

# Patriarchy and Women: An Exploration of Ruskin Bond's Selected Novels.

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**Abstract-** Patriarchy is delineated as that kind of society where the supreme authority is vested in the hands of males. Due to such social system, a type of hierarchy and hegemony is maintained between the two biological sexes. But, it is maintained that such a system is not a biological but social construction. In patriarchy, females are perceived through the lens of being mere sexual object with no feelings. They have to undergo a lot of misery and exploitation in different fields and phases. This paper is an attempt to analyze Ruskin Bond's attempt to portray such a patriarchal system, that which he certainly observes through the eyes of criticism. If explored minutely, one can find traces of feminine suffering depicted inhabited.

**Index Terms-** discrimination, oppression, patriarchy, social construction.

## I. INTRODUCTION

A social system where males hold the authorial power of the family as well as society delineates the word patriarchy. As Gulnaz Fatma puts it that as per standard sociological theory, "patriarchy is the result of sociological constructions that are passed down from generation to generation." The term signifies oppression of women by men, usually older men. Patriarchy literally means "the rule of the father" and originates from Greek. Sociologist Sylvia Walby has composed six overlapping structures that define patriarchy and take different forms in different cultures and different times:

- The state: women are unlikely to have formal power and representation.
- The household: Women are more likely to do housework and raise the children.
- Violence: Women are more prone to being abused.
- Paid work: Women are likely to be paid less.
- Sexuality: Women's sexuality is likely to be treated negatively.
- Culture: Women are misrepresented in media and popular culture.

Suppression, ill-treatment and exploitation of women in a patriarchal society have always prevailed as a subject matter in Indian fiction. This theme goes back to Indian epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. While certain writers explicitly raise their voice in support of women's liberation and position in the society, some writers do not resist the patriarchal tradition but only shows women in traditional roles in society. Ruskin Bond is one such writer who presents a patriarchal society of his times

i.e. twentieth century but the sufferings of women is passively explored. If this writer is studied from a feminist angle, then it can be discerned that the writer criticizes this social system by satirizing the oppression in marital relationships, gender discrimination and the dominative nature of males. One can observe that his portrayal of suffering of women is not stark and naked. He, through the projection of patriarchy tries to revisit the role and status of women in society.

But the study has a limitation since it encompasses only three representative and famous novels for analysis of patriarchal system and woman's condition in it: *The Room on the Roof*; *Vagrants in the Valley*; and *Delhi Is Not Far*.

## Discussion

Ruskin Bond endeavors to depict such a society where males have an oppressive and dominative attitude towards women. In Bond's world, females swallow their sufferings without any complaints. He portrays women who are trapped in a world of patriarchal conventions where they are bound by responsibility and obligations to serve the family and males. Their desires and emotions are crushed by men, sacrifice being made as their prime soul. This analysis of patriarchal conventions will be distinct as we move on through the paper.

In the beginning of the novel, *The Room on the Roof*, Suri cried: "Oh, Mummy!"(6) as the cycle along with Ranbir, Somi and the boy speeded through the steep downhill. This is a very common phrase which everyone utters or gets to hear at times of despair. But the phrase which incorporates the word "mummy" poses a question as to whether the mother is cried in reverence or otherwise! In reality, it signifies that mother is called not because one acknowledges her strength to save one, but because everyone takes their mothers for granted and they are seen to be supporting thing on which they will step and get over all difficulties.

Again if we come to the example of the missionary's wife, she never received any happiness which is clear in her effort to derive pleasure from gardening. She felt flattered when a butterfly landed on her bosom which indicates that she was not fortunate enough to obtain any appreciation, or any attention. In a patriarchal society, a woman's strength or voice is always tried to be killed. Even here, the male figure, Mr John Harrison hated the lady's lively spirit. A woman is made to obey her husband's orders which is also perceived when she obeys Mr. Harrison's wish to keep the boy occupied with works while he was absent from home. Moreover, the lady was also defeated when Rusty who was a mere adolescent declined her request to help her in her garden and finally had to submit: "All right dear, come back soon."(13). She has been entitled as "cauliflower-like lady" which marks female tenderness. The missionary wife's parental

concern is never given the deserving response by the boy. Even when she had accomplished all her works by herself after being refused by the boy and heartily welcomed Rusty offering him lemonade drink, he indifferently smiled only as a matter of courtesy and hurried away from the place. It really hurts when the boy thinks that such cruelty on his part could be forgiven by his good thought of donating money for upkeep of church, wife and garden, and it clarifies how a person remains unconcerned about female's emotions.

Another character, Meena Kapoor also represents the suffering woman as her husband is a drunkard, while she has to take care of him. She was not given much respect and it is evident when her son, Kishen did not even care to inform about the money which he asked from his father. Even, her husband did not care to attend to her feelings. Whenever he was scolded for having too many drinks, he "ignored" them. When the story of their arranged marriage is revealed, the readers come to know that they had been betrothed from childhood, while the same patriarchal reason goes behind this wedding: "Kapoor was a promising young man, intelligent and beginning to make money; and Meena at thirteen, possessed the freshness and promise of spring."(60). Females were only thought to be a toy made to please men. Her emotions never meant any importance to her drunkard husband, for which she went to Rusty in search of some care and affection. Again, in the world of Bond, females were only attached to domestic works like Meena was presumed to make tikkees while the male figures would do the accounts or selling activity in their future plan of opening a chaat shop. Mr. Kapoor fell into the category of a male patriarch who took females as something for use. Therefore, when his first wife met with an accident, he didn't even wait for the sorrow to die down but immediately another.

In his next novel, *Vagrants in the Valley*, another such character exists, of an Englishman, Mr. Pettigrew who also perceived females as entertaining dolls: "Only invalids get married, so that they can have someone look after them in their old age. No man's likely to be content with one woman in their life."(159). The attitude of self-centeredness of Mr. Pettigrew who only saw that women were ones that have come to nurse their so called gods or males when needed. But this is contrary to female attitude which is crystal clear in Rusty's aunt's utterance. She too wanted somebody (like Rusty) to take care of her but she never displayed the typical self-centric behavior of man but the feminine characteristic of caring for others: "Let us be burdens on each other. I am lonely, sometimes. I know you have friends, but they cannot care for you if you are sick or in trouble." (196-197). Even, Kishen, who was an adolescent began to like Aruna's company because of her physical beauty: "...examining her palm, predicted misery; his predictions were made at length, for he enjoyed holding Aruna's hand."(163-164). Again, another character, Devinder follows the utilitarian principle with the two prostitutes, Mrinalini and Hastini. He not only employs them for his physical satisfaction but often borrows money, which he hardly returns.

It is really strange to find the assumption of a woman (Rusty's aunt) about ghosts: "Oh they are usually the spirits of immoral women, and they have their feet facing backwards. They are called churels." So, this sense of patriarchal

interpretation also got infused into the minds of women who themselves had no high thoughts of their own category.

In the other novel, *Delhi Is Not Far*, Seth Govind Ram too derives pleasure from females and living in a patriarchal society, he too has the instinct of possessing a mistress to satisfy his physical urge, while owning dancing girls at the same time. Again, male figures such as Deep Chand discerns the opposite sex from the utility perception: "What you should do, is marry a wealthy woman. It would solve all your problems" "She doesn't have to be a widow. Find a young woman who is married to a fat and important millionaire. She will support you"(14, 15) Even, selfish husbands like Kamla's live in Ruskin Bond's society who witnessed females as utility and entertainment materials: "I have a husband who is happy only if I can make myself attractive to others...he has given five acres of land for the favour of having a wife half his age. But it is Seth Govind Ram who really owns me; my husband is only his servant." From such statements, it is clear about the male attitude towards women. Women are never seen through the lens of respect; their feelings and desires are never regarded or attended to. They are commodities used for profitable interests. Bond portrayed the images of submissive and docile women like Suraj's mother who is described as a "subdued, silent woman."(28).

Another interesting but patriarchal distinction that bars both the sexes is when the readers come to the passage: "For a girl, puberty is a frightening age when alarming things happen to her body; for a boy it is an age of self-assertion, of a growing confidence in himself and in his attitude to the world. His physical changes are a source of happiness and pride."(30). Thus, patriarchy assumes that puberty invites danger into the lives of womankind. But feminists would surely argue that both females and males attain maturity at this stage and like males, females too become confident, thus making it a moment of celebration. Furthermore, in Bond's world, males feel like possessing women as if they were some commodities: "he (Suraj) constantly felt the urge to possess a woman."(31) Another male figure noticing women as sexual objects gets projected. For Ramu, it was a matter of pride that he could seduce quite a number of females, whom he had never visited more than once. He feels proud to have discarded them which he finds manly.

Ruskin Bond very well describes how women are stereotypically thought to be a burden. Women are mostly noticed to be dependent and fragile in nature. Ganpat said, "I am a poor man, with a wife to support." Women are so conditioned by the society that they believe in the social conventions. These ideas are instilled which results in formation of a timid mind. Women experience continuous insecurity in such a male-centered society and therefore desires for male support. This is evident when Kamla speaks out: "I want your protection, not your money, I want to feel that I am not alone in the world." Friendly and direct nature was restricted to the girls and therefore the boldness of Kamla surprised the protagonist of the novel. Infact, a model with the fashionable hair-cut aroused questions in the mind of Kamla who asked: "But her hair, how is it like that?"(32). Again the delicate nature of women is clear when the people find that women faint at troublesome situation which readers get to see in Bond's representation of patriarchy.

The study of this novel also brings to the forefront the insignificant position of women in a patriarchal society. A

female, even if a mother, is not considered with regard but only her father's property matters: "A man's credentials are his father and his father's property. His mother is another quantity; it is her family-her father-that matter."(34).

Insanity is also another aspect discovered in patriarchal society as extended by feminists. Some believe that females become insane and suffer more from psychological problems because of exploitation and frustration. An instance from this novel proves this contention and the author particularly stresses that a woman is announced to be insane by the husband's(Aziz) family: "...he was forced to send her after his family pronounced her insane."(11).

In addition, female characters like Kamla and Mrinalini in the novels *Delhi Is Not Far* and *Vagrants in the Valley* could not free themselves from the shackles of responsibility, even if they yearned for freedom. They had to think about their parents, while the male figures live a free life, neglecting most of the people around them, whose own desire matters the most in the world.

### Conclusion

Thus, this paper reveals that Ruskin bond who is known to be much absorbed with themes like love, nature and childhood, also deals with such a sensitive issue of female discrimination and oppression. He goes on to criticize the social conditioning and the prevalent abusive ideas regarding females. He realistically draws the contemporary patriarchal society, underneath which his feministic outlook can be observed definitely. He, through the representation of patriarchy, goes on to speak for the cause of women. He, obviously understands the psychological frustrations of women, and their inherent and subdued desires which are buried in the graveyard called "sacrifice". Therefore, he establishes such protagonists like Rusty and Arun who falls in true love with women who are either married or a prostitute. He displays that prostitutes who are seen

as degrading elements too have their own wishes. He shows that while males always have choices, females are never offered with any alternatives. Therefore, even if Kamla, Mrinalini, Meena wanted to lead a different life, yet they could never show their back to their responsibilities. While women were always assumed to be responsible towards their family, men could move free from it. They never considered the feelings of women and could always feel shameless to pursue other women, despite having a wife. Bond, through these protagonists, attempts to extend his supporting hand to all those suffering females who have been crushed by the so called cruel patriarchal ideologies. But perhaps, because he himself is a male, therefore, he failed to portray the misery of women in a realistic and descriptive manner. It is only from certain gaps and implications that one can find that he too has the feeling that the patriarchal situation needs reformation.

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