

Patriarchal Hegemony And Its Impact On Women

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ABSTRACT

This article uses Lalrammawia Ngente's *Life—A Flower* to illustrate the detrimental effects of masculinity on women. It examines women's patriarchal rule, the extent to which it affected women, and the continued relevance of patriarchy as a topic worth discussing. A patriarchal system places men at the top with the goal of controlling women. The protagonist of this tale embodies this idea. Despite realizing that his wife was not at blame for their childless situation, he let his frustrations and bitterness towards her out. This study examines the effects of patriarchy.

KEYWORDS: Patriarchy; women; feminism.

INTRODUCTION

Women have often been depicted as a subordinate, the weaker beings in society. Literature has been understood as a reflection of life every now and then. Mostly the Mizo literary works portrayed women as weak and vulnerable. Although the condition of women has been ameliorated to certain height, their condition is not close to perfection. Even earlier, their condition had been pathetic and execrable. As such, they were ostracized from various activities in the society. In activities which required various decision-making processes, men usually took the lead role. It is evident that women are considered unfit to make decisions.

This chapter is a textual analysis of *Life- a flower*, written by Lalrammawia Ngente and translated into English by Rualzakhami Ralte. This story reflects the reality of women where they have inner strength and courage in midst of patriarchy dominating over them. Some women have lost confidence and even failed to believe in themselves; however, they failed to see their massive potential which lies immobile.

Scholars and researchers have found out that there are women who identified themselves as 'feminists' and there are women who rejected the idea of feminism simultaneously. Interestingly, there are women who shunned the idea of identifying themselves as 'feminists' but conforming the feminist principles. There is research which found out that the aforementioned third group stayed akin to the issue of gender equality (Liss et al. 2001; Quinn & Radtke 2006; Roy, Weibust, & Miller 2007), while some researchers found out that the third group stood in the middle between the feminists and non-feminists group (Aronson 2003; Smith 1999). Likewise in the Mizo society, most women belong to the third category. It is somewhat credible that women knew the oppression which they carry on their shoulders are not right but they did not have the courage to stand up and speak for themselves. Simultaneously, the patriarchal society made them believed that it is their position to stand in the shadow of men. They accepted the fact that they do not have a say in the presence of men. In certain fictional writings, there are scenes where women shared their hurtful experiences happened within their family with their friends and how they gave detestable comments. This gives the idea that they are aware of the immoral treatment they got from men.

The third categorized women who are sometimes labelled as weak feminists and who stood in the middle position embraced the principles of feminism. In tracing the history of the Mizo, there are queens who ruled over their respective village which is a tell-tale sign of women's potential in administration. It tells of the power and capability of women in the arena of administration. Those were the times when patriarchy was at its acme, but the queens did not refuse to shine. They were certainly not elected by the pupils but when they got the chance to rule, they did it perfectly just like the kings did. There were no signs of weakness in their

way of administering the village. Therefore, this chapter presents the strength of women regardless of the toxicity of patriarchy and its supremacy towards them.

CONCEPT OF PATRIARCHY

One of the most common traits of patriarchy is its work distribution, of which Durkheim explains, “The division of labor is initiated by individual transformations brought about by the socialization process and internalized by individuals in the environment in which they are raised,” (Rokhmad & Susilo 2017). This gives the notion of excluding women from certain tasks doubting their ability due to their gender. In this way, women are projected as weak and helpless; thus, reflecting the strength of men which shed light to patriarchy and hegemony of women. Patriarchal culture resided permanently in a patriarchal society, of which Alfian remarks that it came from patriarchy and it refers to the structure which positioned men to the central and the negative impacts of patriarchy dominates the culture as well. According to Sikweyiya, patriarchy is one which placed men in the top position with the intention of controlling women. This notion is relevant in the protagonist of this story. He vented out his anger and resentment at his wife for their state of childlessness although he became fully aware of the fact that it was not his wife’s fault. In this way, he maintained dominance and power over his wife who remain tolerant towards him. Muniarti explains that patriarchy is a system which gives authority to men to make decisions. This notion gives men the privilege to hold their power over women. The protagonist of this story is the epitome of patriarchy in a sense that the atmosphere of his relationship depends on his attitude and temper. In the story, the author enlightened us with the fact that the protagonist Puⁱ Thanzuala brought anger and gloom into his home from the incident and people he met at his work. In one of the scenes where he met a happily married couple, their loving gestures reminded him of his miserable life which led him to the condemning of his wife eventually. There are some ways in which patriarchy hold power over women. To begin with, subordination of women has been one of the traits of patriarchy. Subordination of women simply means that female gender is weaker and lower than that of male. Subordination is found mainly in decision-making processes where women are found unfit to do it. Walby explains the patriarchal notion, thus:

I shall define patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women... the use of the term social structures is important here, since it clearly implies rejection both of biological determinism, and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one... patriarchy is composed of six structures: the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institution... (20).

This notion is reflecting and became relevant in this story as women are assumed to be regarded as producing class. The protagonist’s wife did the domestic work within the household, providing everything needed for her husband. Therefore, there are several levels of patriarchy in which some of the levels talked about the division of labor where men are usually expected to be the breadwinner of family. This led to the subordination of women, belittling the domestic work they did, which is a necessity for everyone. Another level tells of the violence of men which is endured and tolerated by the structure. Even some women normalized the violence and torture they got from their husbands. This kind of violence is reflected within the marriage of the protagonist and his wife. The author tells of the protagonist’s wife, saying,

That evening he entered his house with sadness and a deep frown on his face which made his wife withdraw herself from greeting him. She was used to keeping quiet when he was angry for it was the best way. She had ample patience to wait for his anger to cool down, when they could then speak to each other again (Ngente 154).

In this way, she is tolerating the torture that she receives from her husband. In this story, there is a reflection of private patriarchy, which lies parallel with subordination of women. Walby rightly explains that “private patriarchy is based upon household production, with a patriarch controlling women individually and directly in the relatively private sphere of the home” (178). This is another way of describing the subordination of

women. As aforementioned, the protagonist Pu Thanzuala set the mood for his family. Therefore, whenever he came home sad and gloomy, the atmosphere of their home instantly became sad and tense. Additionally, his wife let it happen that way. She could have knock it off in her own way. Instead, she gave in to the ill-treatment of her husband and leave it to be in that manner.

Gros states that the subordination is a state of willfully obedient towards others. It is true even in this story. He explains that in this idea the power holder is not portrayed as oppressor, rather they are portrayed as a caretaker. In the context of patriarchy as well, the structure does not portray men as they are, but as dutiful caretaker and it make it look like women to be their responsibilities. In this way, many women think it is their duty to suffer in silence, as they accept their condition is how it ought to be.

What enables subordination is depreciation. Tirrel states that demeaning words is instrumental in playing oppression, the toxicity it reflects affected the targeted women. Therefore, it reflected how disrespectful speech can imposed harm to the women in the patriarchal structured society (141).

The protagonist in this story depreciating his wife often unsurprisingly leads to subordination. Although he does not talk too much in the story, his anger vented out on her is a sign of depreciation.

As long as patriarchal concept is concerned, it refers to the construct where men are considered as superior to women. Therefore, this superiority comes with stereotyping masculinity and femininity in a society. Gender stereotypes is derived from unequal arrangement of both the genders in terms of social roles like the division of labor which is still relevant today. With various developments and advancements, education of women is strongly advocated. Concerning Mizo women, it is evident from this story that women are not entirely barred from working outside; however, the atmosphere of their homes depends on men simultaneously. This is evident even in this story when the author tells how one evening Pu Thanzuala 'entered his house with sadness and a deep frown on his face' (Ngente 154), the whole atmosphere in the house became intense as his wife became passive and submissive towards the fact that he controls as according to his mood.

PATRIARCHY AND POWER

In a patriarchal structured society, men are vested with power which involves domination and subjugation of other genders. It works in such a way that several writings and media portray women as weak and inferior and it gave the typical notion which normalizes men control over women in any possible manner. This notion is reflected in the way the author portrays both the protagonist and his wife. Not to mention the protagonist's controlling character towards his wife, it is the woman's response that catches attention from a feminist lens. It can be assumed that she gave herself to be her husband's scapegoat as she would tolerate every action when her husband vented out his anger towards her. The author tells, "She sensed her husband's changing attitude towards her, but there was nothing that she could do except to quietly cry in solitude (151).

On the notion of power, Max Weber states, "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance..." (53). This implies the notion that the person holding power is controlling the situation according to his likes regardless of others' choice. Foucault states, "If we speak of the structures or the mechanisms of power, it is only insofar as we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others" (217). In terms of patriarchy, Pu Thanzuala makes judgements from his position claiming power in every possible situation. Therefore, he vented out his anger on to his wife because of their state of childlessness although he knew it was not her fault.

A socialist conception of power within a married couple is truly relevant in this story. As Okin puts it that the unequal distribution between men and women in terms of work, power, opportunities and economic security reflects the disparities between housewives and husbands (136).

Here, it can be assumed that Okin intends to reflect the fact that power has been unequally distributed between men and women. Simultaneously, Iris Marion Young, in her distributive mode of power believes that power is not something that can be possessed or distributed. She rightly put it forward that “social relations are tightly defined by domination and oppression” (32-33).

Power has always been instrumental for patriarchy. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir gave the feminist approaches to male domination. She contends that while men are having the status of subject, women are having that of the object or the Other. In an introduction to this book, she writes, “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute- she is the Other” (xxii). According to her, this ladder of distinction is the key to oppression of women, as men holds power in their hands. She also points out that women are partly responsible for their status as they were submissive towards patriarchy (xxvii). As aforementioned, the notion is vividly portrayed in this story. Although oppression is not rightful; however, an act of oppression to women is somewhat expected and normalized even by some women. In analyzing the protagonist’s wife in this story, she somehow gave her consent by being silent and tolerant towards the oppression which she got it from her husband.

On the concept of power, radical feminists explain it as a form of dyadic relationship. This concept is parallel to the concept of Beauvoir’s where she talks about the subject and the object, and the same analogy is given by the radical feminists. MacKinnon connects power and gender distinction when she says that “difference is the velvet glove on the iron fist of domination. The problem is not that differences are not valued; the problem is that they are defined by power” (219). It is true that the masculinity is defined by power and patriarchy put power in the hands of men. In this way, women have been deeper and deeper with much less of power in their hands. MacKinnon makes it clear that “women/men is a distinction not just of difference, but of power and powerlessness... Power/powerlessness is the sex difference” (123). In this way, power is granted to men and some women think it justifiable because they are okay with being powerless. Therefore, many women thought that being weak for a woman is how they ought to be and it is how the society works; rather it is how patriarchy works. This might answer the silence of many women in places of torment and torture. The protagonist’s wife in this story can be assumed to be one such woman who regarded that being silent is their character and tolerating oppression is their share as these women regarded themselves weak and powerless. In this way, they gave consent to oppression and patriarchy.

Foucault is undoubtedly the inspiration of post-structuralist feminists on the concept of power. Foucault, in his mid-period works (1997, 1978, 1980) describes modern power as one which appears from social interaction and affects the whole society. One of his explanations that “power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (93) is relevant in terms of patriarchal power. In a patriarchy, power stemmed out relatively from society, family and individuals; so, oppression comes from every corner of living. It makes sense to the fact that some women embrace their position as a subordinate as they received too much of belittlement rooted from the power of men. Although feminists are highly interested in how Foucault analyzes power and Sandra Bartky even criticizes him in her essay that Foucault fails to point out that power and disciplinary actions are gendered (65). Through such disciplinary actions, women’s bodies are considered to be more docile and submissive. It is rather an expectation from the society through the power embedded in men that women ought to be submissive. So, it is completely gendered. Bartky significantly states that women that practice to be submissive towards women even in terms of their bodies. Women are subjected to self-surveillance where they are self-conscious about their physical appearances. They often checked and rechecked to see if their makeup needs a redone. It is a serious action that reflects the obedience to the patriarchal system to meet to the needs and desires of men (80).

This notion of Bartky implies that women are accepting their being of subordinate by trying to live to the expectations of men. Besides their physical appearances, they are giving their consent to men by giving in to their means. It is interesting to note that being silent is a way of giving consent. In this way, the protagonist’s

wife is an exemplar who resort to silence. As the story proceeds, the author informs the readers that she became silent so as to not elevate her husband's anger towards her. So, she is subjected to oppression in which she gave her consent by being silent and voiceless. The irony is that she is presented as a dutiful wife for being silent. So, indirectly the notion of bearing the torture of oppression silently as the assumed nature of femininity is portrayed in the character of the protagonist's wife.

On the male supremacy in the society, MacKinnon explains that "no woman escapes the meaning of being a woman within a gendered social system, and sex inequality is not only pervasive but may be universal (in the sense of never having not been in some form)" (104-105). This definition answers the character of Pu Thanzuala's wife. According to her, women are subject to the likes and will of men which pointed towards women's obedience. She believes that heterosexual intercourse is a source of male domination. She states that "the social relation between the sexes is organized so that men may dominate and women must submit and this relation is sexual- in fact, is sex" (3). She gave the picture of women being submissive to men as a means of men's domination.

Marilyn Frye also gave a feminist view on power saying that "total power is unconditional access; total powerlessness is being unconditionally accessible. The creation and manipulation of power is constituted of the manipulation and control of access" (103). According to her, access is one of the most significant modes of power where she brings out the 'feminist separatism' as it paves way to deny access to women's bodies and challenge male domination and power. She strongly suggests that women must involve some kind of separatism; and she even points out that men got upset by it as they cannot let their power function as a form of domination. She suggests that if one must do something that is against men, they must do something worth and right (98).

Frye compares male domination of women to that of master and slave relationship (103-105) which is relevant in this story. In this sense, she rightly explains oppression as, a system of interrelated barriers and forces which reduce, immobilize, and mold people who belong to a certain group, and effect their subordination to another group (individually to individuals of the other group, and as a group, to that group) (33).

The relationship of master and slave is vividly reflected in Pu Thanzuala's relationship with his wife. In the course of the story, the protagonist aggressively vented his anger on to his wife and she does not have the courage to go against him in defense of herself. So, it gives the picture of master and slave relationship. The wife's character portrayed a sense of submission and obedience when she kept silent regardless of the fact that she has no fault in not conceiving a child. Frye further mentions that the one who holds power determines what is sayable (105). This is one way of showing domination to women in a patriarchy. The protagonist, in this story, justifies torturing his wife according to his likes and mood. It gave an atmosphere of subjugation and domination. It can be argued to be the wife's patience; however, her submissiveness and fear of her husband is more perceptible. What Frye mentions as 'access' is not own or control by the wife in this situation, so she became powerless. At times when her husband was rude to her, 'there was nothing that she could do except quietly cry in solitude' (Ngente 151). She has the notion that she was helpless; however, if she has denied her husband access to control physically and emotionally, as according to Frye, she would have been able to react and hold power in her own hands.

In *The Sexual Contract*, Pateman states that gender difference is formed by domination, saying that "the patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection" (207). She neatly states that in modern society every man is considered good to be women's masters (219). On the social contract, Pateman viewed it as a law of male sex-right which gives sexual dominance over women (182). This view of Pateman, is what Nancy Fraser terms as "master/subject model" which presents women's subjugation and subordination as the foremost subject to the command of man (173).

Haslanger explains two kinds of oppression; one is what he calls an agent oppression where “a person or persons (the oppressor (s) inflicts harm upon another (the oppressed) wrongfully or unjustly” (314) and the other one is structured oppression is where “the oppression is not an individual wrong but a social/political wrong; that is, it is a problem lying in our collective arrangements, an injustice in our practices or institutions” (314). Structural oppression is assumed to be more related in this story. The structure of society ie. patriarchal can be regarded as the main responsibility in the male dominance and subjugation of women happened in the society.

CONCLUSION

This story is an exemplar of how patriarchy affected Mizo women in their lives. As aforementioned, the system and structure of patriarchy makes men to become oppressive towards women; and it also makes women submissive and give in to the structure as the oppression cuts too deep which makes them think that their situation is how it ought to be. In this way, they could not grab power in their own hands. They let themselves drown in the system by giving in.

The protagonist’s wife, Piⁱⁱ Sawmi, whose name is mentioned only twice in the whole story gave her consent by staying silent in moments of oppression. In other words, she complies with the structure of patriarchy. This story brings out the need of women empowerment and it shadows how patriarchy has its lasting effects negatively on women even at this point of time. It pictures the fact that women were no longer tortured physically in general sense; however, they are subjected to emotional and mental abuse resulting in belittling oneself and lack of self-esteem and self-respect. Therefore, this chapter studies the patriarchal dominance of women and how much and in what ways did it affect women and the relevancy of patriarchy which is needful and is worth a topic to discuss till date.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ A way of addressing a man in Mizo language

ⁱⁱ A title given to married women

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