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A Comparative Analysis of the Attitudes towards Patriarchal Society between Hester and Zaitoon

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ABSTRACT

The basic purpose of this study was to compare the two novels *The Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa and *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. The comparison of both the novels has been done to analyze the attitude of Patriarchal society towards Zaitoon and Hester who are the main characters of the *The Bride* and *The Scarlet Letter* respectively. Both the novels are written centuries far apart and in places which are geographically two different parts of the world. However, both the characters face same difficulties and miseries from the patriarchal society. Both refuse to surrender before the oppression and strongly resist against this tyrannical attitude. They prefer to lead the life of their own choice and refuse to follow the set rules and regulations of patriarchal society. The comparative analysis proves that the dominance of patriarchal thought is same in both east and west and women are exploited for one or the other reason by the male dominated societies.. This attitude is not reserved to any particular part of the world or any specific time period. Thus, this fact is established that patriarchy has no geographical and temporal boundaries. Nevertheless, Hester and Zaitoon give a very strong message to rest of the women folk that it is through inner courage and determination by which they can defeat the oppressing forces. Both of them become a symbol of struggle against this chauvinistic thought.

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Introduction

Women are always oppressed part of our society. Their role in political, social and economic spheres of life is very limited. They are supposed to follow the rules and regulations set by the male members of their family and society. Throughout the history of human societies, the attitude of patriarchal society with female has remained the same. Both the novels, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne and *The Bride* by Bapsi Sidhwa are about women characters who live in societies where feminism and women empowerment have not been either known or accepted by the societies. Both Hester and Zaitoon are rebellious against the Patriarchal society as they break the set norms and traditions defined by Patriarchal society. Both of them struggle against the unjust and stereotyped societies and do not surrender before the cruel patriarchal society.

Aim

This study presents a comparative analysis of the attitudes towards patriarchal society between Hester and Zaitoon.

Comparison of Backgrounds in *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Bride*

Both *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Bride* have been written by two different novelists in two different cultures and time spans. However, this difference does not bring any significant change in their dealing with women. The interesting fact is that both the novels are based upon true incidents and migration is also involved in both.

Writing Background of *The Scarlet Letter*

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 - 1864) a novelist and short story writer was among notable writers of America and was one of the foremost 19th century writers in America. He was born in Salem Massachusetts on July 4, 1804. He is seen as an important figure in the growth of American literature for his tales of the nation's colonial history. He was the famous novelist of the

Victorian age. The Victorian age was an age of realism rather than of romanticism which strives to tell the whole truth showing moral and physical diseases as they are. Hawthorne has also shown the truth and real picture of puritan society. *The Scarlet Letter* is a masterpiece by Hawthorne and is set in 17th century New England. Hawthorne successfully portrays the Puritanism that was found there. Puritanism actually began in England and was aimed at purging the Church of its pretention and exploitation. The predominant immorality in society also became the object of attack by the Puritans who insisted on orthodoxy and severe rules of living. In America, Puritanism was spread by the early English settlers, the Pilgrim Fathers who left England to avoid religious oppression. Settling down in New England, they slowly established colonies and started executing puritanical rules. *The Scarlet Letter* is based upon the true incident when the author read the manuscripts of the old surveyor and saw the actual scarlet letter. He wanted to share the grief and agony of that woman who was outcast by the society. The scarlet letter became a spokesman of that woman for Hawthorne and he thought it an opportunity to show how women of that time were considered inferior and degraded.

Writing Background of *The Bride*

Bapsi Sidhwa is considered one of the leading and successful English novelists of post-colonial age in Pakistan. She was born in Karachi in 1938 in a Parsi family. *The Bride* is her first novel published in 1983. The major issues of post-colonial literature are: socio-cultural changes, power misuse alienation, transition from colonial to independences, exploitation of the weaker sections of the society, politics and its impact on the overall society of the particular region and the development of feminisms. Sidhwa's basic concern has always been to explore and depict the predicaments of women in Pakistani patriarchal society. The settings of the novel are

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around the time of separation and migration. In *The Bride*, Sidhwa wants to give a feeling of courage to the repressed women that by being psychologically strong they can change their fate. Dhull (2010) talks about Sidhwa approach in this way.

Influenced by the development of cultural awareness among women at global level, some women writers have taken up cudgels against women's exploitation and suppression of whatever nature, genetic, social racial, cultural or professional.

Significance

Hester and Zaitoon is representative of women folk of two different cultures and time spans. The comparative analysis shows that women have the same problems worldwide and they are equally victim of ruthless attitude of males who exploit them in one or the other way. Both of them become a sign of struggle against the patriarchal set up.

Research Questions

What is the role of patriarchal society in Hester's and Zaitoon's life?

What is the attitude of Hester and Zaitoon towards patriarchal society?

Comparison of Role of Patriarchal Society in Hester's and Zaitoon's Life

Both Hester and Zaitoon have to suffer due to patriarchal society. Both of them are denied their basic rights and forced to live a pathetic life. Another common factor between both of them is that most of their sufferings are due to their close relationships. Both the characters are repressed and representative figure of all the contemporary women folk who are dealt with the same cruel way by the patriarchal society.

Role of Patriarchal Society in Hester's Life

The time when *The Scarlet Letter* was written in 17th century was patriarchal means men and husbands were considered as head of the family and women's role was just limited to home. They were not supposed to disobey the male members. Walby defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices which becomes a source for men to dominate, oppress and exploit women (1990). The social and spiritual worth of women lied in their practice of preservation of chastity. Patriarchal society was a great barrier in their social, political and economic development.

One can see how Hester's sufferings increase due to Patriarchal society and how men become a major source of those problems. Hester had illegal sex and it is shown not only shameful act on her part but a disgrace to the whole society. Hester is forced to stand on a stage and asked to declare the name of the father of the child so that the crime might be punished properly. These are men who hold the position of leadership and minister ship of the town and it's very ironical that the person who is asking Hester to expose her partner is himself guilty of that crime. But when she does not speak he simply says "*Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman's heart! She will not speak!*"

He does not pressurize her any more as if he does not want her to speak the truth. The point here is why Dimmesdale himself not unfolds the truth by telling the whole society that he is partner of Hester in this sin. He remains hypocrite to save his own reputation. Though, he is highly qualified from great English universities and brings a great knowledge for people as he is very eloquent speaker as well but he is coward and selfish person who cannot afford to expose the reality before the world. Through Mr. Dimmesdale, Hawthorne represents the general attitude of patriarchal society as a whole. Hawthorn shows how selfishness of men becomes a major cause of pains for women.

Hester keeps his secret keeping in mind his high religious status which can be destroyed if she exposes the truth. Apparently, Dimmesdale believe in religious and moral values but where those values are when he commits adultery with Hester and later on, he is deaf and dumb towards sufferings of Hester and Pearl. It was in his hands to help Hester and accept the guilt but he denies it due to his high social and religious position in society. He is representative of hypocrisy, the meanness and cruelty of the whole male dominated society. This person which is supposed to be Godly figure proves very unkind and selfish to Hester as well as his daughter.

Chillingworth is again a sinister representative of patriarchal society who takes the laws in his own hands. He is least bothered about his own mistake of marrying Hester when she was too young. The relationship was not only imbalanced, but Chillingworth also married Hester under false impression when he says that "*mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay.*"

Roger Chillingworth's greatest sin was that he married Hester when she was not that much mature and he forced Hester into a "*false and unnatural relation*". It is clear that neither Hester loved him nor pretended it and Chillingworth is very much aware of this fact. After marriage, his next crime is that he sent her all alone to a new place without any proper arrangements. Afterwards, his major sin appears in his stubbornness of "*unwillingness to forgive*". He even refuses to recognize her as his wife and dictates Hester to keep his secret. .

The patriarchal society not only imposes punishment of carrying a letter 'A' throughout her life but they feel themselves in a position to decide what kind of life Hester and Pearl should spend. The society imposes a punishment upon her to leave the civilized society to achieve purity. She is harassed and tortured by people wherever she goes. She's forced to stand before all the Puritan citizens, bearing their gossips, hatred and scornful eyes. The fathers of society even don't understand the strong relationship between mother and child and decide to take Pearl away from Hester. They are cruel enough as when they see Pearl, they tease her and call her a '*demon-child*'. The patriarchs are hypocrite enough that they do not accept Hester in their society but strangely enough they wear cuffs and collars embroidered by her. They deny Hester's existence but not her creativity as it is of their use.

However, even if when Hester's reputation improves, she is told that she is not supposed to go to Heaven thus forcing sinner to be more inclined towards sin once forgiveness is out of question.

Role of Patriarchal Society in Zaitoon's Life

Sidhwa defines the status of woman in Pakistani patriarchal society as the one who are supposed to follow the rules defined by their husbands, brothers and fathers. At first, she loses her parents after partition and is brought up by Qasim, a kohistani from Himalayas. Though, she is looked after properly by him but she is denied any opportunity of education though she is living in Lahore where access to education is not a big issue even in those times. It is thought that education is useless for her as "*She's not going to become a baboo or an officer!...She will get married and have children*". This poignant line shows the limited role which is assigned to women in Pakistani patriarchal society where education is considered necessary for men only. It is dangerous if Zaitoon goes outside for education but moving in different homes for the sake of gossip is not a big issue.

Later on, when her marriage is fixed, Zaitoon is not taken into confidence. She is told about the decision only when

everything is finalized. Though Qasim is realized by Miriam that *"they are savages. Brutish, uncouth and ignorant....she will be a slave."* But these words have no effect upon Qasim as he has given his so called *"words"* which are more important for him than the pleasure and peace of Zaitoon. Though, inwardly Qasim is very much aware what he has done is wrong but his patriarchal mind set is so strong that he has no choice to think rationally. Traditions and customs are more important for him than feelings of one human being. It's very ironical that Qasim himself is a loose character who off and on visits *Heera Mandi* but for Zaitoon her so called sense of honor awakes. Killing any human being is also not a big deal for him but when it comes to Zaitoon, he is supposed to follow his sense of honor. Another important figure in Zaitoon's life is Sakhi, her husband. Her forced marriage with Sakhi brings no joy for her rather it opens a new chapter of sufferings in her life. He is a cruel and savage tribesman who does not know the words of love and emotion. The first night which Zaitoon spends with him makes his callousness evident to Zaitoon. Later on, he beats and abuses her at very trivial matters by saying *"you are my woman! I will teach you to obey me"*. This line represents the status of woman in patriarchal society. "Woman is shown as a territory to be conquered by men. The relationship becomes one of colonizer-colonized type wherein the colonizer as if on an imperial offensive tries to possess and extend his powers so as to use and abuse this occupied territory" (Ahmad, 2013, P.3). An Indian critic Makarand Paranjape states, "it would seem that entire code of honour of the tribe rests on the notions of sexual superiority and possessiveness" (Dhawan, 1987).

When Zaitoon leaves the home, he is not concerned about her security. We don't see any feelings of repentance for what he has done with Zaitoon due to which she could not survive in this tribal set up rather he is more concerned about that so called *"honor"* and humiliation which he might have to face due to this incident. Initially, we see Sakhi a bit inclined towards Zaitoon but he is provoked by his brother Yunus to control *"His woman"* and these words were enough to inflame Sakhi who later on leaves no opportunity to show his *"manhood"*. It shows another picture of our society as how people interfere in the lives of other and make it a hell for them as afterward, Sakhi leaves no opportunity to torture Zaitoon physically and mentally.

In the end, we see Zaitoon being raped by two strangers making it clear how much worthless this creature is before the eyes of men and how they take advantage of helplessness of women.

Comparison of Attitudes of Hester and Zaitoon towards Patriarchal Society

If Hester is a strong character, Zaitoon is not lesser than her as both refuse to accept the patriarchal concept of shame, honor and chastity. Both of them struggle for their survival and self-respect. They are revolutionary in their social set up and try to escape the men made law and do what they feel correct. They are bold and courageous who face all the odds and tackle them in the best possible way. They prove that they are strong and can run the affairs of life as per their own choice. Both of them rebels against the suffocating and hypocritical society by giving more importance to their personal freedom and individual rights.

Attitude of Hester towards the Patriarchal Society

In 17th century, Feminist movement did not catch its roots in society. It was very difficult for women to rise against the oppression met upon them. However, Hester's attitude towards patriarchal society is rebellious. She defies the set traditions

very boldly. She appears to be a strong woman who gives a heavy punch on patriarchal society.

We observe that she revolts against the patriarchal society by committing adultery out of her own free will. With this action, she defies the moral values and patriarchal laws. Her concept of sin is also different from patriarchal society as she thinks that her sin is not adultery rather her real sin is marrying Chillingworth due to compulsion rather than love. In the very first scene, we see her watching people in their eyes, refusing to tell the name of baby's father and keeping quiet without a single tear or feeling of remorse. All these signs show that she has refused to surrender before the powerful patriarchal society.

She wears scarlet letter very boldly without any shame. The way she delicately decorates it also indicates that she is not ashamed of what she has done. Evan Carton, literature professor at the University of Texas, also criticizes the society in this way

This classic male anxiety: How do you know for sure whether your baby is yours? If you don't know if your woman and your child are actually yours, then you have no control over property, no control over social order, no control over anything — and that's the deep radical challenge that Hester presents to this society.

Hester defies the elderly patriarchs by showing a sense of pride over what she has done. Her sin was already intolerable but once she adds pride to it, it becomes simply unbearable for them as pride is considered a major sin in puritan society.

At that time, people could not imagine that female could also be financially self-reliant but Hester makes it possible by building a small business doing embroidery-work. *"It was the art - then as now, almost the only one within a woman's grasp - of needle-work."*

She does not beg any one and brings up her child as an independent woman. Afterwards, she starts gaining the respect among society due to her economic status. This self-reliance can be called a great revolutionary step against the male dominated society. In a way; we can say that her effort of establishing a new identity is successful because the women suppress if not forget the *"black scandal of bygone years"*.

She strongly resists the fathers of patriarchal society and protests against the decision of taking Pearl away from her. Ultimately; they have to surrender before Hester and they take their decision back.

The strength of her character is accepted and acknowledged by Dimmesdales when he himself demands her to help him by saying *"Think for me, Hester! Thou art strong. Resolve for me!"* Here Hester appears more strong and morally a better choice than Dimmesdales. Again this role of a wise woman is not compatible with patriarchal concept of woman. Another revolutionary step of Hester is her plan to run away with Dimmesdales. It also proves that she does not consider her affair with Dimmesdales as sin.

At the end, when she is given permission to take off the letter, she does not do so to show that society has no right to decide on her part rather she will remove it herself once she will feel it appropriate.

Rather than becoming submissive, she becomes revolutionary towards the patriarchal society. Hester, at the end of the novel in fact says: *"One day when God is ready, there will be a new world – a better world for women. We will be the same as men." The world's law was no law for her mind"*

Attitude of Zaitoon towards the Patriarchal Society

According to Sidhwa Pakistani family most of the time denies identity to female but her characters are very strong and

the main character Zaitoon also negates the patriarchal concept of 'woman'. Zaitoon is considered "a challenge to the patriarchal culture and values of Indian Pakistani society" (Ross, 1991).

Symbolically Zaitoon is representative of all those women who are raising their voice against the sinister patriarchal set up to establish their own identity and to get their basic rights.

(Dhull,2010) says that

Zaitoon becomes a symbol not only of woman fighting against oppression in Pakistan but of the human spirit struggling against all physical odds to survive and maintain its integrity. Zaitoon represents Khudi or the mental and spiritual strength of human kind, indefatigable indomitable and irrepressible

We see her revolutionary and bold nature when she takes the responsibility of firing upon her own shoulder to save her father from the wrath of Pakistani army. Her action is against the definition of "woman" which patriarchal society has set. Later on, we see that she very boldly asks her father about her would be groom. We don't observe the traditional shyness in her attitude as the girls are mostly not expected to ask such kind of question in our society.

Once marriage of Zaitoon is decided upon, it's not just the sense of obedience due to which she accepts this decision rather she has very romantic allusion about tribal area and people. She considers it a "A region where men were heroic, proud and incorruptible, ruled by a code of honor that banned all injustice and evil.... Their women beautiful as houris and their bright rosy-cheeked children, lived besides crystal torrents of melted snow."

Her mind is just dreaming about a prince who is waiting for her. However, as soon as she realizes that her father's decision is wrong, she starts resisting the decision. Once she senses the savagery of tribal, she forces her father to take her back to plains. She very boldly tells her father about her own choice for marriage bond that her father has to say that "...a decent girl does not tell her father to whom he should marry her"

Later on, we see that despite cruelties of Sakhi, she tries to get closer to him to win his love. It was a symbol of her strength again that she wants to be with that person whom she has started liking to some extent. But eventually, when she feels that his nature is not going to be changed, she doesn't delay in taking decision to escape from the tribal area and to restart her life. She rebels against the brutal and suspicious nature of her husband. She is not ready to bear all these circumstances just like the other oppressed women of that area where "women get killed for one reason or another... Imagined insults, family honour, infidelity"

Her struggle to reach the civilized society is simply praiseworthy. Only with a few pieces of bread, she wanders in

jungle for ten days. She does not lose courage and after all she succeeds in escaping the wild tribal people. Her escape from the male chauvinistic system is a proof of her revolutionary and bold nature. The way she escapes the tribal people "endorses a challenge to the structures of patriarchy" (Ross, 1991).

Abrioux(1990) also states his feelings about Zaitoon in this way:

Zaitoon is ultimately protected and saved, which suggests that an awesome, ancient, natural order combined with a young girl's defiant spirit can overcome the oppressive shackles of a conspiracy of men

Conclusion

Both the novels are tragedies written by two different authors and published more than one century apart in two different cultures but through the main characters, Zaitoon and Hester Prynne, we can look at ways in which the authors Bapsi Sidwa and Nathaniel Hawthorne demonstrate oppression of women due to the patriarchal society they live in. However, their approach of presenting women in their novels is different. We see that both the characters become a challenge and question mark for patriarchal society.

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