

Culture Entrenched Gender Inequality in *Othello* by William Shakespeare and *Night of No Moon* by Syed Waliullah: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Culture of a society directly influences the pattern of behavior of the people. It is such a strong force that, people are hardly able to go and think beyond the boundary of their cultural practices. The problem begins when cultural indoctrination controls human thought process and appears to justify inhuman practices in the name of culture and tradition. This study has been done with a view to exposing the gender-based inequality prevailing in the society which is nurtured by culture. In doing so *Othello* by William Shakespeare and *Night of No Moon* by Syed Waliullah, two great pieces of literary works have been picked. Both of the literary pieces depict unequal treatment of the women in the society. Although, two of them are composed in different contexts, yet there are similarities in terms of treatment of females in the society. In both *Othello* and *Night of No Moon* the fate of women is decided by the men and the whole societal system fuels the unjust action. The authors draw real life characters to show how the females become victims in the hand of social organizations formed and dominated by men. This study explores through the characters and plots of the two texts and intends to see the facts from a feminist point of view to analyze behavior of people. Therefore, we observe the condition of women of the society, who are considered as 'the weaker sex', and continuously dominated, suppressed and victimized by culturally motivated men. Thus, we have put our logical argument drawing evidences from the literary texts to establish that, Culture of a society substantially contributes to constitute patriarchal mindset among the people of the society which results in treating women as so called 'Second sex'.

Keywords: Inequality, Patriarchy, Culture, Social System, Politics, Religion.

INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare is one of the greatest playwrights of English literature. He was a leading literary figure during Elizabethan period, which was known as the era of rapid development of art, literature, science and politics (Craig 1965). Despite all these advancements under the rule of queen Elizabeth I, the condition of women in the society did not improve much. Men were still the domineering force who controlled the fate of women. The women being considered as the weaker part of the society, happened to be the possession of men. Predominantly men had the power and authority to govern the social institutions. However, women were culturally

deprived of freedom in both public and private spheres. In Elizabethan England a husband used to be treated as the ruler of the household, who decided the fate of entire family. Consequently, the female members of the family remained subordinated and they had the role of following orders of their husbands. The socio-political conditions of Elizabethan era had definitely a great impact on the works of Shakespeare. He portrayed his female characters from a humanitarian point of view to expose the pains and miseries they had to undergo as woman in a patriarchal society.

Othello is certainly one of Shakespeare's masterpieces that sheds some light on the existing gender inequality of the society. This play is a demonstration of gender relations and their manifestations on the basis of social norms, social hierarchy and class division. Shakespeare draws three female characters in *Othello* who belong to different social classes and appear to patriarchal system in different ways. However, the 'noble' woman Desdemona is the victim of patriarchy whose life is full of restrictions and the prevailing social norms make her dedicate her life to her husband. Like other typical Elizabethan wives, she is obedient and submissive to her husband, Othello.

On the other hand, Syed Waliullah's *Night of No Moon* is written in the context of a post-colonial Bengali society. All his three novels are the depiction of social injustice and the domination of patriarchal rule. The long practiced social rules enforced by men transform into cultural norms throughout the passage of history and keep exploiting women in the name of tradition, convention or religion. Syed Waliullah raises his voice against the oppression of women in this novel. Interestingly, he does not draw any active female character in *Night of No Moon* and the presence of women is described indirectly. For instance, we can take the scene of lamentation of the mother-in law and the sister-in-law after the discovery of the dead body of a young village woman. We do not see too much of female presence beyond this although, 'women' is the major theme of this novel. The scene mentioned above is the reflection of the fact that, women in patriarchal society express their presence only through lamentations. The author presents women throughout this novel exist as a lifeless entity. This reality is present in both Elizabethan English society and post-colonial Bengali society. In both the texts gender issues are intentionally addressed with a view to showing the inhuman practices of the people of the society. We can see how culture of a society turns out to be an oppressing force to strengthen patriarchal rule and uses politics, law and religion to keep women under control.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture and gender studies have been the center of interest for many scholars and authors in modern time. Different scholars have different perspectives to see the role of culture in fueling gender inequality. However, culture itself is a diverse term that incorporates lots of topics. Therefore, it is difficult to analyze each and every component of Cultural practices around the world. Some scholars do defend their cultures to be progressive and in favor of women empowerment although gender disparity exists everywhere in different forms.

Urther Rwafa defines culture as an illusion through which people share their concerns and values in the face of real and contentious divisions that exist among classes, genders, races and ethnic groups. She describes culture, gender and religion to be problematic terminologies that are used in some African communities to justify the oppression of women. In her study she shows how factors such as Biblical notions of the creation of men, polygamy, cultural belief on

spirit, medium, violence, forced marriages as well as cultural practices such as female genital mutilation have informed cultural and religious decisions to justify the oppression of women in contemporary Africa. As culture and religion are socially constructed, the author challenges the manner in which they define gender roles in Africa.

People's perception towards gender inequality may vary from culture to culture. Zoe Kinias and Heejung S. Kim investigated these differences and their psychological consequences using cross-cultural comparisons. The researchers have conducted empirical studies on the women from different parts of the world and found that, Hongkong Chinese women saw gender inequality as less unjust and less unfair and valued gender equality less than European African women did. Gender inequality caused anger and predicted reduced life satisfaction more among European American than among Chinese women.

Another study conducted by Mirza (2014) presents real life experiences of black and ethnic female students in higher education being a part of diaspora. The researcher discovers both racial and gender segregation in academic environment. The white superiority treated them as inferiors to maintain hierarchical relation with a view to keeping them under control. The black and ethnic female students staggered along the prejudice and discriminatory practices in the academic premises.

Classic literature reflects the true picture of the society with perfection. Therefore, researchers use literary texts to analyze human behaviors and actions. Rosida and Rejeki (2017) chose the short story 'Bob Darling' by Carolyn Cooke to study gender and social class. Interestingly, they found social class division as the primary cause of gender discrimination. The short story shows verbal and nonverbal violence against the major female character who lives in a patriarchal culture. The authors intend to prove that, beside patriarchal system, lower position in the class structure also contributes to the oppression of women.

Many researchers found poverty, race and migration as prime factors behind gender inequalities. Istrefaj(2018) studied the novel 'My Antonia' and examined gender, race and class relations experienced by three characters of the novel. The study found that the white male characters are being privileged in the society due to gender, race and successful job. In contrast, two female characters are the victims of oppression because of their powerlessness. Antonia was an immigrant and poor woman while Arnault was a black disabled woman that disadvantaged them in social relations.

When we study culture and gender roles, we must go to indigenous people, as they are strongly driven by their cultural practices. "United Nations Office of Special Advisers on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Secretariat of the United Nation Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues" observes that, men and women have different gender roles and responsibilities and as a result they often have different needs, desires and interests. Moreover, in different cultures and societies different values and norms related to men and women play a big role in positioning both the genders in different statuses. In addition, the practices deprived from colonial past and dominant cultures such as purity and pollution, liability and asset, dependent and bread winner have segregated men and women.

Columnist Rokeya Kabir examines social practices and beliefs to identify the root cause behind poor condition of women in Bengali society. According to her, this society has subordinated women socially, economically, culturally and politically. Moreover, they are identified as the commodity that has been established as the subculture of the society. She also points out to the speeches delivered by the religious speakers who have always identified women as the product of consumption for men. Consequently, the socio- cultural mindset of the people is turning towards accepting the ideology of considering women to be subordinate to men.

Another columnist and author Dr. Abdul Wahab considers Bengali culture as a favorable force to freedom of women. According to him, the history of Bengali culture is the proof of his claim. Moreover, Bengali culture provides honor to female sex a little bit more to some extent. He also thinks, this civilization is based on agriculture and this sort of civilization is matriarchal which has been proved by socio-anthropological researches.

Professor Anisuzzaman in one of his speeches in the department of women and gender studies of Dhaka University comments, "The female characters of Bengali literature remain incomplete as they are picturized from a male point of view ". According to him Bengali literature has not been able to reflect the conventional ideas of the society. The birth of a male child creates more happiness than the birth of a girl child in the society but this idea is not supported by Bengali literature.

Reporter Vidhi Doshi in her article made an effort to draw a relation between Indian culture and gender inequality to protest against female sexual abuse in India. She accuses some feminists who use the words such as 'mother', 'sacrifice', or 'giving' to describe themselves, while men often describe themselves as 'leader' or 'powerful'. She refers to an interview conducted by Deepa Narayan, a sociologist based on Delhi to say that, "women feel burdened by the 'shoulds', the expectations of duty imposed on them". Narayan also writes, "In fact, most words chosen by women describe the emotional abilities and strengths needed to cope with the duties of being a daughter, wife and mother, in other words meeting everyone else's needs selflessly"

METHODOLOGY

This researcher takes qualitative approach regarding data collection and analyzing data. The aim of qualitative research varies with the disciplinary background, such as a psychologist seeking to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. Qualitative methods examine the *why* and *how* of decision making, not just *what*, *where*, *when*, or "who", and have a strong basis in the field of sociology to understand government and social programs. In this study, the intention of the researchers is to compare between two different pieces of literature from two different languages and time. Through this study, the differences and similarities between two cultures have been revealed. The data are mostly collected from secondary sources like books, articles, research papers and internet sources. In terms of collecting data, qualitative approaches like- interviews, focus group discussion, observation and collecting written documents have been followed.

Research questions

Throughout the procedure of this study, the researchers have attempted to answer five different questions in order to find a productive outcome from the whole effort. The questions

are associated with the objectives of this research that helped us reach our ultimate goal. These questions have been answered on the basis of the plots and contexts portrayed in *Othello* by William Shakespeare and *Night of No Moon* by Syed Waliullah. The questions are-

- 1) How do we define culture?
- 2) How does culture affect the people of the society?
- 3) How does culture become a strong force in the society?
- 4) How does culture patronize patriarchy?
- 5) How does patriarchal system contribute to create gender inequality in the society?

Culture and gender role

It is a fact that culture determines social values and norms of people and it has a tremendous influence on their way of life, mentality and perception. However, culture has different levels and each level has impact on the society to some degree. Generally, national culture is thought to be the most dominant force to have an impact on people's life. The major components of culture such as- ethnicity, religion, social class, race and gender play significant role to the life of individuals. In this study we intend to highlight culture determined gender roles and its severe impact in creating gender inequality. By definition gender discrimination refers to, "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on gender which has purpose or effect the restriction and exclusion of recognition, usage or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedom or rights recognized by law, in equality conditions in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life". (Law no 324/2006)

It is certainly the manifestation of social values when it comes to role differences between sexes. Conventionally, masculinity is the symbol of power and authority while, femininity is associated with obedience, gentleness and submission. Both the terms have been defined by culture with a view to determining separate role for men and women. The selected texts for this study are two classic pieces of literature that represent different cultural practices and socio-cultural dynamics. The following discussion will focus on the gender issues associated to social norms, politics, religion and social class portrayed in both the texts.

Social class

William Shakespeare draws three female characters in *Othello* who belong to three distinct social classes and their position in the social hierarchy determines their actions. Desdemona possesses the highest position as a noble white woman, while Emilia belongs to middle class and Bianca comes from the lowest strata of social ladder. We can see how this class distinction impact their gender relations as women.

Othello, a Moor living in white majority country is supposed to be in a low position but, as a male he is provided with the opportunity to become a general as well as it allows him to occupy a powerful status in the society and makes him eligible for marrying Desdemona, the noble white woman. The author in this play shows fluidity in male-female relationships. At times, a woman too becomes an oppressor with the help of power provided by the higher social class and tries to dominate the individuals from lower position. Therefore, Desdemona does not have that power to protect herself from the unfair treatment of the men who belong to a lower class such as Iago and Cassio which is clear from the following dialogue:

Iago: She that could think and ne'er disclose her mind,
See suitors following and not look behind,

She was a wight, if ever such wights were—

Desdemona: To do what?

Iago: To suckle fools and chronicle small beer.

Desdemona: Oh, most lame and impotent conclusion! Do not learn of him.

Emilia: Though he be thy husband how say you, Cassio? Is he not a most profane and liberal counselor?

Cassio: He speaks home, madam. You may relish him more in the soldier than in the scholar.
(II.i.153 - 162)

This conversation shows us a scenario which helps us understand the social position of Desdemona and Emilia. Desdemona obviously is the loudest voice because of her social status among the others. Emilia on the other hand, passively accepts her husband's words which shows her submissive nature. Interestingly, Cassio tries to please Desdemona and shows more honor to her than Iago does and he intends to defend her position as a woman. Unfortunately, Desdemona in her married life remains subordinate to her husband, Othello. Othello comes from a minority race but that does not stop him reaching a high position because of his gender identity. In contrast, Desdemona, a noble white woman coming from a majority race is subordinated by her husband only because she is a woman. Moreover, Desdemona shows her powerlessness in terms of defending the truth she believes. She plays a passive role as the society has taught her to be obedient to the husband even if he is an oppressor. The tragic death of Desdemona proves the helplessness of a woman who cannot save her life although she has a high social position.

Desdemona: Alas, he is betrayed and I undone.

Othello: Out, strumpet! Weep 'sthuo for him to my face?

Desdemona: Oh, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!

Othello: Down, strumpet!

Desdemona: Kill me tomorrow—let me live tonight! (V.ii.80 - 85)

On the other hand, Emilia, the maid of Desdemona shows a contrasting behaviour regarding men. In front of her husband, she is a gentle and obedient wife but she does criticize the domination of men when her husband is not around. While talking to Desdemona, she expresses her thoughts regarding gender issues and gives her perception about the women who are oppressed by men. This perception towards male domination certainty comes from her social position and real-life experiences which enable her identify male's intrigue around her. Emilia's loyalty for fellow women derives from her mistrust towards men and her rebellious voice does intend to violate traditional values of being submissive servant and to respect the master. Emilia tries to protest any unfair treatment to Desdemona from her husband which shows the suppressed hidden flame inside her mind.

Emilia: 'Twill out, 'twill out.—I peace?

No, I will speak as liberal as the north.

Let heaven and men and devils, let them all,

All, all cry shame against me, yet I'll speak.

Iago: Be wise, and get you home.

Emilia: I will not.

(Iago offers to stab Emilia)

Gratiano: Fie! Your sword upon a woman?
Emilia: O thou dull Moor! That handkerchief thou speak'st of
I found by fortune and did give my husband.
For often, with a solemn earnestness—
More than indeed belonged to such a trifle—
He begged of me to steal it.
Iago: Villainous whore!
Emilia: She give it Cassio? No, alas, I found it
And I did give 't my husband. (V.ii. 223 – 235)

Unfortunately, her courageous voice does not save her from the sword of Iago which is its evidence of power of men. Undoubtedly, Emilia's powerful voice reveals the truth but she is defeated to the social system.

However, Bianca, a prostitute shows up with a total opposite character than the other female characters in the play. Surprisingly, despite living in a lowest social class Bianca possesses some sort of domination in gender relations. Cassio, a man from higher social class than her cannot oppress Bianca like other male characters. This is because of her outrageous attitude and disobedience to the social norms which make women submissive to men. Being a sex worker, she barely cares about culture and she is unaware about proper behaviour, that turns out to be her strength to act against the domination of patriarchal system.

Cassio: 'Tis such another fitchew. Marry, a perfumed one. —
What do you mean by this haunting of me?
Bianca: Let the devil and his dam haunt you! What did you mean by that same
handkerchief you gave me even now? I was a fine fool to take it. I must take out the work? A
likely piece of work, that you should find it in your chamber, and not know who left it there!
This is some minx's token, and I must take out the work? There, give it your hobby-horse.
Wheresoever you had it, I'll take out no work on 't. (IV.i. 144 - 152)

Bianca is disobedient unlike Desdemona as she does not need to follow all the rules and norms followed by the people of the polished class. She is not confined by the traditional values and dares to say whatever she desires to say. Women living in upper class does not have the freedom to do whatever they like and whatever they feel right because always there is this fear of going against the tradition and being criticized by others.

If we compare the contexts of *Othello* and *Night of No Moon*, we can see that social position plays a vital role in gender issues. Social class and gender have complex relation because each of them plays a part to define the role of other. Desdemona faces injustice being in a higher social position because of her gender role defined by the society. On the other hand, the young village woman who was murdered in *Night of No Moon* does not get justice as she is a woman and a woman living in the marginalized part of the society.

The main character of the novel *Night of No Moon* Aref Ali is widely known as the 'young teacher'. The author picks up a wonderful strategy to picturizing the mindset of the society. In these circumstances we need to analyze the character of the 'young teacher'. Generally, youth

refers to excitement and power of life and a teacher is of course a man of responsibility. The author's comment regarding the young teacher is as follows:

"He was a teacher and though outwardly like a grown-up, his mind was still very young". (Waliullah – 16)

Seeing the dead body of the woman and her killer, the young teacher starts running away. This feeling is that subconscious direction of his mind that tells him to flee from the responsibility that might bring danger. This is the first time he has appeared to be the eye witness of a murder. This grim experience does not remind him of his responsibility as a teacher. This experience can be within the normal boundary of socioeconomic-system or it might be the result of socioeconomic conspiracy where the young teacher has no role to play. However, this is the first time he has witnessed an incident that deserves an active role of him as the conclusion of the whole event depends on his decision to remain silent or raise the voice.

The young teacher is a dreamer and a trusted young man. On the other hand, his social position educates him about opportunism. However, the pride he rears inside his mind as a teacher gives him guardian like mind that makes him forget his duty. He can ensure the justice for the young woman who has been murdered and he should do it as a responsible man but the social system and the social status refrain him from doing this. Desdemona too is a victim of social system and long practiced social norms. Therefore, in a patriarchal society the systems are designed in a way that ensures the supremacy of men and systematically justifies crimes against women to protect the oppressors. Whenever a woman is victimized, the society at first judge her character as if it is justifiable to kill or rape a woman if she is not chaste. The system keeps the men of high class in a very comfortable position that they hardly talk against the crime it commits as they do not want to lose the privileges they get from the system.

ROLE OF RACE AND RELIGION

Religion certainly is one of the most influential parts of human civilization and played a major role in cultural practices. In *Othello* religion plays a negative role to create extreme chaos and injustice. Racism comes as a by-product of religious beliefs. The Christian doctrine of damnation creates immense psychological pressure on the characters of the play and produces huge amount of pain and suffering. We also see immorality among the characters despite having the belief of punishment Day of Judgement which is really ironic and this two-faced moral stand of Othello is a reason behind the murder of Desdemona.

Every human behavior has identifiable causes and so racist behavior does have its origin where it is nurtured. However, the Christian idea of damnation plays a significant role in the play *Othello*. We come across some supernatural words like- 'devil', 'soul', 'hell', 'angel', 'heaven' and 'damned' throughout the play. This is an indication that Christian morality comes from fear and supernatural beliefs. Therefore, the belief of the life after death and doomsday influences their actions. For example – we can take the moment when Iago at last convinces Othello to forget about Desdemona as according to religion she is a sinner, an adulterer and worthy of hell.

Othello: "Ay, let her rot and perish and be damned tonight, for she shall not live. No, my heart is turned to stone". (IV.i. 202 – 204)

As soon as Othello realizes that Desdemona is a sinner, he fears his soul might be damned given his association with her. Hence, he vows to commit a homicide and stays strict to his decision to kill Desdemona till the end.

Othello: Get me some poison, Iago, this night. I'll not expostulate with her, lest her body and beauty unprovide my mind again—This night, Iago!

Iago: Do it not with poison. Strangle her in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated. (IV.i. 225 - 229)

There is no doubt that Othello still loves Desdemona but he must do what is 'right' and this 'right' is defined by his religious belief. 'Revenge' is not the reason for which Othello decides to kill his Desdemona; it is a sacrifice that he has to make to ensure spiritual justice. Othello does believe that his actions are serving God's purpose and God's work must include clemency. Therefore, he orders Desdemona to 'prepare' for the meeting with God and pray so that she gets salvation in the afterlife. As he says:

"I would not kill thy unprepared spirit" (V.ii. 33)

Othello does consider himself as a religious person but he becomes so blind in his belief that he forgets the words of Christ: "If you forget not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespass" (Matt. Vi 15). Othello does not forgive Desdemona when she begs for her life and his actions become immoral according to Christianity. The blind faith of eternal damnation was working like a virus in Elizabethan society. The privileged class of the society nurtured these beliefs to create fear inside the mind of the people and it becomes easier to exploit them in the name of religion.

There is term called, 'punishment of nature'. The young teacher of *Night of No Moon* who happened to be a 'madrasa' student, puts his trust on it. He has doubt in his mind about the justice of the murder he witnessed. He doubts whether the actual criminal will be caught or an innocent person will be punished for the crime. However, observing the society and nature he has come to realize the fact that humans cannot help humans. There must be an intervention of God to ensure justice. Syed Waliullah establishes the credibility of his observation about human ignorance, limitations of knowledge, lack of broader outlook and the dependence on religion. He takes the help of Quran to give the young teacher some sort of relief in his confused state of mind. In fact, the author does not hesitate to express his thought about the weak religiousness of the young teacher. In order to get rid of the mental pain and praying to God for ensuring justice for the crime he has witnessed with his own eyes, the young teacher relies on reciting holy verses from the Quran. To describe the situation the writer writes:

"The young teacher did not have the habit of offering his prayers regularly before he came to the Baro Bari. Nowadays he regularly offered at least the morning and the evening prayers. Of course, it could not be said that he put his whole heart into it He did not deny the need for prayer – but he certainly did not understand it completely. Today, he had felt himself to be so totally alone and helpless that when he stood to say his prayers his heart was overflowing with deep emotion. He was not just mechanically going through the motions of the prayers by reciting the verses like a parrot. His whole heart felt the presence of the One that he was praying to and he had not the slightest doubt that He was listening to his prayers." (Waliullah – 113 – 114)

We do observe the cautious steps of the author in terms of prayers and religious practices. The author juxtaposes the behavior of both religious and nonreligious persons. His main focus is on Islam as a religion, the culture of practicing religion in Indian subcontinent and the impact of it in the social and political achievements of the Indian Muslims. However, Syed Waliullah certainly mentions the influence of powerful countries and the promotion of Christianity in the social, political and religious field of India.

Syed Waliullah in his all three novels intends to find out the deep-rooted existence of religious fundamentalism in the context of Bengali society. His first novel *Lalsalu* moves through apparently complex but dynamic events where he depicts relations between poverty, illiteracy with religious fundamentalism prevailing in the society. In his third novel, *Kado Nodi Kado*, he expresses it by using witty metaphors under the simple description of the plot. However, in all three of his novels, women appear to be the first and foremost victims of religious exploitation and tend to remain present to raise the voice of protest. In *Lalsalu* Jamila raises her voices against Majid; as a result, we come to know the hidden character of Majid, the deformed face under the disguise of religion. At the same time, we can identify the religion-centric malpractices. All these things have come together in *Night of No Moon* yet without any active woman voice. There is no voice like Jamila but the author heavily insinuates the religious exploitations and the existing social system of oppressing women without even presenting a female voice.

The author draws the face of an angry policeman as the symbol of corruption and misuse of power by the administration. On the other hand, the murderer Kader has an aristocratic family background and possess a title of 'dervish' (holy man). Besides, the owner of the household 'Dadasaheb' is a pious man. In his professional life he had the feeling of disgust regarding his boss from other religion. As a result, when he comes back to his village after retirement, he implements strict religious rules and regulations in his family and establishes a religious atmosphere around him. He is always cautious about the religious education of the children of the house. Kader has a tendency to treat himself as a saint and he himself preaches this to others. Therefore, the social and religious status of Kader's family appears to be powerful enough to prove the statements of Aref Ali wrong.

After witnessing the event of a crime, the young teacher goes through limitless thoughts inside his mind. This society is the architect of the thoughts which continuously guides him to escape the reality. He knew that Kader was the killer from the moment he saw the dead body in the bamboo bush. However, the young teacher is sheltered in Kader's house and he has a kind of respect towards Kader. The existential crisis of Aref Ali can be described in the following way: "Even if nobody brought complaint against the young teacher, after the disclosure of the event, he would be compelled to leave his job and then his conscience would forbid him to live in the BoroBari. Where would he go then?" (Waliullah – 112)

Dadasaheb wants to use the cover of religion to ensure that the glory of his lineage does not decay as a result of failure of sustaining the riches he inherited from the ancestors. Dadasaheb is in a failing state but desires to regain the lost glory and riches through religion. We can see it from his comment:

"The riches of Muslims have gone but has it reduced the internal value of them?"

Another quotation may be mentioned to show the use of religion of Dadasaheb:

"I have taught him.

But then, who can teach a dervish?" (Waliullah -33)

This comment proves that Dadasaheb himself is the creator of the whole drama of 'dervish'. The character of Dadasaheb is no longer confined in the village. We do see this sort of characters around us. Religion has been used as the biggest weapon to earn money – both in honest and dishonest ways. Most of the corrupt persons who have made a lot of money through corruption tend to build religious institutions. They give 'zakat' to the poor people as a promotional activity and present themselves as philanthropist in front of the society. The only thing behind these so-called humanitarian activities is to hide the dark side of their characters. In the same way we can say that, in this novel the religious disguise of Dadasaheb is used to protect Kader from the crime of murder. The young teacher knows about this harsh reality and hesitates to reveal the truth regarding the murder.

POWER POLITICS AND GENDER

It is an undeniable fact that masculinity of Othello earned him respect, admiration and power. At the same time, the 'conquest' of women becomes easier for him because of his rank of a general. Critic Julia Genster writes- "The bonds formed in military ranks have direct correlation to sexual power structure".

Another critic Neely explains, "since the reputation and manliness which the men covet is achieved in competition with others, all of them are jealous in honor". For instance, she continues – "Iago is critical and envious and resentful of Cassio's position and 'daily beauty', of Othello's love and power perhaps even of Rodrigo's wealth and rank". If Othello stood by Desdemona who had been rumored to be unfaithful, he would be emasculated in the public eye. That fear to lose his credibility in the public sphere and apprehension of losing his reputation makes him a jealous man and act irrationally. At the same time, this cold political pressure continuously pushes the men of *Othello* towards the cockfight even in the face of tragic consequences.

On the other hand, the women in *Othello* appear to be more rational and less competitive than the men although they are the victims of tragic incidents. Neely points out that, "Desdemona's willingness to incur a general meek is evident in her elopement and her defense to it and in her request to go to Cyprus". Women are calmer and remain more focused than men as they are not pressurized by the fear of damaging reputations. In terms of the battle between sexes, the men are active soldiers but the women depend more on their words than action. As Neely writes- "the handkerchief is the symbol of a woman's civilizing power that because of its origin represents sexuality controlled by chastity and sexes to induce love and control it"

Despite initiating the peacekeeping efforts, the women in *Othello* are unable to resolve the issues between the sexes. We can see the double standard of the society that creates an irreconcilable conflict between men and women.

There is a communication gap between the two sexes in the play that paves the way for all tragic consequences. The women play the role of active peacemakers in the active chaos created by the men but end up losing their lives. It seems irrational efforts of the women who did not take

steps to save their lives. The existing cultural norms compel them to accept the gender roles as a passive force.

Similarly, Syed Waliullah in *Night of No Moon* shows how the administrative system and law enforcement agencies are corrupted and how this corruption creates a culture of injustice in the society. In this novel we see the main character, Aref Ali as a spineless man who lacks courage of revealing truth. This fear of Aref Ali does have logical ground. As a poor teacher he has no capability to fight against a rich man and he does not want to endanger his life for an unknown woman. But he cannot get rid of the panic of his conscience that makes him think again and again. Inside his mind, there lives an honest and responsible man who wants to bring justice for the murdered woman in spite of having the apprehension of losing his shelter, losing his earning source and belonging unable to help his old mother. On the other hand, criminals who belong to the upper class tend to justify their crimes by saying that men have those weaknesses; the actual fault is in the woman. This sort of unnatural death happens to the depraved women.

This comment comes from the supporters of criminals who have a tendency to blame the victims. In this incident both Kader and the young woman are married. If the woman is accused of adultery, Kader should also be accused of the same. But the culture of this society is, whenever a woman is victimized, the society immediately appears to analyze her character and intends to justify the crime putting the blame on the victim herself. The author portrays the perception of the villagers about the dead body found in the bamboo bush. We come to know the reflection of the people of her surroundings including her family members. Instead of demanding justice for the heinous crime, they begin to tell a supernatural story.

“The old mother of the young woman believed that the unfortunate young woman was possessed by jeans and fairies. One day she was picking lice from the head of her sister-in-law in the yard, when a tall white figure suddenly appeared in front of her. He came like a flake of white cloud in a cloudless sky like a gust of wind on a calm day.” (Waliullah – 126)

This is the way they condole themselves as they know that, they won't be able to get justice. Rather, they might face bigger danger because of their social status and poverty. On the other hand, in order to uphold the dignity of the family, Dadasaheb and his family want to conceal the crime, as the criminal himself belongs to his family. They are ready to do anything to remove the incident from the mind of the people. Therefore, at first, they request and then try to intimidate the victim's family. Finally, they end up putting the blame on the innocent young teacher who is ironically the only eyewitness of the crime. Interestingly, Dadasaheb, the pious man does not see any immorality in doing so. This is the real picture of the society perfectly drawn by the author to show the chaotic socio-political conditions. He shows how the upper-class elites control the structure of power and manipulate social perception in favor of their actions.

PATRIARCHY AND GENDER ROLES

A patriarchal society refers to a society that treats men as superior to women. The society portrayed in 'Othello' is undoubtedly a patriarchal society that determines how a particular gender should behave. The society assigns gender roles to a man or woman on the basis of their sexes. As patriarchy considers men to be more perfect than women, it provides men with direct

access to the power of leading social, political and financial institutions. On the other hand, the women being treated as less perfect for public affairs, remain confined around performing household chaos along with reproductive works. The men portrayed in the play hold powerful positions in the administration and armed forces. It gives us a glimpse of the context of patriarchal Renaissance era of Europe. Men in the society are associated with rationality, chivalry and civic standing, while women are considered to be physically weak and irrational in thinking.

Emilia is a rebellious woman who challenges patriarchal practices of the society. She expresses her rebellious thoughts when she is around Desdemona but chooses to remain silent in front of her husband to avoid conflict. Shakespeare depicts women in *Othello* as vulnerable and silent. The vulnerability becomes clear when a helpless woman is left alone to her hot-headed, irrational husband and no one is coming to her protection when she is mercilessly killed. Culturally, submissiveness of women is celebrated even in the face of death because wives are the properties of their husbands in a patriarchal society. Therefore, a man is free to do whatever he likes with his property and it is nobody's business to interfere with it. A woman who is divorced is the most hated in the society and she is left with two options – killing herself or being a prostitute. Desdemona, being aware of these consequences, chooses to remain patient and desires that her husband might come round. The society tells the victims of domestic violence to remain silent and hang in there. Desdemona is a victim of domestic violence who is struck by her violent husband when she was receiving news from her cousin Lodovico. In spite of watching the violence, Lodovico does nothing against it although he knows this no accident. This is an indication of the indifference of the society towards marital issues. Therefore, the responsibility of the murder of Desdemona goes not only to her husband but also to the people watching her misery without intervention.

On the other hand, Emilia is a rebellious woman living in a patriarchal society. She demands sexual equality and desires to say that being faithful in a relationship is not only the responsibility of a woman. Moreover, if a woman is unfaithful, the husband can be held responsible as he is the one who assaults his wife publicly and justifies this action in the name of protection. Shakespeare, through this play intends to challenge patriarchy and desires to establish that women too have their voices. Emilia points out to the male dominance and corruption in Venice on her death bed. She frees herself from the social constraints that women practice in their life as social norms. The author symbolically tries to show how important it is for a woman to speak out. Emilia earns psychological freedom but cannot practice this freedom in her practical life. This is certainly the authors purpose to make the society aware of the fact that liberation of women from shackle of patriarchy is important for the development of the society. This is really tough for the people of the society as both men and women accept the norms of patriarchy as social values.

Traditionally, women do not have any independent identity in a marital relationship and they are identified by the identity of their husbands. To exemplify, we can say, women are excluded from the deal of property or any financial contracts on their own. Independence of women is therefore a contradictory idea where there is aristocratic role of masculinity. In this play Iago murders Emilia as she desires to be independent and raises her voice against male dominance. Laws of a society reflect the norms and values of that society. In patriarchal society laws are made in order to protect the interests of men as there is no voice of women. Therefore, anger

and violence are treated as the components of masculinity and they intend to justify their Criminal acts by the laws.

For a moment Desdemona's decision of marrying a person she likes, makes us think that she is a progressive woman. She possesses strong personality to make her own choices in terms of selecting her life partner. However, this same lady surrenders to her husband and plays a very submissive role in her marital life. Therefore, we can say her decision to marry a black Moor, Othello, does not come from a rational mind. Rather it comes from her infatuated mind towards Othello and the instinct of the attraction for opposite sex. She does obey the norms of patriarchy and she says to her father:

Desdemona: My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty.
To you I am bound for life and education.

.....
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord. (I.iii. 180 – 190)

However, she is unable to control her instinct in terms of making her own decision to marry Othello. The submissiveness of Desdemona comes from the teachings of her father which she practices in her relation with Othello.

We can see the exercise of freedom by both men and women in *Othello* through the characters of Emilia and Iago. The psychological freedom that Emilia acquires is used by her to speak the truth so that she can remain loyal to her mistress Desdemona. On the other hand, Iago exploits others and causes harm to others with his freedom. However, the consequences of speaking the truth comes out to be grim for Emilia and nobody comes to save her from Iago when she is struck to death by him.

The silence of the state is evident in the play in terms of the murders of a spouse as the society considers it to be a 'domestic affair' and feels no necessity to interfere with its machineries. The deaths of Desdemona and Emilia are caused by the culture of violence in the society. Emilia speaks out against the vicious crime committed to Desdemona and that independent voice costs her life. Murders of the wives are justified with the accusations of being adulterous. Moreover, the society responds differently in terms of violence occurring to both men and women. When a woman is a victim of violence, she cannot talk or protest against it. It takes a really brave effort to go against all the odds and pass the barriers to ensure justice. The whole society is systematically against women and the domestic violence have been normalized in the name 'private affair'. Emilia shows her courage and risks her life to support Desdemona despite being powerless. Critic Bartels argues that, women do not lack power, they lack the authority to legitimize their decisions or agendas. (Bartels)

William Shakespeare condemns the patriarchal system that makes women think that they are tapped into their bodies and so they wish to be born as men. This is the mindset that creates self-hatred and inferiority complex among the women. However, the patriarchal order provides the privileges to the armed men in *Othello* which is seen in their attitude towards women and it reaches its climax when two women are brutally killed for their 'crime' of disobeying patriarchy. The author criticizes the social system by condemning the subordinating and victimization of women in *Othello*. The Lodovico is symbolically presented

to show the indifference of the society regarding domestic issues. He silently watches when his cousin Desdemona is badly insulted and struck by 'Othello'. In the same way Iago suggests Desdemona to stay calm and patient in her failed marriage ignoring her complaints. The author's intention here is to draw the attention of the people about the importance of intervention when a crime is being committed against humanity, even if it is a family issue.

A patriarchal society considers women nothing but a body and a product of enjoyment which is evident in the description of the dead body of the young woman by a man in *Night of No Moon*. The description of the dead body of the young woman comes there: "Naked?" One teacher remembered in the voice of a startled novelist, as if it were wrong for a bloated dead body of a woman to be without clothes" (Waliullah – 62). Different stream of thoughts are created among the teachers regarding the female dead body. A teacher of 'morality' imagines the scene of the dead body of beautiful young woman floating on the river. In his mind, he thinks "If her body is a little bit inflated, it is because of her overwhelming youth". If this is the thinking pattern of a teacher then we can imagine the moral stand of the average people. Whenever, they come to know that it is a dead body of a poor wife of the boatman of their village, the palace of secret lust of the teachers of morality is broken all of a sudden. The class character of the people is revealed as all of them now feel free to comment on it. As the dead body belongs to the lower class, they don't afford to do anything against the comments. For instance, the Arabic teacher says, "There must be something behind this. The woman had the habit of going to different places." The whole society begins to judge her character.

Waliullah does not exaggerate his description to conceal his intention. We come to know through the voice of the author that it seems to be a sin to be naked even for a floating lifeless young woman. The frequent mentioning of the word 'naked' expresses the perception of even comparatively educated people towards women. This destitution of thought and patriarchal mindset is still present in the society. When a woman is victimized in this society, the first thing people intend to do is judging her character. They feel intense pleasure in the process of their pervert actions. The author successfully unfolds the character of the society in front of the readers.

CHASTITY AND GENDER

William Shakespeare presents the women of Elizabethan era as weak creatures who are inclined to adultery. He clarifies how the fathers see their daughters using a metaphor "your white eye". Purity and chastity were considered to be the most important aspects of women and therefore we can consider that the word 'white' is referred to chastity as women were expected to be virgin before marriage. The word 'ewe' refers to a religious symbol that too indicates goodness and purity, which is used to show Desdemona's chastity and loyalty to her father. Conventionally, Desdemona is the property of her father which is proved by the use of possessive pronoun 'your' and in the same way comparing her with an animal refers to that she is not an independent entity.

Othello uses derogatory words like_ "mistress". The word 'mistress' has several connotations, which has been pronounced to reduce her status pointing towards infidelity. Othello expresses his hatred to Desdemona through both mental and physical degradation in front of her family. His abusive behavior points out that he considers his wife as a whore and Lodovico as a customer. Although initially Othello seemed respectful towards women, he turns out to be a

conventional dominating husband because of the cultural practices of the society to treat women as objects.

Objectifying women as sexual products is common in Indian society which has been portrayed in *Night of No Moon*. Extra marital relationships or pre-marital sexual relations are considered as serious crime, where both men and women are involved. However, when there is question regarding infidelity, the women are demonized and severely tortured, while the men don't get that extreme treatment, even in most of the cases they are not punished at all. In *Night of No Moon* the author does not clarify the reason behind the relation between the wife of a poor boatman and Kader. We assume it is an illegal relation from the perception of the young teacher. It seems that both of them meet in the bamboo bush voluntarily. However, the reason behind the murder remains ambiguous to us. Kader kills the woman that night, perhaps because of getting identified. An illegal relation and a murder both are serious crime in the social system. Both Kader and the boatman's wife are involved in the illegal relation. We don't know the reason behind the relation because the relation is quite unnatural as they both belong to different social classes. At the same time there is a possibility of financial gain for the wife as she is poor. However, it is clear that there is no love in the relation between them. The woman is killed and her naked dead body is floating on the river but the villagers prefer to make an analysis of her character. What was she doing at the middle of the night being a woman? They make a judgement that the woman is not chaste. As a result, she deserves this sort of consequence. Unfortunately, nobody points their fingers towards Kader because he is a man and he belongs to powerful family. Women are burdened with the responsibility of maintaining their chastity and purity in any circumstances. Without chastity their life is sinful and meaningless. This idea of chastity has been a powerful weapon for the oppressors of the patriarchal society to dominate women throughout the centuries.

CONCLUSION

Both William Shakespeare's *Othello* and Syed Waliullah's *Night of No Moon* portray a particular kind of society where gender inequality is deeply rooted. In both the cases culture plays a major role to patronize the elements of gender inequality. Yuval Noah Harari, a famous historian thinks that human beings are stronger than other species because they can generate powerful stories. These stories are so powerful that they survive in human societies for thousands of years and unite them to fight against all the dangers. Culture is nothing but sets of stories that direct people's way of life and create perception towards the outer world. Therefore, culture and tradition are very fundamental elements of human societies. Without culture, a society cannot unite its people for a particular purpose. Cultural practices help humans to fight against natural and man-made hazards for a long period of time. But in this modern world we are conscious about basic human rights of everyone as we consider all humans are equal. In these circumstances, some cultural norms that has been practiced for centuries may seem too incompatible with the modern values and ideas. Gender equality is a fundamental part of human rights. It is still dominant in different parts of the world although some western countries have made substantial development in terms of ensuring gender equality. Both the authors of our chosen texts intend to present the negative consequences of gender inequality in the society. A society cannot progress if it does not treat its inhabitants equally and it brings intense pain and suffering in the life of the people. Both of our authors are the dreamers of a peaceful world where each and every individual will be treated equally. Therefore, they have realized the importance of criticizing cultural practices that are against human rights. We have

already mentioned that cultures have their roots deep inside the society. It is very dangerous to speak against cultural norms and values even if they are harmful. An author's purpose is to enlighten the society by curing the disease that the society has been suffering from.

In both the texts, we witness the incidents of violent murders and in both the cases women are the victims. Moreover, we surprisingly discover that the whole societal system remains silent about the crime. When we go deep into the reason behind the attitude of the society, we see a grim picture of patriarchal system that has been cherished throughout the centuries. We also discover that women are identified with a different class and the society assigns them different role to play. It teaches people that women are weak and less intelligent than men and therefore, they are not capable of doing the work men do. Furthermore, we find out that the administration and law enforcement agencies are corrupt and most of the time favor the powerful class of the society and in this way a culture of injustices is established. Both Desdemona and the wife of the poor village boatman represent the oppressed women of the society who are the victims of patriarchy. Both the women are innocent but they are killed by patriarchal men and society remains silent. We do see some voices raised against the crime but they are not as powerful as the criminals. In *Othello* Emilia tries to speak against patriarchal system. She condemns Othello's treatment towards Desdemona but she has to sacrifice her life for being rebellious. The young teacher of *Night of No Moon* too intends to raise a voice against the barbaric crime committed by Kader. But he fears the possible dangers he might face if he reveals the truth. As an irony of fate, the young teacher himself faces the allegation for committing the crime. Hence, the vicious system has been designed in a way that no voice of protest will be tolerated. This is the rule of evil that suppresses all the positive forces that try to emerge. As a result, women like Desdemona and the boatman's wife keep being tortured over and over again. All the windows of justice are closed on them. This is the history of pains and miseries of women which have been fueled by the unequal treatment of genders.

William Shakespeare and Syed Waliullah depict the pains and sufferings of humankind in their works. They desire to change the perception of people towards gender inequality with a view to establishing a society based on equality. Literature is a powerful weapon to fight against the inhuman practices prevailed in society in the name of cultural values and norms. Our authors use this weapon to change the society.

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