

that Honneth is an idealist, though he is not dogmatic, his re-emphasis on the idea of pragmatism is undeniable in the present context to renew the idea of socialism.

JADUMANI MAHANAND  
O P Jindal Global University, India

BELIEVING WOMEN IN ISLAM: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION. By Asma Barlas. Texas: University of Texas Press, 2019. 120 p.

This slim volume is a simplified version of Asma Barlas' own book *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* published in 2002. According to her, the Qur'an does not support patriarchy and modern day Muslims were not properly interpreting the text. In this abridged version also, she lays bare open the wounds that were inflicted in the name of religion on the women of Muslim society. She very meticulously tries to hit upon, unread and re-read the patriarchal readings of the Qura'n, serving us on our platter the egalitarian concept of Islam in a very simple yet profound and efficacious words. The incorrigible questions – Does Islam promote and validate patriarchy? Does Islam objectify women to be merely acting as marionettes at the gesture of the eyesight of men? Does Qura'n identify men in the semblance of God? Is it the biology of the woman that reduces her to be as futile as the heap of emotions with no brains and nothing more? Is the exploitation and subjugation of women justified owing to the myth ascribed to Eve's sole sin, wherein she was vandalized as the one instigating Adam and being responsible for her and Adam's fall from paradise? All these, and many more questions that had haunted women of Islam and people of other religions in manifold ways since antiquity, have been deftly woven and answered by deconstructing the arguments of previous scholars in quite a pertinent and appealing manner.

The Qura'n's reading which till now had been interpreted as promulgating and justifying the sexual exploitation, patriarchy, women discrimination and gender inequality, is taken up as a believer's reading by Barlas. She dissects and re-reads these traditional understandings and teachings through Islam's egalitarian and anti-patriarchal lens. Through her balanced and intricately layered arguments she precipitates and brings forth the truth that Qura'n and Islam have nowhere been unjust to women and never restrict the growth and liberation of women. This is achieved by picking up apposite verses from Qura'n and offering quotations from various unswerving sources that offer an eye-opening understanding and conclusion as to what the reality is and how it had been maneuvered by those in power! She picks up her yarn of arguments from the grass root level and neatly arranges them by posing simple questions both from believers and traditional thinkers and proves that Qura'n clearly confirms and establishes equality between men and women. In doing so she takes us back to the seventh century and offers us the accounts and understandings of the age of Prophet Mohammad, alluding to the lifestyle of Prophet himself and his reverence and treatment of women. There are many arguments that are articulated by Barlas related to God and his indivisibility: first one is about God's self-revelation in Islam, "God does not discriminate: humanity includes all humanity that is and will be" (p. 4); second argument is about semblance of Men with

God, *The Tawhid*, where God's sovereignty is indivisible and cannot be shared by anyone; the third argument is about seeing the man as the head of the family where he exercises his command and control over his children and wife by comparing the masculinity which he attributes to God in all his ignorance. The Qura'n strictly repudiates the sexualization or engenderment as father or male and affirms that it doesn't support biological supremacy. In a nutshell unraveling patriarchal interpretation offers Qura'n as a panacea to the ailments that inflicted society with sexism and misogyny so far.

Barlas brilliantly deconstructs the patriarchal monopoly of male elite, who profess unique and undivided proficiency in the interpretation and reading of Qura'n and deciphering Prophet's Word *Tafseer* in *Ahadith*. By writing she establishes her primacy in male dominated discourses and also rips apart the patriarchal stubbornness and the perversities involved in the entire process of biased interpretations.

Men's treatment of women as sexual vassal and "possessions" in compliance with their misreading of *ayat* 3:14 (verse) which they construe as "as a license to covet women" and women "as an impediment to closeness to God". They even nurture the illusion of equating women to be equivalents of "heaps of gold.... Horses branded" (p. 45) which may be possessed by men against their desire. The second *ayat* 2.222-23 (verse) is made to endorse misogynist patriarchal claim that, "Your women are a garden {harth} for you, so visit your garden as you wish..." (p. 46). These two verses that invariably and unflinchingly offer men all the rights and claims to exercise their supremacy by treating their women as their slaves, where the consent of women for intimacy is insignificant, have been beautifully offered a scaffold of support by Barlas where she suggests a metaphorical reading instead of literal one by re-reading the verse as, the verse advising men, "not about a *right to sex*, but about when sexual activity is permitted" (p. 49). Thus, the entire reducing and disparaging patriarchal play of power and authority may be exalted to the level of "graceful courtesy for men and the love's patience" when their women are menstruating. There are also well knitted arguments for women keeping their chastity and purity intact where *Chador*, *Niqab* and *Hijab* are seen as the liability of women violating which they might incur the wrath of entire Muslim community. The veiling of women by Islam has been explicated by Barlas as, "counsels, not commands" (p. 21), alluding to the historical narrative of Prophet where both men and women were counseled to guard their modesty and lower their gaze. The issue of family, marriage and divorce is revisited and useful insights are offered in many intricate issues that had been twisted and manipulated previously. While talking about men's right to divorce she discloses the egalitarian reading that if a husband decides to divorce his wife then the onus of reconciliation too falls upon man only, "as he is the one shredding the fabric of their marriage" (p. 71). The husband has been restricted in the number of times he may desert his wife by divorcing her and is at the same time prohibited from using divorce to deceive her. The book offers a complete amalgamation of Islam's history and Qura'n's *tafsir* to proclaim the egalitarian inclusiveness of both men and women on the pedestal of equality and does away, rips apart the misinterpretations offered by the traditional Islamic scholars. She, in doing so also relentlessly offers ample pertinent evidences that might otherwise have labelled her work as finagling by utilizing western and modern understanding.