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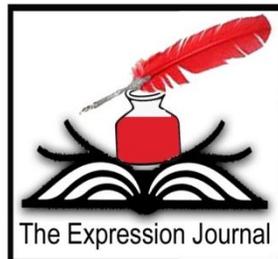
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MALE DOMINATION VIA SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Bharti

B-16/A, Ground Floor, Near J.V.T.S Garden

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Abstract

Iris Marion Young in “*Is Male Gender Identity the Cause of male Domination?*” has criticized the psychoanalytical theories given by Nancy Chodorow, Nancy Hartsock and Sandra Harding. These three writers have exclusively taken into consideration the gender psychology and equated gender differentiation to male domination. While on the other hand Young is of the view that we also need to consider how male domination is sustained through the social structures and institutions, which does not arise only from gender psychology. It permeates through ideologies, societies, cultures, languages, nature, spiritual world and even mythologies. Though psychoanalysis has significantly contributed to feminist theory, it needs more elaboration in context of cross cultural and historical variation. According to Young, male domination exists within a society if the following conditions prevail: (a) Men control aspects of women’s lives and actions, can even enforce their will, while it is not the other way round, (b) men have the position of decision making, excluding women, who do not have such space and privilege, and (c) men benefit from the activity of women to a greater degree, and not vice-versa. Taking into account the above mentioned conditions, one can point to patriarchal domination as the underlying principle in many historical, cultural and literary works, being the product of many social realities and institutional structures attached to them. This paper is in the light of the aforementioned argument regarding the importance of structural relations of gender and their determining institutional forms, as given by Young.

Key-Words

Street theatre as political, representation of common man issues, Jana natya manch, street play 'machine' on the herig factory incident, the play 'aurat' against patriarchy.

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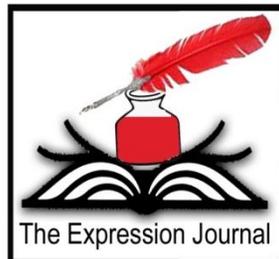
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Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* says, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.” that is, a woman is contained into femininity and womanhood according to the patriarchal conceptions, which form our social realities. Society defines a woman’s femininity or “womanliness”, according to the roles she plays in her domestic sphere as a mother, a wife or a daughter. These aspects form the social conditions of their lives which affect the inner consciousness making them unaware of the male domination meted out on them.

Looking back in the ancient history, at the Greek classical period, the literature produced by men be it philosophy, tragedy, or comedy, all have a common factor. And that is either misogyny or dictates to be followed by women. *Medea*, a tragedy by Euripides, is a prominent example projecting how the social structures and institution of marriage affect the lives of women. It was first produced at the dramatic festival of Dionysian in 431 B.C. Euripides based the tragedy on the myth of the 'Golden Fleece', a popular legendary tale of early Greece. The play deals with Jason’s treachery with his wife Medea and his decision to marry another woman, the daughter of the king of Corinth. Medea married Jason (King of Iolcus in Thessaly) by betraying her brother and father. Both belong to the royal class but are in exile in the famous Greek City State of Corinth.

Medea is shown as overwhelmed with grief and anguish as her husband has broken the sanctity of marital relationship. Swinging between Jason’s betrayal and the guilt of her betrayal to brother and father, not even her maternal instincts assuage her mental condition. And she decides to kill her two sons in order to take revenge. The dialogues provided to Medea are mostly a discourse on the condition of women in society, as she says

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that marriage is like a gambling game. She has fulfilled her obligations of bearing sons and keeping the husband happy, but now she is of no use to him. The institution of marriage seems exploitative and suppressive to her and the plight is further aggravated as she is a betrayed woman in exile.

Society has prescribed different roles or codes of conduct for men and women, where the law subjugates only one gender. On the other hand Jason's behaviour reflects the patriarchal ideologies which contort the laws of society according to a man's will and profit. It is important to note that, this particular tragedy by Euripides has the instance of the murder of children by Medea, while other myths and plays do not. It is Euripides' misogyny that shows Medea to give Jason "the deepest wound" and it is her identity of 'other' or barbarity (Eastern Princess) that enables her to stoop to this level. "Medea is not about women's rights: it is about women's wrongs, those done to her and by her" ("The Medea of Euripides", Bernard M.W Knox). Euripides did not put forward her character as an example to be followed, but rather to be avoided. Her sexual jealousy is vented out by killing her children, which shows the gruesome behaviour of a wife and a mother, overshadowing the pity and need for justice that the audience might have felt for her.

Aristophanes in his comedy *Lysistrata* (405 B.C.) takes up the women's issue in a very different manner. It deals with the 'great idea' of sex strike, where the female sexuality is both empowered and stereotypical. Therefore making it a complex play which touches upon the issue of prescribed gender roles. The play is set against the background of the Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta, which lasted for two decades (430- 410 B.C.). *Lysistrata*, an Athenian woman calls all the Greek women and persuades them to not get involved in sexual relations with their husbands and lovers, in order to force them to have peace and stop the war.

"No man is ever going to get satisfaction, if the woman doesn't choose that he should", says *Lysistrata* while convincing them to use sexuality and slyness to dominate men's will. In contrast to such strong statements, Aristophanes has also given the typical male reaction to such words, as the Magistrate says, "it's the same old story - the unbridled licentiousness of the female sex displaying itself", highlighting the misogyny. Since it is a comedy, there is no direct harm to patriarchy. If we analyze the play closely, the women do take a step to come out in the Acropolis, but do not go further than that. It cannot be seen as a feminist text as they are not fighting for equal rights but for peace, in order to live a normal happy domestic life at home. Feminism's aim is to champion equality for women, political participation of women and their public visibility, but *Lysistrata*'s fight is for peace which does not go beyond sex strike. The play unfolds as a warning by Aristophanes to the patriarchal society that if men cannot be "manly" enough, then women will take over the power in society. If men would have managed their work well, then there was no need for *Lysistrata* and other women to come out in Acropolis.

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While talking about the Greek classical period, one cannot forget to mention the most influential philosopher Plato, who wrote *Republic* (380 B.C) formed by his opinions of an ideal society or 'Utopia'. In *Republic V*, we get Plato's view on gender roles and their communal responsibilities. According to Plato, men and women should be able to take on same social roles in his ideal state as they have same capable nature to be the guardians of the state. But even after being so close to equality, he calls it a fact that women are weaker than men.

Plato says that women are the weaker sex, yet this does not devoid them from being trained in war fare, and gave the example of women from Pontus who knew the arts of weapons. While at the same time he opines that, "they will receive lighter duties than the men, because of the weakness of their sex" and "one gender is far superior to the other in just about every sphere". Therefore the best women will be the second best of men, but will never be equal to the best of men. It is interesting to note that Plato's views changed in others texts such as in *Laws* and in the *Timaeus*, where he states that if "men lived immorally they would be reincarnated as women". Plato comes back to the traditional patriarchal views and says that women have an inferior virtue than men as they are emotionally inclined. *Republic* is a Utopian situation and nearly impossible to achieve, therefore a shift of ideologies towards the conventional and believable aspects.

What we observe in these works is indeed the male psychology, which is fuelled by patriarchy and influences the social structures which in turn mould the female psychology, giving rise to male domination. Even though these writers provide a flame to the gender centric issues, but then they are only taken up to a certain level where the overall scenario is not compromised. The literature portrays the working of male domination in contemporary times and the shaping of gender roles and divisions.

Regarding the portrayal of women characters, William Shakespeare's plays have both outgoing as well as submissive heroines. In *As You Like It* (pastoral comedy) Rosalind escapes her persecution in uncle's court, along with her cousin Celia. She disguises as a young man and pretends to counsel Orlando (her lover). Assuming Rosalind as Ganymede, several other characters are also involved in the confusion and a shepherdess Phoebe falls in love with him. At the end Rosalind solves the issues and characters get married to their loved ones. The play has attracted the attentions of gender studies as it involves elaborate cross dressing and the reversal of gender roles. While Harold Bloom calls Rosalind as Shakespeare's greatest and completely realized female character, it is important to observe that she is able to accomplish her desires only by dressing as a man, by acquiring the patriarchal characteristics.

Another example of cross dressing by the female character is in *The Merchant of Venice*. Bassanio needs money to subside his expenditure, in order to be a suitor of Portia, a wealthy heiress, he gets loan from a Jewish money lender Shylock, by naming Antonia as

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the guarantor. But on the condition that if the amount is not repaid on the specific date, Shylock may cut a pound of Antonio's flesh. Later Antonio is not able to repay the amount and Shylock refuses to take the double of the loan's amount. He wishes to have the pound of flesh, but soon Balthazar, a young "doctor of the law" enters and asks for mercy. When nothing works, he says that the contract only mentions the flesh and not the blood of Antonio, and if the blood drips then Shylock's property will be taken away. This saviour is no one else but Portia, showing the practical wit and intelligence, which would never be expected of a woman during the Elizabethan Era. There is a reversal of gender duties; it is the hero's responsibility to save the woman and not the other way round. But in this play Shakespeare gives the responsibility to a woman to save the man.

Apart from these there are other woman characters in his plays which show typical conventional behavior such, as Hermia and Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In *The Tempest* the character of Miranda is a portrayal of desirable feminine characteristics as laid down by the patriarchal society. She is a stark contrast to the other heroines such as Rosalind, Portia and Viola. The absence of the mother figures is also recurrent in most of the plays by Shakespeare. And the daughters being brought up by the fathers according to their ideologies, paves way for male domination.

Marriage is the major social institution to maintain the patriarchal conventions as seen during the Victorian Age. "A man gains everything in marriage: he gains a 'helpmate', but a woman does not", aptly expresses Florence Nightingale in "*Cassandra*" (1852). Known as the 'Lady with the Lamp', Nightingale throws light upon the peculiar position of Victorian Women, how they are conditioned into being subservient to patriarchy. She fought to get the right to work for women as she herself wanted to become a nurse. According to her, the civilization is halted in its progress because of its curtailing of development of women. Nightingale begins by posing a very strong question to the readers, "why have women -passion, intellect, moral activity - these three and a place in society where no one of the three can be exercised?"

Women are constantly controlled and instructed, therefore "thought" or imagination is the only space, free from patriarchal structures, where women fancy a Utopian world different from the actual world. It is the creation of a parallel world through imagination or even literature, but not a direct challenge to patriarchy. An interesting feminist approach that we observe here is the notion of time and how it is different according to the gender roles. A woman's time and energy are channelized into daily household organization, a strategy by patriarchy to keep a woman busy so that she is not left with anytime to follow her own desires. Due to the hectic schedule of domestic work, a woman is not able to cater to any calling of her intellect.

Even time has gendered concepts attached to it, where it is very naturally accepted or assumed that a woman has nothing to do, her labor at home is not 'work' but a duty she

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must perform, or it is the only activity she can do. It is looked down as unfeminine, if you hear a woman say that she has work to do. "To have no food for our heads, no food for our hearts, no food for our activity, is that nothing?" asks Nightingale criticizing the patriarchal norms which do not allow spiritual fulfillment to a woman.

Later the early modern period does an attempt to give rise to the 'new woman' as opposed to the 'true woman' image. But even this figure could not co-exist with the traditional angelic woman; it remains confined to the non-fictional world unable to shatter the social reality of patriarchy. To dwell into this aspect of literature, one can observe the showcasing of the 'new woman' in "*The Story of an Hour*" by Kate Chopin (1884), which breaks the conventions attached to the institution of marriage.

As the title suggests, it is the protagonist's (Mrs. Mallard) life's one hour, when she experiences freedom. The death news of her husband is given to her in "broken sentences" and "veiled hints", as it is assumed that such news is unbearable by a woman. But for the first time she is able to contemplate the world outside in solitude, and not with the identity of "Mrs. Mallard". As Chopin puts it, "she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window". Mrs. Mallard who now becomes Louise, reflects upon the oppressive existence she has lived in her married life, where the husband used his exterior kindness and fake love to dominate her. This was the "brief moment of illumination" but vanished soon when she sees her husband standing at the door, resulting in her death. Though one would think it's the shock of extreme happiness at her husband's arrival, but the ironical truth is that Mr. Mallard's coming back is the reason of her death. The death of the heroine and the fact that Kate Chopin had to kill her are the same, symbolic of the existence of 'new woman' which is nearly impossible.

It is evident that apart from psychology, the sociological institutions and structures play a major role in defining the male domination. If in Greek classical period, there were the teachings of dramatists and philosophers, then coming to a complex model of gender differentiation we have the heroines of Shakespeare, who are strong characters but still confined in patriarchy. The Victorian Age has the submissive homemaker and then a shift in the Modern Age, with women writers trying to make a niche for themselves showcasing the experiences in a woman's life. It is relevant to note that the female psychology is shaped by the male psychology, which is both the producer and the product of oppressive patriarchal ideologies. Therefore, Iris Marion Young is right in pointing out that, where gender differentiation pertains to individual psychology, experience and cultural categorization; male domination is validated through structural relations of gender and their determining institutional forms.

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