

A Story Of Female Sub-Ordination: An Analysis Of Sana Munir's Reema In The Light Of Beauvoirian Phenomena Of Defloration And Altruism

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Abstract

Reema's character in *Unfettered Wings* depicts a journey of female subordination. Simon de Beauvoir's phenomena of altruism and defloration becomes prominent and recurring themes of the story that further shed light on the sorry state of Reema's subjugation as Other in the patriarchal society. Female subordination can be clearly seen through the character of Reema and her mother. Simon explains in her theory that there is a relationship between ovum and sperm in various creatures like fish, insects and mammals etc and she describes women's subordination to species in term of reproduction. The story is about the past of a woman named Reema who is in a state of nostalgia. She is memorizing the past time of her life as now she is 80 years old and lying on a hospital bed suffering from Alzheimer's disease. It was the impact of this subordination that Reema at the age of eighty after having daughters and granddaughters cannot forget that critical phase of her life and it left permanent impressions on her life. It was due to all this that she was still feeling guilty from her husband that he was so loving with her but he was unknown of the fact that what happened to her past. From her character analysis we came to know clearly that women face oppression and power of patriarchy as they are not able to speak anything against men. From this story it is analyzed that Reema was not able to speak for two reasons, firstly she was not telling the truth because it was about her uncle and she was horrified that if he will kill her or he will do something more bad than this to her. Secondly she was keeping it as a secret for saving her next life which was married life as she never disclosed it to her husband. From this story, it is analyzed

that Reema under enormous patriarchal pressure becomes speechless. She did not disclose, it was a matter of reputation for her family which was purely altruistic on her part. She also did not want to hurt the pride of her husband and spend so many years in silence by tormenting her own soul and going through mental agony. Defloration becomes a constant disturbing factor for Reema that pinches her throughout her life but she behaves altruistically in order to uphold the patriarchal system. These things distinguish between the concept of masculinity and femininity. Women need to be more careful of their self because society demands a proof of their chastity. Men are more independent because they don't have to give any proof in this way. Because of these restrictions a woman is not able to speak in front of anyone for her humiliation. She sacrificed her whole life that becomes a metaphor of subordination. Reema's sexual abuse was kept as a secret by her mother also who never disclose it to anyone because she was well aware of the fact that in that society of male domination if someone came to know about her rape no one will marry her daughter and she will remain as a curse in the society as females are always subordinated in the society. In this act of Reem's mother we can see the element of subordination as well as altruism.

Keywords: Altruism, Defloration, Harassment, Patriarchal Society, Subordination, Feminism

Introduction

The role of women in existence of human life is vigorous. Different cultures define different roles of women in domestic, local, national and international perspectives. The role of women in a culture fixes the respect and position of women in the society. Analysis of respect of women in different societies and ages indicates that the position of women was worse in ancient societies. Women were considered inferior to the men. They had no basic rights. The birth of the female child had no pleasure for her parents. Even parents used to kill or bury female baby at the time of birth. There were no systems, which could save the girls from the cruelties of life and the cruel fate of women. Women were deprived of the right of education and basic pleasures of life. The main role of women was considered to look after only the household matters and serve their family. Women are oppressed in all societies but not in the same way. Women are oppressed psychologically, politically, socially and economically. Women are always taken as "Other", in all the societies as, Simon de-Beauvoir said that: "woman is always considered as an object" (34). The main goal of all the feminist theories and feminist criticism is to change the world by promoting gender equality. Gender issues play a significant role in literature. The Feminist Movement that started in the twentieth century, metamorphosed the attitude and perception of the world. It actually provided a better understanding of women's issues and rights and endeavored to bring them forward because they had been marginalized for so long.

In 1990, Bapsi Sidhwa in an interview said "Feminists are those who dare to break the conspiracy of silence about oppression, unequal relationships between men and women and who want to change it. All feminist pursuits are aimed at social movement acquiring rights for women from society. Keeping this under consideration, one might argue that feminism in Pakistan is a complete

myth. Ever since its independence, in Pakistan, have been battling exploitative treatment at the hands of their male counterparts the social, economic and political environment, making it difficult for them to progress and fight for their rights.” (1990, 06). Beauvoir (1949) claims that man has fabricated and constructed woman as “The Other” as the one who is not oneself. Whatever characterizes men, in their own view indeed, women are defined as the opposite. “If men are active, women must be passive, if men represent good, then women must represent evil. In other words, all the negative characteristics of humanity as men perceive them are projected onto women” (23). According to Barkty (1990): “Women’s oppression under male domination not only consists of solely in depriving women of political and legal rights but also extends into the structure of our society and the contents of our culture and permeates our consciousness.” (43)

According to Carol Pateman: “the patriarchal distinction between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection. In patriarchal power, making women into pledges haggled by families for political power. She has to sacrifice her emotions, desires, identity, and education and sometimes even parents also.” (74)

Methodology

“She appears essentially to the males as a sexual being. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental; the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject; he is the absolute. She is the Other” (Beauvoir, 37)

The Second Sex (1949) comprises of the theory of feminism and its existential perspectives. In this book Simon de-Beauvoir has not discussed feminism from only one point of view, but there are different dimensions of feminism which are discussed in it. In this book author has discussed that how women were treated throughout the history. When this book was published it was the second wave of feminism. The book was published with original title “Le Deuxieme Sexe”. In this book she talks about sex, marriage, narcissism, bad faith, altruism, dream and sincerity and according to her all these things are cursed. She relates all these things to feminism in which, according to her the narcissism is related to self-love and when women loves herself more than anything, then she can achieve the goals of her life easily without external pressure. Altruism is something she do for the good of others. It can be taken as a sacrificing act of women for the others. She further talks about the unnatural and maternal mother, according to her, maternal love is not a natural love. The most important thing she has discussed in the book is altruism which is the selfless concern for the wellbeing of others, in which she further said that female nature is compromising and it can be seen all around in our society as well as in other societies that how much women compromise, for the sake of better living and in order to have a happy family beside the fact that how much she is hurt from inside. The one section of her book is “ The Women’s Formative Years” in which she explains that a girl passes from different stages of childhood, girlhood and sexual initiation to bear all the bitter experiences with that patriarchy with whom even she is not ready to live. But again there is an element of compromise in it.

The different theories of *The Second Sex* can be applied to different sort of works related to the humiliation of female. What I found is, to apply the theory of “female subordination” to the character of “Reema in Sana Munir’s *The Un-fettered wings*”. Female subordination can be clearly seen through the character of Reema and her mother. Simon de-Beauvoir explains in her theory that there is a relationship between ovum and sperm in various creatures like fish, insects and mammals etc and she describes women subordination to species in term of reproduction.

Analysis

The story is about the past of a woman named Reema who is in a state of nostalgia. She is memorizing the past time of her life as now she is 80 years old and lying on a hospital bed suffering from alzheimer’s disease . She was the only child of her parents until her brother came in to the world . She was living with her parents and her uncle named Billu who was the person responsible for her defloration. She was so innocent at that time as she was only ten years old . The day when her mother left her alone at home and her father went to office she felt happy as she had a lot of time to play with her uncle but that uncle played with her life . It was a horrible incident which left permanent impressions on her mind. She started playing with her uncle by awakening him from sleep but that person slightly made him seduced by his words and actions. The example of his seduction can be seen from the words uttered from his bad tongue:

Billu: “My dear Reema when a man is young he doesn’t care much about such things.”

Reema: “What did he care about?”

Billu: He wanted a companion u know. Someone to stroke his hand and someone to run her fingers through his hairs”

Reema: “Mommy does that to me when I am not sleepy”

Billu: “You are the most innocent creature ever, my darling” (28)

From these words of Billu it can be analyzed that how much bad his intentions were when he was having Reema with him. The meanings are not clearly defined by his words but an in-depth analysis can make is clear to us. It is a clear picture of patriarchal society. The true picture of patriarchy and its long lasting effects on women as said by Simon de-Beauvoir can be seen from the very starting of description of Reema’s character which is: “ However , the same cannot be said about Reema, who had for years, mentally stayed in that period of time when she was ten. You see she has Alzheimer’s” (22). It can be clearly seen that how much female were suffering from the domination of male in the society although she was so much broken from inside but she never expressed those feelings with anyone in her whole life because of the fear of being abused in the society and if she disclose the fact of being sexually abused no one in the society will accept her ever. Due to this fear she was not able to tell anyone and she kept that secret in her heart because women were oppressed at that time under the male domination.

Simon de Beauvoir says that: “No one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or more scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility” (67). Defloration is a tool of subordination as propounded by Simon de Beauvoir in her book, *The Second Sex*, is also witnessed among same lines within this story of Reema. “You know the nib of the pen is fragile and too much pressure can crack it. He mourned the loss of his only pen.” (28). But it was Reema who was so innocent that it was not possible for her to take out the deep meanings out of it and she was taking it just as a story. It was a self-made story by Billu although there was no truth behind it because when Reema ask him about the ending of the story that whether it was happy or not. He just got confused that he was not expecting any question from her side. Because his words were symbolic and he was relating the cracking of nib and loss of his pen to her loss of virginity. He was talking so easily without any fear because he was confident that no one is going to ask him anything because women were subordinated at that time so easily and men were not blamed.

He started playing different sort of games with her and when she said to come out of blanket and play with her, he was not ready to go and he said her to play within bed. When he said:

Billu: “I got a new game for you, guess what?”

Reema: “Yay! She jumped down from the bed, anticipating a sport of sorts.”

Billu: “No, come back we have to play here on the bed. He gestured her to come sit near his legs.” (35)

He assigned her to find out the chocolate bar from inside the blanket and while she was trying to find he just harassed her and raped her. She was in so much pain and it was so terrible situation for her that she was not able to think that what was happening with her. He raped her and went outside home and escaped for many years. She was left alone at home and she continuously shouted for Mommy but no one came to rescue her. When her father came he was shocked to see his daughter in this condition. He asked her time and again that what has happened to her but she was not ready to answer him although she was just shouting to meet her mother. He took her to her grandmother home where her mother was and she was so upset to see Reema in that condition. She was asking Reema to tell her that what has happened to her but Reema told her that she was slipped from the bed and fell down. Here is the patriarchal approach in which female is under the oppression of male and not ready to tell the truth about male. She is oppressed but bearing everything on her own. When her mother was changing her clothes she noticed blue and black prints on her arms by which she came to know that her daughter has been raped. But she never disclosed this reality to Reema. Her mother was silent throughout her life because of subordination and she was doing so in order to save her future which was linked with patriarchal society. The sacrificing act of women as explained by Simon de-Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* can also be clearly seen in Reema’s story as: “Her mother never talked about those bruises after that night” (37). Reema’s sexual abuse was kept as a secret by her mother also who never disclose it to anyone because she was well aware of the fact that in that society of male domination if someone came to

know about her rape no one will marry her daughter and she will remain as a curse in the society as females are always subordinated in the society. In this act of Reema's mother we can see the element of subordination as well as altruism.

Though Reema's chastity was spoiled but she still ask her mother that where is Billu and why he is not coming back , it is a sacrifice that she was trying to forget the things happened to her and showing the others that Billu did nothing wrong with her. It contains an element of sacrifice as well as subordination of women due to male dominance. It is clear from the words when Reema says: "If they had reported to the police that why uncle Billu has not come back" (37). But her mother never answered but she knows very well that Billu was responsible for all this. But as a female she was not able to raise her voice against Billu as he was a man and society never accept the voice of female against man. It was a compromising act done by Reema's mother as well as Reema herself.

Reema's mother changed the room of Billu into store room and Reema asked her mother that where do Billu live when he will come back. But her mother said that he will never come. She was trying to remove every memory of Billu from her home. Because she want to remove every bad memory from her home which is related to her daughter's past. Years passed but Billu was still escaped. Reema got engaged and her mother died soon after her engagement. At the funeral of her mother Reema was standing with her fiancé and suddenly she saw Billu who was staring at her from backside of the pillar. She totally ignored him. But he was still like he was before, because it was a male dominating society and he was not feeling ashamed of that act. He raped another girl too when he was escaped from home after sexually abusing Reema. Now it's a time when Reema is 80 years old but still that bad incident has permanent impressions on her heart and mind. When she talks to herself: "Peter this is the bit of me that I held back from you. This is the part of my soul that I didn't bare to you." (40)

She is now a grandmother to the daughters of her daughters. Her husband remained sincere throughout the life. She never told him anything related to the dark aspect of her life. She kept it as a secret in her heart and that secret was buried in to the deep layers of her mind and her heart. She said: "I owe an apology to myself for not opening up about Billu to my parents or Peter. I pushed myself in to isolation and social boycott. I spent lonely colorless teenage. I needed help, I refused to get it. I was made to feel that I was the wrongdoer" (40). She was in so much pain and in need of someone help but she was helpless and she was not able to take help from anyone because of the fear of being called an abused girl in the society. Because no one can blame a male for this, although female is subordinated. And it was an effect of that incident that she got so much concerned about her daughters and more sensitive about her granddaughters. Because the bad situation from which she suffered, she doesn't want anyone else to suffer from it.

Reema's character depicts a journey of female subordination. Simon de Beauvoir's phenomena of altruism and defloration become prominent and recurring theme of the story that further shed light on the sorry state of Reema's subjugation as other in the patriarchal society. It was the impact of

this subordination that Reema at the age of eighty after having daughters and granddaughters cannot forget that critical phase of her life and it left permanent impressions on her life. It was due to all this that she was still feeling guilty from her husband that he was so loving with her but he was unknown of the fact of what happened with her past. From her character analysis we came to know clearly that women were oppressed and under patriarchy as they were not able to speak anything against men. From this story it is analyzed that Reema was not able to speak for two reasons, firstly she was not telling the truth because it was about her uncle and she was horrified that if he will kill her or he will do something more bad than this to her. Secondly she was keeping it as a secret for saving her next life which was married life as she never disclosed it to her husband.

There is another famous feminist psychologist Nancy Chodorow, whose famous book is "Individualizing Gender and Sexuality". She propagated the concept of masculine and feminine: "The masculine and feminine personalities develop as a response of parent practicing" (35). It describes that the personalities of male and female totally depend upon the ways in which they are brought up in their childhood. Male and Female is constructed by mother. The ego boundary of female is flexible and blurry because of which she is emotionally dependent on others and unable to distinguish their own interest, like in the story of Reema, it can be clearly seen that Reema and her mother are not independent although they are dependent and they cannot do anything on their own. They are not free to take any decision. Her mother is not able to open the secret of her daughter's rape before her husband. Reema never told her husband about her past because she was afraid that if she discloses the reality before him she might get divorced. From Reema's story it is evident that her mother was helpless, because as a woman she cannot speak for her daughter. She was in pain, but norms of society didn't allow her to raise her voice. "She didn't reply for several moments and Reema saw her lips purse tightly as if she was trying hard to stop the words escaping her mouth". (38)

Nancy Chodorow in her book "The Reproduction of Mothering" says, "The mother is the early care giver and primary source of identification for all children. A daughter continues to identify with the mother". According to Nancy Chodorow, mother is involved in the development of a child through different stages of early childhood, but when a child grows up, a girl usually follows her mother and son follow his father. A girl become soft hearted and shy whereas boys becomes brave and strong. A girl is not supposed to go outside like boys and she is not even allowed to speak aloud. These things are engraved on the minds of girls since their childhood, so is the case with Reema and her mother because they knew very well that if they speak the truth, then the society will never forgive them and they will not be able to face anyone because everyone will reject them as inferiors. Parent's role is most important in correcting the situation as female oppression is the result of this flexible ego boundary that make her dependent upon others. The involvement of both the male and female parents is necessary for the development of a child.

Iris Young, an American feminist said, that women make up series of events, actions, certain goals, projects and traits. The practice-inert realities in which women lives and their actions are oriented

around certain objects and everyday realities. In the story of Reema, it can be analyzed that the personality of Reema is a product of circumstances around her. Even at the age of eighty she is remembering her past and she is still not satisfied and happy in her life although her husband is very loving and caring with her. But the regret of past is still in her heart and mind. For Reema, it is a fear of society which made her to feel herself a wrongdoer when she says: "I owe an apology to myself for not opening up about Billu to my parents and Peter. I pushed myself into isolation and social boycott". (40)

There are two groups of Practice-inert objects according to Iris Young, out of these two only first group is applied to Reema's story that is female bodies. According to which, the physical facts like biological process take place which includes mensuration, pregnancy and childbirth. The social rules are associated with these biological processes. The most important among biological process is virginity test which is a proof of a girl being virgin. The concept of virginity loss is in the story of Reema when Billu rape her and after that she never told her mother but her mother noticed and said: "I didn't need a second proof to know what caused bruises on my daughter's arms and why she had bleed in the toilet for a day or two afterwards".(38)

These things distinguish between the concept of masculinity and femininity. Women need to be more careful of their self because society demand a proof of their chastity. Men are more independent because they don't have to give any proof in this way. Because of these restrictions a woman is not able to speak in front of anyone for her humiliation. She doesn't want any other girl to be humiliated in this way as in the story Reema said: "I silently wished that my children and grandchildren would experience more ease here than I ever had".(43). Because the pain she was going through was understandable only for her and no one else can feel and compensate her pain. So, she doesn't want anyone to suffer from this situation like her.

From this story, it is analyzed that Reema under enormous patriarchal pressure becomes speechless. She did not disclose; it was a matter of reputation for her family which was purely altruistic on her part. She also did not want to hurt the pride of her husband and spend so many years in silence by tormenting her own soul and going through mental agony. Defloration becomes a constant disturbing factor for Reema that pinches her throughout her life but she behaves altruistically in order to uphold the patriarchal system. She sacrificed her whole life that becomes a metaphor of subordination. Whole story can be concluded in Beauvoir's words: "A woman is the object, that belongs to subject and this makes her "The Second Sex". (77)

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