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Unblinding history through literature in Tanushree Podder's, *Escape from Harem*

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ABSTRACT The history of India had been coloured by series of brutal invasion, torture, bloodshed and massacre in the name of religion and conquest. One of the most remembered invasions is by the Mughals in the beginning of 16th. century where Babar successfully established the Mughal dynasty in 1526. The Mughal dynasty, from the eyes of the historians is one of the most dynamic dynasty which possessed splendour, wealth, bravery, artistic architecture and conquerors who fought to glorify Islam. While historians and history were limited to the study of chronological events, the historical novel *Escape from Harem* took the liberty to peep into the human and humanity of this dynasty; a scope which is deep irrelevant in the study of history. This paper intends to show how Tanushree Podder exposes some unknown episodes from the history of these great conquerors and builders through her novel, *Escape from Harem*. Strings of episodes and secrets which may not be deemed important by historians are revealed as the readers follow the journey of the girl who is taken into the harem. These episodes will be seen in the light of new historicism. This research reveals the dark side of the dynasty which are as intriguing as the magnitude of splendours which are identified with this kingdom and its rulers. The untold stories from the darkest chamber of the harem, massacre, filicide, fratricide, animalistic behaviour of emperors and the oppressive treatment cast upon women that was carried from one generation to another in the name of power and conquest will be brought to light through this research.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper will unfold some of the events that took place during the era of the Mughals in India which were not highlighted by the historians. The Mughal dynasty, from the eyes of the historians is one of the most dynamic dynasty which possessed splendour, wealth, bravery, artistic architecture and conquerors who fought to glorify Islam. The Mughals are often glorified for their new direction and impetus in architecture which resulted great works like Taj Mahal, Agra Fort, Shalimar Gardens and Fatehpur Sikri. The Mughal era in India lasted for about 331 years from 1526 to 1857 with Babur as the first monarch and Bahadur Shah as the last. This era ended with the establishment of British Raj in 1858. This empire was often seen as an empire that set a standard of magnificence for the region of Asia. Taj Mahal is considered the zenith of their architecture which is known as the jewel of Muslim art in India and one of the universally admired masterpieces of the world's heritage. This much talked about empire was first founded by Babur (b.1483-1530), a Sunni foreign ruler who was a descendent of Turko-Mongol conqueror, Temur on his father's side and from Changatai, the second son of the Mongol ruler Gengis Khan, on his mother's side (Berndl 318-320). He invaded India five times – twice in 1519, 1520, 1524 and 1526. In his final attempt, which is known as the First Battle of Panipat, he killed King Ibrahim Lodhi and entered Delhi. He was a born soldier, talented poet and efficient administrator (Verma 77). He was succeeded by his son, King Humayun (b. 1505-1556) who was an opium addict. He ruled only for nine years from 1530 to 1539 as he was forced to retreat to Punjab and then to Persia (Iran) when he was attacked from the East by Sher Khan Pathan, the King of Bihar and Bengal. However, Humayun came back to power after fifteen years when Sher Khan Pathan died. As he was ill, he made his thirteen year old son, Akbar as the Governor of Punjab. Humayun died at the age of 51 following a fall in his

palace. After the Second Battle of Panipat, the 14 year old Akbar (b.1542-1605) took possession of the throne in 1556 (Verma 83). King Akbar is the first Mughal king born in India. His mother was a Hindu and he founded a new faith which he called Din-e-Ilahi (Divine Faith). He also abolished tax on Hindus, *sati* (immolation of the wife in the pyre of her husband) and slavery. During his 49 year reign, he brought most of the northern and central India and Pakistan under his control. Despite having three wives (Ruqayya, Salima and Balquees), he married Jodhabai, the daughter of the Hindu King of Jaipur and had three sons (Salim, Murad and Daniyal). After Akbar's death, Salim who is known as King Jahangir takes the throne.

While historians and history were limited only to the study of chronological events, Tanushree Podder's historical novel, *Escape from Harem* took the liberty to peep into the human and humanity of this dynasty. This historical fiction helps to humanize history. This paper unblinds some of the episodes and secrets which may not be deemed important by historians. *Escape From Harem* presents the brutality and subterfuge behind the wealth and glamour of the Mughal empire. Tanushree Podder begins her novel, *Escape from Harem* by chronicling and depicting the cruelty and lustfulness possessed by Jahangir. Jahangir married his Hindu cousin, Manbhawati Bai and fathered Prince Khusrau Mirza. Then, he married another Rajput Princess, Manmati and had three sons (Khurram, Parvez and Shahiyar). Although this novel is a historical fiction, Podder exposes a lot of events unknown to the masses of the world. Tanushree Podder has authored nineteen books. *Escape from Harem* is her third novel which was published in 2013. Podder who was born in Delhi, has worked in corporate sector for eight years before she quit and took up writing seriously. Podder claims that the history and events are absolutely factual and that only the protagonist in the novel is imaginary. She portrays the entire story through the eyes of a harem inmate or a kaneez. The daring escape of Bahar, Jahangir's concubine, along with her kaneez has the ability to stir the imagination as much as the historical events of the time. Podder sketched the protagonist's life from age 15 to almost the age of 60 where she documented a vast series of events. Readers have the opportunity to mirror the Mughal harem from a teenager's point of view and from a matured woman's perception.

2. UNBLINDING THE HISTORICAL EVENTS

History is a form of power. Each historical era develops its own episteme and this episteme controls how that era and its people will view reality (Bressler 1994:131). History unearths a vast and complex web of interconnecting forces that determines what takes place in each culture and society. These epistemes change from one historical period to another and the cause is unclear. According to Foucault, these radical and abrupt changes that cause breaks from one episteme to another are neither good nor bad, neither valid nor invalid. Different epistemes exist in their own right as they are neither moral nor immoral, but amoral. He further claims that historians are influenced and prejudiced by the epistemes in which they live in. Therefore their thoughts, customs, habits and other actions are coloured by their own epistemes and that they can never be totally objective about their own or any other historical period (Foucault 1965:131- 132). Parallel to what is recorded by many historians about the Mughal emperors and the empire, *Escape from Harem* gives a closer and more intimate recordings of these emperors and their dynasty. Podder takes the readers one step closer to look into the traits and characters of these emperors. Although this novel depicts the Mughal empire from Jahangir's reign onwards but the incidences actually trigger the readers to look back into the history and the events that took place during the reign of Jahangir's ancestors. New Historicism declares that a text must be analysed through historical research that assumes that history and fiction are inseparable (Bressler 1994:8). *Escape from Harem* arouses the reader's curiosity to do a parallel reading of this text with the recorded history of the historians. While historians are selective and manipulative with the events, fictional texts actually have no reason to manipulative facts. Historians look at the events as mere recordings of facts without indulging into the inner thought, characters and their feelings. New Historicism challenges the supposed objectivity of history, redefines the meaning of a text, and asserts that all critics must acknowledge and openly declare their biases when interpreting a work. History can be seen as the

reflection of selected truth while literature is the reflection of absolute truth. History can never provide us with the “truth” or give us a totally accumulate picture of past events or the world view of a group of people (Bressler 1994:129).

Podder in this novel exposes the life in the harem that belonged to the Mughals. The readers get the clear picture of harem from a fifteen year old Zeenat who accompanies her mother, Humra who works as a servant to the dowager queen, Ruquaih Begum (Podder 2013:2). In the beginning, as a young girl she only saw the “gloss and glitter of the harem” (Podder 3). Zeenat thought working in the harem could help her escape the drudgery of her life. One night in the month of January 1610 Zeenat is summoned to the palace through Yakub Khan, the eunuch who ruled the harem. She was carried on a heavy wooden palanquin to fulfill the lust of Jahangir who wants to bed a new woman every night. Jahangir is frustrated because the widow Mehrunnisa refused to become his wife. For four long years, Jahangir had been trying to woo Mehrunnisa. So he takes out his frustrations by sleeping with different women every night. The drunk emperor asks her to dance and later rapes her.

Silent tears streamed down her cheeks at the violence of the act. *Is this what women experience? Is the act of lovemaking so ruthless?* The pain was excruciating. *Did I imagine or did he really uttered Mehrunnisa as he entered me*, she wondered as she tasted the tears ... (Podder 9).

In the wee hours of the morning eunuch Yakub Khan comes to take her back to the woman in the harem. He sympathises with the girl and reminisces that he “had lost count of the girls who returned weeping to their homes” each night after being raped by the emperor. History has recorded that Jahangir had about 800 concubines to satisfy him. During Akbar’s rule there were about 500 concubines and had increased manifold by the time Aurangzeb ascended the throne (Podder viii). Jahangir also was an opium addict.

Night after night, for four nights, Jahangir summoned her to amuse him... Twice he made love to her. His activities were governed by the amount of wine and opium he had consumed (Podder 17).

Finally, the emperor lost interest in Zeenat and Humra became worried that they would be thrown out on to the street. Humra was aware that bearing the child of the emperor will elevate a woman’s status by several notches. There were three categories of women in the harem. The highest ranking women are called the Mahaldars who controlled the harem, followed by middle ranking women known as Paristaran-e-hudur and finally the lower wrung employees that consisted of female slaves or kaneez, the passing fancy of the emperor (Podder 19). There were often ego clashes between the Mahaldars and Princesses as these women had more power than the princesses. Zeenat finally learns that the harem is a prison for women which were heavily guarded. Intruders were blinded. Podder also exposes the life a concubine named Bahar Begum, daughter of a Rajput chieftain who was brought to harem at the age of sixteen. Her maiden name was Ambalika and she was his favourite concubine until she was twenty-one. Bahar Begum hires Zeenat as her servant. Bahar falls in love with Zafar Khan, a minor noble whom she meets at Meena Bazaar which is opened once a year for selected men to enter into the harem. Zafar Khan’s wife, Ayesha has been allotted a stall in the bazaar. When Zafar asks Bahar to elope, she refuses saying that, “once a woman enters it as a concubine, she leaves it only when she is dead” (Podder 60). However, she escapes later with Zeenat but only to be slaughtered by Jahangir’s men. Podder in an interview said the following about the Mughal harems:

There is a lot of mystery and intrigue connected with a harem in the minds of most people; the idea of unravelling the mystery excited me. There was much that went on within the confines of a harem yet the aspirations, emotions and dreams of its inmates were not very different from those of the modern women.

Indeed, the harem is mysterious place behind the glossy facade of a hedonistic life style. Babies were born and raised here. Mughal princesses lived here until they grew old as they were not allowed to marry (a rule made by Akhbar to safe guard the empire from outsiders). This is the place where women plotted and gossiped against one another. There was so much of jealousy among the

women who lived here. One of the major gossips ended when Mehrunnisa agreed to marry Jahangir. She became his twentieth wife and he bestowed her the title Nur Jahan (the light of the world). From then on Nurjahan took the reign and Jahangir took to opium and wine (Podder 33). Podder also exposes Nur Jahan's vengeance on Prince Khurram or Shahjahan who refused to marry her daughter, Laadli Baanu. Prince Khurram is often sent on war with his wife Arjumand (Mumtaz) tagging along which will eventually cause her death.

During the reign of the Mughals violence was the only weapon to control and conquer. According to Braudel in his book, *A History of Civilization*:

“Islamic rule in India as a ‘colonial experiment’ was ‘extremely violent’, and the Muslims could not rule the country except by systematic terror’. Cruelty was the norm – burnings, summary executions, crucifixions or impalements, inventive tortures. Hindu temples were destroyed to make way for mosques. On occasion there were forced conversions. If ever there were an uprising, it was instantly and savagely repressed: houses were burned, the countryside was laid waste, men were slaughtered and women were taken as slaves”. (Braudel, 1963:232-236)

Although Podder does not reveal much about the violence on the subjects, but when compared with the historical recordings, many truths seem to unfold by itself. She records the war with the Rajput King, Maharana of Mewar vividly in this novel.

The Mughal army went on rampage destroying all crops, killing ordinary peasants, looting and raping the women in the villages for miles around. The kind of bloodbath and terror unleashed by the imperial soldiers had never been seen before. (Podder 44)

Arjumand (Mumtaz) who married Shahjahan could see the “sadistic traits of the prince she adored” (Podder 44). The cruelty imposed on the Hindu Indian subjects were beyond words. Babur raised towers of Hindu skulls at Khanua when he defeated Rana Sanga in 1527 and later he repeated the same horrors after capturing the fort of Chanderi. Akbar who was supposed to be one of the few tolerant Muslim rulers, ordered a general massacre of 30000 Rajputs peasants after he captured Chithod in 1568. Aurangzeb is said to have killed 4.6 million people during his reign (Gascoigne, 1972:88-93). Cruelty was also imposed among the Mughals themselves. Quest for power and glory made the Mughals lose their humanity and love for their own kin. They committed filicide and fratricide. Prince Khusrau Mirza, the eldest Prince of Jahangir was the favourite of Akhbar, his grandfather, who wanted him to succeed as the emperor since his other two sons, Murad and Daniyal were opium addicts. Jahangir was also an opium addict and rebelled against Akhbar. Prince Khusrau was very much loved by the people as he was brought up by his grandfather, Akhbar who taught him liberal tradition he had fostered throughout his reign and brought up in the liberal tradition he had fostered, entrusting his education to teachers such as Abu`Fazl and Abu`Khair. Sheo Daft, a scholar of distinction, instructed him in Hindu religious thought and philosophy. However, Jahangir ascended the throne eight days after Akhbar's death in 1605. When Khusrau rebelled against his father, Jahangir in 1606 and in 1607, Jahangir's army defeated him and Khusrau was ordered to be blinded as a punishment though his eyesight was never completely lost. In 1616, he was handed over to Asaf Khan, the brother of Nur Jahan.

Nur Jahan felt that Shahjahan was a threat and she again and again sent him on missions. His continued refusal to marry Laadli, her daughter made her hate him more. Prince Parvez was drinking himself to death while Shahryar was a weak and irresponsible person. (Podder 68). In 1620, Prince Khusrau was handed over Shah Jahan and in 1622, he was killed on the orders of his brother (Mahajan 1997:126-7). Shah Jahan took Prince Khusrau as his pawn when he was ordered to go to Deccan.

“It will be a difficult journey for a blind man. The terrain is rough and the circumstances harsh, “ he tried one last time. “I will take care of him. He is my brother” (Podder 71).

Jahangir knew that he had “the death warrant of his eldest son” when he agreed to allow Shah Jahan to take along his brother (Podder 71). Then one morning, Khusrau is found dead in his room. In the novel, the despaired Salamat Khan finds out through the guard as, ‘It was done on the orders of Shah Jahan’ (Podder 111). The cruelty and heartlessness of Shah Jahan is reflected when he announces that:

‘My poor brother, he died of diarrhea yesterday night’, he declared loudly, daring anyone to defy his statement. ‘Let it be announced through the kingdom that Prince Khusrau fell prey to his ailment’. (Podder 111)

Zeenat’s husband Salamat could not accept the death of Khusrau and weeps. He started blaming himself for not having been able to prevent his death. Zeenat consoles him.

‘Please don’t torture yourself. You couldn’t have prevented it. The Mughal dynasty is known for such deeds. After all, even Jahangir tried to put his own father out of the way when his rebellion failed. It is rumoured that even Shahenshah Akbar didn’t die a natural death.’ Zeenat tried to ease the conscience of her husband (Podder 112).

From Deccan, Shahjahan is summoned to proceed to Qandahar by Jahangir. Instead, Shahjahan writes to his father asking him grant him the authority to administer the state of Punjab (Podder 125). Jahangir becomes furious upon this demand and decides to imprison him for treason and disobeying his orders. Later, Shahjahan decided to overthrow his weak father who is addicted to opium and wine and the influence of Nur Jahan who wants to make Shahryar, her son-in-law the next emperor. Podder shows how Jahangir actually mourns the actions of Shahjahan.

‘The Mughal history is fraught with revolts carried out by sons against their fathers.’... ‘First it was I who raised the flag of mutiny against my father, the Great Akbar, and then it was Khusrau against me, and now Shahjahan, my beloved son who has risen mutiny.’ (Podder 126-7)

However, Jahangir’s army was too strong for Shahjahan. The rebels were pushed towards the hills of Malwa and had to take refuge in the “dense forest fringing hills” (Podder 128). The threatened Jahangir under the influence of his Queen Nur Jahan tried to make his second son Shahjahan surrender to him by taking his grandsons as hostage. Shahjahan who was on the run for three years finally decides to appeal for clemency from the ailing emperor. He wrote to his ailing father begging pardon for all his faults.

The emperor replied that if Shahjahan would send his sons Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb to court, and surrender captured forts of Rohtas and Asirgarh, he would be forgiven (Podder 141).

Shahjahan’s elder brother, Prince Parvez dies of a strange illness. The path for the throne was clearing for him. There was only the weak Shahryar who is in the clutches of Nur Jahan. Emperor Jahangir dies in 1627 and Asaf Khan quickly informs Shahjahan. At Lahore, Shahryar declares himself as the emperor of Mughal Empire and seized the treasury. Meanwhile, Asaf Khan has declared Khusrau’s son, Dawar Baksh as the next emperor in order to buy time for Shahjahan to return to Kashmir (Podder 145). Dawar Baksh marches to Lahore and defeats Shahryar and imprisoned him. Shahjahan ordered Asaf Khan, his father-in-law to blind Shahryar (Podder 148). After deceitfully taking over as emperor, Shahjahan ordered to kill all of his brothers children and Jahangir’s two brothers Murad and Daniyal’s children. Khusrau’s sons Dilawar Baksh, Garashap, Sharyar, Tamarus, Hoshang were executed along with other male cousin brothers and uncle’s sons on Jan 23, 1628 at Lahore fort by Asaf Khan, the scheming father-in-law of Shah Jahan. All male relatives of Mughal dynasty were executed except Shah Jahan and his own sons (Majumder 2007:197).

Shahjahan was thirty-six when he became the fifth Emperor of the Mughal Empire and had to “step over the bodies of many brothers to reach it” (Podder 150). He gave the title Mumtaz Mahal to his third wife, Arjumand Banu Begum. The news of famine and irrepressible rulers in Deccan and Gujerat dragged the whole family again to Deccan. Arjumand and the children who had been with Shahjahan all while had to start another long and tedious journey. Arjumand was pregnant with her

14th child. Besides being warned by the physician of her weak womb and fragile body, Arjumand was constantly pregnant.

‘Her body will not endure the ordeal. It is already weak from innumerable child bearings.’

The physician had shaken his head gravely (Podder 159).

Arjumand dies after giving birth to her fourteenth child. Shahjahan locked himself in chamber for seven days. He hated his youngest daughter, Gauharara. His eldest daughter, Jahanara took over the duties of running the harem. After mourning for five years, Shahjahan was resuming his duty. He started his plan to build a beautiful monument for Arjumand. The building of Taj Mahal took twenty- two long years to complete using 22,000 labourers and 1,000 elephants. The monument was built entirely out of white marble, which was brought in from all over India and central Asia. After an expenditure of approximately 32 million rupees Taj Mahal was finally completed in the year 1653. Meantime, Aurangzeb grew impatient of his father’s passion for art and buildings. Aurangzeb was given the command of Deccan while Dara stayed with the emperor. Zeenat who chronicles all the happenings in the Mughal empire from the time of Jahangir, feels that Dara and Aurangzeb are at loggerheads. Podder also exposes the characteristics of Aurangzeb through the eyes of Zeenat.

‘Aurangzeb professes to be a puritan. He claims to be a pious Muslim.

According to him, Islam does not permit wine, music and dancing girls. In any case, he believes Dara to be a charlatan and kafir’ (Podder 184).

Aurangzeb hated his eldest brother, Dara Shikoh. The emperor has decided to hand over the reign to Dara and is supported by his eldest daughter, Jahanara. There was also a gossip in the harem that Jahanara was ‘having an incestuous relationship with the emperor and that is the reason why she has so much power over the emperor’ (Podder 189). The French physician François Bernier, who was employed at court for several years from 1659, describes how Shahjahan, realising that a suitor was hiding in Jahanara’s bath-tub, ordered the cauldron to be lit underneath and only left the room when he was sure the victim was dead. On another occasion he is reputed to have poisoned Jahanara’s steward who had been suggested as a potential husband.

Jahanara was close with Dara Shikoh and he had promised her to lift the ban on marriage for Mughal princesses, which Akbar had introduced. Had he triumphed, her power would likely have continued. However, Aurangzeb wrested India's crown from his father before the end of June 1658, after defeating his brother Prince Dara Shikoh's armies, first at Dharmat near Ujjain (15th April 1658) and the second, led by Dara himself, at Samugarh on 29th May 1658. Aurangzeb secured his position by making Murad, his brother and accomplice in his impetuous pursuit for power, his prisoner, by treachery, on 25th June. On Aurangzeb's ascent to the throne, Shahjahan was put into the Agra Fort as a prisoner and Jahanara joined her father in imprisonment where she devoted herself to his care until his death.

His beloved daughter, Jahanara refused to abandon her father and opted to stay with him within the confines of the fort. She continued to act as the intermediary between the ailing Shahjahan and Aurangzeb (Podder 204).

Aurangzeb murdered his eldest brother Dara Shikoh because he was favoured by Shah Jahan. Before killing Dara Shikoh, he was paraded along with his young son in a very disgraceful manner by Aurangzeb on an elephant and later beheaded him. He also killed the other two brothers Murad and Shah Shuja to occupy the throne. Mughal history had not seen such a devious man as Aurangzeb (Podder 204). He is a master in the art of deception and is responsible for Shahjahan’s mysterious death. Shah Jahan survived his confinement by nearly eight years and the disgraceful manner of his burial will ever remain a stigma. Podder ends the novel with Aurangzeb banning music and dancing in the empire and “the free flow of wine and merriment came to an end” (Podder 205). Aurangzeb reigned cruelly for 49 years. After him, the Mughal empire slowly began to decline. Bahadur Shah Zafar (1821-1857) was the last Mughal Emperor, son of Akhbar Shah II. He was the 23rd in line after Babar, the founder of Mughal Empire. He was arrested by British in September 1857 because he took part in a mutiny. The British killed 22 of his 24 sons. He died in exile in Burma in 1862. His mausoleum is in Burma (Verma, 2009: 97). The last living Mughal

descendant in India is Sultana Begum, aged 54, the great granddaughter in law of the last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar. Her husband is Mirza Bedar Bakht. She receives Rp400 pension and resides in a 66sq feet room and runs a tea stall in Howrah (Verma, 2009:99).

3. CONCLUSION

Shah Jahan, Mumtaz, Taj Mahal and various other names and elements that are linked to the Mughal empire are indeed the household names even among the children of modern India. These names and terms never fail to trigger a sense of majesty and supremacy and are associated with a sort of fairy tale like romanticism. But the truth is a far cry from the fairy tale like story of a heroic and just king building a heavenly castle as a monument of love for his beloved queen. Contrary to what is popularly known or what the masses would like to believe, the era of Mughal dynasty is one that has the taint of vengeance, lust, fanaticism, cruelty and brutality written with the colour of blood. And it is not fair to leave the story of this kings and their deeds in the intoxicating romantic air as many of us would like to believe. This is because they, the rulers and the subjects in the Mughal dynasty are not mystical characters that can be moulded to suit the mood of the day. Instead, they are figures in history that shaped a part of a nation. Revealing the truth, the whole truth, in absolute, is the only way justice could be done to a nation that was under the seizure of these rulers for almost 300 years. Only by doing this the scholars, let them be archaeologist, historians or people of literature are doing justice in guiding the masses to understand the path endured by their ancestors prior in building a sovereign nation. This is exactly what Tanushree Podder did. At a glance, *Escape from Harem* is just a novel that describes the life of Shahjahan and Arjumand. But for a trained reader, Tanushree Podder's writing actually triggers the mind to peep into the real historical recordings of Indian history during the Muslim invasion; in areas never highlighted in any history classes. For once the eyes which are blinded by the brightness and grandeur of Taj Mahal were opened. Historians do not look into the characters and the traits of the people involved in the major incidences of history. It is the fiction writers who take the trouble to give life to these innate characters. However, when looked into the new historicism's point of view, a text brings more sense and exposes the real motive of a writer when a parallel reading is done by cross referring the history. In general, the historians have only recorded the positive aspects of the Mughal Empire. I don't deny the authenticity of historical recordings but we must remember that historians have the option and liberty on deciding to what extent they want to reveal the truth. The revealing of the negative aspect is so trivial compared to the extent they were glorified. This is where *Escape from Harem* came in. It patches and fills the vacuum left by the historians. In doing so, Tanushree's work did not in any way disturb history. As a matter of fact *Escape From Harem* strengthens and fortifies the history by looking at it from another perspective; an untold perspective. By doing so, she gives the opportunity to the readers to decide if it justifies that the great granddaughter in-law of the last and the 23rd Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, the descendent of Mughal dynasty, the greatest of dynasty that once ruled India should be running a tea stall on Fore House Road in Howrah, drawing a monthly pension of Rs400 from the government of India (Verma 99).

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