

Vol. IV, No. II (Fall 2019) | Page: 78 – 82
p-ISSN: 2663-3299 | e-ISSN: 2663-3841
L-ISSN: 2663-3299
DOI: 10.31703/glr.2019(IV-II).11
URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/glr.2019\(IV-II\).11](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/glr.2019(IV-II).11)

Incredulity Towards Metanarratives: A Gender-Based Study of Sultana's Dream by Roqeyya Begum

Abstract

Patriarchy has always been a dominant metanarrative among different societies, hence controlling all other power centered notions too. The ones affected, for instance, women started retaliating against dominance but postmodernism gave them a platform. Roqeyya Sakhawat Hussein in 1905 wrote a short story Sultana's Dream A qualitative based study, utilizing textual analysis has been done to look at Sultana's dream through the lens of Postmodernism based on Lyotard's theory of Incredulity towards grand and metanarratives. The analysis shows Hussein's (1905) rejection of grand narrative, i.e gender here, in her short story Sultana's Dream. She presented a land where women are assigned roles based on power, logic and reasoning. They are rulers, scientists and educationists and males were not even visible in the story. They were barbarious, and bound to stay in boundaries. It is thus highlighted that Hussein (1905) has shown incredulity towards the power center and metanarrative, which is gender here.

Key Words:

Incredulity, Metanarratives, Gender, Stereotyping

Introduction

Female writers, since very early, were restless about their stereotypical portrayal in literature and their assigned roles in society which is why they are observed to reconstruct the portrayal and roles. Postmodernism, a movement, advocated a similar approach of reconstructing the stereotypes, as Lyotard (1984), a postmodernist philosopher, claimed to reject totality and showed incredulity towards metanarratives. Female writers have always attempted to raise their voices against the judgemental portrayal of women. Although South Asia is considered to be slow in conceiving the latest movements, Roqeyya Sakhawat Hussein's short story Sultana's Dream written in 1905 is proof that women everywhere were feeling the change. Sultana's dream is a story based on a female's dream of having a place where the roles of genders are reverted and played by the opposite genders. Females portrayed as males and males portrayed as females. This rejection of a metanarrative, gender roles here, as propagated by Lyotard (1984), in his theory of postmodernism, is implemented by Hussein in her short story. A textual analysis of the story highlights the theory of rejecting metanarratives. It is observed that female writers are rejecting the roles assigned to them by society, which they enforce through creating such stories in literature. Female writers, since very early, were restless about their stereotypical portrayal in literature and their assigned roles in society which is why they are observed to reconstruct the portrayal and roles. Postmodernism, a movement, advocated a similar approach of reconstructing the stereotypes, as Lyotard (1984), a postmodernist philosopher, claimed to reject totality and showed incredulity towards metanarratives.

Hussein projected her story as a dream. If its a dream which one has with close eyes, it becomes a suppressed desire. A desire which can only be fulfilled in a dream. It suggests that Sultana wishes to have a world where fantasy becomes reality and she turns into a brave, powerful and independent woman. She can lead in all fields of life and men become almost invisible. Sultana gets her desire fulfilled in a dream. But if it is a dream which one has with open eyes it turns to be the ambition of one's life. In this scenario, Sultana's Dream turns to be Hussein's attempt to get her ambition achieved and that is to have a society where woman sets everything upright, according to her own wish and will. The one who has her individuality and identity. Sultana becomes the figure to could revert the wheel of time and tide. In other words, Sultana becomes sultana in the true sense of her name who overpowers, who takes the revenge of all injustice that had been happening with a woman for so long.

Literature Review

Postmodernism is a vast term adopted by philosophers who reacted against the values and assumptions of the modern period. It is also noted by researchers that there is no consistency of philosophy in postmodernism (Kvale, 1992). Postmodernism first became part of painting, architecture and civil engineering, then it moved to philosophy, literature, art, technology. Postmodernism theory

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, SBK Women's University Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.

†Lecturer, Department of English, SBK Women's University Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan. Email: mahwishalibk@yahoo.com

‡Lecturer, Department of English, SBK Women's University Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.

has become a part of almost all disciplines, such as literature, criticism, art, philosophy, ethics, education, sociology, anthropology, science and culture, economics, politics, and architecture (Carter, 2012). Although there are different perceptions about postmodernism there is an agreement that it is basically a cultural movement (Samuels, 2008). A prominent postmodern philosopher Jameson (1991) asserts a postmodern condition, for which he mentions some signs of postmodernity. Breaking down of distinction between high and low culture is one of them through which he calls culture as dominant (1991, p.3). Culture is very dominant, it shapes people's attitudes and ways of life. In recent times the post-structural and postmodern theories have an increasing influence on literary movements. They attempted to reject the major theories of the past. Universality had been replaced by differences. Feminists have utilized the postmodern notion to propagate their ideology. Foucault, one of the postmodern philosophers is against the relation of power to knowledge. He is of the view that alternate opinions and views can challenge the powerful discourses. These hegemonic powers associated with knowledge are the power centers. They control different power-based relations in society (1976).

According to a critic, postmodernism is the way we are living our lives now, which is why it needs to be put together with feminism because then it will come to terms with the way of today. A recent update on the notion calls it postmodern feminism which "analyze(s) the gendering of representations into canonical and non-canonical divisions exemplifying sexual difference" (p.4) They call postmodern theory a tool for feminist purposes, it has entered the realm of feminist equality (Wicke & Ferguson, 1992). Flax is also of the view that postmodernism and feminism align together. Feminism should adopt postmodern characteristics. They both adopt a critical mode towards the structures of society and some strict ideals. They both are against "linear, teleological, hierarchical, holistic, or binary ways of thinking and being" (Flax, 1987, p.622). Postmodern feminism thus means a theory of feminism, which is inclusive of postmodern and post-structural inclinations. Postmodernism intersects different issues including gender. Literature has been utilized to intersect different roles, where female characters are incorporated in such a manner where their roles are reversed.

One of the prominent Bengali writers, Rokeya Sekhawat Hussein wrote *Sultana's Dream*. It is a feminist work depicting a utopian placement for women. She was against the patriarchal system. The story revolves around a dream of Sultana which is not narrated only as a means of entertainment rather as an ideal abode for women where women live in a high tech country created by themselves and the whole country is empty of men having major social roles. What is worth wonder is that Sakhawat wrote during a time when women's education was not a favorite topic among society particularly of Muslims. She talks in her story about women being scientists and educationists and running the matters of the country, which in normal situations is done by men due to our patriarchal society (Chakrabarty, 2014). Her writing is quite progressive of her age and out of time for that period. As postmodernism roughly falls in the 1960s and she wrote the story in 1905, which makes it worth scrutiny under the lens of postmodernism where philosophers reject metanarratives (Lyotard, 1984), and Hussein, a female writer is observed to be working on the same lines in her stories. The literature review also highlights the gap of not looking at the work from this lens.

The short story *Sultana's Dream* has a strong bond with eco-feminism. Rahman & Sarker (2018) have explored the connection between women and nature in a particular work. According to them, the story offers a simple solution to the oppression women receive in male-dominated society by introducing a place that is in full harmony with the environment and science and technology. The study suggests that since women and nature share some traits, women are the appropriate beings who could excel in the world of advanced technology while being equally cautious about the environment and nature. The woman through the story has proved herself the close companion of ecology, unlike men.

Ferdousi (2014) highlighted the elements of social reform of the short story *Sultana's Dream* in her study. In her opinion, the author the story provides the guidelines to her society for the social reform. It does not only offer the perfect model for the field of education or feminism, rather it covers all kinds of restructuring for an idyllic culture. Begum Rokeya became the reformer of her time who sparked a new hope in the generations to come for a prosperous future of women of the subcontinent who at that time was misguided, uneducated and uninformed.

Sultana's Dream had been studied from various viewpoints such as the researchers have explored the feminist aspects by highlighting the subjugated position of a woman of the subcontinent, some have focused the special connection between ecology and woman with reference to the story and some have tried to prove Begum Rokeya as the social reformer. The above section enabled the researcher to locate and fill the gap by observing the story *Sultana's Dream* from the postmodern standpoint of rejecting the metanarrative by indicating the reverse gender role.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher has adopted the theoretical framework of postmodernism by Jean Francois Lyotard (1984). Postmodernists are theorists who propagate that the society has since long been dominated by grand narratives, by the majority who run the affairs of society and world by enforcing their rules and regulations. Among others, gender biasedness and domination is also a socially constructed notion. It is through this notion that men are considered powerful, and logical and females as weak and emotional. Men

are the ones who earn and females are the ones who cook and nurture the children. Lyotard in a lecture on postmodernism asserts that we are being urged to stop experimenting in arts and literature. What makes him combat this notion is that artists must present what they see in society, which keeps on evolving. This approach makes him define and defend postmodernism by answering that postmodernism is what presents the unrepresentable, where the comfort of good forms is denied. A postmodern artist is called a philosopher, the works which an artist creates are not judged by preestablished rules, this establishing of new rules creates new "events" (p.82). Therefore he says that "The answer is Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences...." (1984, p.82).

Research Methodology

The researcher has utilized a Qualitative approach in the Study. As the study does not quantify rather discusses the results after doing a textual analysis (McKee, 2003). The researcher has read the text and taken out excerpts of the story which depict how the writer has presented a society where the roles of genders are changed. As mentioned by the postmodernist philosophers, such as Francois Jacques Lyotard that the metanarratives are rejected by postmodernists (1984). The researcher has used Gender roles as the metanarrative, here.

Research Objective

To analyze sultana's dream as a rejection of Gender role in Indian Society.

Research Question

How is Sultana's dream depicting the rejection of gender roles in society?

Findings and Discussion

The textual analysis of the short story by Sakhwat Hussain depicts how women were portrayed by her. The researcher highlights the deconstruction of gender roles by her thorough analysis of the text. The content of the text is split under the headings of education, science and politics. These three fields are considered to be male-oriented fields but here Hussain has completely removed the men from these fields and has put only females in these roles and has portrayed them strong and potent for these disciplines.

In the story, Sultana, who is also the protagonist went out for a walk with her friend she observed: "...there was not a single man visible" (l.9). She also felt that the women were making jokes on her when she asked her friend about it she said that they find her mannish and by mannish "They mean that you are shy and timid like men" (l.13). She further says "This is Ladyland, free from sin and harm. Virtue herself reigns here" (l.19). It reveals that the writer and the character as the mouthpiece of the writer believe that the land can be virtuous and free of sin and harm only if it is empty of menfolk. A line further elaborates that the females of this land pay more attention to are of cultivation and gardening, which means they are busy in progressive works. The place where she steps in the land meant for the lady. This also shows that mostly when it comes to the matters of property inheritance, women are deprived of their due rights. Moreover, places are usually named after the names of men, but Hussein dedicates her dream's land to the ladies by calling it a Lady Land. This is the incredulity expressed towards male-oriented tradition to nominate land by men's names.

She further mentions that they shut their men inside because it is not fair to keep women inside who are harmless and let men loose because if they are kept inside to keep them safe from men, then isn't it sensible to keep the mad inside and the weak ones out, which is why they have kept men inside in this free land. It is like letting a wild animal roam openly. Hussein reverts the gender role by shutting the men into zenana and showing females of Ladyland managing all the affairs which are usually thought to be men's affair, thus portraying the postmodern trait of rejecting the metanarratives (gender role). Rather she projects through her short story that men are the cause of evils, vice and all the absurdity in a society. If they are kept under a check

In another instance, the female in Sultana's dream is seen making a flying object for them. It is stated: Then she screwed a couple of seats onto a square piece of plank. To this plank she attached two smooth and well-polished balls... they were hydrogen balls and they were used to overcome the force of gravity. The balls were of different capacities to be used according to the different weights desired to be overcome. She then fastened to the air-car two wing-like blades, which, ... were worked by electricity (64-67).

In these lines, it is observed that the women were so competent that they had a lot of information about science and technology and they themselves were handling everything without the help of men. The ladies of the Ladyland are techno-smart.

In another piece of text, the lady says "Our fields are tilled by means of electricity, which supplies motive power for other hard work as well, and we employ it for our aerial conveyances too. We have no railroad nor any paved streets here" (l.125). It is another piece of evidence where women are to independently handle a high level of technical situations, which are conventionally done by

men. They have technologically developed so much that they do not have any problem in living life. They consume only fruits. They have artificial showers when it is hot and use solar heat to keep themselves warm.

In the field of education also they were remarkable, although there is a general notion that logic and reasoning are associated with men and emotions with women but here the women are handling the logic and reasoning of the society, i.e the education system. It is mentioned "... the Lady Principal of the second university (who had collected sun-heat)..." (l.150). Sultana also mentions her visit to their universities "...and was shown some of their manufactories, laboratories, and observatories" (l.175). Queen had started patronizing the education of girls since her early times due to which women had attained good positions and had also become scientists. Universities were established in the country. They invented some miraculous scientific inventions like balloons to collect water from the atmosphere and an instrument to collect heat and utilize them according to their need.

The story of Hussein does not fail to criticize the men as they men do against women in their chronicles, it is said: "since the "Mardana" system has been established, there has been no more crime or sin; therefore we do not require a policeman to find out a culprit, nor do we want a magistrate to try a criminal case" (l.131), which shows that evils of society are only because of men and when they are kept inside and locked the crime rate automatically falls down. It shows the retaliation of the female writer against the stereotyping of women in their writings. It is observed in another line too where the lady says "We do not like dealing with men because they have low morals" (l.172).

The "Ladyland" (l.18) is obviously run by a lady, the queen sees the affairs of the land, she is very just and also curious about the safety and integrity of the women in her land. She also met her without protocol. The queen encourages trade with other countries. She pays special attention to the advancements made in her land and gives them all the patronage that they require. She says that her queen is fond of botany. Another remarkable thing mentioned about the queen is that she is a mother too. She had started educating the women of her land since very early.

The author of the story has created the world of her dream and desire. The world is perfect for the true sense of the word. She introduces the land which is led to ladies in every walk of life. The very concepts reject and oppose reality. In the real world, men have the sole administrative power to runs society. There are some particular fields such as philosophy, politics, defense etc. where the only man is supposed to rule. However, the author Mrs.Rokeya has taken a bold step to undo all biased concepts and practices. She has opened a postmodern eye towards reality by showing incredulity towards the old narrative of gender roles set by society. The women of her story have become the epitome of modern society who are not inferior to anyone. The females of the lady land can look after all the matter of their state without any man's support.

Conclusion

Thus, it is highlighted that Sultana's dream rejects the role of genders assigned by society, endorsing the postmodernist claim that they have incredulity towards metanarratives. The men have no voice in the story, they are being presented through the eyes of women and are assigned roles, which are inferior and which are generally assigned to women. Moreover, it is observed that the women have adopted all the skills completely and they are masters of it, be it the field of education, science and politics. It also highlights a point that while rejecting the metanarrative of gender, the females are also rejecting other metanarratives, i.e religion, social hierarchy and all the power centered ideologies because the postmodernists believe in plurality and difference and it is highlighted through the analysis of this story that if those who are in power are removed from their dominating position then consequently all the metanarratives are shunned because these grand narratives and the concept of totality is propagated by these dominating forces only to keep power in their hands. All praises for Begum Rokeya, who wrote the story in 1905 and initiated the postmodern trend to question the dogmas set for centuries. She shook the belief of the people of her age and the generation after her and invited them to redefine their faith, reshape their practices and restructure their overall social system to be the pace with time, trends and technology.

References

- Carter, D. (2012). *Literary theory*. Harpenden: Oldcastle Books.
- Chakrabarty, P. (2014). A Contemplation on 'Sultana's Dream'. *Space and Culture, India*, 2(33), 10.20896/saci.v2i1.57.
- Ferdousi, S. A. (2014). A Social Reformer is peeping through-Sultana's Dream. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science* , 19(4), 68–73.
- Flax, J. (1987). Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 12(4), 621-643.
- Foucault, M. (1976). *Power/Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- Hossain, B. R. S. (1905). *Sultana's dream*. Tara Publishing.
- Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP.
- Kvale, S. (Ed.). (1992). *Psychology and postmodernism*. (9). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (Vol. 10). Minnesota: U of Minnesota Press.
- McKee, A. (2003). *Textual analysis: A beginner's guide*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Rahman, M. M., & Sarker, M. A. M. (2018). "Sultana's Dream": The Eco-Feminist Vision of Freedom. *Global Journal of HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: A Arts & Humanities - Psychology*, 18(3), 37–40.
- Samuels, R. (2008). Auto-modernity after postmodernism: Autonomy and automation in culture, technology, and education. *Digital youth, innovation, and the unexpected*. Ed. Tara McPherson. Cambridge: MIT P.
- Wicke, J., & Ferguson, M. (1992). Introduction: Feminism and postmodernism; or, the way we live now. *Boundary 2*, 19(2), 1-9.