

Feminism-Intersectional Feminism/Gender and Queer Theory: A Review on the Identity- Women in *The Color Purple* and *Rudali*

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Abstract

Stevie Jackson and Jackie Jones in their article- *Contemporary Feminist Theory* said that Jackson says “The concepts of gender and sexuality as a highly ambiguous term, as a point of reference”. Sexual orientation is an intricately planned, socially developed and questionably interrelated gadget utilized not in violation of our spending plan of Women's liberation that considers "sex" as an employable term to conjecture its deconstructive social viewpoints. Helene Cixous notes in *Laugh of Medusa* that people enter the emblematic request contrastingly and the subject position open to either sex is unique. This difference of entrance points of the marked and un-marked bodies results in variation of rights! Within the corpus of Human Rights, the considerable printed rules include all those entitlements which permits any ‘human being’ to sustain and appreciate the self as an acceptable and floatable being not as an ‘othered and subjugated’ life! The idea, of being recognized and categorized within the binarized construction of either inferior or superior in relation to caste and gender, is somewhat normalized under the framework of birth of the body in and within a specific standard of the ‘brahminical structure of Indian society’. Marginalization has numerous branches of oppression, out of which I prefer discussing how from Feminism the journey top Intersectional Feminism including Gender theory has enriched our comprehension and percepts to visualize the numerous and multiple oppressions taking place. I will therefore discuss selective literary works to showcase the multiple marginalizations of Women.

Keywords: women, feminism, intersectional, gender studies, India

Introduction

The Third wave of Feminism more clearly focused into ‘micro-politics’- which concentrated on ‘identity politics and politics related to more individual, personalized groups and organizations, where the individualism was gradually given importance. Another crucial feature of Third wave Feminism was interpreting gender and sexuality from post-structuaralist phenomena and dismantling the ‘inherent link/natural connection’ structurally constructed between Sex/Gender/Sexuality (Gender Theory), where one of the prominent figures where Judith Butler (1990). The ‘body’ became the political ground of theoretical interpretations where gradual study and implementations resulted and yielded to perceptions that started questioning the very much ‘centrality and oneness’ of the Political Movement-Feminism. The traces of this Third wave was stretched and started towards creation of Intersectional Feminism where feminism, no longer was restricted to any particular class or body, but rather became an inclusive body that counted, recognized the perils, scuffles of

individuals and turned to a ‘spectrum’ that included Socialist and Marxist, Radical, Liberal, Black and Post-colonial and third-world Feminisms. The term ‘intersectional’ was coined by Kimberley Crenshaw, where she clearly said that intersectionality is not something flowing from one and ending at another rather it shows how “race, class, gender and other individual characteristics ‘intersect’ and overlaps with each other” (Crenshaw, 2020) creating a spectrum of experiences and experience-based marginalization. From here, started the course and inclusion of Queer theory too, that questioned the fixation of sexuality and or sexual orientation; it interrogated the social creation and production and regulation of sexuality and fixing it to the ‘heterosexual’ benchmark omitting the fluidity, with a strong focus on multiple sexual oppressions. Hence, the ‘queer-feminist’ politics is not confirmed to the normativity set mandatory for the bodies; although which operates based on a clear difference- whether that’s a vagina or penis!

Literary Texts and Women

Literary texts have often brought dimensions of experience that has otherwise been omitted from practical conversations. To draw in the concept of intersectional feminism, I drew two literary texts from two different cultural setups where “Rudali” is a short story by Mahasweta Devi (1997), who is a middle-class Bengali writer and activist and *The Color Purple* is written by Alice Walker (2019), who is an African-American woman, working as an American novelist, short story writer and an activist. My focus stays on ‘women’ when I am talking about the respective books, where a comparative analysis of women’s marginalization will be focused on.

Commencing with Mahasweta Devi’s Rudali, we see how Devi very clearly presented the layers of marginalization that operates on a body and identity- women. Oppression of women does not only takes place from one perspective; rather, multifarious forms. The protagonist Sanichari- a divorced dalit¹ woman, is depicted as a body that is oppressed not only as the gender- woman, but also from caste, class, geo-location, profession and culture. The story centrals on and around the profession Rudali, where women are rented to ‘sell their crying’ in the funerals of rich upper-caste rich land owners in the state of Rajasthan; the scuffles of

¹The word Dalit—literally translating to “oppressed” or “broken”—is generally used to refer to people who were once known as “untouchables”, those belonging to castes outside the fourfold Hindu Varna system. According to the 2001 census, there are some 167 million Dalits (referred to in the census as “Scheduled Castes”) in India.

Sanichari to ‘cross’ the sexual, castist, class-wise, cultural relegations, to ‘pass’ as a ‘valued’ identity and body is clearly portrayed through her journey as a Rudali. The story presents the oppression of women on multiple levels, it shows that once born with a ‘vagina’ you don’t choose whether or not you want to perform as a ‘woman’, you are labeled ‘a woman’, and as you are a woman you will have to like a phallus, which will rule you. This basic operation of power is further intersected with tribal culture, dalit caste system, geo locations, and etcetera. However, my focus would shift a bit from Sanichari’s journey to the concept of objectifying women as commodities of sexual pleasure and reproduction. Women in “Rudali” are clearly either wives or prostitutes, who during their old age turn into Rudalis. Being a woman in the location and cultural spectrum of India, one is already marginalized; moreover, if you are poor and from low caste you are doubly oppressed, and “Rudali” presents how multiple subjugations overlaps with each other making the women of lower class and caste either the house servants or the sexual slaves. Often few prostitutes were kept in the houses of upper-caste and class men; these women when gave birth to girl child, were again drawn into the vicious circle of satisfying the desire of the phalluses, and they do not have an option of rejecting the same, if they do so, they will be sold in brothels, where lives would be brutally horrendous, as Gambhir Singh, one of the upper-caste zamindars did to *his whore’s daughter* after the whore died- “...this world treat their labourers and whores alike- they tread them into mud... The worst is Gambhir Singh. He kept a whore, had a daughter by her... A whore’s daughter is a whore- practise your profession and support yourself” (Devi, 1997, 91) and she was then thrown away from the house. The body of a woman is oppressed and sold, used and thrown from “a five-rupee whore to five –paise whore” (Devi, 1997, 91). The story ends with an echoingly strong reflection on how ‘crying’ becomes the only weapon of these women to represent their shaded selves.

The Color Purple, by Alice Walker is a novel that culminates and functions on all the levels- emotional, psychological, social, and cultural. My focus will restrict the emotional amalgamation of the social self and how that shows or very simply gets linked and connected with the objectification of women shown in Rudali; however, intersectional feminism assists us here to understand how family, legitimacy and culture gets included here to analyze the objectification. Celie, the protagonist here, is a young black girl who is repeatedly raped by the man whom she recognizes as her father; the phallus of this identity has raped the vagina of the identity- daughter when her mother went to visit the “sister doctor”, because due to

numerous numbers of pregnancies she was getting sick day by day, and was reluctant in giving this ‘father-phallus’ the pleasure. Hence this phallus said to this little daughter to fulfill this pleasure giving role and get “used to it” as we see- “First he put his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold my titties. Then he pushed his thing inside my pussy. When that hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better shut up and git used to it” (Walker, 2019, 3). As the plot moves, eventually we can see all the women characters are subjected to sexual objects and forced marital relations, either killed by boyfriends or raped by husbands. Beaten and sexually tortured by *father phalluses*, Celie’s sister Nettie was also petrified from this ‘father-phallus’, but Celie often saved her and let her run away someday. The use of ‘God’ as when asked by her mother “Whose it is?” to which Celie replied- “I say God’s” (Walker, 2019, 4), is crucially to draw the feminist perspective of oppression in an intersectional level; as well as, this also exemplifies how phallus is equated with God, and considered as the ‘supreme’ figure. We can say that Celie is not only oppressed or subjugated because being a woman; she is marginalized being from an oppressive culture that celebrates ‘phallus’s authority’; from being in a geo-location which is remotely inactive; furthermore, when she comes to know that she was raped more conveniently by this *father phallus*, because she and Nettie were the illegitimate children - “Pa is not our Pa!” (Walker, 2019, 159). Another recurring and beautiful aspect that was shown here is queering of the emotion, so when I apply the ‘Queer theory’, I see how clearly possibilities of Celie’s sexual and emotional journey can be discussed upon, particularly in relation to the character Shug Avery. Noticeable dialogues clearly portray the chances of Celie being a Lesbian and sexually as well as emotionally attracted to a woman; while Shug Avery can possibly be bisexual or a lesbian woman, which she could experience during her stay with Shug Avery, but Celie doubts herself and interrogates this emotion as the social structure has practiced and fixed the ‘sexuality’ to Heterosexuals as the ‘natural’ one, omitting the spectrum- “He love looking at Shug. I love looking at Shug/But Shug don’t love looking at but one of us. Him/But that the way it spose to be. I know that. But if that so, why my heart hurt me so?” (Walker, 2019, 70). The phrase ‘suppose to be’ shows as if her desire to look at Shug is questionable against what not questionable. The love making of Celie and Shug was Celie’s first moment of actually enjoying sex- “Way after while, I act like little lost baby too” (Walker, 2019, 103), because prior to that it was only rape or her body acting for the purpose to satisfy the penis and produce a child. The novel ends on a note of love and self liberation.

Conclusion

Therefore, both “Rudali” and *The Color Purple* narrate the marginalization of women, but does so on a variantly different level. If I was to consider the way Celie is marginalized is similar to Sanichari’s marginalization or the women of Rajasthan, it would have omitted numerous branches of subjugations. The commonality stands as women in both the cultures are treated as commodities of sexual pleasures, yet diversities include the triadic and multiple other factors that overlaps and intersects with each other and makes the identity women multifariously oppressed, as the identity of what a woman is as Judith Butler said in *Gender Trouble*- “Women are the sex which is not “one”. Within...a phallogocentric language, women constitute the *unrepresentable*...women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity” (Butler, 1990, 13).

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