insane"(8:18 sec-8:22 sec). The mayor and the mullah think that speaking with a stranger is bad. Being a woman in Muslim community and speaking with a man is not accepted easily. The mayor says, "Worthless woman. Talking to strange men now?" (8:22 sec-8:28 sec). This dialogue makes clear that how much women are restricted in Muslim patriarchal society. They are restricted to speak with the strangers and taken negatively if they speak. They are misinterpreted and believed as insane.

This research paper focuses on oppression of females in Iran especially by males who possess the misogynist attitude. The movie raises the voice against oppression that women face through the unwarranted behaviors of the Iranian men and self-appointed rulers. Most of the female characters in the movie are the victims of male and have to face injustices. Though they will not commit any crime they should face the punishment. That is because of the male superiority and their authority. Such a stoning punishment is specifically meant torture. The protagonist of

the film, Soraya who is innocent is victimized and stoned to death due to her own culture and religion.

In a review article, “Stoning Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Is It Holy Law or Gender Violence”, Hamid R Kusha and Nawal H Ammar argue that the book is based on a true story of a woman who is accused of adultery and is stoned to death. They mention that the stoning sequence in the movie is very difficult to watch. While the stoning is not easy to watch, the director does a good job of downplaying the graphic nature of the scene. Kusha and Ammar further illustrate the fact that, “such stoning punishment is specifically meant as torture” (2).

Similarly, Matt Philbin in the review of *The Stoning of Soraya M.* mentions that a beautiful, innocent woman betrayed by her husband, is accused of immorality and condemned to horrible death by a cruel male power structure that hides behind religion (2). Philbin also adds that the movie also addresses misogyny, “*The Stoning of Soraya M.*” set in an Iranian village in 1986. The woman is the victim of Sharia law (Islamic Law). It addresses misogyny, injustice, human rights abuses and narrow religiosity.

Philbin argues that the movie is about an innocent woman who is betrayed by her husband and condemned to horrible death. She is compelled to death due to cruel male power structure in the society that hides behind religion. Being a female, she has to face stoning because females are regarded as inferior and males superior in the society.

Likewise, Clay Waters’ view towards male in the movie are misogynist Islamists. Waters asserts the male as misogynist and murderous Islamists.

From the above lines, we can understand that Waters’ and Philbin’s view on Muslim males are misogynist. Both the critics argue that males are misogynists or female

haters. In the movie, basically Soraya's husband Ali can be said as misogynist because he hates his own wife Soraya. She is accused of adultery though she is not engaged in it. Her two sons are not in support of her, they support their father. Likewise, Zahra is also disliked in the beginning of the movie. When she says everything about Soraya's stoning to journalist Freduine Sahebjam, she is blamed as old and insane by Mullah. She cannot narrate every incident to Sahebjam at that time due to male restriction. Females in Muslim community in Iran are restricted to express their decisions and ideas freely. They have to follow the strict rules and regulations made by males in the society. In addition to this, females have to be careful about their culture. They cannot go beyond their culture and believe that if they do any bad works their holy god will punish them.

Similarly, Tawfik Hamid in *Observations of Radical Islam* argues, "The suffering of the woman portrayed in the movie is based on the story of an actual stoning that took place in Iran in 1986, as described in Freidoune Sahebjam's book *The Stoning of Soraya M.*" (29). He also argues, *The Stoning of Soraya M.* is the most powerful weapon in the war against Radical Islam because of three possible reasons. They are:

First - to reject stoning; a fundamental concept in the Sunna of prophet Mohamed (his acts and deeds) and adopt only the *Quran*. Stoning as a punishment for adultery is only mentioned in the former. Second – selective use of the Sunna; this will demonstrate to many Muslims that the Prophet Mohamed is not the perfect role model for mankind. Third – proving that stoning exists in the *Quran*; Islamic scholars may try to teach Muslims that stoning had been mentioned in as a verse in the *Quran* that was later abrogated only from the writings of the *Quran* but remained a valid law (29-30).

In the above paragraph, Hamid claims that the suffering of woman due to stoning shown in the movie is based on actual stoning that took place in Iran in 1986. He also claims that the movie can be taken as a powerful weapon against Radical Islam because of three reasons. The first reason is to reject stoning. The second is the selective use of Sunna and the third is to prove that stoning still exists in *Quran*. From the above paragraph we can understand that if stoning still exists in *Quran*, Muslim women should accept the stoning and they are unable to defend Islam as a religion. “On one hand, accepting the act of stoning will make many Muslims unable to defend Islam as a religion of peace or one that gave women their rights”(30).

In *The Stoning of Soraya M.*, Soraya has to face stoning because the stoning has been mentioned in Muslim’s holy book *Quran*, Muslim women should accept it any way and they are unable to defend their religion. Soraya’s suffering of stoning is portrayed clearly in the movie because she cannot go beyond her religion. She had to face stoning because it is mentioned in *Quran* and it is regarded that anybody who go beyond religion will be punished by god. So, that Soraya had to face stoning though she was innocent because of her own strict religion. As stoning is listed in as a verse in *Quran*, women had to accept it any way.

Various critics have mentioned or claimed that the movie *The Stoning of Soraya M.* is about the misogynist Islamists male that shows the direct domination and oppression towards females. Females are victimized by males. They are restricted to express their sufferings and pains. Females are regarded as inferior characters in male’s concept so that males feel themselves superior.

Some critics mention that such stoning is meant as a torture. Hamid R Kusha and Nawal H. argue that the book is based on a true story of a woman. They claim that such stoning punishment is specifically meant as torture. They praise the movie maker

that the graphic nature of the scene will be fact about the punishment. Though the stoning sequence is difficult to watch the director's technique is good. They claim that the scene had to be shown to do justice to all those victims who have suffered (2).

Likewise, Matt Philbin claims that an innocent Soraya is betrayed by her own husband and accused of adultery and condemned to death. Philbin mentions that the movie addresses about misogyny and injustice towards females but not towards males.

In addition to Philbin, another critic Clay Waters also directly claims that the males in the movie are misogynist Islamists and they are regarded as murderous Islamists. They had kept females under the restrictions. In this regard, Matt Philbin's view and Clay Waters' view towards the movie is same. They both claim that the movie is about misogyny and the males in the movie are misogynist and murderous Islamists.

Similarly, Tawfik Hamid mentions that the movie is the weapon against Radical Islam because of three reasons. He also claims that stoning is still mentioned in holy book *Quran*. These critics have given their own view or opinion towards the movie which were quite similar. Despite the views of these critics, my view or claim towards the movie is quite different. My main focus is to show the relationship between the women and culture in the movie. Culture is seen as a main barrier for women in the movie because in the name of culture women had to be the victim. Though, Soraya is innocent and has not been engaged in any sorts of crime she had to face stoning. She had to accept stoning at any cause due to her strict Iranian culture. Stoning is still mentioned in their holy book *Quran* so that it should be accepted. But it is only for female not for male. Though male and female are equal in the eye of god, only female had to face the punishment. Soraya's innocent nature is not cared by

anyone. No one supports Soraya, except her aunt. Her husband Ali is engaged with a fourteen year young girl and ready to marry her. But his mistake is not cared by the other people in the village though it was his mistake. He should not face stoning because males are presented as superior in the movie. They are regarded as the decision maker. So, my research work has different claim than other various critics and my thesis is totally different than others.

The primary concern of this research work is to show the treatment of women in Iranian society in the name of culture in *The Stoning of Soraya M.* The movie shows the sufferings and pains of women due to stoning in Muslim community in Iran. The protagonist of the movie is female and she is dominated in the name of culture. Due to the strict rule of the society and male's hegemony she has to face stoning and turns to death. So, to justify the hypothesis and make the research appropriate, Anitta Kynsilehto's Islamic Feminism is taken as a supporting theoretical tool. In *Islamic Feminism: Current Perspective* Kynsilehto describes, Islamic Feminism as a discourse concerning women's rights and their position in Muslim societies as well as of Muslim women where Muslim populations constitute a minority. She further adds:

Islamic feminism has been a widely discussed phenomenon since the emergence of the term in 1990s, oftentimes subject to a heated debate. On one hand, this debate is due to the ways in which it is embedded in the wider discourses concerning women's rights and Islam, and the position of women in Muslim majority societies as well as of Muslim women in societies where Muslim populations constitute a minority. (9)

Here, Kynsilehto explores that Islamic Feminism is concerned with women's rights and position in Muslim societies and Muslim women in those societies where Muslim

populations is less. So, Islamic Feminism basically deals with the rights of women in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies. She further argues, “the *Quran* contains principles of gender equality and wider issues of social justice, thus laying grounds for challenging patriarchal traditions” (10). Though, the issues of gender equality and social justice are listed in the *Quran*, we cannot find gender equality in the Muslim societies. The issues of gender equality are limited in *Quran* only. Women are the victims of social norms because each and every rule is made by men. These rules should be followed by women but not men. As a result women have to challenge patriarchal traditions and norms in order to resist against male dominations.

Similarly, in *Women Claim Islam* Miriam Cooke claims that the word ‘feminist’ refers to the women who do something to change their social roles and responsibilities. Feminism is much more than an ideology driving organized political movements. It is an epistemology, an attitude and a frame of mind that highlights the role of gender in understanding the organization of society. She further argues, “Feminism is much more than an ideology driving organized political movements. It is, above all, an epistemology. It is an attitude, a frame of mind that highlights the role of gender in understanding the organization of society” (viii). Feminism provides analytical tools for assessing how expectations for men’s and women’s behavior have led to unjust situations, particularly but not necessarily only for women. It involves political and intellectual awareness of gender discrimination and opens the opportunities for women to participate in public life.

Women claim Islam examines how women are reimagining foundational narratives from historiography to the war story from narratives of migration to the most recent engagement in Islamic discourse. The activities of women at that period was affected by Islamic revolution. So, that the revolution played an important role in

women's empowerment and they can actively participate in every events. They became able to advocate about their duties and responsibilities. Their participation leads to the change in their status and position in the society. And perhaps no historical event of this century has affected Muslim women more than Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. As a result Islam came to be viewed as an instrument for bringing a subalternized people into representation and potential hegemony. Islam played a prominent role as an instrument in bringing the marginalized people into representation. Islam helped to change the positions of women at that time.

Cooke further adds:

Perhaps no historical event of this century has affected Muslim women more than Ayatollah Khomeini's 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. Islam came to be viewed as an instrument for bringing a subalternized people into representation and potential hegemony. (ix -x).

Here, Cook claims that the events of Muslim women has been affected by Islamic revolution in Iran. As a result, Islam came to be viewed as an instrument to improve the status of subalternized people into representation. The incident took place after the Revolutionary Iran so that women from both Muslim and non-Muslim communities became aware and conscious about the masculinity and dominations done upon them in the name of Islam. After the Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution, they became capable in gaining and advocating about their rights.

Islamic feminism has emerged as a challenge to patriarchy in Muslim societies. It is a form of feminism concerned with the role of women in Islam. It is a discourse of educated urban women, who re-read the *Quran* and early Islamic history in order to recover their religion from patriarchal interpretation and violent practices.

This movement aims to highlight women's participation and rights as well as to give theological authority to the movement for women's rights in the Muslim world.

However, some feminists in Muslim societies degrade Islamic teaching and borrow Western ideas to advance women's cause. This is due to wrong notions and interpretations of Islam either from Western's or Muslim's perspective.

Likewise, Islamic Feminism is defined as a cross border movement that brings all Muslim women together seeking to redefine their identity in a more genuinely modern manner that befits their religion and culture.

To clarify the above definition Zamila Abdul Rani further adds:

In Iran, the discourse of Islamic feminism was accompanied by movements to challenge discriminatory Islamic family laws. It is a discourse of educated urban women who re-read the *Quran* and early Islamic history to recuperate their religion from patriarchal interpretation and practices. They are challenging patriarchal norms, which are culturally ingrained within the family and society, by arguing that those norms have nothing to do with Islam but only related with tradition. The social practices imposed on women in the name of Islam were not prescribed by the religion rather patriarchy uses the religion to dominate women.(249)

In the above lines, Abdul Rani argues that the Islamic Feminism challenges patriarchal norms. The social practices imposed on women in the name of Islam were not prescribed by the religion. But patriarchy uses the religion to dominate women though men and women are equal according to Islamic law. So, females in Iran use Islamic feminism discourse to challenge patriarchal norms and values that discriminate them.

In addition to Abdul Rani's view female characters in the movie are challenging the patriarchal rules. When Ali, Ebrahim and Sheik Hassan were discussing about the involvement of Soraya with Hashem, Zahra listens their conversation. And when Ebrahim (the mayor) comes out she threatens him saying, "I'm warning you, I won't let any harm come to my niece" (47:16 sec-47:25 sec). Her warning can be understood that she gathers her courage to challenge patriarchal beliefs. She also slaps Ebrahim when he tells about the relationship of Soraya to Hashem that was false and it was just the rumors to blame Soraya by Ali. This rumor was spread to show male control over female. And those rules have nothing to do with Islam but only related with tradition. The social practices imposed on women in the name of Islam were not prescribed by religion rather due to male's superiority. Patriarchy uses religion to dominate women. The similar situation can be viewed in the movie. Though women are restricted to work outside, Soraya works in Hashem's house who is a widower. Though her aunt says her to quit the work, Soraya refuses to leave thinking that she worked according to her hope. She says, "Quit? This job is my only hope. I can't quit." (48:34 sec-48:35 sec). Soraya asserts that the job was her so that she will not quit it. From this dialogue, Soraya seems fixed in her decision. Though rumors have spread in the town, she doesn't feel frightened. So, her decision seems that she is challenging patriarchal norms. Patriarchy seems to be prominent in the movie among the male characters in the movie. Ali and the village mullah unnecessarily spread the rumors about Soraya that is false thinking that Ali can remarry.

Similarly, Haifaa Jawad in *A Case Study of Amina Wadud's "Qur'an and Woman"* discusses about the Muslim feminist tradition, giving special emphasis on the new development of feminist notions within the Islamic framework, to re-interpret the Islamic sources from female's perspective. This study concerns itself with the position

of women from the *Quranic* perspective. It attempts to consider aspects of gender equality in the *Quranic* world view. Here, Wadud's main concern is to demonstrate the relevance of *Quran* to the lives of modern women, through female perspective.

She argues:

I believe the Quran adapts to the context of the modern women as smoothly as it adapted to the original Muslim community fourteen centuries ago. She defines three approaches that are traditional, reactive and holistic approaches to interpret women in Quran. All traditional interpretations from modern or classical periods are written by males and women's experiences are interpreted through male's perspective. (114-115)

In the above paragraph, Wadud mentions that, women's experiences are interpreted through male's perspective because the traditional interpretations are written by males. She shows the differences or departure of interpretation of women in the *Quran* in traditional, reactive and holistic interpretations. Though, the study concerns with the position of women from *Quranic* perspective and consider on gender equality it is not found so because women's experiences are defined from male's perspective.

Likewise, in the movie women's experiences are also interpreted through men's perspective so that Soraya's sufferings are not clearly revealed out. There is men's control over women. Male are seen to control each and every action of women. Female's experiences and sufferings should be defined by females themselves so that the core idea comes out. Female can understand the pains of female as well as others but not by men. Zahra always advocates about the dominations done upon females nor does she hesitate to speak with the male characters. Zahra is always in support of her niece and other female characters. While Ali, Ebrahim and Sheik Hassan discuss about Soraya's unfaithful behavior to Ali, Ebrahim and Hassan tell Ali

to bring the strong witness. Hassan says that Islamic law dictates that any witness can come forward. At the same time, Zahra listens all their conversation. She makes Soraya alert that the men will hurt her asserting, "You're not listening. They could hurt you." (48 min:52 sec- 48 min:53 sec). But Soraya doesn't listen her but continues her work at Hashem's house as a job. So, to get the real experiences of females, they should be given chance to express their own feelings and sufferings.

Similarly, Elaheh Koolaee in *Iranian Women from Private Sphere to Public Sphere* argues, throughout the centuries women belonged to private sphere and men belonged to the public sphere. In the same vein, men have belonged to the public sphere, which consists of different social, cultural, political and economic activities" (401). Koolaee again describes the status of women in this way:

The 20th century is usually labelled as the "women's century", because in this era, women's condition underwent basic changes, and the cultural, social, and economic arenas were profoundly transformed. However, the women in Islamic and non-Islamic countries are still suffering from different types of violations. Women in Iran have become the victims of two kinds of suppressive systems: first, by authoritarian rulers, who exploited all the people of the country. Second, they were suppressed by men as their husbands, fathers and brothers. (402)

Though twentieth century is labelled as the women's century, women in many countries of the world like Iran are the subject to different types of inequalities and suppressions. Women are always victimized and dominated. They are the victims of authoritarian rulers and second by their own husbands, fathers and brothers. Women are always restricted to come out from their houses. They are always restricted in decision making activities and busy in household works. So, they cannot get proper

rights and cannot speak against dominations. But men belong to the public sphere and are involved in social, cultural, political and economic activities. They can be engaged in decision making activities.

We can find the same situation in the movie. Though it is regarded as the women's century, the protagonist is suppressed by her own husband. She is victimized because of her own religion. She is restricted to express her opinion and cannot get freedom. But she is charged without committing any crime. Like Soraya, her aunt Zahra is also restricted to express her feelings. But she speaks confidently. While narrating the stoning incident to the journalist she is misrepresented by Sheik Hassan (Mullah). He says, "Ignore her. She's old and insane. That would be your ancestors! Worthless woman. Talking to strange men now?" (08:23 sec-8:28 sec). Through this dialogue it can be clearly understood that women in Iran are not regarded good to talk to strangers. They are not given chances to involve in decision making activities and cannot express their feelings easily. Only male characters decide what to do and what not to do. Females are not given chances to make decisions. Female characters get only few rights. Due to male superiority females are restricted in such activities. Male characters in the movie think themselves superior so that they regard their own world. They only misrepresent female characters. Soraya and her aunt Zahra are dominated by Sheik Hassan (Mullah) when Soraya refuses to give a divorce to her husband easily. Mullah says, "You witches, Your venom will come back to poison you. And you too (for Soraya) Wait, and you'll see. You both will see" (20:30sec-20:35sec). Due to male hegemony in the society, women are dominated and misrepresented. Soraya and Zahra are regarded as witches in the eye of Mullah because Soraya rejects to give a divorce. From this, it can be said that there is male hegemony in the movie.

Similarly, Savita Kanade in *Family Violence in India: Human Rights, Issues Actions and International Comparisons* claims that home is a very dangerous place for woman where they had to accept violence in this way, “Home is perhaps a dangerous place for a woman-to-be, since husbands, fathers-in-law or other male relatives within this “safe heaven” perpetrate much of the violence. The very term “domestic violence” relegates it to the realm of private and personal family matter that does not brook outside interference” (226).

Home has also become a very unsafe or unsecured place for Soraya as well. In her own home she has become the victim of violence by her own husband. Home has become a very dangerous place for her because she cannot be protected in her own home. She is beaten by her own husband after she refuses to give him a divorce. Her husband drags her and tells to get out from the house. Soraya doesn't only gets punishment inside her home but outside home as well. He punishes her in public telling that his wife is a whore and a bitch, “My wife is a whore! A bitch!” (56:23 sec-56:30 sec). Soraya is always abused by her husband and misinterpreted. Though she hasn't committed any crime she gets punishment due to her husband's behavior to fulfill his demands. Soraya as well as her daughters couldn't stay in peaceful environment inside the house. They have to pass their days in tortures and cries. Her husband neither loves Soraya nor his daughters. He wants to be irresponsible for their caring but agrees to take his sons to the city with him and act as revolutionary guards. While Soraya questions about his responsibility and dignity he shouts at her. Due to his torture, she has to leave her home and asked for help with her aunt Zahra. She goes to her aunt's house with her daughters.

The given pictures clearly depicts that Soraya is the victim of family violence.



Fig. 1: Soraya's wound beaten by her husband (21:16 sec-21:30 sec)

The cinematographic technique used in the scene is medium shot technique. The camera angle is taken from side which focuses on the central character's wound that refers to the torture by her husband. This is the scene taken after Soraya refused a divorce proposal to Ali. He had beaten her so terribly. This scene reflects how much women had to suffer at their own homes in the name of culture. This scene reflects the male violence in the name of culture.

Various cinematic techniques used in the movie clearly present central character's suffering. This movie utilizes the standard lighting technique. There are main categories of lighting. They are low key, high key, and three points. In this movie, the lighting for most part is bright or high key. Three point lighting techniques are used in different situation to show the real expression of character in the movie. This technique is used to express many characters' situation. Cinematography is the art of recording light or electromagnetic radiation in an image. Cinematography is the science or art of motion-picture photography by recording light or other electromagnetic radiation, either electronically by means of an image sensor, or chemically by means of a light-sensitive material such as film stock. James Monaco defines cinematography, as a scientific tool, that allows us to analyze a large range of time phenomena, and make an objective record of reality (76).

Cyrus Nowrasteh has adopted the cinematic technique, point-of-view and about Point-of-view, Blain Brown states that:

Point-of-view(POV) is a key tool of visual storytelling. We use the term in many different ways on a film set, but the most often used meaning is to have the camera see something in much the same way as one of the characters would see it: to view the scene from that character's point-of-view. (10)

Nowrasteh shows the impact or influence of Muslim culture on women by using cinematic technique, point of view. While, presenting his characters, he makes them embody the certain aspects of society. The character's suffering is focussed and captured in the camera. The camera angle is focussed at the center so that the actual event is captured. The picture shown below clearly shows about the character's point of view. The shot taken by the camera in this picture is close-up shot. It is a close-up shot because the picture depicts the human head. This picture is taken at the beginning of the stoning incident. She is buried in soil till her waist and stones are thrown to her. This picture depicts a very pathetic situation of the central character. She is seen bold even to accept the stoning.



Fig. 2: Stoning incident of Soraya at the beginning (1hr:32min- 1hr:33 min)

The above picture clearly depicts the stoning incident of Soraya that takes place in Muslim community. This picture reflects the cultural aspect of the society. This is the picture taken when her husband Ali hits her with a stone. While presenting the characters, Nowrasteh makes his characters able to reflect the real thing prevailing in the society. The real situation of the society are presented by the characters in the movie. Through Zahra, the stoning incident can be known in the movie because she is the narrator of the story. After the stoning incident of Soraya, Zahra says to Ebrahim:

What are you afraid of? Justice was served wasn't it? The God that I love is great. Wasn't our village...going to be an example for the rest of the country? Now the whole world will know. Yes! The world will know what happened here! Yes! The world will know!!(1hr:49 min-1:50 min).

Here, Zahra asserts that the stoning culture of Iran is unknown to the other countries. Through this dialogue, Zahra wants to reveal the stoning practice all over the world. The injustice done upon female characters in her country is revealed. She gathers courage to bring voice to the story that is untold and unknown to the world. Her country Iran is going to be an example for the rest of the countries. The whole world will know stoning is still in existence in Iran. The picture given below proves the above dialogue.



Fig.3: Zahra after Soraya's Stoning incident (1hr: 49 min-1:50 min).

This scene is taken immediately after the stoning incident of Soraya. When Zahra gives the recorder to the journalist Freudine Sahebjam. She says to Ebrahim that the god whom she loves is great and the whole world will know about the stoning incident of her village. Through her facial expression it can be understood that she is confident in her work. She becomes able to narrate the whole story to the journalist and provide the original tape recorder to him. The cinematographic technique used in this scene is medium-close-up shot technique. The camera angle is taken from the center of the character which focusses on character's facial expression. Medium close-up, as Susan Hayward describes, generally frames the shoulders or chest and the head. Here, Hayward claims that Medium close-up (MCU) generally captures the human figure upward from the chest of one or two and sometimes of three characters.

Film is a human art captured in camera whether moving or still. Film is the mirror that reflects the prevailed practices of the society. According to the Greek philosopher, art is best understood as a type of mimesis, an imitation of reality dependent on a *medium* (through which it was expressed) and a *mode* (the way the medium was utilized). The more mimetic an art is, then, the less abstract it is. In no case, however, is an art completely capable of reproducing reality. The concept of art does not cover truly 'cinematic' films that is, which incorporate aspects of physical reality with a view of making is experience them (Monaco 320). The film theory has interconnection between film and culture, film and individual, film and the society. The real life style or activities of people are clearly captured in the film. It is full of human experiences created by human themselves. So, in other word a film can be understood as an imitation of reality.

James Monaco states that, "the 'long shot' film theory is the theory which deals with film in context, which judges its political and social implications. "Medium shot" film

criticism, focuses on the human scale of the film, which is what most reviews concern themselves with. “Close-up” theory, however, “breaks down” the film into its parts, and “resolves the film into its elements”. Film semiotics and other theories that attempt to treat the ‘language’ of film for example are Close-up approaches. (312)

In the above abstract, James Monaco states that cinematic techniques are used to judge its political and social implication. It also has specific language that deals with the relationship between film and culture, film and individual, film and the society. Film theorists use cinematic terminologies to describe the difference between various approaches to the film study. Similarly, cinematic techniques are used to judge about the film. These techniques help to improve the quality of the film.

Similarly, Liz Kelly in *A Central Issue: Sexual Violence and Feminist Theory* illustrates that, feminist theory connects analysis of sexuality with male violence in this way:

There are two interlinked aspects of feminist theory which connect analysis of sexuality with male violence: first, the proposition that male control of women’s sexuality is a key factor in women’s oppression; and second, that sexuality as it is currently constructed is based on men’s experiences and definitions. She further mentions that Feminism fundamentally identifies sexuality as the primary social sphere of male power. (345-346)

In the above abstract, Kelly presents her view towards feminism and women’s sexuality. She claims that male control of women’s sexuality is a key factor in women’s oppression and sexuality is currently constructed and based on men’s experiences and definitions. Sexuality is regarded as the primary social sphere of male power. In the same way, we can find the same situation in the movie. There is a male

power or male's superiority in the movie. Ali says his sons, "This is a man's world.

Never forget that, boys" (26 min:25-

26 min:30sec). Ali says this, because Soraya refuses to give a divorce to him. Ali does not support Soraya and her two sons have also turned to their father and hate their mother. He ignores his wife and daughters. While Soraya says to leave the house with her daughters, Ali beats Soraya. So, we can argue that there is male superiority in the movie.

Through this incident it can be said that there is male hegemony in the movie. Male directly or indirectly imposes his power upon females to control them. Women are controlled by men. Sexuality is defined on men's experiences rather than females. So, that women's sufferings and pains cannot be understood by men. Men feel themselves superior to women. Females should be given chance to define their experiences and sufferings from their viewpoints.

Likewise, in *International Society of Iranian Studies*, Jasamin Rostam Kolayi discusses the status of women during Safavid period. Their status at that time was not good in the society. The evolution of Persian cuisine played a significant role in the status of women. Thus, Iranian women, both Muslim and non-Muslim were in need of uplift. Kolayi argues:

The evolution of Persian cuisine played a vital role to the position of women during the Safavid period. Persian cuisine in its present form is an historical heritage which has been refined through inventive minds seeking an occupation. This delicate cuisine could have only been created by women who had endless free hours to devote to it. She further adds, "Missionaries assumed Islam was solely responsible for women's degradation and was a source of

backwardness in Middle Eastern societies. Thus, Iranian women, both Muslim and non-Muslim, were in need of "uplift. (357-358)

In the above extract, Kolayi argues that the evolution of Persian cuisine played a vital role in the status of women during the Safavid period. Before this period women in Islam were backward due to their degradation. Missionaries was responsible for the degradation. So, Iranian women both Muslim and non- Muslim were in need of uplift from such degradation. Likewise, female characters in the movie are also treated in the name of religion. Due to strict rules mentioned in the *Quran*, for women, they had to suffer a lot. Whether they haven't committed any crime they had to accept punishment according to the decisions of men. Women have a very low status in the society. They have to face stoning at any cause. They can rather go against the decision of the society nor can reject the punishments. But they innocently accept the punishments.

The cultural domination is clearly depicted in the movie *The Stoning of Soraya M*. Female characters whether they have or don't have committed any crimes had to accept the punishment in the name of culture or law. Though Soraya was innocent, Ali accuses her. Ali forces Hashem, to tell that Soraya is in relationship with him to prove that he is a witness. When Hashem, Ali, Ebrahim, Zahra and Soraya were discussing about the Soraya's betrayal with Ali and closeness to Hashem, Ebrahim asserts, "When a man accuses his wife...she must prove her innocence. That is the law. On the other hand, if a wife accuses her husband, she must prove his guilt" (1hr: 2min-1hr: 3min). From this, it can be clear that female are the one to be punished by law if they are not involved in any guilt. Not only this, if they are accused by her husband they have to prove their innocence. And if a wife accuses her husband she must prove his guilt. Women have to be troubled in the both situation but not the men.

They are dominated in the name of law as well and due to male's super power in the society.

Likewise, Ziba Mir-Hosseini argues the Sharia treat women as second class citizens and place them under men's domination. She sees herself a second class citizen. Hosseini further adds as a Muslim woman there is no justice for her because of patriarchy upheld in the name of Islam. She claims:

The popular revolution(1979), in my country Iran, transformed my personal and intellectual life. Likemost Iranianwomen, I strongly supported the 1978–79 revolution and believed in the justice of Islam; but when the Islamists strengthened their hold on power and made the sharia the law of theland, I found myself as a second-class citizen. This brought the realization that there can be no justice for me, as a Muslim woman, as long as patriarchy is justified and upheld in the name of Islam. (629)

Like Hosseini argues,there can be no justice for a Muslim women as long as patriarchy exists in the society and justified in the name of Islam. Islamic sources are interpreted through patriarchal viewpoints. The female characters are the victim of patriarchy in the movie. Women have to live a life as second class citizen due to male's power. They have to live under control of male. Likewise, Soraya's life is so pathetic due to her husband's control. Neither can she live freely in her home nor outside her home while working in her home. She is accused without any fault by her husband so that he can marry Mehri. He just want to fulfill his demand accusing her. This seems that patriarchy has a power in the movie. Men make decisions to punish women but without the involvement of women.Sheik Hassan (mullah), Ebrahim, Ali and Soraya's father (Morteza Ramazani) decided for a stoning punishment to Soraya. Her father also came to the conclusion that his daughter had committed crime. He

asserts, “She’s been convicted. Convicted. She’s guilty. Guilty” (1:7min: 28sec-1hr: 7min: 34 sec). This dialogue makes clear that only male have powerful role in the society rather than female. Females have to accept the rules made by male whether right or wrong. Only female are the subject of blaming and victims of penalties.

Summing up, Nowrasteh’s *The Stoning of Soraya M.* explores the relationship between the culture and women in Iran. The protagonist of the film, Soraya is the victim of stoning punishment. She is accused of adultery without being involving on it due to the male dominant nature of the society. Ali, her husband suspects her. Due to the strict cultural value she has to face such a cruel fate. Though Ali is engaged with a fourteen year young girl he should not face the stoning due to male’s superiority. Due to her cultural restriction, Soraya has to face stoning. Female are misinterpreted in the movie and are restricted to express their opinion. Sheik Hassan (Mullah) says witches to Soraya and Zahra after Soraya disagreed to give a divorce to Ali. This is true story from Muslim society in which the female characters are represented as inferior.

Female and male have equal religious duties in front of God according to *Quran*. It states that men are the maintainer and protector of women. They are equal in creation and made from a single soul. A woman is not something derived from man. The gist is that woman is not created for the purpose of man but are created for the mutual benefit of each other. However, the gender roles seem to be limited in the *Quran* only. Women are not treated as equally as men though men and women are mentioned equal in *Quran*. Male are in the power and hold their control over female. Women’s innocence nature is not evaluated rather they are insulted. In the movie, Soraya is also insulted and accused that she is in relationship with her neighbor. Though she is innocent and hasn’t any fault she is punished due to cruel nature of her husband. This cruel nature of her husband seems that male impose their control over female. The

story of *The Stoning of Soraya M.* examines a culture in which women have very few rights and many women suffer from abuse by their husbands or other men. One form this takes in the film is domestic violence, but throughout the world women are suffered by other violence against them.

Finally, this research paper strongly highlights the relationship between the women and culture in the movie. The pathetic condition of the protagonist is depicted in the movie who is the victim of her own culture. The actual situation of women is represented in the movie. Zahra systematically narrates the story to the journalist in order to reveal the hidden story. She narrates the story about stoning of her niece Soraya that takes place in her own community. The people around the world are unknown about the incident so she gathers effort to flash out the actual event.

The movie breaks the silence about the hidden story of a fearless woman Soraya that is revealed by her aunt Zahra. She gathers her courage to reveal the hidden silence all over the world and to bring voice to the story. Despite the issues of masculinity and male dominations in the society the female characters have played a vital role to raise voice against their dominations. They have gathered effort in each and every incident to resist masculinity and advocate their rights. The religion has played a significant role in the movie. Soraya has to face stoning due to strict rules of Islam. She boldly faces the situation.

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