

# Women in Chains and Tears: Subjugation within Family

Dr Tawhida Akhter

Exploring the Subjugation of Women within Family through the selected  
Novels of Anita Nair, Buchi Emecheta, Salman Rushdie, Alice Walker and  
Doris Lessing

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# **Women in Chains and Tears: Subjugation within Family**

*Dr Tawhida Akhter*

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## Preface

**T**he author takes great pleasure in presenting the readers this enlarged and extensive book on Feminism with special reference to Subjugation of Women within Family. The book is a valuable asset to all the stakeholders like under graduate students, post graduate students, and teachers and particularly for researchers.

During the last few decades, there has been remarkable progress in research on various aspects of Feminism. Different fields have been explored, and still there are so many fields yet to be explored. We often talk about discrimination of women in the society. Society is one among the important components in shaping the personality of an individual. The personality of an individual shapes from his/her home. In this piece of literature attempts have been made to encapsulate the influence of family in the development of an individual. Discrimination and oppression of women is very common and there are various factors responsible for it. One such factor is family.

This book explores the facts that how the oppression and discrimination starts from within the family. It has shown that

how this discrimination starts even the child is in the womb of her mother. It further explores how all this behaviour has a negative effect in the development of one's personality. The present book intends to fulfil the needs of students, teachers, researchers and all stakeholders who are engaged in the study of Feminism. The book comprises of 6–7 chapters. Beginning with the introduction of Feminism-providing a deep insight into the different aspects of Feminism with detailed information and some more emphasis on subjugation of women within the family, by her own family members. This is followed by chapter's on novels like *Ladies Coupe* by Anita Nair, *Shame* by Salman Rushdie, *The Bride Price* by Buchi Emecheta, *The Grass is Singing* by Doris Lessing and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. These chapters provide valuable information about Feminism.

## Acknowledgments

All praises and thanks to Almighty Allah, who created the heavens and the earth, and originated the darkness and the light. Thanks to Almighty, the most gracious, the most merciful. The constant grace and mercy of Allah have made me able to accomplish this research journey successfully. First and foremost, I would like to bow my head in front of Allah who blessed me with opportunity and instincts for pursuing me to work.

A journey is easier when we travel together and this present work is the outcome of the support of all those who helped me in one way or the other. It is an honour and very pleasant opportunity to be able to express my gratitude to all of them.

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In the end, I wish to acknowledge the debt to my family, whom I left waiting on several evenings, nights and holidays, while I was busy in finalizing the manuscript or the illustrations for this book. My heartfelt heartfelt gratitude and love for my parents, who always stand there whenever I need them. I specially thank my children who are so responsible to understand the work and worth of their mother even in their infancy. I gratefully thank all my friends for their unfailing support and encouragement. Their care and concern was a great motivating force. May Allah bless them always and keep them content. It wouldn't have been possible for me to complete this research without the extensive support of all the above mentioned advisers, panellists, librarians, family and friends.

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# Contents

## **Chapter 1**

Introduction	- 01
--------------	------

## **Chapter 2**

Ladies Coupe	- 12
--------------	------

## **Chapter 3**

Shame	- 34
-------	------

## **Chapter 4**

The Bride Price	- 39
-----------------	------

## **Chapter 5**

The Grass is Singing	- 47
----------------------	------

## **Chapter 6**

The Color Purple	- 72
------------------	------

## **Chapter 7**

Conclusion	- 78
------------	------

## **References**

- 82
------





# Chapter 1

## Introduction

**M**ost of the societies are male-dominated where a woman is only supposed to be a mother, an ideal wife and a home-maker with multifarious roles attributed to her in the family. As a wife and mother, her service of sacrifice, tolerance and submissiveness are her required attributes. Furthermore, her admired qualities of adjustments make her life faithful and obedient. But this individual self of a woman has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and it leads to her self-effacement. Mary Ann Fergusson opines that: “In every age women has been seen primarily as mother, wife, mistress, and as sex object—their roles in relationship to men!” (Fergusson 4-5).

In most of the settled societies women in all classes have experienced very low status, oppression and lead towards their exploitation. Women have been enslaved by men in every class and in every society. Woman in the whole world like in Asia, Europe or the Middle East is unable to have any influence over the political, religious or cultural lives of her society. She doesn't own any property nor does she inherits it, but is herself

treated as a property. In ancient times, if a man rapes a woman, the punishment was given to his wife by handing her over to the rapist's husband. In ancient Greece, women had no political right and couldn't inherit any property either. They were even forbidden to leave homes after dark. Similarly, in most of parts of the world women were unable to take part in any social or political event.

As we know that the status of women has risen over few decades with respect to their social and political status but still oppression and male domination prevails in many parts and cultures of the world. They (women) don't have any role in determining their lives; they are seen as nothing more than a commodity, property of the males in a family, and as owners, the men have the right to make decisions for them. The oppression of women is only because of men's desire for power and control. Since men feel the need to gain as much power and control as they can, they steal away power and control from women. They deny women the right to make decisions so that they can make them for them, leave women unable to direct their own lives so that they can direct their lives for them. The men made decisions about their education, living, marriage and other things related to their lives. The subjugation is not only restricted to the current husband but may extend to former husbands, and other family members such as parents, siblings, and in-laws. "Domestic violence is defined as rape, physical assault and stalking perpetuated by current and former dates, spouses 'and cohabitating partners.'" (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Globally, Subjugation of women within the family is universal across culture, religion, class, and ethnicity. Despite

this widespread prevalence, however, such violence is not customarily acknowledged and has remained invisible because most of the women are socially and economically dependent on men. The acts of violence against members of the household, whether wife or child, were perceived as discipline, essential for maintaining the rule of authority within the family.

Subjugation of women is predominant everywhere in world, in developing and as well as in developed countries. It occurs in many forms like abuse, psychological, sociological, economical, physical etc., yet the problem is often overlooked, excused, or denied. The abusers use varying tactics to forcibly to gain and to maintain power and control over the victims which leads to rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an partner and reported at least one impact related to experiencing these or other forms of violent behaviour in the relationship i.e., feeling fearful, concern for safety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), need for health care, injury, crisis support, need for housing services, need for victim advocacy services, need for legal services, missed work or school. The main causes responsible for subjugation of women are illiteracy, male dominance. Noticing and acknowledging the signs of an abusive relationship is the first step to ending it. No one should live in fear of the person they love. Actually, very little is known about the actual living experiences of women who are in a subjugated relationship. There are various impacts of subjugation which include physical injuries, mental health problems, social isolation, a growing faith as well as adverse effects on the children and on the women's self-worth.

From other aspect, the women also struggled to avoid negative labels given for being disrespectful to their men because of living in the conservative societies where a woman is expected to be silent, the more silent she is the more faithful she is. In addition various feminist findings have revealed four main themes related to the underlying issues on the needs and support of subjugation of women within family that women drew on in their accounts: Unpleasant experiences when accessing the services outside; the problems with procedures in disclosing and in the help-seeking process; the usefulness of services and women's needs and support mechanisms. The social isolation component can also be intensified for women living in rural areas. These women have grown in an environment where their main concern is to look after their families either before or after marriage. The women have been taught since their childhood that they are inferior to men both physically as well as socially. So, one can say that the subjugation of women starts at her birth. There is a belief that domestic violence occurs more often in urban areas than rural, and the reason for this is that violence among rural women is vastly under-reported. Most of the women in rural areas are illiterate or with less education, and are not able to stand on their own. They bear all the assaults and busy themselves in household works. So, their problems are unreported and unheard.

According to available statistics from around the globe, one out of every three women has experienced violence in an intimate relationship at some point in her life. This is an average based on available national surveys across industrialized and

developing countries (World Health Organization 1997). World is of diverse nations and every nation has a unique social structure, religious orientation, economy and political experience. Many studies have been devoted in an attempt to understand these issues, yet many facets of these issues have remained elusive. The subjugation of woman is a central fact of history, and it is the main cause of all psychological disorders in society.

Fiction is a means of entirely describing destinies, feelings, circumstances and interpersonal relationships seems much more appropriate. This is because skilful fiction does not merely tell, depict, describe and explain but eventually involves and captivates the reader. This way, it causes a kind of emotional intimacy between the reader and the fictional characters, which lets the reader approach the text differently and allows different conclusions. However, this seems only constructive when fiction claims to be realistic in one way or another e.g. historically accurate, politically relevant or critical. Women did not write in the beginning as like, the obvious reason as Virginia Woolf puts it, “A woman must have money and room of her own if she is to write fiction” (Woolf 126). Money symbolizes power and freedom and a room of her own is to have contemplative thinking. Very often women had enjoyed these things in the past so to develop their imaginative capabilities and personal freedom. The basics of Feminism were initiated by Virginia Woolf in 1929. In her book *‘A Room of One’s Own’* she had focused on the need of emancipation of women from the clutches of patriarchal society.

By juxtaposing different novels from different regions of the world on the theme of subjugation of women within family will make efforts to draw parallels between these novels and how this discrimination starts within a family and leading towards social and mental breakdown of a personality. Along with this it will also be explored whether differences in culture, race, religion and region make any difference in the pain and trauma suffered by the women from different backgrounds. In all these books, we can explore that the basic theme of these novels in women subjugation, and these women got their emancipation which can come under Feminism. Feminism is an umbrella term which contains all these themes. Feminism started in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the two key philosophers like John Stuart Mill and Mary Wollstonecraft. The definition of feminism is to provide equal rights to women. Women have been fighting to get the status of equality, suffragettes and autonomy. Even 8<sup>th</sup> March is celebrated as International Women's day. The main feminist writers were Simone de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*), Betty Friedan (*The Feminine Mystique*), Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*), Fredrika Beamer (*The President's Daughter*) and so on. But the real roots of feminism go long back when Simone de Beauvoir wrote that “the first time we see a woman take up her pen in defense of her sex” was Christine de Pizan who wrote *Epitre au Dieu d'Amour* (Epistle to the God of Love) in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. So in a way we can say that the struggle of women intentionally or unintentionally started long back.

The history of feminism has been divided into three phases by an American feminist Elaine Showalter. The three

phases according to her are feminine, feminist and female. The first phase was the muted phase in which the female writers just wanted to match the intelligence of male writers, and they often wrote under pseudonyms. The second phase is often called the protest phase in which the women protested for the right to vote. The last phase which is still present is the phase of self-discovery. The females demanded for self-autonomous rule. Showalter coined a term Gyno-criticism to describe feminine writing. Showalter in her essay *Towards a Feminist Poetics* says that the language is also male oriented. Even if we have to talk about both male and female as in terms of universal issue we say 'Man' representing both men and women. Instead, she says that 'Human' should be used. So according to her, everything is created by man to dominate woman. Even history is used against her. As she quotes one instance by saying that Cleopatra in history is represented in two different forms. Like Shakespeare in his play *Julius Caesar* has depicted her as Caesar's adopted daughter, whereas G.B Shaw portrayed her as Caesar's concubine. So Showalter is against this false image given to woman. She comments even on the role of woman in pop culture, where even if there is no need of a woman, still she is shown and that too naked. Showalter says that it is not only the fault of men but also women who just for the sake of money is allowing men to use them.

If we talk about the French feminism, then we can say that it was more philosophical and literary. This movement included writers who were not actually French, but who have worked in France and French tradition. The main writers were Bracha Ettinger, Helen Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and

many more. These writers focused more on the body and were considered to be bold and blunt. As Helen Cixous says, “Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard” (Cixous 335). She says that there is nothing to be ashamed of one’s body. According to her, females are very special and should not feel embarrassed of themselves at all. The female according to her has the power to give origin, so she should feel proud of the things like menstruation, lactation, pregnancy and so on. She invented a new term ‘écriture féminine’ meaning female writing, as she thought that the writing was phallogentric i.e. male oriented, and according to her, if females have to write then they should develop their own language to express themselves.

Basically, whatever feminism was in the world it was always bounded to white feminism. In a way it was biased and focused around white females only. The Third World women were being neglected and ignored. Recently the Third World women found their part missing in feminism and they felt the need to write about themselves, because what actually was happening was that white woman was writing about them in her own perspective, so it was the time to mend their history in the eyes of the world. They wanted to show that they were also suffering and the pain which was theirs could be expressed only through them. So all the Third World women started writing about themselves. To talk about the African or Black feminism then it can be said this movement focused not only on black females but females around the globe. Alice Walker, a black writer, for the first time used a word ‘Womanism’ for all the females of the world. India also welcomed this wave of



feminism and many Indian writers came forward to write about their struggle and condition. The women of India had to struggle a lot. In the colonial rule in India, the females were the easy targets. As Gayatri Spivak says, “Subaltern as a female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak 83).

After making such good steps towards women emancipation, still women of India have not attained that equality. Still women education is a big problem in most parts of India. Female infanticide is a crime in India, but still it is carried out not only by the illiterates but even the so-called literates. And if talk about the writings of the female writers in India then they can write with free will. If anybody writes boldly and bluntly, then she is condemned. The best example can be of Kamala Suraya (Kamala Das). She tried to write whatever has happened in her life, but she was considered a prostitute in writing, so naked. Apart from this still in India we have great writers like Kamini Roy, Mahashweta Devi, Anita Desai, and so on. The main objectives of the feminists were to have women’s control over their own bodies, specially the right to abortion, to protect against domestic violence, to pose an essential femaleness which women must seek to reclaim beyond the structure of the patriarchal family.

Family is the smallest unit of society where all the members share their joys, sorrows and anxieties of life. Familial relations are important as they help us interact with the wider social world. The relationships between family members often serve as the central focus in works of literature. In particular, many writers – including women – place great significance on

the dynamics of human relationships for relations often present complex, provocative models of interaction. Women, from time immemorial, have been seen sincerely playing their role of upholding the traditions of the family. Ever since the dawn of civilization, there has been a struggle to emancipate women from male oppression. Consequently, more and more women writers are articulating anxieties and concerns focusing on women's issues and creating a body of 'literature of their own'. Women writers have been echoing the feeling of marginality and expressing their revolt against the purely masculine world. One of the major concerns of contemporary literature the world over has been to highlight the plight of women, their increasing problems, their physical, financial and emotional exploitation, and their mental anguish in their families by subjugated them within their families. Women's suppression is rooted in the very fabric of every society – in religious doctrines and practices, within the education and legal system, and within families.

The male domination in a woman's life is a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal society, and the consequent suppression of the woman to a secondary position seems to have prompted women writers of the world to take up the cause of women. These women writers focused on the dual image of women to break the shackles of their traditional position and search for their identity as an individual, rather than sacrificing at every step for the sake of their husbands and children, for their fathers and brothers. Traditionally, woman has been known to bear primary responsibility for the well-being of her family. Yet, she is discriminated against systematically and deprived of access to resources such as education, health care services,

jobs, etc. In this book, the novels analysed and compared are the selected works of four writers – Anita Nair (Indian), Buchi Emecheta (African), Salman Rushdie (Indian), Alice Walker (Afro-American) and Doris Lessing (British) – and discuss similarities and dissimilarities between their women protagonists as they redefine gender identity and relationships especially their subjugation within the family by their own family members. It highlighted the struggles which these women protagonists pass through and eventually emerge as empowered individuals. The chief questions investigated are: what are the similarities and dissimilarities between the women protagonists in Indian, African, Pakistani and British fiction in relation to: conflict between their familial responsibilities and the quest for identity? What kind of relationships do the protagonists maintain with their family members? Are they able to maintain a balance between tradition and modernity in their lives? How the women are subjugated within family? And their journey from mute acceptance to protest?

## Chapter 2

### Ladies Coupe

by

*Anita Nair*

Anita Nair is an Indian English writer and the author of bestselling novels: *The Better Man* and *Ladies coupe*, poetry collection *Malabar Mind*, a collection of short stories *Satyr of Subway* and eleven other stories and has written two children books. She has also edited an anthology of writings about Kerala titled *Where the Rain is Born*. Anita Nair evokes experiences that are drawn from day-to-day life and her approach often enables the readers to suspect the character to be one of their neighbours or a friend. She is an eminent Indian women writer, writing in English, holds revolutionary ideas about marriage and man-woman relationship. In her opinion, social consciousness of today is leading us to the point where conditions for better growth of two complementary components, man and woman, would be ensured by their separate and individual development. Relationship plays a vital role in human encounter. It is the music of life. Without it no physical or mental aspect can be given a name. It moves around the world to keep the lives enriched with feelings.

Anita Nair has presented in her novels, modern Indian women's search for revival of relationships that are central to women. Anita Nair reveals that her concern is with the exploration of human psyche. She explores the emotional ecology of her protagonists. Indian women writers have established their own identity in the field of writing by exploring female subjectivity in their literary offspring and striving to bring an identity for Indian women, have highlighted various untouched and unnoticed facets of life which an Indian woman faces since birth. Literature is in fact the most explicit record of the human spirit. It is a medium through which essence of our living is made paramount by linking it to imaginative experiences.

The Indian woman is particularly conditioned by tradition and conventions and willingly accepts the responsibility of being the custodian of the family and its prestige. It is widely acknowledged that family constitutes the dominant milieu and constructs the primary identity of women. It defines and prescribes the social roles that women will play in familial terms: daughter, wife, mother. Thus family becomes the major site of women's oppression. An Indian woman in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is yet to seek identity as a human being with equal status in the family in which she is born and in the family to which she is married. Anita Nair's primary focus is on psychological exploration of inner self of Indian women.

Anita Nair permeates deep into the inner psyche of the depressed women by virtue of their feminine sensibility and psychological insight and brings out their issues, which are mainly because of the psychological and emotional inequalities

in a male-dominated society. Since the beginning of this world, women have been quite suppressed and oppressed both outside and inside of her family and this is expressed by the quest for self-identity. This quest for identity leads to self discovery which pervades in the selected novel of Anita Nair. This search for self is the predominant theme with the Anita Nair's novel *Ladies Coupe*. The women in this novel are suppressed and subjugated by their own family members.

In this novel, Anita Nair depicts the changing relationships within family and a society. Her concept of a free woman transcends the limits of economic or social freedom, but relates to her mental and emotional attitude and well-being. A girl is taught since birth that she is subordinate to men. In Indian culture women are treated only as inferior to men even in this present world of science and technology.

A woman has low status when compared to man. There are still so many places where girls receive only a primary or elementary education whereas compared to boys who are even sent by their parents to other places in order to receive education. As per census 2011, it has shown a prominent decline in the number of females per thousand males. The figures are very shocking in many states. There is sharp increase in female foeticide cases. The little angles are killed before their birth not by outsiders but by their own parents. This shows the subjugation of women starts in the womb of a mother when she is totally unaware of this world. Why is she killed? Only because she is a girl.....During ancient times, a woman was killed if her husband died before her; that was known as 'Sati'. Now, female foeticide is prevalent. Female foeticide has been linked to the

arrival, in the early 1990s, of affordable ultrasound technology and its widespread adoption in India. Male to female sex ratio for India, based on its official census data, from 1941 through 2011. The data suggests the existence of high sex ratios before the arrival of ultrasound-based prenatal care and sex screening technologies in India.

The suppression of women is rooted in the very basis of Indian society – either in traditions or in religious doctrine and practices; the suppression may be regarding the education and legal systems, and within families. Traditionally, women bear primary responsibility for the well-being of their families. Yet they are discriminated systematically and deprived of access to resources such as education, health care services, job, training and etc. Anita Nair's novel *Ladies Coupe* shows the frustration and disappointment of women who experience the oppression of their families. *Ladies Coupe* is a journey of individuals in search of one's true self who confronts the gender oriented tradition. It depicts the plight of a spinster who suffers silently in the name of family. Anita Nair provides perfect examples of victimized women in *Ladies Coupe* where the novelist tries to depict the picture of an Indian woman who stands along with her family despite of all their tortures.

In the *Ladies Coupe*, Anita Nair questions a taboo, which still continues to affect most of the women in India to this day. The main question of the novel is "Can a woman stay single and happy, or does a woman need a man to complete?" *Ladies Coupe* is a very powerful novel which depicts the theme of women's quest for strength and self-identity and signifies a relationship of inequality. We can also say that the story is an

attempt to show how, in life, suppression and oppression do not always come in recognizable forms, as we think of outsiders who are strangers for us but often under the guise of love, protection and the assurance of security by our family, nears and dears. *Ladies Coupe* is the story of six different women of different age groups dealing with women's quest for strength, self-identity and independence.

*Ladies Coupe* has depicted some bitter facets of women's life regardless of their geographical, cultural, religious, social or economic differences. Whatever they are, or whoever they are, all these women have one thing in common, that is, 'subjugation' and the first site of this subjugation is the family itself. The novel opens with "a sense of escape, of leaving, of running away, of pulling out, of escaping" by its protagonist Akhila (Nair 1). She always dreamed of a life where there should have no family obligations. She wants to live the life of her own which she has failed to do. Now at the age of forty-five, she wants to leave all the horizons. She wants to cross all the illusions of the society. "So this then is Akhila, forty-five years old. Sans rose coloured spectacles. Sans husband, children, home and family. Dreaming of escape and space. Hungry for life and experience. Aching to connect" (Nair 2).

Akhila has no life of her own except the one prescribed by her family. Though dutiful and the eldest, she is not allowed to think of her own self. She made her dreams and desires always take a back seat when it comes to her family. Now the time has reached when she has to think of herself. Akhila was quite mature to take her decision and then finally decided to escape from the boundaries of the relations which were just



liabilities on one another. “Akhila was not a creature of impulse. She took time over every decision. She pondered, deliberated, slept over it and only when she examined every single nuance and point of view did she make up her mind” (Nair 2).

The Brahmin heroine, Akhila, whose life has been taken out of her control, is a forty-five year old spinster, daughter, sister, aunt and the only provider of her family after the death of her father. Getting fed up with these multiple roles, she decides to go on a train journey away from family and responsibilities, a journey that will ultimately make her a different woman.

The coupe becomes a metaphor for a utopian world that is liberated from patriarchy, one that is not characterised by false binaries. Akhila lived in a South Indian Brahmin family with her father, mother, two younger brothers and one younger sister. Her father was the lone breadwinner of the family. When Akhila completed her pre-university course with first division, all of a sudden her parents stopped her further education. She was very anxious to learn more, but the family forced her to stop her education. They have considered that her education is completed and now she should learn how to perform the household chores. Her parents didn’t bother about her desires. “Her parents considered her education complete and she was expected to fine-tune all her housekeeping abilities in preparation for the day she would be married” (Nair 48). Her mother was a staunchest Brahmin and had made her life’s main duty to please her husband. She had a different ideology like other orthodox people of the society have, that a woman doesn’t

have her own identity, she is always known either by her father, brother, husband or by her son.

The women's identity in their culture has been compared with Kolam; she should know her role in the family. "A sloppily drawn kolam suggests that the woman of the house is careless, indifferent and incapable. And an elaborately drawn one indicates self-absorption, a lavish hand and an inability to put others' needs before yours. Intricate and complicated kolams are something you reserve for special occasions. But you everyday kolam has to show that while you are thrifty, you are not mean. ....Your kolam should reflect who you are: a good housewife" (Nair 50).

Akhila was the bread winner of the family; she was not considered as the head of the family and her needs and desires were least bothered. Her brother decided to get married, as he was a man, he did not ask for anybody's permission. When he told the family that he was going to marry the principal's daughter, "No one could fault with his choice and there was nothing anyone could say except perhaps – Don't you think you should wait for your elder sister to get married before you think of a wife and a family? But who was to mouth this rebuke?" (Nair 77). And both Narayan and Narsi had their weddings in the same hall, on the same day and time. Akhila waited for Amma or her brother's to say something about her marriage, but they never asked, "What about you? You've been the head of this family ever since Appa died. Don't you want a husband, children, a home of your own?" (Nair 77). Nobody in the family bothered about her. They didn't treat her like one of them she was only a earning machine for them and nothing

else. Even her mother whom she expected to speak for her and for marriage remained silent. Akhila became a sort of feelingless creature for them who can only earn for them and fulfilling their demand. She has been subjugated in her own family first by her parents who stopped her education and then by her siblings who thought of their own family and life and not of their elder sister who has been very loyal to them since their father died. She became the victim of her own family.

Though Akhila had done her duties, all that of a head of a family to her brothers and sister, she was not recognized as the real head, just because she was a woman. She sincerely paid for her younger brother's education, younger sister's marriage, and even establishing the families of her brothers too. She plays the role of a daughter, sister, aunt, and provider; but she is never allowed to live her own life, never asked what she wants. Even after the marriage of her brothers, they never asked about her marriage. "What about you? You have been the head of the family ever since Appa died. Don't you want a husband, children, a home of your own?" (Nair 77). For her own family, Akhila was no more a woman, she has been ceased to be a woman and has already metamorphosed into a spinster. There was a quite difference between the treatments that both the daughters got in the same family by the same mother. The mother ignored the mature age of marriage of her elder daughter and paid more and more attention on her younger daughter. "Besides, there was Padma. When she had her first period, Amma dressed her as a bride and had her photograph taken in the local studio with her back to a mirror, so that the intricate flower arrangement on her braid would be seen as well. She

gave the photograph to Akhila to admire and stood looking at it from over her shoulder. ‘My little one is a woman now,’ she said quietly” (Nair 77).

With the passage of time Akhila’s life changed and stopped only to work, eat and sleep. Nothing else was left in her life. Now she was thirty-four, there was no love in her life and nobody bothered about her not even those for whom she sacrificed her life. Nobody in family asked what a single woman does next in life. “She took a train to work every morning..... the same route back and was home by seven. Her mother would wait for Akhila to arrive before she put the pressure cooker on. They ate; they listened to the radio, and by quarter to ten were in their beds. They lived quiet, starched and ironed lives where there was no room for chiffon-like flourishes of feeling or heavy zari-lined silken excesses” (Nair 78). Akhila has lost her own identity, she has forgot her own name because no one called her by her name. She has lost her identity and was and treated as an elder member in the family and was called as madam outside. Her real identity has been struck somewhere. “So who was Akhilandeswari? Did she exist at all? If she did, what was her identity?” (Nair 84).

After sacrificing the golden period of her youth for the sake of the good of her family, she is not given her due reward. When she seeks permission from her mother to go to Mysore with an office group, her mother finds herself helpless and asks her to get permission from her brothers because they are the men of the family and have the right to make the decisions of the other members of the family, especially of Akhila’s life, but she being an elder sister, thinks it is not fair to get permission

from them. “Amma, I’m their elder sister. Why should I ask them for permission to go on an office tour? You might be older but you are a woman and they are the men of the family” (Nair 150).

Parent-child relationship plays an important role in the development of the psyche of a child. Akhila’s mother is a strong conservative and orthodox lady, because of the patriarchal structure that has framed strict social, political and economic limitations on them. Akhila’s mother is a highly conservative woman. Throughout her life she has been a devoted wife with her own theory who considers herself inferior to her husband. She is that sort of woman who had never took a decision on her own regarding her own life or of her children, but had left all decisions to her husband for she believed, “He knows best” (Nair 14). According to her, “A good wife learnt to put her husband’s interests before anyone else’s, even her father’s. A good wife listened to her husband and did as she said...it is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband” (Nair 14). This supposedly leads to a harmonious life. This marks the absolute mode of traditional society. So, Akhila’s mother wants that her daughter should imbibe such values so that she may live a happy life that is the reason why she asks her to have permission from her brothers for any sort of decision in her life. But Akhila totally disapproves it. “This is ridiculous, I’m not going to ask them for permission to go on a trip. I’d rather not go” (Nair 150).

Akhila has become that sort of a person who has lost her identity and was always an extension of someone else’s identity. She has been fed with all this. Her identity was, “Chandra’s

daughter; Narayan's Akka; Priya's aunt; Murthy's sister-in-law....Akhila wished for once someone would see her as a whole being" (Nair 201). Akhila's encounter with her school friend Karpagam awakened her spirit to think of a life of her own where her needs would come first. And finally she made her decision to live alone. Akhila is a modern girl who knows very well how to follow her own path. She is not given much attention regarding her marriage. Due to this, she decides to leave her family and live alone, her siblings do not approve that, her younger brother Narsi says, "It's improper for a woman to live alone. What will society say? That your family has abandoned you. Besides, there will be a whole lot of questions that will pop up about your reputation.... Have you thought of how embarrassing my position will be" (Nair 205). So she gets furious and wants to be nobody's daughter, nobody's sister, nobody's aunt, nobody's mother, nobody's well-wisher and nobody's family member and declares her revolt against patriarchy saying, "For heaven's sake, I don't need anyone's consent? Look at me, I'm forty-five years old. And older than all of you. I will do exactly as I please and I don't give a damn about what you or anyone else thinks..." (Nair 204). So after sometime, Akhila, without getting permission, decides to go to Kanyakumari and undermines the myth that "a woman can't live alone. A woman can't cope alone" (Nair 16).

She is not the woman of traditional society, but she is the image of the new woman. She remains unmarried and does not want to be the follower of this male-dominated society. As she remarks, "Women are strong. Women can do everything as well as men. Women can do much more. But a woman has to seek

that vein of strength in her. It does not show itself naturally” (Nair 210). In this way Akhila is the image of a new woman who sets aside the traditional psyche regarding woman. This new woman is a self-reliant, emancipated and happy individual, sexually uninhibited, intelligent, confident and assertive. She lives with a heightened sense of dignity. This new being has been projected in the context of the contemporary world.

Margaret Shanthi was also dominated by man-power. Men like her husband, Ebenezer Paulraj are orthodox who are unable to see and praise the worth of the women. Margaret Shanthi married Ebenezer Paulraj of her own choice and at the immediate willingness of her family because she had fallen in love with him. “I fell in love with him the first time I saw him at the church youth group meeting” (Nair 101). She at that time was only twenty-two and was honoured with gold medal in M.Sc chemistry. She was a Chemistry teacher and not an ordinary teacher, but the one who had been a gold medalist in her subject. Initially Margaret did not understand the deep rooted male egoism in Ebenezer Paulraj, as her extreme love for him had made her blind. Though at times she felt the pain of it, she convinced herself saying, “He was Ebe. My Ebe. He was right. He was always right” (Nair 109). She silenced her aspirations in order to be what Ebenezer wanted her to be. Anna Coate and Beatrix Campbell in their work *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women’s Liberation* (1982): “Women are an oppressed class... We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants and cheap labour... Our prescribed behavior is enforced with threats of physical violence. Because we have lived so intimately with our oppressors, in isolation from each

other, we have been kept from seeing our personal suffering as a political condition...” (Anna Coate and Beatrix Campbell 15).

Ebenezer is simply a male chauvinist when he takes the power to ask Margaret to abort the baby their first baby. When they came back to home from the maternity home Margaret had been very much happy; she wanted to tell the whole world about her happiness. She has waited for this moment from last eighteen months. She became so crazy that she felt the presence of the baby everywhere. She wanted to gave this good news to her parents, but she felt that Ebenzer was somewhat quiet and withdrawn. He was not feeling like Margaret was feeling and asked her to abort the baby. Margaret was shocked; she didn't want to abort her baby but she still aborted it for the sake of her husband whom she loved very much. “Maragatham, I'm not so sure if we should have a baby now,’ he said” (Nair 104). Not only in that, but he continued interfering in her matters and also thrust his supremacy over her in deciding her higher studies, career and even simple things like choice of food and her hair dressing. She wanted to go for Ph.D in chemistry, instead of encouraging her, he told her doctorate is less worth than B.Ed., so that you could be a teacher but didn't cared for her desire, for he says, “What's the point of working for a doctorate? Do your B.Ed. so you can become a teacher and then we will always be together. Long hair doesn't suit you. Cut it off. You'll look nicer with your hair in a blunt bob. Do we really have to go to church every Sunday? I don't think it is wise to eat bhelpuri from these roadside stalls” (Nair 105).



Margaret wanted happiness from the small activities that she wanted to share with her lover-cum-husband but the egoistic behaviour of Ebenzer came to her knowledge with every passing day of life. The first time Margaret felt anger for her husband was on the day when she was going to the operation theatre of the maternity clinic and Ebenzer wished her all the best “As they wheeled me away, Ebe walked by my side to the end of the corridor where the elevator banks were. ‘All the best’ He said. For the first time, I felt angry. All the best! What did he mean by that? Was I going in to write an exam or recite a poem?” (Nair 109). Margaret bore all the pains and problems without speaking a word. She loved her husband so much that she took all the wrong steps in her life. She said it was because of love a person becomes mad. She had been mad in Ebenzer’s love who was an arrogant, egoistic, dominating male of the society, “Love beckons with a rare bouquet. Love demands you drink of it. And then love burns the tongue, the senses. Love blinds. Love maddens. Love separates reason from thought. Love kills. Love is methyl alcohol pretending to be ethyl alcohol” (Nair 111).

For society and for Margaret’s family, Ebenzer was a successful man, he was a respectable man for the community, a good husband; and Margaret as compared to him was a person with numerous faults, overweight and barren. When Margaret tried to talk to her mother about her life and the treatment she has been getting from her husband, she refused to support her daughter and in return made Margaret realize that it is the duty of a wife to make her husband happy all the time. “When I tried to talk to my mother about the unhappiness that swelled my

flesh, shadowed my thoughts and tied my tongue, she dismissed it saying, ‘It is normal to quarrel with one’s husband. Every day won’t be the same when you’ve been married to a man for years. There will be bad days and there will be good days. The trick is to remember the good days. And like I have said many times before, it is a woman’s responsibility to keep the marriage happy” (Nair 112).

Margaret wants to ask her mother what about her. Does she can’t expect anything from her husband for whose sake she had sacrificed everything, even her career? She knew of her parents who didn’t want to hear anything that threatened their idyllic world that the society has created. Her parents who are living with ease and comfort, both their daughters married to eminent men, well-settled in their lives and the Indian society has a stigma of divorce, whatsoever the condition of a woman may be, divorce is not accepted in either the family or in the society. Margaret is in a dilemma because no one in her family has been ever divorced, “In respectable families such as ours, no one gave up on their marriage. They grit their teeth and worked harder to preserve it. If I left Ebenezer Paulraj, I would have to be prepared to lose my family as well. What do I do? I asked myself again and again” (Nair 113). The same thing has been shown by Arundhati Roy in her major work *The God of Small Things* as a woman writer proclaims that, “Is there any taboo when it comes to women’s marriage, it must be divorce. It is something that is unthinkable to any well mannered woman. There is virtually no good reason for a woman to leave her husband and file a divorce. Women who break such a taboo are never treated well by the society and are condemned even by

their families. A divorced woman has no position in her parents home. This is an euphemistic way of expressing the common belief of people (Roy 45).

As Ebenezer was becoming more and more egoistic, domineering and hypocritical, their relation became sour day by day. Ebenezer wasn't interested in her anymore. With the passage of time Margaret came to realise it and she stopped talking to him but it hardly affected him. Margaret used to share each and every day experience of her with Ebenezer and was of the thinking that her Ebe was interested in knowing all these things as she was herself always eager to know about her husband's day-to-day happenings. But one day she realised that he is not interested and was only pretending to be, "One day I noticed that he wasn't listening. He was only pretending to. I saw a fog of disinterest settle over his eyes as I talked. I saw him reach for a magazine and flick through its pages. I stopped. I didn't know what else to do. That night I couldn't sleep. I kept asking myself: if I can't tell him, who else is there for me to talk to? The next day, I was quiet. I waited for him to notice the silence; to ask me if everything was alright; to find out what was bothering me. He didn't" (Nair 117).

Then she realised that there is nothing left behind in their relation and finally she had lost all her hopes and expectations from her marriage. She was so patient and gulped in all insults thrown by him on her. She was taken to the height of anger as Ebe started throwing insults on her in front of his favourite Coterie. When he said to the Coterie "When I think of Chemistry, what comes to mind is the odour of rotten eggs" (Nair 130). The anger in her bubbled for she thought how he

had turned the evening into another moment of triumph for himself. She thought, “all that was good and noble about my life that he had destroyed, the baby that died even before it had a soul, .....there was nothing left for me to dream of and the words rose to the surface again: I HATE HIM. I HATE HIM. What am I going to do?” (Nair 131). She chose flattery as the weapon to bring down her husband’s self-esteem. She flattered and flattered and fed him with fatty food since dawn till night; till fat found its home on him, and turned him into a fat man, a quiet man and an easy man who sought her for food and sex and every way she knew. By doing this she made him fat; she eroded his self-esteem and felt that he is an easy man to live with now. The point of suppressing feelings and how adversely it affects one’s behaviour eventually resulting in conflict is corroborated by eminent psychologists, Calvin S. Hall and Gardner Lindzey in their book *Theories of Personality*, “The denial does not mean that the feelings cease to exist; they will still influence his behavior in various ways even though they are not conscious. A conflict will, then, exist between the interjected and spurious conscious values and the genuine unconscious ones” (Hall & Lindzey 289). Margaret gains self-esteem by eroding Ebe’s self-esteem. She succeeds in achieving her emotional fulfilment keeping the family ties intact, though some justifications contain a modicum of sense” (Nair 69). Thus one can say that the character of Margaret shows that the woman could vanquish the domineering man.

The subjugation of women within family shows its ugly face from cradle to grave. Even parents are more concerned about the boys than the girls. And it has been rightly shown in

the character of Prabha Devi to emphasise this issue of subjugation by the parents, especially by her father. When Prabha Devi was born her father sighed, as he was of the hope that it would be another boy in the family having already four boys, still wanted to have another boy and had planned to open a fifth jewellery store in the city, “Five stores, five boys, everyone happy” (Nair 169). But when a girl was born to him, he shelved the idea of the fifth jewellery store. Her mother was pleased with her daughter and said to her husband that there would be someone whom I would share my recipes, but her father stared down at her disapprovingly and muttered it would be a hindrance for his business progress as he says, “Has this baby, apart from ruining my business plans, addled your brains as well? If you ask me, a daughter is a bloody nuisance” (Nair 169). No doubt, Prabha Devi’s mother was pleased when a daughter was born, but her thoughts were convinced that a daughter is someone who will take her recipes to the other house and treasure her jewellery and someone who will say that she did this and that in her mother’s house. When Prabha Devi started playing games as a child, in Indian society, a girl is destined to choose to play cooking or babysitting games which would help her in the future life, “A kitchen was set up for her to play house and mother games. Sometimes Prabha Devi’s mother joined in her daughter’s games, pretending to be an adult-child while her daughter tried hard to be a child adult” (Nair 169 - 170).

Basically a woman is never liked to come out with opinions. When Prabha Devi asked her mother permission to go with her friends for movie at a nearby cinema, her mother

at a once shook her head nervously, “I don’t think your father will like it” (Nair 170). Since her childhood, she has been taught that a woman should be kind like her mother. Her mother also taught her that a woman should be subordinate to man; she gave her own example that how obedient she was towards her husband, in the same manner Prabha Devi should be a replica of her mother. Her mother also told her that if a woman speaks against the man of the family, she will be treated as a bad smell which nobody likes, “She had discovered that a woman with an opinion was treated like a bad smell, to be shunned,” (Nair 170). She was only eighteen years old when her father decided her marriage with Jadesh, the only son of a prosperous diamond merchant; and the reason behind the marriage was to expand the diamond section in their jewellery stores by marrying Prabha Devi to that man. When she is married to Jadesh, the remarks Prabha Devi gets at her in-laws house are, “Wives often lead their husbands down the wrong path. Away from their family and responsibilities. We’re not suggesting that your wife will..... but it is up to a good husband to accept or discard what his wife suggests. And not be smitten by a slavish love that makes him agree to her every demand” (Nair 174). She swallows this without saying any word. She doesn’t want to define herself within a more mechanical and monotonous life of a homely wife and a mother, as her mother had lived and taught her to live. She is not satisfied with this life and craves for something more. She wants to live life of her own without any interference and without any hindrance of which she had craved from her childhood; and finally Prabha Devi achieves the self-actualization by learning swimming on

her own out of great desire. As T.Varalakshmi says, “She triumphs over her innate timidity and gains peak experience of supreme content bringing tremendous happiness to her husband as well” (Varalakshmi 69).

Anita Nair has used the character of Karpagam to bring awareness to the society of women’s demands and their need for self-expression. Karpagam is portrayed as a strong woman striving for self-definition in a patriarchal social organization. She is a widow, but unlike other widows she wears the kumkum and colourful clothes. She is a courageous woman who breaks the shackles of patriarchy when she says, “I don’t care what my family or anyone thinks. I am who I am. And I have as much right as anyone else to live as I choose. Tell me, didn’t we as young girls wear colourful clothes and jewellery and a bottu? It has nothing to do with whether she is married or not and whether her husband is alive or dead. Who made these laws anyway? Some man who couldn’t bear the thought that in spite of his death, his wife continued to be attractive to other men” (Nair 202). Her defiance is outstanding when she says, “I live alone. I have for many years now. My daughter who is just twenty-three does as well. We are strong, Akhi. We are if we want to be” (Nair 202). Then Akhila asks her a question that what is her suggestion for Akhila who wants to live alone beyond the boundaries of relationships, “Whatever you think you want to. Live alone. Build a life for yourself where your needs come first” (Nair 202).

More than any other woman, Karpagam and her words instil a strong desire to live a life of her choice as Akhila feels, “Karpagam are you real or are you some goddess who had come

here to lead me out of this” (Nair 202). Thus Anita Nair portrays the character of Karpagam as one who courageously breaks the larger framework of patriarchy that denies personal freedom to women.

Anita Nair uses certain characters like Akhila’s mother, to express how women are strong conservatives of the patriarchal structure that has framed strict social, political and economic limitations on women. Akhila’s mother is a conservative and orthodox mother, a devoted wife with her own theory that a wife is always inferior to her husband. In Shashi Deshpande’s novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, she has rightly shown the cruelty of undue gender discrimination of mothers inflicted on their girl-child. The protagonist of the novel, Saru, is acutely aware of her mother’s preference for her brother, Dhruva, even as a child. Saru cannot tolerate the preference which her mother gives to her brother, Dhruva, simply because he is a boy. Saru recalls that there was “always a puja on Dhruva’s birthday. A festive lunch in the afternoon and an aarti in the evening. My birthdays were almost the same but there was no puja” (*The Dark Holds No Terrors*). She is the sort of woman who never takes decision on her own but left all decisions to her husband for she believes, “He knows best” (Nair 14). According to her, “A good wife learnt to put her husband’s interests before anyone else’s, even her father’s. A good wife listened to her husband and did as she said. It is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband. That way, there can be no strife, no disharmony. It is so much easier and simpler to accept one’s station in life and live accordingly” (Nair 14).



So Anita Nair's women raise the question of their way of life consolidated by patriarchy, and see it not only as the site of their oppression at home and in society but also make it a field of battle to vanquish their oppressors. This novel has shown us an image of the subjugated and marginalised women within family circles with an emphasis on men's pride, incompatible marriages, traditional norms of behaviour and patriarchal social system as the real forces of the oppression and exploitation of women. This novel reveals women's plight in the present day society. It is a fact that woman is victimized and subjugated by the male community everywhere. She has been treated as the subordinate sex and has to conform to male standards.

## Chapter 3

### Shame

*By*

*Salman Rushdie*

It is widely acknowledged that family constitutes the dominant milieu and constructs the primary identity of women. It defines and prescribes the social roles that women will play in familial terms as: daughter, wife, and mother. Thus family becomes the major site of women's oppression. The woman in this 21<sup>st</sup> century is yet to seek identity as a human being with equal status in the family in which she is born and in the family to which she is married, and writers have primarily focused on psychological exploration of inner self of these oppressed women. Salman Rushdie in the novel *Shame* permeates deep into the inner psyche of the depressed women by virtue of their feminine sensibility and psychological insight and brings out their issues, which are mainly because of the psychological and emotional inequalities in a male dominated society. Since the beginning of this world, women have been quite suppressed and oppressed both outside and inside her family and this transfer is expressed by the quest for self-identity. When Bilquis

Hyder is not able to conceive for some time, she becomes the victim of her in-laws. They don't bother who is responsible, but blame Bilquis for her barrenness, even her husband's cousin Duniyazad Begum pins her:

The disgrace of your barrenness Madam, is not yours alone. Don't you know that shame is collective? The shame of anyone of us sits on us all and bends our backs. See what you're doing to your husband's people, how you repay the ones who took you in when you came penniless and a fugitive from that godless country over there (Rushdie 84).

This shows the subjugation of women by her in-laws that one can understand, but if one is subjugated by her own parents then what to say. The more common subjugation of a girl by her own parents is predominant themes in this novel. Salman Rushdie has portrayed the figure of Sufiya Zinobia as a shame for her parents. When Bilquis Hyder conceived after sometime both Raza Hyder and Bilquis Hyder always talk about of a male baby. They didn't even imagine the possibility of a girl baby, "Raz, he's coming back, the little angel, just you wait and see" (Rushdie 88). They have always expected a male baby but a female baby was born to them: their first baby was born dead who was a male, but the second baby born alive is a daughter, "Raza Hyder's daughter was born at two-fifteen in the afternoon, and born, what's more as vivaciously alive and kicking as her big brother had been dead" (Rushdie 89). Both the parents were shocked when they found a daughter born to them: Mother's reaction when the swaddled child was handed to Bilquis, that lady could not forbear to cry, faintly, "Is that all, my God? So

much huffery and puffery to push out only this mouse” (Rushdie 89). A surprisingly small bundle was returned by Bilquis to the midwife, who bore it out to the anxious father.

A daughter, Major Sahib, and so beautiful, like the day, don’t you think so? In the delivery room, silence flooded from the pores of the exhausted mother; in the anteroom, Raza was quiet, too. Silence: the ancient language of defeat (Rushdie 89).

Raza Hyder always wanted a boy and was sure that a boy will be born, so he could not believe that a daughter was born to them. Raza shouted:

Mistakes are often made! Terrible blunders are not unknown! Why, my fifth cousin by marriage when he was born.....! But me no buts, woman, I demand to see the hospital supervisor! And even louder: Babies do not come clean into this world! And blasted from his lips like Cannonballs: Genitalia! Cau! Be! Obscured!” (Rushdie 89).

From the reaction of both the parents it is clear that the daughter was not acceptable in the family. With the passage of time she became the shame for the family. The mother treats her own shame. Whenever anybody asks about her, she calls her shame. They didn’t call her by her name but by a metaphor shame. That is the treatment of a female to a female! Mother to a daughter! “Rani, a judgement, what else! He wanted a hero of a son; I gave him an idiot female instead. But darling, there is nothing. That birdbrain, that mouse! I must accept it: She is my shame” (Rushdie 101). The preference for boys to girls is

the stigma of every society. People can go for any extent only to have a boy and is prevalent in every society and in every religion of the people, not restricted to only a particular group of people for any particular area. Bilquis's blame was because she has been abandoned by her husband. Same things happen to other female character in the novel, Rani for giving birth to a daughter, "Meanwhile, two wives are abandoned in their separate exiles, each with a daughter who should have been a son" (Rushdie 104). The main shame for the family is their daughter Sufiya Zinobia, "Sufiya Zinobia was a wrong miracle because her father had wanted a boy" (Rushdie 107). She was ill-treated since the first day of her birth and tortured by her own parents and gets the name of shame, "Even Rani Harappa in exile heard the rumours of dissension of the idiot child whose mother called her Shame and treated her like mud" (Rushdie 119). She grew in an atmosphere where there was no love, lack of affection and was never a precious thing for her family only just because she was a daughter. All that ill-treatment by her family as a neglected child made her retarded, "And once upon a time there was a retarded daughter, who for twelve years had been given to understand that she embodied her mother's shame" (Rushdie 135). Sufiya Zinobia nickname-Shame was married to thirty-one years older than her, even older than her father. The reason behind this was that her parents wanted to get rid of her; she was not mentally fit but still they married her. "She even had a husband, Omar Khayyam Shakil, and never complained that her parents had chosen for her a man fully thirty-one years her senior, that is to say, older than her father" (Rushdie 197). The main reason behind her madness

was the ill-treatment and starving for the love from her parents. With the passage of time she became wild, “Poor girl got so upset she went wild. That’s all” (Rushdie 198). This shows the discrimination and subjugation of female within the family, in such situation to which one blames when your parents don’t accept you. There are thousands of such stories within family which are unheard and unseen. This subjugation of women which is currently visible in every society has its roots from the home. A girl is ill-treated since her day one and is always taught to be oppressive in this male dominated society. She is not an equal to man but is always his subordinated. She is treated as the shadow of the man. She doesn’t have her own identity and is known as somebody’s daughter, somebody’s wife, somebody’s mother and has to fulfil her duties as per her role.

## Chapter 4

### The Bride Price

*By*

*Buchi Emecheta*

Traditional cultural practices always played an important role in development of customs and cultures. One of such custom that is prevalent in some Asian and African countries is paying the ‘Bride Price’. The bride price can be defined as a transfer of an amount at the time of marriage from the groom and/or his family to the bride’s family typically significant in size, often greater than a year’s income, and can be in the form of money, animals, or any other commodity. Paying bride price at the time of marriage is a custom that is widespread throughout many developing countries. It has a long history and was used by the ancient cultures like Mesopotamians, Hebrews, Egyptians, and the Aztecs. It become recognised that cultures always played an important role in the economics development of that particular nation.

Buchi Emecheta is an Ibo writer, her novels chiefly deal with the difficult and unequal role of women in African societies. She was born on July 21, 1944, to Ibo parents in a small village

of Yaba near Lagos, Nigeria. Both her parents died when she was very young. She married Sylvester Onwordi with whom she was engaged since the age of eleven. Only after a year later, Emecheta gave birth to her first child then shortly to her second child and then departed for London to join her husband, who had gone there to study. In a short span of six years she was mother to five children and also a divorced and a single mother. She did so many odd jobs to support her family, her children and her writing career. Emecheta always wanted to be a writer so that she can record the hardships of her own struggle and the struggle of her own people, hardships by a single mother raising her family and also as a writer. Her first book is *In the Ditch* (1972), other novels are *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977), *Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Destination Biafra* (1982) etc. are set in Africa and explore her favourite themes.

Subjugation of women by men is her main concern. It is a topic that she has experienced first-hand not only in a general, cultural context but also in the realm of her personal life at home. At one point in her budding career, her husband burned the manuscript of her novel *The Bride Price* (1976) in an attempt to stifle her desire for independence. We find the effects of her difficult life in the major themes of her novels like self-confidence, quests for equal treatment, and the dignity for woman as a woman in Africa. Through the novel *The Bride Price* Emecheta wants to eradicate the superstitious attitude of her primitive society where bride price is considered as the fate determining factor for the bride and also demonstrates the unfairness of male sexism and caste constraints in her native



country. In this novel, she takes us back to Lagos and Ibuza during the 1950s.

*The Bride Price* begins in Lagos, a port city in Nigeria, Africa. The opening scenes move quickly through the events that are about to drastically alter the lives of the Odia family: Ezekiel, the father; Ma Blackie, the mother; Nna-nndo, the son; and Aku-nna, the daughter and protagonist of this story. The setting of the story, a somewhat industrialized urban centre, presents a sharp contrast with the family's move back to the traditional, agrarian society of their ancestral village. Unknown to the mother and children of the Odia family, Ezekiel, the father, is dying. It is his farewell to his children (the mother, at this time, is visiting the country village of Ibuza) that sets the rest of the events in motion. In their culture, a woman without a husband is unable to take care of herself or her children. The translation of Aku-nna's brother's name reminds Aku-nna of this fact. His name means, "*father is the shelter*." In Nigerian culture, "the mother is only a woman ... boneless. A fatherless family is a family without a head ... a non-existing family."

Unfortunately Aku-nna's father, although he tells her that he needs only to visit the hospital for a short time, is overcome by an infirmity and dies. Aku-nna senses that something dreadful has happened to her father, but she neither is told directly by her relatives, who suddenly appear at her doorstep, nor does she ask direct questions. "Good children don't ask too many questions" (Emecheta 12). Instead, she follows the dictates of her uncles and aunts as they come together to prepare for the funeral rites. She then relates the burial practices and beliefs of the traditional culture, which have been infiltrated

by; the belief in heaven and hell as preached by the Anglican ministers. Fearful of offending any of the gods, the Ibo people follow the ceremonial dictates of both cultures. Ma Blackie, Ezekiel's widow and Aku-nna's mother, returns to Lagos to discover that her husband has died. She had left Lagos to visit her homeland in hopes of regaining her fertility and giving Ezekiel another child. She knows that since she is without a husband, she cannot afford to remain in Lagos and prepares her children for their return to Ibuza. Ibuza is an agrarian village of Ibo people who "have a reputation for not minding what job they take on, so long as it brings money, a race who is particularly business mad" (Emecheta 23). It is in Ibuza that Ezekiel's older brother, Okonkwo, lives. In that society, a man's status was measured by the number of wives he could keep. Okonkwo already has several wives, but he, by virtue of his brother's death, inherits and eventually marries Ma Blackie. Okonkwo does this while looking forward to the bride price that Aku-nna will bring him. He is an ambitious man who covets the title of Obi, which he can claim if he has sufficient money.

Aku-nna's father dies when she was only thirteen, leaving her in the responsibility of her paternal uncle who treats both her mother and her as his own property. She is now considered as an orphan because in their culture if a father dies the child is treated as an orphan and mother is treated only as a woman and not a responsible person, has no worth in Igbo society. In Igbo's culture father is considered to be the life and the shelter and if father is lost, means they have lost both of the parents. When Aku-nna and her brother learn that their father's death, they lament, "We have no father anymore. There is no longer

schooling for me. This is the end” (Emecheta 24). The women are out of access to any authority in this society and families, their job is just to bring out children and take care of them and their husbands and a childless woman has no worth.

After father’s death, they return to Ibuza and were inherited by her uncle Okonkwo. It also shows the oppression of women in their own families where they were treated as commodities and don’t have their own choice to live their life as per their own desire. When they reached Ibuza, her stepsister Ogugua tells her, “You still don’t know the customs of our Ibuza people! Your mother will become my father’s wife. My father has inherited everything your father owned, and he has ‘inherited’ your mother too” (Emecheta 23).

It is in Ibuza, as she is walking towards the village on arrival, that Aku-nna meets Chike Ofulue, her future school teacher as well as her future husband. Chike is also a descendent of slaves, and, as such, friendship between Aku-nna and Chike, according to tribal custom, is strictly forbidden. Through a conversation between one of Okonkwo’s wives and one of his children, the narrator states “the serious nature of such a friendship if it is true, as some of the villagers begin to suspect, that Aku-nna and Chike are developing a relationship: ... it was the greatest insult that could befall a family which had never been tainted with the blood of a foreigner, to say nothing of that of the descendants of slaves” (Emecheta 34).

African husbands think boys are more treasured than girls and they want their wives to bear boys more than girls. Since sons can transfer their names and way to other generations that

brings this reason to husbands to put their more energy, money, emotions on their sons rather than girls and as the most important aspect of a girl for them is just her bride price.

Aku-nna attends the school next to her brother very commonly and quite easily in order not to learn how to progress at the beginning but to sacrifice herself for his real father and then his husband later, however, this aim was alongside with lots of jealousy from the next-door families and others. Aku-nna at the beginning wanted to study in order to be educated, so that she could marry a rich man who her father would have approved of and bring her family a big bride price, as she did not want to see her father down in the dumps for the sake of financial problems, therefore, she did schooling just for fulfilling the fathers and family's ambitions. Despite the protestations of her family and a would-be suitor who kidnaps her, Aku-nna elopes with Chike and dispossesses her uncle of her bride price. In the end Aku-nna succumbs in childbirth, fulfilling the fateful superstition that a woman whose bride price is unpaid will not survive the birth of her first child. In Ibuza society big bride price is an honour to bride but if a girl marries without her bride price, it is assumed that the girl is not a virgin or not worthy to marry. It is a belief that if a woman's husband fails to pay her bride price, the bride dies in child birth. Afterwards every girl in Ibuza was told the sad story of Aku-nna and chike. "If you want to live long they were told, "you must accept the husband that your people choose for you, and your bride price must be paid. If it is not paid, you will never survive the birth of your first child" (Emecheta 85). The woman is not allowed to marry of her own choice and if she does so, then is cursed by everyone

in the society. Progress in any society requires adapting changes it is within our powers to eliminate all the man-made discrimination and subjugation against women. Aku-nna's family and relatives don't accept her physical ailments responsible for her ill health but their superstitious nature makes them to think that it is only because of her unpaid bride price. They totally contradict with medical science. When Aku-nna and her husband meet a doctor he says, "Mr. Ofulue, your wife is so young, and small. She has been undernourishment for a long while, so you should have given her time to recuperate after you married before deciding on a baby... you must both be very careful. She has hardly enough blood for herself, let alone for a baby, but we shall do our best" (Emecheta 168).

After Aku-nna's death, her story was narrated orally with the intention of reinforcing the longstanding superstition. Therefore, with this strong belief that if a girl wants to survive the birth of her child and see her children, her bride price should be paid by the husband, it is partly out of the question to modify the aborigines' ideas, although Aku-nna and Chike did it. They put feet on this false convention to indicate that every success in alteration needs a start, though encountering with defeat at the beginning.

Every girl born in Ibuza after Aku-nna's death was told her story to reinforce the old taboos of the land. If a girl wished to live long and see her children's children, she must accept the husband chosen for her by her people, and the bride price must be paid. The novel underlines the psychological hold that how family has subjugated the minds of African people and the consequent adherence to the old ways. How this remains

possible even in the age of modernization is strange but undeniable.

Aku-nna, right from the beginning of the story, has many questions about her family, her culture, and her role in society. She thinks about these questions, but she never voices them because in her culture it is considered worse than bad manners to ask them, especially coming from a girl. But it is these questions that drive Aku-nna throughout this story. She is on a quest for answers.

The book draws on the events that Emecheta witnessed growing up in Nigeria. It is the third book that Emecheta has published, but it is the first one in which she offers a hint of hope that both the African woman as well as the descendents of slaves might overcome the potentially debilitating restrictions of their culture. The marriage between Aku-nna and Chike heralds this new hope that the issue of fixed gender roles and and class divides might actually come to a resolution.

Buchi Emecheta as one of the most debatable writers from Nigeria, did the best endeavours to demonstrate the culture and traditions of the Nigeria in the form of a tragedy novel to the world, she has been very ambitious and hopeful to see great changes in the attitudes of the African people about woman and her role in the family. I believe she has been very successful in this way since by publishing this novel, Emecheta has gained manifold critics from all over the world, they have divided into two groups, the first group, i.e. Western critics acclaim her for her must-read novel, on the other hand, second group who are mainly from Africa complain and object for her novel because of depicting the traditions of Africa in a negative way.

## Chapter 5

### The Grass is Singing

*By*

*Doris Lessing*

**D**oris Lessing in her novel *The Grass is Singing* shows that how there is discrimination between the children only because one is boy and the other is girl. Lessing through her fiction had presented a revolution towards the society to dig out the ugly realities of a society where people become the cause of oppression to others. Her most of the fiction is realistic in nature portraying the harsh reality of society. One of her important novel of this realistic feature is the renowned novel *The Grass is Singing*. Mary is the protagonist of the novel who becomes the victim of this subjugation. Lessing presents Mary true to the life and society. The relation between Mary's parents is not good and became a cause of oppression also:

He drank himself every evening into a state of cheerful fuddled good humour, coming home late to a cold dinner, which he ate by himself. His wife treated him with a cold difference. She reserved her scornful ridicule of him for when her friends came

to tea. It was as if she didn't wish to give her husband the satisfaction of knowing that she cared anything for him at all, or felt anything for him, even contempt and derision (Lessing 33).

The home became a monster to her. She doesn't like to go home. When she was sent to boarding school, she first time in her life felt happy. She can't even imagine backing to home where no one cares about her and were always busy in complaining one another:

Then she was sent to boarding school and her life changed. She was extremely happy, so happy that she dreaded going home at holiday-times to her fuddled father, her bitter mother, and the fly-away little house that was like a small wooden box on slits (Lessing 34-35).

It has a lifelong effect on her personality that she doesn't like even in the imagination to think about marriage and children.

Whenever Mary thought of home she remembered a wooden box shaken by passing trains; when she thought of marriage she remembered her father coming home red-eyed and fuddled; when she thought of children she saw her mother's face at her children's funeral-anguished, but as dry and as hard as rock. Mary liked other people's children but shuddered at the thought of having any of her own. She felt sentimental at weddings, but she had a profound distaste for sex; there had been little privacy



in her home and there were things she did not care to remember; she had taken good care to forget them years ago (Lessing 39).

She hates all the relations in her life. She is not interested in any relation like marriage and family. But society forces her towards marriage that also proves to disastrous to Mary. She marries Dick Turner. Mary thought that now her life that was all since her beginning incomplete will be happy than before, but she was wrong. After marriage she found that there is no love between her husband and her. She tried her best to fit in the environment in which Dick lives but gets unrewarded.

For his pride and affectionate gratitude for what she was doing overshadowed his patient disappointment. When she saw that puzzled hurt look on his face, she pushed away the thought of what he must be suffering, for it made him repulsive to her again (Lessing 62).

Throughout her life she starves for love, first from her parents and then from her husband and always failed. Sakshi Jain in her articles “Marital Discord in Nayantara Sahgal’s Storm in Chandigarh and Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing*” states:

Now Mary is in complete distress. Lessing portrays the life of a girl who could not be satisfied with her childhood and now after marriage also she is restless. Mary finds herself in the same condition of her mother. She is facing the problems similar to her mother. Her mother’s life is replacing to Mary’s also.

Mary cannot cope with her loveless marriage, now she regrets her own decision of life (Jain 63).

Mary's life is full of psychological problems and had accompanied her towards the end of her life. Literature and psychoanalytical concepts are associated with each other. Carl Jung in his *Collected Works of CG Jung* defines the relation between art and psychology as:

Analytical psychology is seen as different from medical psychology. The latter must be discarded when examining a work of art, for a work of art is not a disease, and requires a different analytical approach. Two basic types of art are identified and some criteria provided for differentiating between them. The first (introverted) is the result of the artist's assertion of his own conscious aims upon his material; the second (extraverted) is characterized by the artist's complete identification with his work (Jung 65).

Through dreams, the author expresses unconscious desires that he/she wants to bring out to the whole world. In a masters dissertation Gul Buyu defines the relation between literature and psychology as:

Literature encompasses numerous branches such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy and politics. Yet the most remarkable relations can be established between literature and psychology. Throughout centuries, men of letters have tried to analyse the human being, his motives and relations

with the external world. Man's motives have played a specific role in the formation of society in all cultures. The mystery in the nature of the human being has been, thus, the main concern of most writers due to the fact that this has great significance in the continuation of life and the world in general. Moreover, the reason for the popularity of most literary works, which are labelled as "classics", lies in the representation of man's conflicts with himself and his environment, which appeals to the reader in any age and in any culture (Buyu 1).

When Mary is introduced as a city girl she doesn't have any psychological problem and is happy in her own world, living all alone, an independent life:

At sixteen she left school and took a job in an office in town. . . . She was very happy. She seemed born for typing and shorthand and book-keeping and the comfortable routine of an office. She liked things to happen safely one after another in a pattern, and she liked particularly, the friendly impersonality of it. By the time she was twenty, she had a good job, her own friends, a niche in the town (Lessing 35).

Her independence was the reason behind her happy and cheerful life: "Till she was twenty-five nothing happened to break the smooth and comfortable life she led . . . .She was very happy: that was perhaps her only positive quality, for there was nothing else distinctive about her, though at twenty-five she was at her prettiest" (Lessing 33). The society doesn't allow

her to be alone. Her happiness was over when she herself heard her friends talking about her. The people were very close to her and she had full faith in them. They talked about her sense of dressing, living alone, etc. The narrator says that:

She was alone; and heard people talking in low voices, and caught her own name. She rose to go inside and declare herself: it was typical of her that her first thought was, how unpleasant it would be for her friends to know she had overheard. Then she sank down again, and waited for a suitable moment to pretend she had just come in from the garden (Lessing 40).

Mary was shocked with the behaviour of her friends. She never thought that her friends would make her a point of discussion. She wanted to live life as she likes beautiful, young, and her friends love her sincerely. This can be understood by these lines:

She was friend to half the town. And in the evening she always went to sundowner parties that prolonged themselves till midnight, or danced, or went to the pictures. Sometimes she went to the pictures five nights a week. She was never in bed before twelve or later. And so it had gone on, day after day, week after week, year after year (Lessing 38).

Sigmund Freud in his *Structural Theory* has divided personality into Id, Ego and Superego respectively. Myles in her research paper states: “At the same time agglomerating

around abnormal consciousness, fragmentation, self division, breakdown and subjective distortions of perception and the implicit questions about the external perspective of events” (Myles 25). Mary’s social circle around her, who she treats as her close friends form the superego. It had an adverse effect on her when she found them talking about her and her way of dressing. She realised for the first time that how much she differs from the society she live in. The society wants her to change her way of life. At the age of thirty she lives like a girl in her early teens. The conversation of her friends about her is:

She’s not fifteen any longer: it is ridiculous! Someone should tell her about her clothes.” “How old is she?” “Must be well over thirty. She has been going strong for years. She was working long before I began working, and that was a good twelve years ago.” “Why doesn’t she marry? She must have had plenty of chances. There was a dry chuckle. ‘I don’t think so. My husband was keen on her himself once, but he thinks she will never marry. She just isn’t like that, isn’t like that at all. Something missing somewhere’ (Lessing 40).

All this shows that whatever the society may be civilized or uncivilized the role of woman is fixed in it.

Carl Jung in his book *Collected Works of CG Jung*, makes it clear that it is the collective unconsciousness that motivates the writer to write down the repressed thoughts. It is stated as:

The reasons for approaching literature from the viewpoint of analytical psychology and the role of

the human psyche in both disciplines are outlined. Psychology, a study of psychic processes, can be applied to the study of literature, for the human psyche is the womb of all the arts and sciences. This approach takes two different forms. In the first instance, the object of analysis is a concrete artistic achievement; in the second, it is the creative human being as a unique personality. Although these two aspects of creativity are intimately related, neither can explain the other. Two modes of artistic creation are described: the psychological, dealing with familiar materials drawn from man's conscious life; and the visionary, dealing with primordial images that transcend human understanding. The first mode is seen as a reduction of the artist's vision to personal experience, a reduction that deflects our attention from the psychology of the work of art and focuses it on the psychology of the artist (Jung 84-85).

Mary's friends believe that being at the age of thirty she should marry anybody who comes to her. Green as a critic states: "Lessing's focus on the individual in its relation with the collective" (Green 76). This critical observation on Lessing shows that how she has shown the relation between an individual's personal life and the society's obligations for an individual and how it has its impact on the psychological setup of an individual.

Gul Buyu in the master's dissertation states the role of modern man with relation to psychology and literature as:

Man has been the same as far as his nature is concerned. The only thing that is changed about him has been his perspective towards life and the universe. Hence, the role of psychology in literature is understood better by modern man in the twentieth century owing to the fact that the more progress has been made in the field of psychology, the better the reader has realised the hidden motives and repressed emotions of the characters in most of the literary works. The developments in science and psychology led man to have a much deeper concern about himself; thus, the novelist also turned his focus onto the individual in the light of the teachings of particular psychologists such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung (Buyu 1-2).

The other segment is ego, which Mary becomes conscious of after the realisation by her friends. She afterwards starts working more and more in order to make herself busy but her mind doesn't allow her and then she starts to bring change in her life to obey the society. She changes everything from her hairstyle to her clothes and starts to think for marriage, which hardly means anything important in her life and her life changes accordingly. Her marriage was just a formality which she embraces only for the society. It was void of love. Hardy's view about marriage that fits best to Mary: "Marriage should be primarily for the happiness of the parties themselves rather than for any abstract notion of good of the community" (Sage 25). But Mary's was totally opposite case. All this brings a radical change in her life which was going smooth before all these

happenings. All this triggers Mary's psychological problems. In her personality arise two types of conflicts, external and internal. The conflict between her and her husband Dick is the result of this external conflict. They both having feuds to one another that lead towards the failure of their marriage. The conflict can be seen as:

So Samson, who earned a pound a month, was docked two shillings. He accepted the information with a shut sullen face, saying nothing to her.....Mary began to question him closely as to why he was needed; but Dick touched her arm warningly and shook his head. "Why shouldn't I ask him?" she demanded. "He's lying, isn't he?" "Of course he's lying," said Dick irritably. "Of course. That is not the point. You can't keep him against his will (Lessing 64-65).

They are totally different from each other in their dreams, lifestyles, imagination and their future. Their marriage was an accident and not out of love. It was a need for them to get married. Their treatment of the servants is also conflicting like:

"Listen to me," said Dick curtly. "I work hard enough, don't I? All day I am down on the lands with these lazy black savages, fighting them to get some work out of them. You know that. I won't come back home to this damned fight, fight, fight in the house. Do you understand? I will not have it. And you should learn sense (Lessing 78).

Mary loves to live in the city, while Dick loves his lands and want to spend his whole life there. As time passes to live



in the farms became difficult for her, it started having a psychological effect on her because the life she has imagined was totally different from it. Buyu (2007) in her master's thesis states this condition as: "Likewise, *The Grass is Singing* displays the suffering of an individual in a world which she finds hard to fit in" (Buyu 22). In his research paper on Lessing, V. Mikluc defines the novel in psycho-analytical perspective as:

*The Grass is Singing* deals with later stages of the struggle between the social feeling and the animal feeling through an example of a maladjusted woman who forces herself to death by failing to find a sustainable balance between the two. The object of her desire is a black servant she wants to hate, and the way the story unravels points out that the devastating consequences of racial segregation affect everybody involved in the destructive system, no matter what their skin colour is (Mikluc 211).

Lessing through her writing has altered the focus of readers from plot to the characters and plunged particularly into the unconscious of her protagonists by portraying out the darkest sides of their life. Mary always behaved in a capitalistic way to her servants and other people surrounding her. Her alienation because of her false pride adds more to it. Elena states, "It is important to see that the seeds of Mary Turner's eventual breakdown are shown years earlier, in her progressive alienation from herself. Her inability to handle the black servants-a male/female relationship, to which the tension of black/white roles is added" (Elena et al 27).

It is very clear because of the contradiction between her present life and the life she wants to live in. She only imagines the life in the town and plans to live in town along with Dick. The narrator states it as: “And she began to think, during those gray wastes of time, how it would be when Dick at last made some money and they could go and live in town again” (Lessing 97). But Dick was totally of contradictory mentality. His life is only up to farms where he is the boss and didn’t have to follow somebody’s orders. But Mary dreams of her life as an independent in the town as it was before her marriage. Her feelings are represented as:

It was during those two hours of half-conscious that she allowed herself to dream about that beautiful lost time when she worked in an office... and lived as she pleased, before “people made her get married.” That was how she put it to herself....Slowly, slowly, over weeks, she persuaded herself into the belief that she would only need to get into the train and go back into town for that lovely peaceful life, the life she was made for, to begin again (Lessing 97).

These contradictory mentalities of husband and wife became the cause of their psychological break down. Day after day Mary’s psychic gets destroyed. Their marriage worsens day after day. Mary’s condition also deteriorates after every passing day. Buyu in the research work explains the mental condition of Mary as:

However, day by day, their marriage gets worse and Mary finds herself living in a desert where she is

suffering from extreme hot weather, which almost suffocates her, and this physical pain symbolises her struggle against her repressed memories which try to get out of her unconscious. Her biggest fear has been to become like her mother and ironically day by day she becomes so. The moment she gets into the farm house, she smells the odour of the room and goes back to her unhappy childhood. What she escapes actually haunts her (Buyu 34).

She feels the same pain that her mother has felt. Here Lessing compares her sufferings too collectively with whole female psyche. Mary while arguing with Dick notices these things as:

She was speaking in a new voice for her, a voice she had never used before in her life. It was taken direct from her mother when she had had those scenes over money with her father. It was not the voice of Mary, the individual, but the voice of the suffering female, who wanted to show her husband she just would not be treated like that. In a moment she would begin to cry, as her mother had cried on these occasions, in a kind of dignified, martyred rage (Lessing 96).

The other reason behind their psychological problems is the failure in every work under taken by them especially by Dick and their life became miserable. This evidence is much clear as the narrator states:

The bath itself was of zinc, a shallow zinc shape set into a dried mud base. The metal had been dazzling

once; she could see how it had been because the scratches on the dull surface glittered brightly. When she bathed, which was only twice a week because of the trouble and cost of fetching water, she sat gingerly at the extreme end of the bath, trying to touch it as little as possible, and getting out as soon as she could. Here a bath was like medicine, which had to be taken, not a luxury to be enjoyed (Lessing 72).

Rowe on the psychological state of Mary Turner states, “nevertheless, the most important aspect of the novel is that it is psychological and it focuses on the crises of an individual who is caught up in contradictory feelings and desires” (Rowe 14). Marriage has negative impact on Mary’s social and personal life. She has been the victim of the disastrous marriage of her parents and she escapes from it. The narrator states, “But all women became conscious, sooner or later, of that impalpable, but steel-strong pressure to get married, and Mary, who was not at all susceptible to atmosphere, or the things people imply, was brought face to face with it suddenly, and most unpleasantly” (Lessing 40). Mary’s marriage takes her back to her past. Dick’s failure takes her to her subconscious where she resembles her mother. Life becomes a nightmare from which she can’t escape. She finds herself weak and couldn’t fight with the circumstances and finally becomes trapped in loneliness that leads her towards depression.

After many years of her marriage, Mary passes many periods that have an adverse effect on her psyche. It happens because she is not willing to modify or even to change her life.

We have seen Mary who loves to read books before marriage but after marriage she becomes so reluctant even to have a book in her hand. She was quite sociable and extrovert but after marriage she becomes unsocial and introvert, not willing even to communicate with anybody. She isolates from others and keeps her feelings to herself only and these repressed feelings subvert her psychological life. Her unsuccessful marriage, isolation and pessimistic attitude add more ingredients to her subvert psychic life. She was caught in a dark future. Buyu defines the whole chronology of the novel having a negative effect on Mary's psychology as:

The novel begins to tell the life of Mary in a chronological order focusing on her unhappy childhood, and then the happy days in town, her desperate marriage at the age of thirty, coming to the village as a result of her marriage to Dick, the broken illusions of both, Mary's brutal treatment towards the natives, the economic collapse of the couple and the sale of the farm to Charlie Slatter, her mental breakdown and lastly her murder by Moses in the end where the circular structure of the novel is completed (Buyu 23).

It is shown by the narrator as, "She was letting everything slide, except what was forced on her attention. Her horizon had been narrowed to the house. The chickens began to die; she murmured something about disease; and then understood that she had forgotten to feed them for a week" (Lessing 149). Being alone since from days now Mary has turned to be a psychological wreck. Her behaviour has been totally changed. She only wants

to sleep in order to escape from her life. Her life has become meaningless. This pessimism paves way to her depression. The meaninglessness in her life is clear by this passage by V. Mikluc as:

The noise of nature, i.e. eros, causes headaches and heaviness in her limbs. Hot, low, heavy sky and the hot, painful neck that is going to be broken by the end of her story are the images that make the pulsing noise even louder. Right before her death, Mary frantically runs to all the places that make coordinates of her unsuccessful journey through life (Mikluc 212).

There are various factors behind it as has been shown earlier that her disastrous marriage is also one factor to it. The other factor is their poor economic stability, her incompatibility with her native servants, her hatred for natives and the presence and dominance of Moses became the cause of all her destruction. Moses became the main cause of her depression and destruction. This is shown by the narrator as:

She was tight and controlled in his presence; she kept him working as long as she could, relentless over every speck of dust and every misplaced glass or plate-that she noticed. The thought of Dick's exasperation, and his warning that he could stand no more changes of servants, a challenge which she had not the vitality to face, caused her to hold herself like a taut-drawn thread, stretched between two immovable weights: that was how she felt, as if she were poised,

a battleground for two contending forces. Yet what the forces were, and how she contained them, she could not have said (Lessing 148).

This internal and external conflicts in Mary are because of an individual's obligations to the society. She is so occupied with her thoughts that she forgets each and every thing. The narrator states it:

Her mind, nine-tenths of the time, was a soft aching blank. She would begin a sentence and forget to finish it. Dick became accustomed to the way she would say three words, and then, her face becoming suddenly null and empty, lapse into silence. What she had been going to say had gone clean out of her head. If he gently prompted her to continue, she looked up, not seeing him, and did not answer (Lessing 149).

Sometimes she talks to herself loudly and at the same time is afraid of her servant who has been her reason of this destruction as stated in these lines:

Once she was roused by a noise, and realized it was herself, talking out loud in the living room in a low angry voice. . . The sound of that soft, disjointed, crazy voice was as terrifying as the sight of herself in the mirror had been. She was afraid, jerked back into herself, shrinking from the vision of herself talking like a mad woman in the corner of the sofa (Lessing 149 - 150).

The narrator further says about her depression in this way: “She laughed without knowing why” (Lessing 199). She was such a psychological wreck that her servant helps her in dressing and this is caught by Tony Martson another Englishman. He gets very much annoyed. She is so much terrified of Moses that she can’t express her feelings to anybody. The fear of Moses leaves her restless. He is the reason behind her breakdown, narrator describes it as:

Will you go? shouted Tony. He could have killed this native: he wanted to take him by his throat and squeeze the life out of him. And then Moses vanished. They heard him walk across the kitchen and out of the back door. The house was empty. Mary sobbed her head on her arms. “He’s gone,” she cried, “he’s gone, he’s gone!” Her voice was hysterical with relief. And then she suddenly pushed him away, stood in front of him like a mad woman (Lessing 188).

For psychologists, all this happens because of a conflict between Superego and Id which forced her to do the things beyond her own wishes and desires. The Ego was a referee between Mary’s wishes and the obligation by her society. And make her ego to sink down in many psychological problems which became the cause of her breakdown. Dick and Tony are aware of Mary’s situation. Dick at times is afraid of Mary’s such psychic condition. Tony calls such condition of Mary as: “Complete nervous breakdown” (Lessing 184). And:

Tony, witness of this scene, refrained from looking at Dick. He was grieved for them both. He had learned



to like Dick very much; his feeling for him was sincere and personal. As for Mary, while he was sorry for her, what could be said about a woman who simply wasn't there? "A case for a psychologist," he said again, trying to reassure himself (Lessing 184).

In order to analyse a personality, psychologists have used two concepts—transference and free association. These two concepts are aptly applicable to judge the personality of Mary. Applying free association to make analysis of Mary's personality, it is not applicable to her because she had always repressed her feelings in front of what society demands of her. Change in personality is psychological effect of self and the philosophical function between a mind and the world. So the political system shapes and reshapes the personality of a person as stated:

The Jungian model of psychic growth through the accommodation of opposing drives is analogous to the dialectical paradigm. In this sense duality can be understood as both a psychological configuration within the self and a philosophical function defining the relationship between a mind and the world (Elena 29).

The other concept is transference and is used to analyse her personality. It is applicable to Mary's psychic status as she transfers the relation of pain and miseries of her parents to her painful and miserable relationship with Dick: "Mary, with the memory of her own mother recurring more and more frequently, like an older, sardonic double of herself walking beside her,

followed the course her upbringing made inevitable” (Lessing 90). The narrator further state: “She identified herself with her mother, clinging to her most passionately and pityingly after all these years, understanding now something of what she had really felt and suffered” (Lessing 135).

So, every incident becomes a catalyst in Mary’s life to increase her alienation and anxiety: the poverty, the heat, her neighbours, their successive failures in their lands. She hates Dick for his failures and automatically hates herself. Fink in his book on Lacan and his *Mirror Stage Theory* has associated with the character of Mary. First of all when the child finds his own image in the mirror, then identifies it, like this child Mary fixes her image with that of a little girl which for time being is admired in the society. But in actual she is a mature woman who should get married that is her actual image. The people around her make her realise her real image which she doesn’t want to accept and is shocked. It becomes the cause of her psychological problems as she has been realised her own actual image with her true self which she had never recognised. This is shown as:

He suggested, since he could not afford to send her for a holiday, that she might go into town and stay with some of her friends. She appeared horrified. The thought of meeting people, and most particularly those people who had known her when she was young and happy, made her feel as if she were raw all over, her nerves exposed on shrinking surface (Lessing 133).

Dreams reveal secrets and problems related to the personality of an individual. Janik, the critic defines the novel *The Grass is Singing* as: Mary feels a loss of her “proper” control as a white person and discomfort at her growing awareness of a sexual attraction to Moses, which is manifested in nightmares and in daytime bouts of anxiety and disorientation” (Janik 198). The other dream that makes her sacred of being alone when Mary imagines death of Dick and her isolation from the native. At the same time she feels happy on Dick’s death but the sense of guilt indulges in her happiness. It is shown by the narrator as:

In her dream the conviction grew that Dick was dead- that Dick was dead and that the black man was waiting next door for her coming. Slowly she sat up, disentangling her feet from the clinging weight of the coat, trying to control her terror (Lessing 163).

It is result of her conflicting personality. The political system of a place is directly related or directly influences the individuals of that society. Mary is one among such case who has been the victim of her own prejudice about the race. She becomes emotionally crippled. Elena et al defines the breakdown as:

Viewed in both individual self-division and social absurdity, chaos is first confronted as a result of the external world and then recognised as a consequence upon inner reality. In each case, violence, fragmentation, and self-division are indicative of a breakdown within the self, which is connected to relationships and social institutions (Elena 25).

This presence of contradictory feelings in a single person shows the signs of psychological imbalance in the individual's personality. The above dream shows the native supporting Mary in the death of Dick. In another situation she finds the native taking care of her. All these thoughts are contradictory.

After making the analysis of the novel, the researcher concludes that as a literary piece, *The Grass is Singing* has a close relationship with the social reality of the African society at the time of British rule. At the time when the novel was written class consciousness was among the British people and influenced every aspect of human life. There was only one relation that is master-servant relation. It made one class oppressor and the other oppressed and thus consequences were very fatal. It affected its characters both socially and personally. It caused a struggle among its characters. In *The Grass is Singing*, Lessing's perspectives had been offered by many critics, but the most important perspectives are Marxism and Psychoanalytical. These theories together offer a quite unique position of the novel. By the lenses of these two theories, Lessing exemplified totalitarian dystopia to bring out its effects on the individual personally and socially. Marxist lays focus on disparity between the people on the bases of class, Psychoanalytical criticism addresses topic that are much more individualised. It is concerned with the individuals unconscious and how it manifests itself like in dreams, oppression and projection. These two theories offer separate perspectives but can also work together as shown in the novel *The Grass is Singing*. Marxism theory looks towards the perspectives as a whole while as the Psychoanalytical theory examines from the

individual's perspective. Doris Lessing holds a specific place in the history of English Literature. She belongs to the category of writers who are the most fearless and frank. Her main themes vary from social, political and personal conflicts. Her literary art towards the readers presents a deep insight of its characters, their psyche and their emotional behaviour. Her characters first have the phase of self-analysis, then their relation with other persons (interpersonal) and lastly their relation with society (social relations). She has exposed the meanness, hypocrisy and the double standard of the characters in her novels. Most of the characters found themselves caged and lonely and finally leading to their social and mental breakdown and had portrayed the agony, pain, plight and sufferings of her characters denying them of their equal rights. The novel can be better understood by Diane Sherwood Smith's theses entitled as *A Thematic Study of Doris Lessing's Children of Violence*. He comments:

Mary Turner, whose life on an African farm forces her into accepting quite unconsciously the white supremacist ethic. Emotionally estranged from her husband and living miles from the nearest neighbours in impoverished conditions that offer little escape, Mary turns more and more frequently for companionship to her native servant, Moses, but her inability to see him as a human being turns to tragedy, ending in both their deaths. Such an inability to face life—that is, to recognize part of ourselves in all human beings – is costly. In this novel racism is viewed as a debilitating compartmentalization of the mind that takes away Mary's mind and ultimately

her life, and it leaves society paralyzed with an irrational fear and paranoia. What man will refuse to face consciously will haunt his unconscious, leaving him exiled from a land of joy and freedom, man's rightful domain (Smith 4).

Lessing as a realistic writer never hesitated to jot down the reality of the cruel treatment to people on the basis of colour or race, domination of one person on another. She had definitely dealt with themes as Marxism and Psychoanalysis. Whenever the reader reads her works, he/she feels like a true incident is happening in front of him/her. The reason behind it is that she has observed all this in her life, had faced the cruelties of colonialism, racism and apartheid. All this brings a positive variation in her themes. The novel suggests its readers try to eradicate all types of inequality among people because everyone has equal right to live. She has always focused to convey her views about the problems of a particular group of people by using her artistic taste and people to accept it by her creativity of mixing reality with fiction which was her motif. It lastly shows that how societies are responsible for the breakdown of a personality because of his/her own prejudice. Doris Lessing has made her religion to serve the people and work for the cause of the oppressed classes whether she may belong them or not. Through her writing she holds a mirror to the society and asks people how long they will be oppressing people. She also asks them are they really ready to change or their conscious allows them to ill-treat others only because there is colour bar. Jha's view about Doris Lessing is as:

I think she wrote reality of the real society with the help of imaginary characters. Doris Lessing has presented a true example of taking benefits from literature and making literature a revolutionary weapon to dig the ugly soiled maladies of the society (Jha 125).

Freud in his book *Beyond the Pleasure* gives the role of person while framing their destiny as, “psycho-analysis has always taken the view that their fate is for the most part arranged by themselves and determined by early infantile influences” (Freud 23). Mary Turner did the same for herself. She marries Dick not out of love but out of desperation and thereafter leading towards her downfall and complete breakdown.

So, at last we can say that Lessing’s interest lies in probing the psychological study of the characters of her fiction which can be seen by using the example of Mary Turner. Every character has a particular psychological dimension and the individual’s life reacts accordingly to that situation and Lessing in the novel *The Grass is Singing* definitely succeeded in depicting Mary Turner’s psychological breakdown which is related to her actions and their reactions portrayed by the author very keenly and clearly.

## Chapter 6

### The Color Purple

*By*

*Alice Walker*

The novel *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker was published in 1982 and was her third novel. Alice Walker had won both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for Fiction in 1983 for her distinguished work especially for *The Color Purple* and made Walker first black writer to win the prize. The novel was also adapted into a movie in 1985 of the same name, which only increased the fame of the novel. It was based on Walker's personal experiences that serve as a source of inspiration for writing in this novel. She grew up in Georgia (Eatonton) where male brutality towards women and violence was a part and parcel of routine life. The novel shows the oppression of African women in a male dominated society where they were oppressed within and outside family and how this oppression has led towards a revolt in the society. The novel advocates plethora of violence suffered by African women and their inspiration to survive.



Alice Walker in this novel focuses on the violence suffered by women. Celia, a fourteen year old girl, suffers this violence. Her innocence is depicted when she writes letters to God in which she points her agony, pain and sufferings. Alice Walker through her protagonist Celia portrays the sufferings of a woman. Celia has been continuously beaten and raped by her stepfather, Alphonso. Her relationship with every male in the family is dominating. Everyone oppressed her whether her father or husband oppressed her psychologically and sexually leading towards her social imbalance. Celia talks about her father as: "He never had a kind word to say to me. Just say you gonna do what your mammy wouldn't. First he put his thing up against my hip and sort of wiggle it around and grab hold my titties. Then he pushes his thing around my pussy. When that hurt I cry. He starts to choke me saying you better shut up and get used to it" (Walker 19). It shows the pain and agony of a little innocent girl who becomes a victim in her own family. Celia further points her pain by her father whom she calls Pa when he takes her two babies away and then marries her to an elderly man Albert. He also ill-treats her and always shows his dominance on her. The way her father and husband speak to each other, "Mr. \_\_ come let me to take care of his rotten children. He never ask me nothing about myself. He clam on top of me and fuck and fuck, even when my head bandaged. Nobody ever love me. I say" (Walker 109). As time passes Celia came to know that Pa is not her biological father. The novel portrays the aura of violence which is actually sexual violence within the members of a family.

Celie endures a barrage of brutality, violence, rape and oppression and brutality that causes her to experience her personality as a fragmented and only a victim in the hands of a patriarchal society. The combination of physical oppression and mental oppression on regular basis in the life of human results in the loss of identity. Celia's marriage to Albert is an end to the violence by her Pa but opens a new chapter of violence by her husband whom she calls Mr. The society is responsible for plight of a woman who gives a man a place or space to dominate women. It is because of this society a husband treats his wife as a property and only a commodity to be used and thrown away without any concern of her desires or dreams. Celia accepts the ill-treatment by Albert of her as her fate simply to survive, "It's all I can do not to cry I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celle, you a tree" (Walker 23). Celia talks about her frustration as:

I can't ever remember the last time I felt mad I say,  
I used to get mad at my mammy cause she put a lot  
of work on me. Then I see how sick she is, I couldn't  
stay mad at her. Couldn't be mad my daddy cause he  
my daddy. Bible says Honour father and mother no  
matter what .... Sometimes Mr. \_ get on me pretty  
hard..... But he my husband. I shrug my shoulder.  
This life soon be over. I say. Heaven last all ways"  
(Walker 47).

She only loves to write letters to God. Her agony is clear when she writes to God, "You must be sleep" (Walker 183). This oppression that she is subjected since from her childhood results in a lack of purpose and direction in her life.

Discrimination on the basis of gender was prevalent in African Societies. In these societies fathers control the family and have the license to oppress their women. The author shows in this novel that how a girl child is not safe even in her home and within her own family members. The word ‘home’ usually implies a sense of comfort, protection, and security but the novel shows its opposite. Celia is tormented and brutalised in her own family, the various forms of brutal violence like incest and rape perpetrated within the home reveals how the relationships of mother, daughter, wife or sister have lost their meaning for the male sex. Family as the site of oppression is an important concern for the author in this novel. In this patriarchal society women are taught since their childhood that they don’t have their own identity and are denied even to their basic rights, “A girl is nothing to herself, only to her husband can she become something: the mother of his children” (Walker 162). *The Color Purple* talks about the plethora of violence against women in the form of gender discrimination. It further examines violence and its potential to act as a destabilizing agent of selfhood, identity, and subjectivity are blurred in the face of violence.

Literature, along with other mediums like theatre, press and art, offered an opportunity for oppressed groups to express their struggles, Alice Walker through her works speaks out her mind. She has created characters that have portrayed best examples of the oppression of their society. She talks about the brutality of men against females in an interview about her grandfather, “as young men, middle-aged men, they were ... brutal. One grandfather knocked my grandmother out of a

window. He beat one of his children so severely that the child had epilepsy. Just a horrible, horrible man” (Winchell 6). She further talks about the brutalities of her family to their women that her father has also a tendency to dominate his wife and children and the results were the violence.

*The Color Purple* is one of Walker’s most famous works. The novel is in epistolary form, set from the beginning of 1900 through the mid-1940s. The main character is Celia, a 14-year-old girl from the South who faces oppression, mainly from the men in her life. For most of the story Celia writes letters directed to God, because she feels lonely and God is the only one she can turn to. She talks about the hardships and oppression she faces as a young black woman. From a young age, she loses any privacy she has over her body. She is repeatedly raped by her stepfather, whom she first believes to be her father. She gets pregnant from him twice, and he takes both children away. Besides raping her and impregnating her, her stepfather also beats her and forces her into a marriage with a widower named Albert, in the novel often referred to as Mr. When his son asks why he beats Celie, he says it’s simply because Celie is his wife, representing the dominancy of the male in a marriage in their time. Generation upon generation, men were raised to dominate their wives. Albert learned this from his father and is teaching it to his son as well. However, Celie gains enough courage to stand up to him, and in the end, feeling supported by the women in her life, especially her sister Nettie, Celie is able to break out of Albert’s control and leaves for Memphis where she starts a business of designing clothes. In this book,

some major themes come to light that mirror the society of the early twentieth century.

Subsequently, Albert “looks her over like a head of livestock and marries her in desperation because he needs someone to cook and clean for him and take care of his four children” (Winchell 86). Celie is treated like property and like a servant here, handed from one domineering black male to the other. She is not a slave in the literal sense, but she is still very much dominated by the men in her life, not able to make her own decisions. In the end, Celie gains enough confidence to leave Albert, when she learns that there is a definition of God that ‘even’ loves poor, ugly black women, because that is how she feels herself to be. She also fears the men in her life, because they handle her so violently. For example, her stepfather beats her when he sees her winking at a boy in church, even though Celie tells God in her letters that she is scared of men and does not look at them. “I don’t even look at mens. That’s the truth. I look at women, because I’m not scared of them” (Walker 7). Moreover, when Albert has sexual intercourse with Celie, it is unromantic at best. “He git up on you, heist your nightgown around your waist, plunge in. Most times I pretend I ain’t there. He never know the difference. Never ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep” (Walker 74). The dominant role of the man in the marriage is clear in this scene.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

Women have been struggling with the issue of gender discrimination since ages. Feminism is not a new term and the fight for women emancipation started long back in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since then the fight is going on as women didn't achieve their emancipation. The women from her childhood are dependent on males present in her life: before marriage on their fathers, after marriage on their husbands and after the death of husbands on their sons. They mostly have no life of their own. Women are subjugated on various grounds especially on religion, race, and culture. Religion is considered to be an important part of one's life and usually, religion is also manipulated to subjugate women. Most of the religions of the world are considered to be against women empowerment which is wrong. The tradition of women oppression is a part and parcel of society and women are made to believe that they are inferior to men in all the aspects and all spheres of life. The women have accepted this oppression as fate and hardly speak against it.

The women face different types of oppression across the globe, among which the most common are sexual harassment and domestic violence. Sexual harassment is considered to be a crime which is committed in almost all parts of the world. The harassment leaves a deep scar on the minds of the women. They become so helpless that they lose all the confidence and become completely dependent on men in their life. Sexual harassment at the job place is one of the common places for this crime. Women hardly get the courage to work in a place crowded by men. It is also believed that sexual harassment is done to women not only by the unknown person but by a known perpetrator. Marital rape is also one kind of sexual harassment which is very common among masses. Women are taught to devote their entire lives to their husband and are prepared to satisfy him in any condition. Most of the men hardly care about the pleasure of women during sexual intercourse. Their main concern is to satisfy their sexual hunger and for that, they don't even mind the feelings of women. This marital rape is a serious issue and women across the globe should be made aware of that. Women consider their husbands no less than gods and they consider it mandatory to satisfy their husband. So they take marital rape as a normal sexual intercourse between husband and wife and don't report against it.

Domestic violence, on the other hand, is also a serious issue which is prevalent around the globe and at an alarming pace. Organisations like United Nations Organisation (UNO) and World Health Organisation (WHO) have passed so many reports regarding the statistics of domestic violence. This is one of the biggest causes that UNO and WHO are dealing with and

they are trying their level best to eradicate it from the society. This crime is really a serious crime as it harms the women not only physically but mentally as well. They develop an inferiority complex and finally go into state of depression. This results in the loss of their identity and self.

All the selected novelists in these novels *The Grass is Singing* and *Shame* show the discrimination and subjugation of females within the family, in such situation where one blames when your parents don't accept you. There are thousands of such stories within family which are unheard and unseen. This subjugation of women which is currently visible in every society has its roots from the home. A girl is ill-treated since her day one and is always taught to be oppressive in this male dominated society. She is not equal to man but is always his subordinate. She is treated as the shadow of man. She doesn't have her own identity and is known as somebody's daughter, somebody's wife, somebody's mother and has to fulfil her duties as per her role.

Women are discriminated on the basis of gender since ancient times. Gender discrimination is a serious threat to the society as it disturbs the equilibrium of the society. Women, regardless of their colour, region or religion, suffer this discrimination across the world. Different laws and rules have been passed to eradicate this evil but its is still prevalent in the society.

Women are widely oppressed on the basis of sex, race, region and religion. One of the main objectives of this research is to prove that religion is in favour of women emancipation



which is usually misinterpreted to dominate women. The main issues on which women are oppressed are education, marriage, domestic violence, sexual harassment etc. Thus to conclude, it is explored that a woman across the globe face the same pain and agony regardless of their region and culture, women across the globe face the issues of discrimination.

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