

Tribhuvan University

**Male Chauvinism in Sarah Kane's *Blasted***

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus, Exhibition Road, Kathmandu in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in English

by

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled, "Male Chauvinism in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*" is my own original work carried out as a Master's student at the department of English at Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus except to the extent that assistance from others in the Thesis/research/term paper's design and conception or in presentation style, and linguistic expression are duly acknowledged.

All sources used for this thesis paper have been fully and properly cited. It contains no materials which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other Degree at Tribhuwan University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis/research/term paper.

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**Letter of Approval**

This thesis entitled, "Male Chauvinism in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*" submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus by Chitra Bahadur Lamtari Magar has been approved by the undersigned of the research committee:

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## **Abstract**

The play, *Blasted* (1995), written by Sarah Kane, a British dramatist, represents the wretched condition of women caused by male chauvinism and war. Cate, the protagonist of the play represents the condition of women in society in general. War is a form of patriarchy which exploits women. Like Cate, many women are forced to have sex with soldiers during war. The play is a devastating attack on war, implying that war is the death of all human values; it is the end of civilization; it is less than primitivism. It is this reality that has been depicted in this play. Rape goes along with war and Sarah Kane implies that rape like war is devoid of all humanity and it is equally brutal, and, monstrous. Both are the maturest, the most heinous expressions of patriarchy.

The method employed to conduct this research is feminism, which is very close to Marxism in its study of social evils like inequality and exploitation. Sexual exploitation of woman is very much like the labour exploitation of workers and both these kinds of exploitation are violence.

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## **Introduction: Male Chauvinism and Sarah Kane's *Blasted***

Male Chauvinism is a thinking of men against women. It is male prejudice against woman; the belief that men are superior to women in terms of ability, intelligence etc. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica* chauvinism is an attitude of superiority of men toward members of the opposite sex, as in male chauvinism. Some animal-rights advocates have used the term to indicate a similar attitude on the part of human beings toward other species, as in 'species chauvinism.' It is a belief that men are superior to women and they have an attitude of patronizing, disparaging, or denigrating females in terms of their belief that females are inferior to males and therefore they deserve of less than equal treatment or benefit. It is a belief that men are superior to women. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, defines, "male chauvinism is a belief held by some men that men are more important, intelligent, etc. than women (933)." This male chauvinism is a product of patriarchy which considers women as inferior, weak and incapable.

The play, *Blasted* is a postmodern play written by British playwright, Sarah Kane. The whole play is focused on rape and violence and the protagonist character, Cate is only a metonym of the growing violence in the modern world. Violence through war, has driven men to look for a resort and that resort they find in women, who are easy victims. The soldier in *Blasted* boasts how he had raped and killed even young girls and others like him do the same. He means to say that he has raped numerous women of all ages. Rape in legal phraseology used in Black's Law Dictionary is, "At common law, unlawful sexual intercourse committed by a man with a woman not his wife through force and against her will (3952)." It is this definition of rape that applies to the rape of Cate by Ian in *Blasted*. Most of the critics observe that woman is a helpless creature in the world of men and therefore women act as dictated by men. Their slightest resistance invites violence that we find in *Blasted* also. When Cate does not accept Ian's proposal of sexual

union, Ian puts his gun upon her head and finally Cate succumbs to his demand.

This shows that conscious suffering is qualitatively different from suffering without consciousness. Cate suffers consciously because she lives in an alien world of males where she can never be reckoned and be effective. Therefore, her fate is very much like that of Sisyphus. Though she knows her opposition to male hawks is going to be of no consequence as she opposes, which is evident in her argumentation with Ian. She can never escape the hawkish world, which is proved again when she returns with bleeding legs from outside with food packets. It is a situation that elevates her to the level of tragic hero-suffering. Forceful occupation of the female body is just like, not very different from forceful occupation of a territory by the colonizers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is colonialism and therefore woman is colonized by the male colonialist and thus the fate of women is just like the fate of the colonized. Freedom from this colonization requires resistance and struggle. Just as colonies resisted and revolted against colonizers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for their liberation similarly women have to resist and revolt in order to gain their freedom but it is a very long process and the struggle has not even reached the middle of the journey as yet and therefore women still have to suffer just as Cate suffers in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*.

When the play, *Blasted* was going to be enacted, Stephen Daldry was trying to change the middle class attitude towards traditionalism and modernism in order to rejuvenate the theatre and he stated, we have to listen to the kids, meaning that it was high time to highlight the youth of the time in order to establish the credibility and popularity of the theatre. So he worked hard to create a 'cult of youth.'

*Blasted* was conceived in the early 1990s and the inspiration was the society which Kane had witnessed in her earlier life in 1980s. Similarly, Ian also belongs to a

similar society of 2000s. He represents the specific generation which perceived football hooliganism with his experiences of distancing of Britain from world news. Besides this his character is conceived as a person with confident misogyny and racism. He is a typical representative of the conservative Britain.

We find Cate in the hotel room. This is something surprising but on analysis we understand that the playwright Kane recognizes the necessity and impulses of intimate contact with others, which is the outcome of loneliness and longing manifested in damaging habitual behaviors and shattered expectations. At the end of the play, once more, we find Cate back in the room, which highlights the interpersonal encounter at its most fundamental – offer and acceptance of sustenance. It is a very disturbing scene where the need is at its most intense. This happens after everything has been lost, the worst had happened.

We may say that submissiveness of Cate is the result of her subjection to patriarchal values. Submissiveness of women is the result of internalization of patriarchy in women. It is therefore that she seems not to be determined to oppose and resist the overtures of Ian.

### **Delving into Earlier Studies**

Even in the postmodern era, how gender inequality prevails is the main concern of Kane in her play, *Blasted*. Commenting on *Blasted*, Dina Zhurba in her Master's Thesis, *The endangered representation of Sexual violence in Sarah Kane's Blasted*, quotes, "Kane represents how incidents of rape highlight, exacerbate and solidify the unevenness of power distribution between men and women in the modern world and provides a new perspective on war that can be called 'rape in general' – a transhistorical phenomenon of rape as a practice of violence towards the female victim (2)." Cate is shown as a victim of

males. She is raped by Ian. She is even brutally raped by soldiers outside of the hotel when she is in search of some food. Rape becomes common in war. Soldiers involve in rape of women during war. Generally, soldiers are male; they believe that they are superior to women. They think that they have the right to do on women's body whatever they want. As a result, they use their power upon women by raping, harassing and sexually molesting them. The poetic qualities of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* are obscured by its connections to the radical and shocking events that occur in the play, the events being the rape of Ian by the soldier and the eating of the baby by the hungry Ian.

Helen Iball, in her book *Modern theatre guides*, Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, puts her views, "the *Blasted* has become a list of atrocities – and the journalists writing those first review favored Lists: the play contains anal rape, frottage, urination and defecation, baby eating, cunnilingus, fellatio, the sucking and chewing of eye-balls. Yet, of course, theatrical representation usually acknowledges the limits imposed by a respect of human rights and decency (3)." These atrocities reflect the loss of humanism shown in the play. Kane exposes the brutality done by mankind upon mankind. Man has gone below the animal level. The crime committed by the soldier on Ian is beyond imagination. They have lost the real quality of human beings.

Here we are reminded of "The Savage Male", by an anthropological report by Napoleon and Shapiro edited and published by Marvin Harris. Marvin Harris writes, "To understand the relationship between male chauvinism and warfare it is best to examine the lifestyle of a specific group of primitive military sexists. I have chosen the Yanomamo, a group of about 10,000 American Indian tribesmen who inhabit the Brazil/Venezuela border." In the Yanomamo tribe marriage is nothing more than "dragging something away" and divorce is "throwing something away." The Yanomamo

women expect to be manhandled by their husband and they measure their status as wives by the frequency of minor beatings their husbands give them. The ethnographer Dr. Judith Shapiro of the University of Chicago emphasizes the essential passive role of Yanomamo women. She is very much surprised to hear from Yanomamo women that her unscarred and unbruised condition was a source of concern to the Yanomamo women who decided "that the men I had associated with didn't really care for me enough (184)." The thinking and assumption of Yanomamo women exemplify how they have internalized patriarchy and male chauvinism. The story of the savage male is very close thematically to *Blasted* as in *Blasted* also we can trace this internalization in the character of Cate also when she comes to the room of Ian simply because he is not sound.

Iball further comments, "Ian is persistent in his attempts to shift events into sexual territory, using various strategies of manipulation. He plays on Cate's insecurities, telling her that she is stupid and, to the opposite extreme, saying that he loves her – even, at one point, mentioning marriage (1:5). She says that she does not love him because he has changed, and that she does not want to have sex with him because she is not his girlfriend anymore (1:15). She has a new boyfriend now, who is called Shaun, though she has yet to sleep with him (1:16) (18)." She has come to meet Ian because he seemed to be unhappy but he attempts to take benefit from her by having sex. She is an emotional, fragile and kind who helps him without any vested interest.

Ian tries to seduce her by pointing gun on her head. He ultimately raped her at night without her consent. The dialogue between Cate and Ian confirms the audience's suspicion that Cate was raped by Ian:

**Ian** Loved me last night.

**Cate** I didn't want to do it.

**Ian** Thought you liked that.

**Cate** No.

**Ian** Made enough noise.

**Cate** It was hurting (2:30)

The above dialogue suggests that Cate is forced to have sex with Ian. She is exploited by Ian. She didn't want to have sex with Ian. Sex without consent is rape. She might not have the chance to escape once she is trapped with Ian. A woman is trapped by a man in the male dominant society like a pigeon trapped in a Cage. The so called male dominated society has a very narrow view of women. They are taken as a means of pleasure for men. They are just like a commodity that is sold in the market at different prices.

Cate is nowhere safe. The soldier expects Cate to be raped anyway: "Gone. Taking a risk. Lot of bastard soldiers out there (2:36)." He knows that somebody will take care of violating Ian's girlfriend for him, for Cate's position is vulnerable. Anywhere she goes, she is bound to be raped. Women's condition is very bad during war. They are raped, beaten, even killed by soldiers. War becomes brutal to women. Here, Cate also has become the worst victim of war. She is raped by Ian inside the hotel and by soldiers outside the hotel. People don't have access to food and water in the city because of war. Cate needs some food for her and Ian so she is in search of some food but is raped by soldiers in exchange of food. This scene shows the vulnerable and the pathetic condition of women in the city torn and ravaged by war. Cate represents women's suffering caused by the war and specially by soldiers involved in it.

Elaine Aston in her book, *Feeling the loss of Feminism: Sarah Kane's Blasted and an Experiential Genealogy of Contemporary Women's play writing* states, "Kane captures the male – occupied territory of the female body – both in Ian's abusive

treatment of Cate, and in the refiguring of the heterosexual rape, as the soldier, in turn, rapes Ian (583)." Ian takes Cate's body as if it is his property that he can use anytime. He uses Cate's body for his pleasure.

It is a common thinking of man that women are the property of males. Such thinking is traditional and universal. This is what is proved in the *Blasted* by Cate's sexual exploitation by Ian inside the room and by soldiers outside the hotel. Sarah Kane exposes the reality through the play that the then society was dominated by male. It is equally significant today. The whole world is dominated by males. War is a form of patriarchy which exploits women in society. Male dominated society always views women as inferior.

Lois Tyson in her book *Critical Theory Today, a User-Friendly Guide* mentions Karl Marks who says, "It's natural for men to hold leadership positions because their biological superiority renders them more physically, intellectually, and emotionally capable than women, is a sexist ideology that sells itself as a function of nature, rather than as a product of cultural belief (56)." Ian represents males and Cate women. He is proud to be a man and she seems to be unhappy being a woman so she could not resist male supremacy shown by Ian. She is used as commodity, as a source of pleasure by Ian. Again, Lois Tyson, in her book *Critical Theory Today, a User-Friendly Guide* says, "I commodify human beings when my relations with them to promote my own advancement financially or socially. Most of us know what it means to treat a person like an object (for example, a sex object) (62)." Ian uses Cate as an object of sex. He commodifies his relation with Cate as an object of sex. Cate has become a means of pleasure for Ian. He forces Cate to have sex and spends the night with her as if she is his own property.

Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson, in their book *Contemporary Literary*

*Theory* put the view of Kate Millett in her book *Sexual Politics*, who says, "a ferociously upbeat, comprehensive, witty and irreverent demolition-job on male culture; and in this perhaps, it is a monument to its moment. Millett's argument – ranging over history, literature, psychoanalysis, sociology and other areas – is that ideological indoctrination as much as economic inequality is the cause of women's oppression. She further argues that patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male, and this power is exerted, directly or indirectly, in civil and domestic life to constrain women (214)." Women are exploited, suppressed, dominated and sexually harassed by men in society. In her play *Blasted*, Sarah Kane puts Cate as a woman who is a submissive character and who is an example of a patriarchal society. She is placed as inferior to man and as a victim of male. She is raped by Ian and soldiers because of her non-resistant behavior by accepting the fate allotted by patriarchy.

The condition of women in patriarchal society is studied in this research. The effect of war on women as well as on children also has been examined. Moreover, traumatic effect of war on women and how they are treated by soldiers during war has also been involved in this research. Ideas regarding feminism and male chauvinism forwarded by many experts and theorists have been discussed here, with various references. This research work includes comments and ideas relating to the thesis topic.

According to Lois Tyson, a woman who has internalized the norms and values of patriarchy, is permanently enslaved. She further claims, "the traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive (85)." Cate is a submissive woman who is ready to accept whatever Ian does with her. She has become victim of a man.

This research is intended to explore male chauvinism, which is subversive and as

deconstructive. Feminism is deconstruction. Feminists do not accept the traditional concept of society that treats women as the *other*.

Rape is torture to women and if rape gives pleasure to men, then it is pleasure derived from torture, which is also a sign of machoman. In this sense, male can be considered sadist. Ian and the soldier in this play may be considered as sadist, because it is through rape and torture that they obtain pleasure. Delight in destruction is sadism. It is disgust and anger with oneself that goads a person into destructive activities like inflicting pain, in any form, upon others. As Sigmund Freud tells us that this transferring of one's dissatisfaction to others in any form is displacement. It is in abundant quantity that is visible in *Blasted* right from beginning to the end. Particularly in the case of the soldier, it is his utter disgust with war that is expressed through the rape of women, even a young girl child of twelve years as he himself admits. And it is not only women but also men like Ian who are victimized simply because through this kind of assertion like rape he wants to feel that he is something and he exists letting the id triumph over the superego. The id is really animal principle of indulging in pleasure ignoring all restraints and customary restrictions imposed upon individuals by society.

### **The Woman in the Limbo**

In my study of this play *Blasted*, I find that in the interpretation and analysis of *Blasted*, we should not forget that literature is never prescription but description and this is what Sarah Kane does in *Blasted*. We should not seek sociological or psychological explanation because theatre is not a sociological study. However it doesn't mean that artists and literateurs are not aware of social or psychological occurrences/problems. Kane's model of theatre is highly influenced by Greek Tragedy which presents, in the visceral forms, situations like incest, rape and murder. All critics, more or less, agree to

the view that *Blasted* is a very realistic presentation of the women as they are treated in the world even today.

According to Paul Poplawski, *Blasted* is a depiction of habitual but shocking scenes of modern violence which stretch from the casual abuse and 'domestic' violence to torture and war. We encounter abuse and domestic violence in the first part of the play whereas in the second part we encounter torture and war. The relationship between the middle aged journalist Ian and a young woman Cate is itself disturbing. Suffering from fits and mental illness Kane's characters are unable to articulate the destructive motives which drive them to abuse.

Sexual violence is pervading in the whole play. Ian is repeatedly abusive to Cate and there are many instances of abuse like 'Wogs', 'Pakis', 'Retards', 'Lesbos' and many others. In his book *English Literature in Context*, again Paul Poplawski comments that *Blasted* refuses to give its audience any sense of social context for what takes place in the play. The setting itself is very strange, we move from the expensive hotel in Leeds of the first half to the war torn dysfunctional setting of the second half of the play. Unexplained violence and sexual abuse in the play might be considered as a sensationalist play to attract attention. This is inspired by the idea that the bombardment of people in general with the TV and Print news of domestic violence, sex and murder is most effective.

*Blasted* can be refined as a well planned strategy of reaching beyond the fleeing headlines of the news, beyond the superficial ways in which the stories of human pain and loss are printed or telecast by the print media and the electronic media. That means Sarah Kane intends to define a particular role for theatre. All feminist critics agree that rape is violence and it is a characteristic of almost all men and therefore it is logical to conclude that all men are prospective rapists. This male tendency to commit rape is the

result of female stereotyping because women are presented as sex symbols. They are considered passive and this is an invitation to sexual violence.

In Kane's writings rape is a common feature. She thinks that rape is totemic of pervasive violence that is written into *Blasted* and *Fedra's Love*. *Blasted* is a play, "about violence" about "rape" and it was about these things happening between people who know each other and ostensibly love each other. Cate is raped by a person she knows. Ian is not a "stranger" because he is someone with whom she had sex in the past though consensually. Cate is also aware of Ian's aggression who is carrying a gun articulating images of misogynist and brutal sexuality. Ian asserts in his dictated report of the murdered "Scouse Tart" who must have invited her fate because she was easily persuaded to sexual union. Cate is well aware of Ian's propensity to violence and herein lies tragedy because even then she accepted an invitation to come to his room simply because he sounded "unhappy". When she arrived in the room she affirms that she is "here for the night". This is also an example of how she is unable to avoid Ian. She fails to complain and resist. Kane has clarified that Cate's simulated rape was "most disturbing" scene in the play.

Alicia Tyler confesses that she was wrong in her first impression of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* because in her view it was rubbish produced by a young writer with an adolescent desire to shock..."I can only apologize to Kane's ghost for getting her so wrong the first time around. And may she now sleep in peace (25)." Peter Buse thinks that Kane's work should be addressed in terms of Trauma theory but his examination of the play *Blasted* reveals differences between Kane's point of view and trauma theory.

In his book *Contemporary Literary Theory*, Ramon Seldon and Peter Widdoson refer to Aristotle declaring women, "the female is female by virtue of a

certain lack of qualities (203)," similarly Thomas Aquinas believed that woman is an "imperfect man' There has been a tradition to consider women as passive since time immemorial. In pre-mendelian days men regarded their sperm as the active seed which gives form to the waiting ovum which lacks identity till it receives the male's impress. It has been believed that the males are undoubtedly the superiors and this victory of male principle of intellect brings to an end the reign of the sensual female Furies which leads to the triumph of patriarchy over matriarchy.

It is not that feminism has not sought to disturb the complacent certainties of such a patriarchal culture, to assert a belief in sexual equality, and to eradicate sexist domination in transforming society. In her book, *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf advances the notion that gender identity is socially constructed and therefore it can be challenged and transformed but she continually examined the problem facing women writers. Though she believed that women had always faced social and economic obstacles to their literary ambitions, and was herself conscious of the restricted education she had received, she believed, "while women are indeed the victims of man", they collude their own domestic and professional victimization by acting as a 'looking glass' for the reflecting back to men of their desired image', so she found the independence of women a great challenge. Women's social positioning is different and they have a confined life. They are not allowed to tell the truth of their own experience. She also believed that if women finally achieved social and economic equality with man, there would be nothing to prevent them from freely developing their artistic talents.

In her book *The Second Sex* (1949) Simone de Beauvoir points out that there is a vast difference between the interests of the two sexes and it is assault on men's biological and psychological as well as economic discrimination against women. He is the 'One';

she is the 'Other'. Women have been made inferiors, and oppression has been compounded by men's belief that women are inferior by nature.

In Ramon Seldon's and Peter Widdowson's book, *Contemporary Literary Theory*, Dale Spende in his book, *Man Made Language* (1980) (212) considers that women have been fundamentally oppressed by a male dominated language. Sociolinguist Robin Lakoff supports Dale Spende's view that women's language is actually inferior since it contains patterns of "weakness" and "uncertainty", focuses on the trivial. The frivolous, the unserious and stresses the personal emotional response. But most feminists consider that women have been brain washed by patriarchal ideology, which produces stereotypes of strong men and feeble women. Now it would not be justified to claim that female sexuality is revolutionary, subversive, heterogeneous, and 'open' in that it refuses to define female sexuality; if there is a female principle, it is simply to remain outside the male domination of the female.

Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* ranges over history, literature, psychoanalysis, sociology and other areas. Her argument is that ideological indoctrination as much as economic inequality is the cause of women's suppression, an argument which open up second wave thinking about reproduction, sexuality and representation (specially verbal and visual images of woman and particularly pornography) (214). Sexual politics is an announcement of Kate Millet's view of patriarchy.

Feminism is not a new phenomenon in literature and politics. Sometimes smoldering and sometimes blazing it has made its presence felt throughout a long range of history and as a result of this writings like *Blasted* have been possible. Such writings make us aware of the urgency that the society needs to address the women's cause because otherwise the society is going to be engulfed by the monster of banality and

barbarity as it has been indicated in the play *Blasted* by Sarah Kane.

Consensual sex is alright. But that is not the subject in *blasted*. It is male audacity and brutality that is the concern of the play. Refusal by women invites rape and brutality. Salomith Fyre Stone is a Marxist who in her book *The Dialectic of Sex (1970)* regards male domination as primary and quite independent of other social and economic forms of oppression (216). On the other hand Sheila Rowbotham in her work "women's consciousness, man's world (1973)" recognizes both that working class women experience the double oppression of sexual division of labor at work and in the home and that Marxist historiography had largely ignored the domain of personal experience, and particularly that of female culture (217).

*Blasted* shows the damaging and dehumanizing consequences of sexual violence and warfare. It heralds the cultures of postmodernity and hints at the dismantling of the grand political narratives that previously had women together different sects of socially progressive interest – feminist interest included. *Blasted* was one of the most talked about plays of the 1990s. The play begins as a domestic rape story. It is a hotel bed room in Leeds where the terminably ill journalist, Ian and the young vulnerable Cate meet each other. In the past they were lovers but are lovers no more. They catch up on personal news quarrel and fight. Ian rapes Cate and intimate gender wars of the bed room turn into an epic war zone as a soldier with his gun forces his way into the room. He rapes Ian and blows his brains out. Ian is the unwilling survivor, the living dead "nightmare" to whom Cate returns in the final moments of the play.

If the 1990s can be characterized as a "postemotional" society then the emotional experiential form of *Blasted* can be considered as a counter – cultural response to the difficulty of genuinely being able to feel. Though the play doesn't follow the

experientially styled 'in-yer-face theatre' that politicizes the postemotional characterization of contemporary society, it does propose this as a possibility as observed by Elaine Aston.

She again comments that though the theatre reviewers at the time of the plays; Royal Court Premier sought to manufacture "emotional antipathy" to *Blasted* their journalistic crafting of horror and outrage missed a genuine feeling for the effective political territory of the play that resides in the way it "Blasts" both postemotionalism and postfeminism. The play can be interpreted in the phraseology of the tabloid journalist who "hacks" out sexist, racist, and homophobic abuse.

There is a reference to Bosnia war in the play, "a common rape in Leeds... (And) mass rape as a war weapon in Bosnia. Sarah Kane captures the male-occupied territory of the female body – both in Ian's abusive treatment of Cate, and in the refiguring of the heterosexual rape as the soldier, in turn rapes Ian. *Blasted* gives emotional weight to seeing a world increasingly lost to a violent masculinist, phallo-centric symbolic order. What the playwright means to say that like Cate, surviving the "crisis of living" theory a world conditioned and damaged by male violence, the most that women can hope for is the condition of Cate.

*Blasted* is predominantly gruesome and violent. According to Kane it is often funny and motivated by hope. The play depicts the British life styles in the mid 1990s. Civil war bursts into a Leeds' hotel room, which is inconceivable and shows that the war between peace-time civilization and the chaotic violence of war is only "paper-thin".

The play discusses the social, economic and political background to the play. Kane was a landmark dramatist in the 1990s, over-rated interloper, honorary lad, confrontational bad girl, funny, depressive, tortured, suicidal artist, theatrical, visionary,

savior and prophet. Many of the news reviews are scandalous with the headlines, "this disgusting feast of filth" and it accompanied Jack Tinkers review of the play and as a result the broadcast media picked it up and created a rare occasion whereby theatre came into the lime light.

Sarah Kane, responding to a British media wished "to deny" that what happened in central Europe has anything to do with us because they don't want us to be aware of the extent of the social sickness we are suffering from. Kane literally *blasted* the dramatic conventions with which the contemporary audience was so comfortable. She observed that the play's form is a crucial consideration because it is "direct parallel to the truth of the war it portrays." Kane herself commented on the play that "in *blasted* no authorial voice is leading us to safety." This seems to be what contributed most to the outraged reactions from some members of the press. No doubt, *Blasted* becomes a list of atrocities and journalist writing those first reviews favored lists: The play contains anal-rape, frottage, urination, and defecation, baby eating, cunnilingus, fellatio, the shocking and chewing of eye balls. Yet, of course, theatrical representation usually acknowledges the limits imposed by a respect for human rights and decency. It is indeed the conceptualization of "in-yer-face" theatre that has contributed significantly to the landmark status of *Blasted*.

The period in which *Blasted* was published and enacted, was in many respects a big blow to traditional assumptions about art and literature. In the mid 1990s, Aleks Sierz drew together a group of young British dramatists working to create a 'compelling new aesthetic' experimental drama using brutal and explicit techniques as a means to disrupt audiences' complacency. Sierz identifies Phyllishegy, Anthony Neilson and Phillip Ridley as the precursors of 'New Brutalists', 'smack and sodomy plays' 'Theatre of the

urban ennui'. The atrocities in *Blasted* exploit what Stanton B Garner has labeled, 'neuromimetic transferral', defined as 'the impulse to close one's eyes during simulated blindings on stage', which 'reflects not simply an aversion to the representation of pain, but also a deeper defense against its sympathetic arising in the field of one's own body. Kane tears apart the domestication of mimesis, the 'Kitchen sink' realism that has been perceived as dominant dramatic modes of the Royal Court Theatre in the post-war period. One of the most notable aspects of *Blasted* is the way in which its opening scenes accord with realist strategy while, at the same time, enclosing that dislocate the conventional unity of the time, space and action as later sections of this book explore. Mel Kenyon, Kane's agent believes that it is 'raw emotion' in combination with 'theatrical experimentation' that distinguishes her plays.

In *Blasted* there is a dominant focus upon inter generational relationship and both plays (*Crave* of David Greig and *Blasted*) explore complex experiences of love and desire. Along with the playwright David Greig, Sarah Kane and many others were 'part of an intimate circle of gothic miserablists' at Bristol. The Bosnian civil war had much to do with *Blasted* because Sarah Kane was searching for connections between rape in a Leeds' hotel and Bosnian Civil War. (2002:39) (9) commented 'I do think that the seeds of full scale war can always be found in peace – time civilization.' At the same time Steve Waters suggests that in 1990s Britain was very much a spectator upon war and terrorism which were perceived to happen elsewhere, being beamed into British homes by the television news. In seeking materials to express the horrors of Civil War, Kane looked not only to press report about war rape and acts of torture in the Balkans, but also to equivalents in British culture – once again iterating the 'seed and tree' scenario by drawing parallels that brought the apparently 'and comfortably distance violence very

close to British experience.

The materials in *Blasted*, the comments and observations as well as the objective conditions of the time lay it bare that war and rape are inseparable and that war is an incitement and instigation to rape because both war and rape are patriarchal expressions of masculinity, male chauvinism.

There are frequent references to different kinds of violence, violence that happened at Heysel Stadium at Brussels in 1984 in which 39 people died and six hundred were injured. This is an example of crowd behavior which Buford compares with the behavior of people in war torn Yugoslavia. All these kinds of violence are examples of maleness, exaggerated patriotism, violent nationalism and meaningless anti-social habits. This shows the emptiness of the decadent generation. This generation appears to be what it in reality is. It is a culture without mystery. It is so dead and empty that it expresses itself through violence to make its existence felt. It burns its flesh so that it has smell.

Ian's prejudice characterizes all football supporters as hooligans. Through different scenes and particularly through characters Sarah Kane brings this prevalent explosive reality into theatre which cannot be denied just as Osborne, through his plays, depicted the angry national psyche of class resentment in the 1950s. In the same vein Edward Bond depicts the reality of poverty and cruelty in the generations of 1960s and 70s. Sarah Kane is a bit more extreme in her depiction of terror and social decay of the 1990s. From the mid 1980s through 1990s we find a situation in which direct action is visible. As examples we can refer to IRA terrorist attacks, regional race riots and protests against the Poll Tax. These protests were against the government policies, against job losses in print trade and against the amendments to the criminal justice bill. One event that resonates for *Blasted* and acts as a reminder is that terrorism was not so unknown on

the UK soil. The 1984 IRA bombing of the Grand Hotel Brighton is a befitting example. The bombing was aimed to blow up Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet during the Conservative Party Conference.

It has been observed that *Blasted* is caught up in the 'event culture' and Ian's attempt to shift events into sexual territory through various strategies and manipulations is a suitable example. He plays on Cate's insecurities, telling her that she is stupid and that he loves her to the extent that he mentions marriage. Cate's reply is that she doesn't love him because he has changed and she has no desire for sexual union with him because she is no more his girlfriend. At the same time she informs him that she has a new boyfriend called Shaun though she hasn't had sex with him until that time.

When Ian narrates his horrible experiences which he thinks as extremities exposes the claim of Ian and says it is nothing compared to the real horrors of war which is in fact very much justified. Very soon the soldier proves this first by telling Ian that he smells sex in the room after which he discovers Cate's knickers, rubs them over his face and smells them. The sequence of events that follow has not yet reached its climax and finally he rapes Ian and shoots himself.

Nothing can be more distressing and depressing as well as horrible than the tormented loneliness of Ian which is marked by desperate actions like masturbation, self strangulation, defection, hysterical laughter, crying, hugging the soldier's body, eating the baby until at last he dies with relief. It seems as if there is no way out of the muddled situation in which the modern man finds himself and that the only way out is death.

Different aspects of sexism and racism have been dealt with *Blasted*. From psychoanalytical point of view Cate has been presented as good girl/victim and Ian is bad man/perpetrator. Ian's attitude is demonstrated in his racism, he remarks about the hotel

staff and says that he hates Leeds because it stinks. The soldier who forces Ian to confront his myopia reminds us of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex and Shakespeare's King Lear. It is a literal blinding that leads inside. In one sense Cate also is a perpetrator as she bites Ian's penis and also flies at him slapping and biting.

There is an element of romance also in the play. Women look for a romantic hero who displays strong sexual desire held in check by tenderness and understanding of the heroine's emotional needs. Cate's participation in such relationship is socially constructed as it is harmful to the younger parties involved. Inter generational sex is seen as precocious sexualization. Femininity as an ideal conduct is promoted in a mass media organized, financed and supervised by man. Ian thinks that he has a right to engage Cate in sexual activities and he doesn't want her to sell her body to soldiers in exchange for food. Love and violence not simply sex and violence is co-habitants in complex abusive inter-character relation. In Nazi Concentration Camps women were kept for the pleasure of officers on leave. *Blasted* foregrounds the habitual sexual abuse of women within and without war. Stephenson and Langridge observe that *Blasted* recognizes the complexity of relationship and feelings, that every individual occupies multiple object positions and that 'class, race and gender divisions are symptomatic' of societies based on violence or the threat of violence, not the cause.

Mel Kenyon, who was Kane's agent, stated that, "only a woman could have written a play that understood violence so profoundly from the perspectives of both victim and perpetrator without glamorizing it (86). Both directors Thomas Ostermeier and publicity for the Glasgow citizens production in 2002 suggests (pity) as an overriding motivation for Cate's decision to meet Ian at the hotel.

From feminist point of view it is justified to say that Kane represents how

incidents of rape highlight, exacerbate and solidify the unevenness of power distribution between men and women, and provides a new perspective at war, 'rape in general,' a transhistorical phenomenon of rape as a practice of violence towards the female victims. The play also can be interpreted as a progressive representation of how finally the fundamental binary opposition of the feminine and masculine could be destroyed, providing the narrative about the raped man. It is only Cate who is raped in the social sense but vividly represented rape occurs to Ian also. And therefore it is only the construction of the object of rape as exclusively feminine is conformed. Undoubtedly Kane has presented apparent indifference to her own gender and insisted on its irrelevance, which is to prove that *Blasted* is above all a play about gender. She makes an allusion to the rape camps in Bosnia indicating that as an inspiration for the play. There are four rapes that of Cate's, Ian's, the soldier's girlfriends and Cate's probable rape again when she is off stage in the *Blasted*. The object of rape remains consistent throughout the play and it serves as a visible manifestation of gender difference and otherness, showing that rape is a deeply engendered social practice.

According to Zhurba "Rape is sexual essentially because it rests on the very social difference between the sexes," if men rape women, it is precisely because they are women in the social sense and when male is raped, he too, raped "as a woman." To be rapable is the social position and not a biological. Statistical studies show that in cases of family and sexual violence over 90 percent of victims are female and 97 percent of the assailants are males. What is regrettable is that researchers use such gender neutral expressions as "spouse abuse" or "marital violence." Rape is always perceived socially and culturally as feminine. Sarah Kane focuses on this contention when she constructs binary yonder oppositions between a naive and impressionable Cate and a masochistic

Ian on the one hand and later on she reverses this by ascribing to Ian the role of passive and weak (feminine) victim of the soldiers' aggressive masculine violence.

Although Sarah Kane considered herself as a "gender neutral" writer, she has frequently been associated with the male dominated circles of the "young and angry" British playwrights and feminist authors. She has usually been considered as "the bad girl of the stage" and "the Karate Kid of the British theatre" who can flex her muscles alongside toughest of man. In the *Blasted* it seems that Sarah Kane has made an attempt to destroy the fundamental binary opposition of masculine and feminine. That is why we have in the *Blasted* not only the rape of Cate but also the rape of Ian. Sarah Kane seems to intend to say that rape like no other practice perpetuates the existence of gender difference inequality and otherness. Cate's fainting spells and Ian's verbal abuse are various linguistic practices of social disempowerment of woman. Undoubtedly the character of Cate conform to the traditional feminist critique of the gender binaries. This is suggested by the soldier's realization after the escape of Cate through the bathroom window when he predicts that she will be raped if not in the room, in the world outside because she belongs to the class of woman.

Though *Blasted* has been considered as a blistering attack on gender differences created by patriarchal thinking, yet Cate bringing food for the weak and disabled Ian is simply reaffirmation of patriarchy and it is very much like that of Jane Eyre returning to protect and nourish the blind Rochester.

### **Conclusion –The Abject Condition of Women**

*Blasted* is a severe comment on the history of the cultural disavowal of rape, staging the representation of sexual violence as a process of brutal cover. Sarah Kane questions almost the total absence of scholarly engagement with the unique

representational circumstances of Cate's rape. And that is why she investigates into the causes of this absence of concern. It is peace time during which Cate is raped for the first time and it is only after this rape that the context of war fare is described in the play. This hints at the distribution of power between genders. The war only emphasizes and exposes the power aspect of rape through the figure of the rapist in the military uniform with a gun, which represents absolute domination of the strong over the weak.

The two themes of gender violence and civil war merge into each other. The logical conclusion to the way society expects men to behave is war. Cate gets raped violently even when there is no civil war in the Leeds the subsequent rape of Ian by soldier is a confirmation of the static representation of gender which is embedded in specific social structure because Ian is raped as a woman in a social sense. The soldier introduces the war aspect to rape and the total domination of the male with a gun over a symbolic female defenseless object. However a sense of hope is expressed in the play towards the end by Ian's "Thank you" to Cate. There is hope that no matter how much they were battered and violated the ideals of youth femininity and maternity represented in the gesture of gathering flowers world save the world. The soldier in the play is without a name and this is very significant because then he stands for a universal figure of a soldier embodying all sorts of military atrocities such as group rapes and tortures, killings and mass transportation of refugees in cattle trucks.

Gender difference is the foundation of structural inequality between men and women. As a result women suffer sympathetic social injustice. The feminists' belief is that the inequality between sexes is not the result of biological necessity, but is produced by cultural construction of gender differences. This is also proved by the axiom that the woman's place is the home, that she is the 'angel of the home'; the woman's work is to

secure, order, comfort and loveliness. Even in Greek mythology the woman was supposed to be no parent at all. Therefore, women have been kept in subjugation and this is the triumph of patriarchal ideology.

Thus, patriarchy is by definition sexist, which means it promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men. Finally it is proved that sex is biological construction and gender is social construction. Male chauvinism has permeated the whole social structure disseminating the concept that that femininity is linked to frailty, modesty, and timidity which disempowers women in the real world. Patriarchy has given only two identities to woman and these are: she must accept her traditional gender roles and obey the patriarchal roles. Only then she is a good girl and if she doesn't she is a bad girl.

*Blasted* is a postmodern play by Sarah Kane which presents a gruesome and horrible picture of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in which the miserable condition of women has been vividly described. The play shows how woman is a victim of patriarchy which expresses itself through sexual violence and war. Both these themes of sexual violence and war have been combined to show how there is no escape for woman even in peace times. This has been the fate of woman since time immemorial and there is no imminent rescue for her. To be born a woman is a curse and from the very childhood she is a prisoner in the male dominated home and world. She cannot breathe freely and move safely because she inhabits an alien world where she is the Other; she is not an inmate but a captured slave whose pious duty is to serve man and keep him pleased.

Sarah Kane's *Blasted* is very unusual and striking because it seems to be rooted in the postmodern concept of indeterminacy and iterability for its title, which puzzles us. In fact, I think the title has many meanings associated not only with the play but also with women who are really, represented by Cate. The question arises what does

Sarah Kane mean by *Blasted*? Does she mean women are blighted or laid waste or does she mean all the dramatic norms and forms that have been blasted by her in *Blasted*?

What I think is that she means to say that by her time the dramatic conventions of writing have become outdated and unsuited to convey the intensity of the suffering of women so they need to be blasted. They all have withered away. But on the other hand she perhaps also means that women are as much blasted towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as they have never been in the past.

Kane wants bilateral relationship between man and woman. She found the cursed and worst relationship between man and woman in patriarchal society from the time of Aristotle, Plato and Aquinas . She doesn't like the demonic activities and atrocities performed by males on females. She advocates and raises voice for women giving warning to the patriarchal society that it can explode at anytime if the brutality of males continues on females. She hits and wants to break the traditional thinking of men towards women.

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