

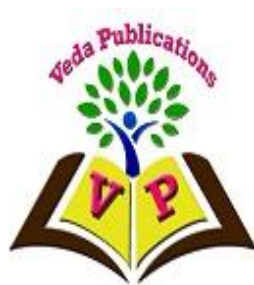


## BEING RESHMA – A JOURNEY OF ACID ATTACK SURVIVOR

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### ABSTRACT

Acid attacks are a grave, heinous social problem which purely is the outcome of vengeance, rejection of male in patriarchal society. These attacks are seen in all communities, castes and religion, on a young girl to an aged woman, in privacy or in public places, inside the house or outside the house, by friend or a family member, a relative or a non-relative, in familiar or not so familiar circumstances. The present paper makes an attempt to study the trauma, humiliation, loss of dignity, desperate attempts to die, depression and finally the success in the journey of acid attack survivor from ordinary to *Being Reshma*.

**Keywords:** Acid Attack, Burning, Humiliation, Disfigure.

### Citation:

**APA** Udipikar.N (2016) *Being Reshma – A Journey Of Acid Attack Survivor*.Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature- JOELL, 3(4), 103-106

**MLA** Udipikar,Prassana "*Being Reshma – A Journey Of Acid Attack Survivor.*" Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature-JOELL 3.4(2016):103-106.



Sexual assault, rape, female child murder, dowry deaths, sexual harassment, and the most heinous, devastating, and degrading violence is acid attack. These are only a few of the many ways that women are persecuted. A serious and horrible societal issue, acid assaults are only the result of male rejection and retaliation in patriarchal societies. A young girl or an elderly woman may be attacked in private or in public, inside or outside the home, by a friend or family member, a related or not, and in situations that are familiar or unfamiliar. These attacks occur in all groups, castes, and religions. This dissertation seeks to examine the psychological effects of trauma, shame, loss of dignity, suicide attempts, sadness, and ultimately, success in the journey of acid attack survivor from ordinary to *Being Reshma*.

Reshma Qureshi, the survivor of acid attack expresses candidly her ordeal in her autobiography *Being Reshma*. "My attack happened faster than lightening..... The two men pulled my hair back, pushed me to the ground, poured acid all over my face, and disappeared as quickly as they have arrived on the scene. A few flicks of their wrists are all it took to induce a storm in my life (pp.75).

Acid attacks are societal, gender, and male-dominated issues. In most situations, it is either retaliation for the in-laws' failure to provide the dowry that was required, the victim's rejection of sexual advances, or an attempt to establish the authority of the husband and in-laws. Jamaluddin, the husband of Reshma's sister Gulshan, is the one who wants to deform Gulshan since her parents could not meet his dowry requirements. When her mother-in-law showered her with paraffin, Gulshan fled her husband's home. Since then, she and her two

kids have been residing at her father's home. Desperate for retribution, Jamaluddin abducts his son from school and beats his in-laws when they come to his house to claim custody of their grandfather. So, Gulshan filed a case with the police against Jamaluddin seeking her son's custody. He along with his cousin and nephew followed Gulshan with a plan to disfigure her by throwing acid. But as Reshma was wearing Gulshan's 'niqab', Jamaluddin's associates mistook Reshma for Gulshan and emptied the bottle of acid on her face by throwing her down on the road.

Reshma losing faith in human relationship wonders:

My own sister's husband had attacked me with acid. He had actually wanted to attack my sister, his own wife. Could we trust anyone in this world? (pp. 116).

The attack took place during day time in the busy market place of Mau Aima. The callousness of onlookers was unbelievable. They all stood looking at Reshma who had fallen on the road coiling in pain,

I screamed in anger and I writhed in agony over the loss of my dignity. (pp.76).

Around hundred people watched both the sisters from a safe distance. Not a single person stepped forward to help them. The writer says:

Those narrow streets with over a hundred people bore witness to my pain, but no one had the courage or the will to stop my attackers as they fled (pp.77).

The scene of Gulshan helplessly begging people for help was heart wrenching. Reshma narrates that her



experience was like burning in an “invincible fire”. She reduces herself to a stray dog “howling for help that fell on disgusting, apathetic, wilfully deaf ears” (p.77). The onlookers were there to watch what would happen next. She wonders “whether humanity had ceased to exist?”.

Apart from physical pain, Reshma is in for shame and insults. When she is taken to a hospital, they deny admission and even first aid unless they get the copy of FIR. The ignorance of the hospital takes toll on the victims. The doctors were bereft of the basic knowledge. They were unaware that “in case of severe injury to an individual, such as road accidents, acid attacks, and rape, the hospital must treat the victim first, without asking for a copy of the FIR” (pp.82). The pangs of humiliation were unbearable in the police station.

When she loses her vision, her hair she thinks of her future. No beautiful thoughts that a seventeen year girl would dream come to her. “The most pleasant outcome was death”. For the first time when she sees her own reflection in the mirror her shock is astounding. She was “transfixed” at her own reflection. Her eyes were deformed. Her face was her enemy. She wished for death. She felt that she cannot go in public. People would be scared and would think that she was a “walking curse”. She tries to commit suicide by taking a sharp knife in the kitchen. Ammi and Aziz intervene and console her. They tell her that she has to survive to fight for justice against Jamaluddin and get back her nephew Saufi from clutches of Jamaluddin.

As they had no money for the series of surgeries that Reshma had to undergo, her brother Aziz

reached out to every NGO hoping somebody would be able to foot the bills. It was during this time of need, he was introduced to Ria by Vivek Shukla, who connected the needy people to those who offer help. Ria a young girl who had vowed to find a purpose in fashion, barely twenty two had hosted *Make Love Not Scars* opted to pay the fees of Reshma’s surgeries under Dr.Jain. Through Ria, Reshma came in contact with many acid attack victims. They decide to curb acid attacks. There was increase in acid attacks in spite of Supreme Court regulations. *Make Love Not Scar* drafted a request letter for an implementation of the ban on over-the –counter sale of acid and a stronger implementation of the Poisons Act and Poisons Rules. Ria asked whether Reshma would be interested in shooting beauty tutorials that could potentially change the way the world viewed acid attacks. The campaign was titled #BeautyTipsByReshma. Ria and the team prepared the perfect petition for the Government of India – one which would later be linked to every video produced for the #endacidsale campaign. Reshma shot three videos namely:

1. Beauty Tips by Reshma: How to Get Perfect Red Lips
2. Beauty Tips by Reshma: How to Apply Eyeliner
3. Beauty Tips by Reshma: How to get Rid of Dark Spots Naturally.

The videos were launched on 31 August, 2015. Over 100,000 people had signed the petition. Over 1 million people viewed the video on tube. Reshma felt as though her spirit had soared higher than before. Her journey of life had begun. There was no looking back. Before meeting Ria, Reshma’s family was living



“under the weight of fear, anger and financial burdens” and within a few months after they met Ria, Reshma had “multiple rounds of free surgeries”, “made real friends”, “connected with other survivors” and most importantly she felt that “she had a significant purpose in life” and that was “to end the open sale of acid”.

Thus Reshma – the acid attack victim had oared her journey from ordinary to extra ordinary, from impossible to possible, from weakness to greatness, from rejection to acceptance, from failure to success. Due to the campaign, on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, 2016 the Indian States started enforcing the ban on free sale of acid. Reshma had triumphed against the odds.

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