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A TRANS-CULTURAL FEMINISTIC STUDY OF TESS OF THE D'URBER- VILLES AND THE HOLY WOMAN

Abstract

This trans-cultural study aims to examine two specific texts to crystallize the suppression and marginalization of women in societies and cultures where patriarchy subordinates' women so much so that even their sexuality is defined and controlled by it. The researcher selected two writings from two different writers and diverse cultures i.e. Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles, which portrays the plight of women in Victorian England and Qaisra Shahraz's The Holy Woman which shows the subjugation of women in twenty-first century Pakistan. This qualitative study makes a comparative analysis of the female protagonists whose sexuality is controlled by the patriarch through rape and forced marriage respectively. The study also throws light on how female sexual charms, an important aspect of female sexuality, are defined and highlighted in the discourses of patriarchal cultures viewing them with only male gaze and depriving them of an identity of their own. The theoretical insight of feminism is used as a tool to analyze data. Through the discussion of these sexually exploited characters, the study concludes that the female sexuality is the site where male hegemony reigns supreme.

Key words; *patriarchy, marginalization, sexuality, rape, forced marriage, male hegemony*

INTRODUCTION

Sexual exploitation of women assumes a major form as sexual objectification in which women are treated as a sex object only. Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) analyze how in a socio-cultural context, the experience of being a female as a sexual object can be understood. In addition, these researches urge psychologists to investigate issues of oppression under patriarchal hegemony at interpersonal and institutional levels. They demand social justice for exploited women and communities (Speight & Vera, 2004). Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) observe that many women are sexually objectified and treated as an object. Their value is assessed through its use by others. Sexual objectification implies that a woman's body and her physical parts are separated from her as a person and she is looked upon basically as a physical object of male sexual desire (Bartky, 1990).

Many women also face more extreme forms such as actual sexual victimization i.e., rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment besides these everyday commonplace forms of sexual objectification, (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). for example, Fisher et al and White et al calculate that one in four women have been victims of rape or attempted rape, and more than half of college women have gone through some sort of sexual victimization(2000; 2001).

Society views a sexually abused woman in a totally different perspective than before she had been preyed upon. She is scandalized as an object of gossip. The whole blame is put on the woman and the perpetrator of the crime is let free of charge. So there is duality of moral standards for men and women (Hera Cook in Clark, 2006, p. 57).

Our society also does not mete out justice to the victims and regards women who are sexually victimized with contempt. According to Clark (2006) Sexual violence in Victorian England was considered a crime, not against the victim women, but a crime against the fathers and husbands. Midwives were directed by law to report pregnant women without wed-

lock. These unmarried women were forced to reveal the name of the father of the child. Failing which, such women were imprisoned. In England and Scotland, 'unwed mothers faced humiliating public punishments, such as standing in front of the church in sackcloth and ashes (Clark, 2006, p. 60).

Another form of female sexual control by society is forced marriage. Sindh is one of the important provinces of Pakistan which is strictly patriarchal where there are strict restrictions on the female behaviour. Sindhi society links family honor to female virtue. Therefore, men construct the roles for women in order to maintain their honor with practices like karokari, vanni, haque bukshwai. The Sindhi society is particularly dominated by the feudal patriarchs in the rural areas of Sindh where women are subordinated by several factors that hinder their development. One of these practices is haque bakshwai. Khan (n.d.) comments on this practice in which a woman is forced to marry inanimate and holy objects like the Quran or even a tree. This practice, according to him is called 'haque bakshish' which means to withdraw from the right to marry. This inhuman practice usually runs in the families of feudal lords whose purpose is to stop the property from being transferred out of family hands at the time of marriage of their daughter or sister (n.pag).

In a report titled 'Married to the Quran' in the Pakistani weekly newspaper The Friday Times, it is mentioned that according to a news published in TheKhabrain, many feudal lords in Sindh had married their daughters and sisters to the holy Quran. A ceremony was organized after the girl of the family was asked to take a bath. The holy Quran was put before her and the menfolk asked forgiveness of the girl as she would be condemned to a life of celibacy after this ritual in which she would read the Quran every day. In Sindh, ex-minister Murad Shah's sister and two daughters, MPA Shabbir Shah's sister, three daughters of Mir Awwal Shah of Matiari, daughters and sisters of Sardar Ghulam of Mahar tribe, of Sardar Dadan and Nur Khan of the Lund tribe, and the daughters of the pir of

Bharchundi Sharif, were all married to the Quran. All this was done to secure the share of the land which was to go to them. In this way, the feudallords prevented the redistribution of land (Mazhar, 2003).

Kidwai and Siddiqui (2011) report Qaisra Shahraz's remarks on this practice in her interview with Sami Rafiq, 'It is based on the premise of subjecting women to a life of celibacy and religious devotion. It is totally un-Islamic and I make this clear from the start in my work and at various other points. A custom related to economy - purely to keep the land in the family' (p. xxx).

This sexual control of women has prevented them from developing their full potential as human beings and denied them their rights of independent choice and authenticity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many theorists such as De Beauvoir (1948, 1956), Showalter (1981), Braidotti (1994), Grosz (1995), Butler (1993), and Bordo (1993) have expressed their views regarding the sexual control of women. Their insights serve as a background support for my article and provide the theoretical lens to perceive the texts. Bordo calls woman a politically inscribed entity, controlled by patriarchy '... from foot binding and corseting to rape and battering to compulsory heterosexuality, forced sterilization, unwanted pregnancies' (p. 21). Braidotti calls female body 'a culturally coded socialised entity' (p. 238). Grosz (1995) finds the female bodies as 'inscriptive model . . . marked, scarred, transformed and written upon or constructed by the various regimes of institutional, discursive and non discursive power as a particular kind of body' (p. 33). Butler thinks that female roles are often acted out under the force of society: 'Performance is not a singular act or event but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo...' (Butler, 1993, p. 95).

De Beauvoir (1956) believes that a woman's position in

society is marginal. She investigates the ways through which women are exploited. She is exploited through the lies of 'love, devotion and the gift of herself' (p. 677). She observes that man subordinates and exploits woman by controlling her sexuality. When she becomes an adolescent, the father has 'all power over her', he 'transfers it in toto to the husband', when she gets married (p. 107). In the patrilineal societies, she becomes a man's property. A woman is a 'perpetuate minor' who is treated like a commodity by her guardian who is either a father, a husband or the latter's heir, and in the default of these, the state. These guardians could transfer their rights at will, as a father gave his daughter in marriage or a husband gave her over to a new husband (p. 111-112). Thus a woman has no control on her sexuality. The views about sexuality have been changing as they suited the patriarchs. The matters regarding her preference in marriage, childbirth are solely decided by the patriarchs.

Commenting on the stereotypical role building of women which is another form of exploitation of women, Showalter (1981) remarks that the term women's sphere implied that in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the roles, activities and behaviours of women which were thought as appropriate for women were quite distinguished from those of men. The Victorian and Jacksonian ideal had separate roles for the both in which women were subordinate (p. 198).

She thinks that women's role in society is to pay attention to her dress, to apply make up and the art of coquetry to hold their husbands. This case accentuates women's role as an erotic object, a sexual partner and a reproducer (Showalter, 1981, pp. 84-85). There is no escape away from the traditional feminine world. The support women need to be the equals of men in the concrete sense is accorded by neither the society nor their husbands (de Beauvoir, 1956). Showalter's idea that a woman's sphere is different and her position is subordinate in society is quite relevant and proves how they are dictated to behave in a way approved by society and any breach of these social norms entitles her to be called a wanton or fallen woman.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a comparative analysis of two female protagonists. It is designed on the qualitative pattern in which the extracts from the primary texts have been used as data, and secondary sources like critics' books, journals and web sources will consolidate my point and the existential feminist insight will be applied to orient my viewpoint side by side. My study assumes that society is patriarchal where super structures like religion, law, education and economy etc. are under male control. Therefore, in patriarchal societies women are marginalized and consequently sexually exploited.

To prove my argument that women are sexually controlled by males, two novels have been used for analysis.

1. An English novel *Tess of the D'Urberville* by Thomas Hardy depicting Victorian England.
2. A Pakistani novel *The Holy Woman* by Qaisra Shahraz reflecting 21st century interior Sindhi culture in Pakistan.

The argument is applied on the female protagonists from the prescribed novels: Tess Durbey field from working class of Victorian England in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Zarri Bano from feudal class of Modern Pakistan in *The Holy Woman*.

Close reading and observation have been applied to collect data. Relevant extracts from the prescribed novels in the form of dialogues or situations have been selected as data for analysis. The researcher has highlighted those areas of the prescribed novels which are related to her point. With the help of close reading and observation, the textual evidence has been collected and analyzed. Besides the researcher has incorporated secondary sources such as library books and journals containing critics and theorists views and web sources like online books, articles, review and web pages etc. to support her analysis of data. For the discussion of exploitation of female protagonists, comparison and contrast technique has been used. The feminist views of de Beauvoir and insights of Showalter, Braidotti, Bordo, Grosz and Butler have been applied to further prove the thesis.

ANALYSIS

Tess D'Urberville in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is a sexually targeted character. Tess' sexuality has been highlighted throughout the novel. It appears as if the narrator himself is in love with her physicality and makes use of a 'voyeuristic gazing' (Widowson, 2010, p. 69) in describing her female charms. In the club walking scene, the narrator emphasizes her pouted up deep red mouth which had not yet taken its definite shape. He notes her habit of thrusting her lower lip on the middle of her upper one when they met together after a word was uttered (Hardy, 1978, p. 52). This habit of her became almost an allure when she grew into a woman. For young man with even the least desire, that little upward push in the middle of her red upper lip was maddening. Her lips and teeth brought to mind 'the old Elizabethan simile of roses filled with snow' (Hardy, 1978, p. 209). In her first encounter with Alec, he looked at her as he spoke, in a way that made her blush a little. She is reported to have an attribute which is a disadvantage for her. She is much overgrown than her age, 'and it was this that caused Alec D'Urbervilles' eyes to rivet themselves on her. It was a luxuriance of aspect, a fullness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was' (Hardy, 1978, p. 82). Brady (1999) notes many responses to Tess 'that focus on the violence performed by the text on the heroine's body' (p. 102) and again one common notion in Hardy's narration, that is, 'its focus on women and on female bodies' (103). Millgate (2004) quotes the words of a reviewer who was later recognized by Hardy as George Saintsbury, ' . . . that Tess' sexual attractions were too much insisted upon . . . (p. 294). In that famous paragraph, when Tess is just woken from her sleep, this physicality reaches to its highest. When she was yawning, the red interior of her mouth was visible. The narrator compares it to that of a snake. He notes the satin delicacy of her hand arching above her coiled-up hair, her face flushed with sleep, and her eye lids heavy over her pupils. 'It was a moment when a woman's soul is more incarnate than at any other time; when the most spiritu-

al beauty bespeaks itself flesh; and sex takes the outside place in the presentation'(Hardy, 1978, p. 231).

Boumelha (1982) compares Tess's sexuality with Hardy's other heroines and remarks that Tess' exceptional physical nature dooms her as it arouses erotic responses from men. She is bound with male images like Angel visualizes her rustic innocence while Alec finds her proud indifference so challenging (p. 125).

Tess' sexual exploitation and finally her rape are closely linked with her economic deprivation. Alec D'Urberville embodies the physical threat to Tess. When he first sets eyes on Tess, he views her as a possible victim of his sexual desires. So, he decides to take advantage of her simplicity and naivety. She refuses his offer to drive her home as she ' had never quite got over her original mistrust of him . . . ' (Hardy, p. 109). He takes undue advantage of her insecurity, and misleads her through Chase where he takes possession of her helpless and lonely being. Due to the apparent taciturnity of the text, the critics are divided whether the incident at Chase is a rape or seduction. To me, this episode is a proof of patriarchy's efforts to control and possess women's sexuality through the superior force of maleness. Tess' helplessness is symbolized by the drops of tears lingering on her eyelashes (Hardy, p. 119). Widowson (2010) calls ambiguity of seduction or rape about his 'pure heroine' and about marriage, separation, bigamy, extramarital relations as a sign of Hardy's being recast in the mould of feminist thinking about sexuality and patriarchy (p. 75). We can diagnose Tess' case. At the time when she is sent to Trantridge, she is just 16 years old, only a minor in the definition of law. She is grateful to Alec for providing her a job and her family a new cob and the children some toys but she plainly makes it clear that she does not love him and does not like his amorous advances towards her. Besides when Alec returns, she is asleep like a tired, innocent child (Hardy, pp. 117-119), a clear proof of her not being a participant in the act. There are many occasions before the Chase incident when Tess

resists his advances. For example, when Tess rejects a kiss from Alec by wiping her cheek with a handkerchief, he threatens, 'You shall be made sorry for that . . . Unless, that is, you agree willingly to let me do it again and no handkerchief' (Hardy, p. 97) or during the ride through the Chase, she pushes him back fearing that he was taking undue advantage of her drowsiness, he shouts at her, 'What am I, to be repulsed so by a mere chit like you?' and asks her authoritatively 'Will you, I ask, once more, show your belief in me by letting me clasp you with my arm? Come between us two and nobody else, now' (Hardy, p. 115). Therefore, it is always Alec who is pursuing and forcing Tess into compliance of his desires. Gedraitis (n.d.) analyses the incident in the Chase in the light of the legal definition of seduction and rape, and proves through evidence that Tess, being asleep is unable to show either willingness or consent. He contends against many critics that considering Alec as Tess' master would be stretching the text too far and maintains that text itself argues for Alec's role as master and employer in the workplace. His efforts to forcefully dominate Tess, fall under the sexual harassment paradigm' (p. 4). In addition to this there is evidence in the text that Alec has a history of being a sexual exploiter. Tess' confrontation with Car Darch proves Darch's intimate relation with Alec when she asserts, 'Ah, th'st think th' beest everybody, dostn't—because th' beest first favourite with he just now! I'm as good as two of such!' (Hardy, p. 111). So, the reader comes to know Tess is not the first victim Alec has preyed upon. Fowler (n.d.) analyses the scene soon after the rape in which Tess has an encounter with a Biblical text painter. He considers her fear at the footsteps of a stranger, her query of a sinful act that is not one's own seeking, and her loss of faith as a sign of her being violated against her will. He writes at the end of his article that like literary doctors, we can analyze Tess' case that she has been violated in the most wicked way and is unable to process the whole data, as most people do after a horrible mishap. This, therefore, proves that Tess has been raped and not merely seduced.

When Alec meets her at Flintcomb Ash, he at once realizes that Tess is vulnerable economically. So he asks her about her poor economic condition, hinting that it was harder than when she was with him, harder than she deserved (Hardy, p. 393). Thus, in the apparent guise of sympathy with Tess and her family, he has his self-serving motives. He persistently follows her trying to tempt her into surrendering her sexuality to his base desires. In this regard, he offers to do something for her and for her entire family. Tess's answer to this is very logical. She asks him not to mention her little brothers and sisters to make her break down. If he wants to help them, as they most need it, he should do it without telling her. But a bourgeoisie like Alec cannot make a bad bargain. He waits till Tess reaches the margin of her forbearance. Gregor (1974) has discussed Hardy's characters from two levels of depiction: as a human being and as a tool in the narrative. The substitute title he suggests for *TD* is very interesting: Poor Wounded Name: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. He notes that Alec presents to Tess a sense of power. As her economic and sexual exploiter, 'Alec D'Urberville enters the field, now wholly intent on winning Tess back to him, having abandoned his preaching and resumed the old jaunty guise under which Tess had first known her admirer' (p. 193). When he finds out that Tess and her family have been turned out of their father's property, his voice has the undertone of victory over a breaking strength. Nemesvari (2002) draws a comparison between Claggart and Alec and concludes, 'Claggart's attempt to ruin Billy through his false accusation of sedition is much like Alec's attempt to ruin Tess through his relentless and forced seduction; each seeks to encompass the object of his desire as a way of controlling the response the object evokes, and of demonstrating power over her' (p. 89).

Thus, Tess succumbs to the sexual desires of Alec to save the other members of her family, particularly Liza Lu from falling a prey to such fate as hers. Regarding the loss of her identity and being labeled as a kept woman, Gregor (1974)

observes: 'Tess is to accept this division within herself to such an extent that when Angel meets her at Sandbourne, he feels that her original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers'(p. 194). In the light of above discussion, it is evident that first Tess is raped and then she is seduced to live with him for a few weeks more as she does not have the means and heart to leave her family in trouble. Likewise, Alec uses economic excuse to win over Tess for the second time. In both cases rape and seduction are the different forms of sexual exploitation of Tess.

Though Qaisra Shahraz is a female writer but she has not been able to resist the temptation to exploit female sexuality in order to attain popular approval for her creation. That is why Zarri Bano's sexuality in *The Holy Woman* has been utilized on more than one occasion. In the beginning of the novel, Zarri is the focus of Sikandar's male gaze who finds her in an elegant black shalwar kameze, with a matching black chiffon dupatta which was casually wrapped around her shoulders. It was forming a very beautiful frame for her stunningly gorgeous face (Shahraz, p. 12). Again when Sikandar comes to meet Zarri in order to convince her to resist the decision taken by her patriarchy, she is presented sitting in her lawn in the most casual way. Her long wavy hair was around her shoulders and without dupatta, she felt herself bare. In order to shield herself from his eyes, she held one arm against her breast and put the other on her cheek, but Sikander's eyes were everywhere. They were focused on her face, then moving down her creamy white throat, they slid down her soft feminine curves, her half naked arms and finally her tousled hair (p. 122). Later in Egypt when her privacy is invaded by the sudden arrival of Ibrahim Musa, she is similarly the centre of his gaze. His eyes focused on her slim figure showed off by the cut of her red dress and 'without her burqa, she felt naked under his gaze. Her back throbbed imagining his male gaze roaming on it' (p. 203). The most sensual and sexualized image of her is given when on Ruby's mehndi, on Gulshan and other women's request, she danc-

es: ' Slowly her arms, hands and legs began to sway in graceful fluid movements around the circle. The shahzadi ibadat was forgotten as her body remembered how to weave magic in movement and rhythm' (p. 248). And all the while Sikandar was watching sitting hidden in the shadow at the far end of the hall. Imtiaz and Haider (2011) also note: 'The central character is represented initially as an exotic maiden represented in terms of her body parts. (p. 14).

Zarri Bano's sexuality is not only utilized but it is defined and controlled by patriarchy. Though she has accepted Sikandar's proposal, her sexual life is determined by her father who announces that there will be no marriage for her. He will not allow her to marryv Sikander or any other man ever (Shahraz, p. 80). Thus, exploitation extends to authority over her sexuality which is controlled through tradition and she is forced to become a holy woman through the ceremony of haque bakshish. Imtiaz and Haider (2011) remark: 'The sexuality of Zarri Bano is controlled by attaching the concept of honor, izzat and asmat with her . . . the concept of honor demands a complete negation of sexual desires on the part of the woman' (p. 13). The Holy Quran is used to ensure the control of sexuality of Zarri Bano so that if she tries to revolt, it will be taken as a breach of her faith.

Habib Khan is a feudal lord who victimizes his daughter by marrying her to the Holy Quran. Zarri Bano's education, status and feministic leanings cannot save her from this misogynistic feudal tradition and her life is no different from many other illiterate and poor women. Engles (2008) links the lot of woman with the the history of the private property, a calamity thatv initiated patriarchy in place of matrilineal regime, and enslaved women to the patrimony. He remarks that even in the countries where children are 'legal heirs to their parents' property, and can not be disinherited . . . like Germany and the countries under French law . . . the children must seek the consent of thier parents in the matter of their marriage. In the countries under English law, where the consent of parents is

not a legal requisite, the parents can, if they so desire, cut their children off with a shilling' (p. 79). He believes that the industrial revolution was the counterpart of that loss of rights and would lead to feminine emancipation.

Thus, Zarri Bano is forced to give up her right to marry, comply with her father's wishes and marry the Holy Quran. If she persists on her right to decide her future, she would be termed as a wanton woman. Vogt (2010) views this deprivation in the light of western concepts of freedom: 'A reader with a western background would probably also feel sorry for Zarri Bano but mainly for the lack of freedom she has' (p. 41). For her the denial of freedom to choose how one wishes to live is more tragic than the denial of matrimony and motherhood. In either case, female sexuality is curbed. Habib attacks Zarri's sexuality to make her comply with his desire of making her a holy woman. Kidwai (2011) calls the patriarchal notion of honor a sheer hypocrisy because of the double standards of males on sexual issue. He remarks: 'As Habib fails in all of his attempts to persuade his daughter, Zarri Bano to don the mantle of the holy woman, he eventually resorts to the effective tactics of shaming her, alleging that she needs a man in her life, as she speaks her mind about marrying Sikander' (p. 93). The initial hint of this sexual repression is visible when Jafar reprehends his sister for not covering her head. It takes the extreme form of her being made a holy woman condemned to a life of celibacy and denial of motherhood. Shahzada is also grieved over this unjust suppression of her daughter's sexual being. She laments that her daughter would remain forever barren and childless, she will be denied the joys of motherhood. Her arms would never know the aching joys of holding a new-born child to her breast' (Shahraz, p. 70). Zarri Bano's forced marriage to the Quran exposes the ugly face of feudalism which exploits female sexuality to safeguard its interests.

To sum up, in all the cultures, women have faced exploitation in every sphere of life. Law and religion are manipulated. Besides, the factors like love, duty, devotion, honour and

spirit of sacrifice is inculcated and indoctrinated in women's mind which makes them an easy and willing prey. Specially sexuality is the site where males have tried to establish their monopoly.

CONCLUSION

Women are controlled sexually as well. This hegemony extends from the exploitation of their physical charms to the actual control of their sexuality ranging from rape to forced marriage. In both the novels, the researcher has proved through evidence how the narrator highlights the physicality of the female protagonists. Even a female writer like Qaisra Shahraz has been unable to resist this popular trend of exposing female sexuality. The physical charms of Tess (Widoson, 2010 Brady, 1999, & Millgate, 2004) and Zarri Bano (Imtiaz & Haider, 2011) confirm my point as to how female body and its charm are highlighted. The study has also proved that female sexuality is controlled by society as decisions about it are taken by patriarchs in general. Tess is persistently chased by Alec. Widowson's (2010) opinion and particularly Gedraitus's (n.d.) investigation who analyze Tess' rape in the light of legal definition of rape and seduction, and Fowler's (n.d.) analysis increase insight on this issue. Tess's rape and then seduction by Alec testifies to the fact how much female sexuality is dominated by males. Zarri's forced marriage to the holy Quran is materialized despite her protests and protestations of independence (Engles, 2008, Vogt, 2011 & Kidwai, 2011). In the light of these instances, there is no denying the fact that female sexuality is defined and controlled by society which is, as I have mentioned earlier, synonymous with male hegemony.

Women's sexuality is the site where male hegemony reigns supreme. It extends from the exploitation of their physical charms to the actual control of their sexuality through sexual harassment, rape and forced marriages.

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