



“Honour killings’ suggest that the female is a symbol of her family honour, and that any marring of this symbolism requires that she (the symbol) should be ‘removed’. So then, the idea that women are linked with honour is not a matter of esteem; rather it is a gross project of objectification and the institutionalisation of control and exploitation of the human and moral rights of women” (Hassim, 2007: 46). This forms the backdrop against which *Daughters are Diamonds* is set.

While ‘honour’ killings (such as those prevalent in Pakistan and Iraq) may not be a feature in South African Indian Muslim society, traditionalist and patriarchal cultures still place a number of restrictions on the autonomy of the South African Indian Muslim woman. These include exclusion from secondary and tertiary education, the right to earn an income, and decision-making authority.

The book gets its title from the statement “women are diamonds”, “often used by Indian Muslim traditionalists to justify the abject seclusion of women.” I myself feel rather dishonoured by this statement as it conjures up notions of female subordination and oppression.

A sample of six women (each facing their own trials and tribulations) forms the core of the study. The all-important question remains: Are women able to “carve out a space for themselves within which a fully reflexive life may be lived in spite of the restrictions placed on them”? I could not help but feel awestruck by the strength of character and zest for life portrayed by these women.

Hassim's deliberate choice of names for her subjects (in order to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of her research) works well to paint a clear image of the life worlds occupied by each woman. "Mira (27, Going Places) is young and spirited, and her name is new-age and suggestive of her progressive outlook. Fiona (35, Limited) is a name found among the upper class strata of both English and Indian Muslim society. Fiza (42, Subservient Daughter-in-Law and Wife) is an uncommon name, but refers to the atmosphere and the potential for the subject/namesake to ascend into the atmosphere. Sima (44, Modern Mother-in-Law) and Salma (46, Cheated-On) are names more common in traditionalist families, especially in Pakistani society. Zara (59, Unmarried) is an older name that continues to be used."

In my opinion, Hassim's book (which was completed as a research requirement for her Masters dissertation) is a valuable contribution to research on gender relations and social control.

Hassim identifies dual-gender research and the exploration of other traditionalist cultures within South Africa, for example the Greek, Portuguese, and African cultures, as recommendations for future research.

What is interesting is that from the very outset, Hassim asserts that *Daughters are Diamonds* is not a feminist work, nor is it a pro- or anti-cultural text. Instead, it is a "comment on the many contradictions that operate in everyday social life as we know it" and a "treatise on the objectification of women in honour-bound sectors of society." A must-read for all gender and cultural studies enthusiasts.

Read Shafinaaz Hassim's *Daughters are Diamonds* blog at

<http://daughtersarediamonds.blogspot.com>