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## Original Article

### Women with Split Identity; A Literary Analysis based on the selected Female Portrayals in Literature

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#### Abstract

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Female characters in Literature are portrayed through diverse dimensions such as heroic figures, objects of desire, rebellious individuals, icons of female liberation and individuals with fragmented identities. Those portrayals reflect the the feminine self which is surrounded by the awareness of her negated existence, stereotyped images of womanhood, the sense of lack of belonging, and repressed individuality. Thus the study focuses on analyzing the female literary portrayals like 'Nora Helmer' in 'The Dolls House' by Henric Ibsen, 'Adela' in 'The House of Bernarda Alba' by Federico Garcia Lorca and 'Emma Bovary' in 'Madame Bovary' by Gustave Flaubert, 'Maggie Tulliver' in The Mill On the Floss by George Eliot and 'Kattrin' in Mother courage and Her children by Bertolt Brecht with the objective of bringing to the surface the socially determined fatal end and the symbolic disappearance of the feminine figure. In analyzing and elaborating the perspectives which are discussed within the research paper the theoretical perspectives of Simon de Beauvoir ('The second sex'), Sigmund Freud, ('Civilization and its Discontents'), and Slavoj Zizek, ('Looking Awry') are referred with a thorough consideration. Consequently the woman figure whose identity is negated and given less vitality is identified as an inferior and vulnerable social figure within the existing social order and thus the literary characters like Adela, Nora, Emma, and Maggie Tulliver portray the antagonism between the social principle of 'Repression' and the feminine 'Liberation'. In contrast to the characters such as Adela, Emma and Nora who negate the social other in pursuing their determined routes towards the self-satisfaction, the feminine portrayals like Kattrin and Maggie Tulliver adopt the self-denial and renunciation of desires for the betterment of the social other. Thus the characters like Nora, Emma and Adela become capable of gratifying their intense abomination towards the social order while Kattrin and Maggie Tulliver with their self-sacrifice and altruistic motives achieve a serene satisfaction. In that sense it can be identified that their self-annihilation leaves behind a symbol of identity rather than nihilistic reality implying a more psychological vitality without being just a physical deterioration.

**Keywords:** Feminine figure, Repression, Liberation, Individuality, Self-annihilation

## Introduction

Woman as a nebulous human figure who is segregated and devalued pertaining to her organic and social differentiation from the masculine self has to concede herself to be identified and defined as an embodiment of mythical, phallic and natural elements. Locating herself within the intersection of the negation and acceptance woman becomes incapable of realizing her true self and her actual essence tends to remain obscured. The images of the 'feminine figures' which are reflected through the socially and culturally coloured mirrors appear as the fragmented bodies thus allowing the feminine self to be surrounded by the awareness of her nonexistence, the sense of lack of belonging and repressed individuality. Observing their own psychological desires, instincts and expectations which are projected onto the fantasy texture of the masculine psyche, the feminine beings are reluctantly induced themselves to become objects of those masculine realms. The social relations which associate with diverse socio cultural norms, customs and value systems place the woman as the focal component though the given position seems to become narrowed and confined to a specified hole.

In spite of the fact that the feminine figure is positioned within a social network of numerous affiliations, the sentiment of alienation which arises and circulates around her life sphere makes her comprehend the vague destiny which exists obscured to her perception. Black and white spheres between which the image of woman oscillates characterize her in accordance with the views and attitudes they hold towards the female being. Thus, what the social other or the big other desires and demands her to be neglecting her actual self inspires an immediate repulsion within her towards the dominant other. With this psychological interruption which stimulates her depression and the awareness of her barrenness of the self, she instinctively becomes narcissistic and an imposter. In another social reality, it can be perceived that owing to the symbolic identity which replaces her actual self, the self-consciousness of the woman induces her to

abandon the complex whole where her 'self' is altered to be the object of desire and demand.

*"...man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity...And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called 'the sex',..." (Beauvoir, 1953)*

The literary portrayals of women figures representing the social reality which is assigned to the feminine sphere address the unsolvable fictitious mystery which wraps her and infiltrates into her naturality. Thus, 'Nora Helmer' in the play 'The Dolls House' by Henric Ibsen, 'Adela' in 'The House of Bernarda Alba' by Federico Garcia Lorca and 'Emma Bovary' in 'Madame Bovary' by Gustave Flaubert, 'Maggie Tulliver' in 'The Mill On the Floss' by George Eliot and 'Kattrin' in 'Mother courage and Her children' by Bertolt Brecht; the feminine characters whose individuality and instinctual essence are repressed and attributed a nihilistic value, bring to the surface the socially determined fatal end and the imagined symbolic disappearance of the feminine figure. Nora, Adela and Emma accept their symbolic annihilation in resisting the perennial disturbance and repression which the 'power' of the masculinity imposes upon them. Thus their revolutionary deviation from the prison shaped life whole, the family circle, turns out to be a narcissistic escape rather than a symbolic expedition towards the attainment of absolute emancipation. They have been identified as the feminine figures whose anti-social endeavours and the pervasive ventures influence on the persistent patriarchal construction. On the other hand, the approaches that Maggie Tulliver and Kattrin have adopted make them appear as feminine figures whose intentions and the efforts stand in enhancing the well-being of the social other irrespective of the disparities and discriminations.

The symbolic annihilation of those feminine figures during the pursuit of their fulfillment of the

innate desires and the independent motives defines their selves and identities through both negative and positive light. The social boundaries which are demarcated by the cultural necessities and assumptions strive to induce these feminine individuals to become incapable of moving out of the constricted whole and their revolutionary steps which disrupt the orderly conservative social texture accompany them towards their self-objectives.

The ambiguity of their steps which unchain them from the repressive linkage that they hold with the dominant social order persuades the observer to question and assess the productivity and the cogency of those self-determining efforts.

The culturally determined frame from which the feminine figure persuades her 'self' to deviate, designs her identity with the features as inferiority, vulnerability, irrationality, fragility and passivity. Continuing their regular life cycle within this constricted domain, these feminine characters which are portrayed in these literary texts have to succumb to the masculine demands and fantasies while concealing her desires and self-determinations with a false reality.

Along with these societal modifications, the repression of the woman (both physical as well as psychological) evolves narrowing down her identity in front of the authoritative appearance of the masculine figure. Thus she is thrown into a continuum of conflicts where her actions and reactions in the face of the imperative cultural dominance are viewed as valueless, nihilistic or destructive by the socially prejudiced perceptions.

*'We have seen what poetic veils are thrown over her monotonous burdens of housekeeping and maternity: in exchange for her liberty she has received the false treasures of her femininity. (Beauvoir, 1953)*

Whether she has pursued the dichotomous routes such as rebelling for her repressed desires or renunciation of her desires, the societal observations and the adjudications have defined

their endeavours and the motives as irrational and illusory. The social situation of the feminine figure where she plays the role of the adolescent girl, young woman, married woman, divorced woman and a widow has forced her to remain under the societal fetters which are fortified by the religious, mythological and patriarchal concepts.

## Methodology

### Field Setting of the research

The research has focused on comprehensively analyzing the image and the life route of a feminine figure who exists within the diverse social strata amidst the cultural demarcations, socio cultural and commercial trials and tribulations pursuing her real self-identity combating with the imposing societal authorities. Thus with the objective of developing an in depth observation of the inner psychological struggle that the woman encounters as well as the dichotomy between the natural instincts and the cultural demands within which she is confined, some foremost feminine portrayals in literature have been selected and analyzed.

Consequently the study focuses on analyzing the female literary portrayals like 'Nora Helmer' in the play 'The Dolls House' by Henric Ibsen, 'Adela' in 'The House of Bernarda Alba' by Federico Garcia Lorca and 'Emma Bovary' in 'Madame Bovary' by Gustave Flaubert, 'Maggie Tulliver' in The Mill On the Floss by George Eliot and 'Kattrin' in Mother courage and Her children by Bertolt Brecht with the objective of bringing to the surface the socially determined fatal end and the imagined symbolic disappearance of the feminine figure.

The fundamental concepts which are highlighted within the philosophical realms such as feminism and psychoanalysis have been utilized in developing the analyzing process and the several studies that relate with literature, sociology and gender studies have been examined. Specifically in analyzing and elaborating the perspectives which are discussed within the research paper the

theoretical perspectives of Simon de Beauvoir ('The second sex'), Sigmund Freud, ('Civilization and its Discontents'), and Slavoj Zizek, ('Looking Awry') have been referred with a thorough consideration.

### **The process of data collection and analysis**

The data collecting procedure is conducted utilizing the secondary data collection methods. Accordingly the content analysis (conceptual analysis, relational analysis), discourse analysis and structural analysis are used in collecting and analyzing the relevant data.

Through content analysis, the content of the referred texts are thoroughly analyzed in relation to the basic themes that are elucidated within the study. Thus the relevant texts are examined based on the portrayal of the individual characters, their behavioral and thinking pattern, pertinent concepts, themes, ideologies, theories and criticisms. Accordingly utilizing the main two types of content analysis; conceptual analysis and relational analysis, the fundamental concepts, their relationship and the meanings they imply, their relation to the thematic perspectives of the study and rational assumptions they evolve, are identified and analyzed based on the key elements of the study.

Consequently the discourse analysis is employed in critically analyzing the selected texts concentrating on the dialogues within the text, most essentially, the conversational pattern and the manner in which certain words are used. Through this analytical method, the individual, psychological, social and cultural characteristics, the communal beliefs, the interactive and conflicting relationships are cautiously examined analyzing the conversations in the text in relation to the situation, the manner through which the interaction occurs and the outer socio-cultural forces which influence on the situation and the communication.

Pursuing the means of structural analysis the relevant texts are studied scrutinizing the

characters, the active details (motifs, symbols), themes, the perspectives that are developed and connoted by the author through the portrayal of characters, setting and the language.

### **Discussions**

#### **Repression, Rebellion and liberation**

*'History has shown us that men have always kept in their hands all concrete powers; since the earliest days of the patriarchy they have thought best to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes of law have been set up against her; and thus she has been definitely established as the other.'* (Beauvoir, 1953)

Repression which is initiated and established as an influential societal principle within the socio-cultural domain approaches and imposes its irrational ascendancy over the individual considering the role of gender. Thus the omnipotent role of repression has developed an imposing linkage with the gender differentiation and discrimination manipulating the feminine identity. Adopting and imbibing the ingredients of this role of repression, the cultural authorities tend to utilize it as a psychological tool in practicing dominance over the individual whose existence and the attitudes appear to be challenging and nonconformist.

*'Freud recognizes that there is a struggle between civilization which attempts to repress an individual's instincts and the individual who wants to liberate them.'* (Bergen, 1999)

Consequently amidst this conflicting confrontation 'antagonism' erupts between Repression and Liberation. Being confined to a narrowed space where several religious and communal taboos surround her existence, the feminine figure has become the focal point upon which the repression cultivates its domination. Thus it obstructs her inner strength and self-determination that she possesses in advancing towards her liberation of identity.

*'Man has succeeded in enslaving woman; but in the same degree he has deprived her of what made her possession desirable. With woman integrated in the family and in society, her magic is dissipated rather than transformed; reduced to the condition of servant, she is no longer that unconquered prey incarnating all the treasures of nature'*

(Beauvoir, 1953)

Woman whose identification of the actual self and identity remain to be dependent upon the masculine power, has to succumb the reality of her life to the fantasies and passion of the masculine world. In the quest of securing her real identity, she has to wrestle with those egotistic, disparaging and injurious approaches of those authoritative figures revealing her hidden identity through rebellious departures.

The appearance of the femininity and the masculinity within a conjugal proximity maintains an inconstant equilibrium through their exterior as well as interior selves. 'Nora', the nucleus of the fantasized psychical formation of Helmer, functions as the constant irrational object which beautifies the fantasizing elements of Helmer's world. The implementation of Nora as a deprived object which the dominant, 'big' masculine other desires within the romanticized conjugal frame reproduces her feminine identity as a nullified yet rainbow coloured element which exists based on the groundless fallacious reality.

The superficial reality which colours Nora's outer pretentious appearance makes Helmer, Nora's masculine other oblivious to her actual reality. Thus, since her life depends on the falsity in securing her social survival, involuntarily she has to enclose herself with symbolic existence. As an element of an illusory reality which fills the fantasized psychical world of Helmer, she continues to be frivolous and inconsequential.

*"Nora is a carefully studied example of what we have come to know as the hysterical personality-bright, unstable, impulsive, romantic, quite immune from feelings of guilt, and at bottom, not especially feminine"* (Templeton, 1989)

Nora with the strict determination of doing the most sacred duty to one's self induces herself to become liberated from the dependence on Helmer with whose identification her 'self' is defined and recognized. As a mere skylark with a vain glory, a play thing which colours herself to impress the other who holds the symbolic fetters around her, Nora is subtracted from the cultured formula which is constituted of variables such as the realm of mental, rationality, masculinity, reality and authority. In this sense her independent departure and the resolution to find her true self are not viewed as a sincere effort with vitality, but as an undignified deed wrapped with insensitivity.

Viewing 'Adela' as a human being who is extrinsically tamed yet intrinsically irrepressible, her feminine role can be defined as an unconventional individual whose motive is to escape the restrained family whole with the intention of securing the imagined autonomy. The repressed instincts within a human psyche constantly tempt her to eliminate her submission towards that forced repression in exploding that fettered frame through the negation of the principles of the conservative social sphere.

'Richard Seybolt said about 'The house of Bernarda Alba,'

*'La Casa de Bernarda Alba may be viewed as the dramatization of a conflict between a repressive social code (Bernarda) and the blind, instinctual forces of nature (Adela).....Bernarda appears larger than life as a wicked and tyrannical mother, and Adela throughout the play portrays rebellious instinct.'* (Bergen, 1999)

Thus Adela whose direct confrontation with the deeply- rooted social norms and the symbolic taboos makes her an abominable appearance in front of the authoritative order, is denied her anticipated survival. The maternal super ego which strives for filling the void which is created by the absence of the paternal authority tends to be a tragic failure. The female repression by another dominant other of the same sex evolves a tension within the psychical structures of the repressed thus allowing the equilibrium of the hierarchical

structure created by the paternal order within the complex of family to be interrupted.

*"...Until I leave this house feet first, I will control my own affairs and yours...In the eight years this mourning will last not a breeze will enter this house. Imagine we have sealed the doors and windows with bricks."*

(Kline, A.S.2007)

Consequently the organic flow of emotion is thwarted thus forcing the five single women whose inner fantasies are pulsating with anxiety, desire, frustration, anticipation and illusion to circumscribe their selves within symbolic rationality which in true sense remains to be the intense irrationality. Thus the repression they feel induces them to become violent within their inner space. If this milieu is viewed through Freudian concepts, it can be analyzed that the strict repression of Adela's pleasure principle and Eros, the life instincts compel her to absorb and engulf herself with the death instincts, Thanatos. Through this psychical disturbance, the aggressive impulses which are erupted within her inspires Adela to express the antipathy she feels towards the dominant social other by annihilating her 'self.'

*'Adela's suicide also stresses the irreconcilable dynamic of the struggle between Eros and Thanatos. Adela arrives at the conclusion that there is no absolute freedom in life. The only freedom, which is part of Eros, can be found in death, Thanatos. Moreover, Adela's suicide proves Freud's claim that an individuals' instincts cannot be repressed beyond a certain level. Adela cannot live without asserting her Eros, and therefore she embraces its twin, Thanatos.'* (Bergen, 1999)

Pursuing the same tragic end yet encountering and witnessing another life trial, 'Emma Bovary represents the victimization of the feminine figure within the demands and value system of the bourgeois social structure. Perceiving through the illusory and fictitious images which are depicted by the Romantic literature; the heroism, passion, beauty etc, she becomes transferred to a fantasized entity in which she imaginatively lives

anticipating the impossible to become possible. Being stimulated by the necessities and desires which are evolved by the bourgeois behavioural and value patterns Emma becomes fixated within a hollow dream world which provides her neither gratification nor survival. Constantly yearning for the fulfillment of her desired love she is turned into an object which is comprised of an symbolic exchange value thus forcing her 'self' to be remained passive without resisting the approach of the dominant other whose sole purpose is to derive what she has to offer for the return of their 'Love'. Here the perfection of love for the sake of which Emma abandons what the social value system demands from her feminine figure, more explicitly from her Mother figure, makes her oblivious to the deceitful mechanism which the masculine power performs. Thus within this continuum of her quest in search of essence of true love through which her true self will emerge, she is obstructed by the phoney and superficial devotion of the masculine desire which appears in the disguise of sincere adoration. In this sense the tragic end towards which she approaches with her repressed, disgraced, disappointed and repudiated self, absorbs each particle of her existence leaving her to be interpreted as a symptom of the deformed femininity.

### **Repression, Renunciation and liberation**

According to Freudian perspective,

*'Civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct...It is not easy to understand how it can become possible to deprive an instinct of satisfaction. Nor is doing so without danger. If the loss is not compensated for economically, one can be certain that serious disorders will ensue. The id cannot be controlled beyond certain limits. If more is demanded of a man, a revolt will be produced in him or neurosis, or he will be made unhappy'* (Bergen, 1999)

During the journey towards the destination of her self-emancipation, Maggie Tulliver follows a path where the self-love is replaced by the compassion towards the social other whose emotional satisfaction and the survival become a source of

spiritual victory in her life. The route that Maggie Tulliver follows in fulfilling her earthly anticipations, bestows her with the serene and spiritual pleasure along with the self-approval.

The destiny of Maggie is incarcerated within a continuum of dichotomies between the societal repression which encroaches upon her feminine life and mind structure. Thus while encountering the injurious and prejudiced repressive approaches of the social other she has to succumb to the repression which evolves within her mind structure by suppressing her intuitive anticipation and securing the emotional survival through renunciation of her hidden desires.

*'The individual comes to the traumatic realization that full and painless gratification of his needs is impossible. And after this experience of disappointment. And after this experience of disappointment, a new principle of mental functioning gains ascendancy. The reality principle supersedes the pleasure principle: man learns to give up momentary, uncertain and destructive pleasure for the delayed, restrained, but "assured" pleasure. Because of this lasting gain through renunciation and restraint, according to Freud, the reality principle "safeguards" rather than "dethrones," "modifies" rather than denies, the pleasure principle.'* (Marcuse, 1956)

In perceiving the Freudian exemplification it can be observed that the psychical conflict that Maggie has to endure induces her anticipations, anxieties and desires to oscillate between her pleasure principle which stimulates her desires and the reality principle which governs the individualistic pleasures in leading her to realize her emotional survival. (Freud, 1962; Marcuse, 1956)

Thus being engrossed in the religious teachings of Thomas a Kempis (Christian year) Maggie wraps her solitude with the spiritual instinct of renunciation amidst the temptations which are evolved through the masculine advances of Philip and Stephen. (Eliot, 1979) The self-love which obscures her observation into the sufferings of the social other and the unjustifiable moral injustice

that underlies her self-interested anticipations persuade her towards the romantic destination that her pleasure seeking instincts yearn for. In contrast to that psychical process, the repression and renunciation of desires through which her hidden yearnings have become diminished convince the moral justification to accept her as a spiritual heroine who alters her life journey through self-denial for the betterment of the other.

*'In a Literature of their own....Elaine Showalter concurred, calling Maggie a 'heroine of renunciation in contrast to rebellious Jane Eyre.'* (Fraiman, 1993)

As a frustrated victim of trauma of War Kattrin appears in 'Mother courage and her children' with disfigured and disable features connoting her negated and neglected situation in the society. Though Mother Courage acts as the courageous mother with vigor and determination in saving her children, her endeavours encounter the disappointments and agonies. In parallel to that, the materialistic perspectives and the traumatizing war scenarios make her an incapable of protecting her children from the victimization. Yet Kattrin though remains as a voiceless and disabled feminine figure, goes beyond the boundary that the society indicates with the overwhelming maternal affection to save the children from becoming victims of war sacrificing her 'self' and thus turning her to be the symbolic mother courage.

*'The mother is the root which, sunk in the depths of the cosmos, can draw up its juices; she is the fountain whence springs forth the living water, water that is also a nourishing milk, a warm spring, a mud made of earth and water, rich in restorative virtues.'* (Beauvoir, 1953)

Negating her 'self' and deviating from the self-centered objectives Kattrin embraces the role of the universal mother who sacrifices her life for securing the survival of the victimized children.

Consequently Maggie Tulliver and Kattrin appear as the heroines whose self-strength and spiritual victory recognize them as the independent

women. Their sacrificing and the negation of self-gratification induce them to turn away from the materialistic and physical pleasures and embrace the serene satisfaction of the altruism and humanity. Amidst the societal and psychological repression which is forced upon their life routes, they step forward with the self-determination and courage inspired by the maternal warmth and sisterly affection rather than succumbing their 'self' for the demands and dominant role of the socio cultural authorities.

## Conclusion

*'Simone de Beauvoir's classic statement that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' is indicative of the view that a woman's biological, psychological and social locations are not significant as the influence of 'civilization' which produces woman. The social constructionist's position on the woman's body emphasizes the view that a woman experiences her body, sexuality and feminine identity as a social being located in a particular cultural setting with its dominant values and norms' (Thapan, 1997)*

Consequently the woman figure who is interpreted as the signifier of the 'nothingness' (Thapan, 1997, Zizek, 1992) ) appears to be the defective hole which disrupts the existing social order and thus the literary characters like Adela, Nora, Emma, and Maggie Tulliver portray the antagonism between the social principle of 'Repression' and the feminine 'Liberation'.

(Fraiman, 1993) The repression of the instinctual impulses of a human being generates an intense psychical energy within them inducing them to attain the repressed gratification.(Fraiman, 1993; Freud, 1962) The prejudiced social scale elevates the masculine figure towards the upper stratum while measuring the feminine self as the mere bodies which should be placed under the domination of the masculine superiority. (Beauvoir, 1993) As the afore mentioned characters reveal, the feminine existence within those discriminated social structure becomes framed thus assigning them their self-denial. In contrast to the characters such as Adela, Emma and Nora who negate the social other in the pursuing their determined routes towards the self-satisfaction, the feminine portrayals like Kattrin and Maggie Tulliver adopts the self-denial and renunciation of desires for the betterment of the other. Viewing these characters through that ideological dimension it can be elucidated that their deliberate acceptance of the death which signifies as a 'radical self-annihilation' (Zizek, 1992) becomes capable of enhancing their revolutionary psychical gratification. The characters like Nora, Emma and Adela become capable of gratifying their intense abomination towards the social order while Kattrin and Maggie Tulliver with their self-sacrifice and altruistic motives achieve a serene satisfaction. In that sense it can be identified that their self-annihilation leaves behind something rather than nothing implying a more psychological vitality without being just a physical deterioration.

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