

**PATRIARCHY: A HINDERANCE IN A FEMALE'S INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT
IN "THE MILL ON THE FLOSS" BY ELIOT**

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ABSTRACT: *The present study is an attempt to show how a female's individual development is obstructed at every step by patriarchal set up which affirms itself by taking references from religion and science. This has been done through the character of Maggie, a bold, intelligent, fearless and impulsive young girl. Despite her qualities, she remains "the other". Her resistance against the established practices, results only in her death. Her individual development remains a dream, not fulfilled.*

KEYWORDS: Hindrance, Individual Development, Patriarchy.

INTRODUCTION

Patriarchy is the central concept of second wave feminism. It is defined as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby, 1990;214). Word, "patriarchal" describes a general structure in which men have power over women. A patriarchal society consists of a male dominating power structure through an organized society. Its opposite is matriarchal. The most common definition asserts that father has the authority to rule his family as his family is subordinate to him. Johnson (2005) in the Great Knot states man's superiority because of his ability to exert force. In this regard violence is his main weapon. Woman is biologically weak. It is the male privilege to rule over woman and define her in terms of "other". It is considered her prime duty to keep family and home.

The supporter of male dominated order take the help of Christianity to show that man is the image of God and woman as she is created from a man's rib, is subjugated to him. The creation of Adam and Eve is described in terms of man's supremacy over woman. Adam was the representative of God's view but Eve was produced from Adam's rib called a super-numeracy bone. De Beauvoir states about man's thinking that he considers his body as a "direct and normal" which is better than that of a woman's "abnormal" body that is taken as a hindrance and a prison" (Beauvoir, 1949).

"The Mill on the Floss" is still regarded as a masterpiece of Eliot's great genius. Even after such a long time, it has maintained its popularity because of the novelty it had i.e.—deep probing into the minds of its characters. Broadly speaking, the theme of "The Mill on the Floss" is the development of the chief character, Maggie. Maggie's experiences, first as a child and a little girl, and then as a grown-up girl till her tragic death in the flood River Floss, are brought before the reader in such a way that they evoke a sense of sympathy for the girl who is unruly, impulsive and an ugly duckling transformed into beauty. The story basically deals with the

patriarchal state of mind which was prevalent in Victorian era. It was the result of that mindset that hindered the growth of an individual.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A patriarchal society gives this prestige to men that they are the decision-makers. It is their prestige to keep power and it is considered the duty of women to be subservient to them. In a patriarchal society, women are marginalized as it is the man who will decide a code of conduct which is to be followed by woman because she is physically weak. The issue of her identity, her worth, dignity, and her value is out of question. Woman is as free to act as man allows her. Women have no access to education, business, politics and religious activities. Simone De Beauvoir and others are of the view that word “man” is enough to indicate that man is equated with standard whereas women is equated with fragility, cowardice, meekness and shyness. Even her language is “marked with hesitation and false starts” as she uses “a question intonation” which is suggestive of the fact that she needs a man’s support. De Beauvoir is so bitter that she goes to the extent of saying that women is “sex-absolute sex”, no less” (De Beauvoir, 1949). So, when women are considered inferior, their individual development in a male dominating society is a concocted notion. Women’s dignity, honor and chastity is an ideal which is scornfully rejected.

“The Mill on the Floss” which may be said to be the epitome of Victorian era. 19th century Victorian era was so strict and so discouraging that Marry Ann Evens had to opt for the pen name of George Eliot otherwise, no publisher was ready to take the risk of publishing her work. Today it is common for a female writer to publish her work with her real name as centuries struggle had made this practice possible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The patriarchal society of Victorian England created a rift between male and female gender when it considered men as” active and resourceful” while qualities like” passivity and self-sacrifice” were linked with womenfolk according to Acka (2009). Men were able to” shape the world” and were “dominative” while women possessed “emotion and motherly love”. These qualities were enough to make women submissive (Karen, 1994). Women’s low position was responsible for causing frustration in Maggie Tulliver’s sensitive mind. In fact through her character, Eliot gave vent to her own feelings of frustration in a society which had left no space for women of their times. Maggie is in the pursuit of education, economic independence and wants to liberate herself from the shackles of patriarchal society according to Liu Xi (2015). She keeps showing her reaction against traditions of society by learning and reading many kind of books and not marrying Stephen even when she is forced to live with him in a boat for many days. In order to show her worth, she dies but does not make any compromise on her esteem and self-respect (Frisca, 2013).

Analysis

At the very outset of the novel, Mr. Tulliver is introduced who is the owner of Darlcot Mill in St. Ogg’s, houses and land attached to it. As regards Mrs. Tulliver, She does not have such right of ownership. She is dependent upon her husband in every way socially, morally and

physically. It is Mr. Tulliver who has the power of decision making. Maggie reacts to it by saying that she would not do her patch work as “it’s a foolish work”. She is sick of “tearing things to sew’em together again”. She does not want to do patch work for her aunt Glegg as she does not like her. In Maggie’s family, her father is a towering personality as he takes decisions without feeling the need of consulting his family.

The lot of Maggie’s mother is not different from hers as she has to follow and obey her husband in every matter even if she has some reservations about his incapability in decision-making. She seems a traditional wife when she says to her husband “well, Mr. Tulliver, you know best. I’ve no objections”. But her inner self is not satisfied with his decision. Mrs. Tulliver asks him to consult her sisters and their husbands in this regard but her husband announces that he would do what he decides, not be influenced by anyone. Mrs. Tulliver is shocked. As a mother she has great concern for her son. She wants to send her son to a nearby school so that she may take proper care of her son. Opposite to it, Mr. Tulliver wants to send his son to the best school and does not care for the distance. By accepting her husband’s decision, Maggie’s mother confirms her identity of being a passive listener.

Maggie’s fate is also decided by her father, the true representative of patriarchy. This incident shows the typical attitude of Victorian society where women were not able to have their right in making decisions about their lives. It is Mr. Tulliver’s self-righteousness and typical approach which shows a total disregard of Maggie’s intelligence. Patchwork represents patriarchal order which considers Maggie’s craving for studies as a sign of her impracticality and irrationality. He is not pleased when he sees his daughter reading a book and orders her to go to the kitchen in order to give a helping hand in doing daily chores, “Shut up the book and let’s hear no more o’ such talk”(Eliot 1960-page:17).

Again patriarchal order asserts itself when Tom is sent to school, Maggie not. This happens despite the fact that she is more intelligent than her brother. She is fond of reading and is shown reading a book, *The History of the Devil*. When she wants to display her knowledge, her father sends her off saying that she has too much intelligence for a girl. Maggie comes to Mr. Riley to show her intelligence but he does not care for her. She wants to tell about the book she has read. Maggie does not go to the kitchen, she tries to search many kinds of books. This reveals her deep quest for knowledge. She has a small bookcase where she keeps her books without letting her father know about them. She is not satisfied with her father’s different attitude towards her education and her brother’s education. She is ready to satisfy her quest for knowledge when her father invites her to Tom’s school for a long time. Just see her attempt of showing her learning, “I know what Latin is very well” said Maggie confidently. “Latin’s a language. There are Latin words in the dictionary. There’s a bonus, a gift.” Her mother does not encourage her because she is a part of patriarchal culture. She scolds her more than her father does. Patriarchy asserts itself in Tom’s uttering “well, you’d be a woman” said Tom,” so, you need not talk”. Maggie at once interrupts “but it shall be a clever woman.” (Eliot 1960: 120-125). In her father’s opinion, Maggie cannot help them more than Tom can do as she is a girl despite the fact that she learns more than Tom does. This reveals a certain bent of mind which prevailed in Victorian era when doors of education were not open for women.

Small incidents show the supremacy of patriarchal order. Incident of puff-cakes is a case in point. When Maggie, unnoticed eats larger piece of cake, Tom feels envious and reminds her how he has been kind to her as he brought present for her and she is so selfish. Here Tom’s self-righteousness is revealed which is a clear sign of patriarchy. Tom is indirectly impressed by his father and feels that whatever he says is right.

When she is young, she is again at the mercy of patriarchal society. When she goes with Stephen rowing a boat but mistakenly, they are much beyond the place where they desired to land. Stephen who is interested in her, persuades her to marry with him but she does not agree to it. Maggie falls asleep on the deck of the ship, and Stephen spends night looking at her. When Maggie returns to St. Ogg's after five days, her brother is convinced of her being disgraced. He declares not to keep her under his roof. Maggie and her mother go to Bob Jakin's house. The people of St. Ogg's learn about Maggie's returning home without marrying Stephen Guest. Especially females are not ready to pardon her as now she is a "fallen woman". They hope that "Maggie would leave so as to purify the air of St. Ogg's." Maggie explains whole story to Dr. Kenn, whom she trusts the most. He accepts her words and believes in her. He offers her to take care of his children but society takes it wrongly and he is forced to break her contacts with her. Finally, a flood comes to solace her. She rows a boat to save her Brother Tom's life. In this struggle, Tom realizes the sincerity of his sister. The conflict between them is resolved. To her amazement, Tom calls her by an old pet name-Maggie. Their boat gets entangled and both are found dead later on but still they are in a close embrace.

Maggie is immoral according to Christian beliefs. She tries to stand against the so-called values but suffers from mental trials and tribulations. Only death comes to rescue her and brings salvation to her in the form of the swelling waters of Floss.

George Eliot's work "The Mill on the Floss" presents the idea that how a female passes through trials and tribulations to establish her individuality. This concept of individuality has one important point that a woman has the right to choose whatever she pleases. In George Eliot's Mill on the Floss, Maggie is the central character. She raises voice again and again against male oppression which places her and other female characters in a marginalized state. It is due to the stubbornness and hard-headedness of males around her which leaves her in the lurch, which causes her to suffer both as a human-being and suffer as a female. It is due to the patriarchal traditions that her father and then her brother have higher status than women of their family. Their superiority lies not in their being reasonable but in their being males. It is they who have the power of decision-making. The setting of the novel is in 1860's which maintains that how burdened the life of a woman is in a society dictated by men. Gender inequality again and again hampers the development of her individuality from childhood to youth. She challenges the supremacy of males over females but in the end dies to save her brother Tom, the representative of traditional male culture. It is the lot of Maggie and other women of her family to embrace the crucial fact that men are free to oppress women and those women who are in conformity with this practice are real women. Patriarchy in the garb of her father and then her brother takes active part in order to curb her faculties. Even her mother and her aunts are the stereotypes who are in conformity with tradition. Maggie challenges the existing code so death is her only lot she deserves as decided by the society which envisages her.

CONCLUSION

In the end it can be concluded that women have to do what they are ordered to do. For a woman, free will is out of question in a patriarchal society. As it is the society which thwarts the happiness of women at every step of life. If a woman tries to change it, the inevitable result is her death. Maggie is such a heroic character who challenges the established patriarchal code. This code seriously thwarts her happiness as she has to die to prove her sincerity. Society does not allow her individual development in the form of her brother, her father and other male

members like Stephen Guest. Her individual development remains a dream for her. Maggie's struggle earns her the title of "Fallen Women". So only death brings her redemption from the worries and cares of life.

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