



Research Paper

Postpartum Hysteria and Patriarchal Hegemony in *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Dr Surela Raj.K

Assistant Professor, Dr Lankapalli Bullaya College, Visakhapatnam

ABSTRACT: This paper discusses how women are perceived and expected to behave and the plight of the protagonist in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. It also discusses the patriarchal control of women and the male-dominated society, which includes discipline, where the narrator lives in a prison-like room, and she finds herself under her husband's discipline. It also concerns the narrator's husband's language and constant surveillance to force her to behave according to society's preferences. The helpless narrator goes through hysteria which consists of mental disorders like anxiety, nervousness, insomnia, and fainting with Postpartum depression.

KEYWORDS: Patriarchal Hegemony, Hysteria, Postpartum Depression, Woman's Madness

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I. INTRODUCTION

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" explores the themes of woman's madness, patriarchal control, and hysteria. The story highlights the damaging effects of patriarchal hegemony on women's mental health and portrays a patriarchal society that seizes control of the narrator's body soon after childbirth. The narrator's failure to conform to the traditional maternal role of a Victorian woman leads her husband John to impose strict discipline to mould her into an obedient wife based on societal norms of the time. The patriarchal system uses language to colonize the narrator's psyche and, as a result, reconstruct her according to its standards. Through her madness, the narrator becomes independent from the patriarchal control that has dominated her life. The story illustrates the societal pressure on women to conform to conventional gender roles and how failing to comply can result in condemnation and institutionalization.

Postpartum Hysteria and Patriarchal Hegemony

A woman is biologically capable of bearing children. She becomes a mother by bearing and giving birth to a child in her womb and giving birth to it. A deep-seated biological determinism, exploited and interpreted by patriarchy for its gain, allows society to continue believing that pregnancy and new Motherhood are a delight for most women – at least for some time. Worry, disappointment, guilt, competition, annoyance, rage, and fear are common emotions for mothers. Women unfamiliar with prenatal care throughout pregnancy may feel alone, which can lead to depression. Motherhood entails a kind of figurative self-sufficiency that entails prioritizing the needs of one's children over one's own bodily and emotional demands. Others must consider that motherhood necessitates certain fundamentals such as financial security, good health, and happiness — in other words, the exact things that the system applauding it is disregarded. The patriarchy uses biological essentialism to comfortably disregard the construction of motherhood and assign childcare-related responsibilities entirely to the mother, who is later praised for being a good mother. According to Dr Stern, becoming a mother is an identity transformation and one of the most profound physical and psychological shifts a woman will ever go through.

There are plenty of issues that fall in this context. Failure to comply with conventional binary gender roles has been regarded with hostility and condemnation for a long time. Throughout history, women have been called defective 'madwomen' when they failed to fulfil their responsibilities as daughters, wives, and mothers. It was not uncommon for a respectable man to commit his wife to an asylum if she failed to meet his expectations.

The Yellow Wallpaper's narrator achieves independence, at least poetically, through her dying hours of madness. She is made useless in the eyes of the patriarchy after being relegated to a helpless kid for failing to fulfil her prescribed gender role of obedient wife and mother. John, the doctor-husband, is a powerful patriarchal figure who embodies both the repressive structures of marriage and the coercive institutions of medical psychology. The story highlights the damaging effects of patriarchal control on women's mental health.

The story portrays a patriarchal society that seizes control of the narrator's body soon after childbirth, as she is seen as failing to fulfil her duties as a mother. As a result, the narrator's post-natal sadness is used by society to excuse her imprisonment and generate her docile physique. Through separation, John wishes to resurrect the narrator and mould her to his liking. "There comes John, and I must put this away, —he hates to have me write a word."(Gilman 175). Through these lines, John's amount of control over the narrator is made clear.

He wants an ideal Victorian wife whose responsibilities are limited to reproduction and housework. Still, Gilman's narrator lacks maternal feelings and refuses to be a part of this traditional wife and motherhood view. According to the narrator, motherhood is a form of punishment that isolates women from society and confines them to their homes. As a result, society separates her in trying to regain control over the narrator's beliefs about pregnancy. In the patriarchal system, the narrator is isolated from the community so that society can dictate her physical and mental state based on its values, which is done to protect the male-dominated society from the narrator's non-conformist parenting ideas.

The patriarchal system suppresses the narrator's imagination by forcing her body to obey the schedules and timetables that her husband and doctor set for her. The narrator's failure to conform to the traditional maternal role of a Victorian woman leads John to impose strict discipline to mould her into an obedient wife based on societal norms of the time. This discipline reflects John's intelligence and serves to occupy the narrator's body and mind, with scheduled naps after meals designed to suppress her independent thinking.

The patriarchal system uses language to colonize the narrator's psyche and, as a result, reconstruct her according to its standards. Language is used as a silent weapon. Surveillance makes her life miserable, preventing her from writing, thinking, or leaving the house. John permits her to do only one thing: breathe, as appears in his speech, "but the air, you can absorb all the time."

The narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* is recommended a rest treatment for her nervous fatigue. While she is suffering from Postpartum depression, her husband, on the other hand, doesn't understand or empathize with her. He does not even allow her to do something she likes: writing. The narrator becomes helpless in this case. The narrator experiences agony inexplicable and her mental illness goes to another extent, where the wallpaper and her state illustrate these notions during the rest of the cure. Day and night, the narrator maintains a close eye on the wallpaper. According to her conclusion regarding the shapes in the paper, a woman's shape is hidden behind the paper. Maybe it is more than a shape. The narrator begins to see her condition reflected in the article as if there were a lady like her trapped behind a barred window, and the entire paper refuses to let her out. The yellow wallpaper in this example represents her spouse and the patriarchal society of her period.

The narrator decides to hide everything from her husband. She realizes that it is better to live or survive on herself. "I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time. Of course, I don't when John is here, or anybody else, but when I am alone."(Gilman 3) she was not even able to emote a primary expression of crying as she feels. As the days pass, she examines the wallpaper more closely and notices some variations in the design. The narrator afterwards detects an odour emanating from the paper. She now sees her universe in the paper as if she were a part of it. The pattern and smell disappear in the morning and reappear in the evening. The narrator devotes most of her time to the wallpaper, particularly at night. "I really have discovered something at last.... The front pattern DOES move, and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!"(Gilman 10).

The narrator of this speech wishes to convey that many women like her face the constraints imposed by male-dominated cultures. She thinks the woman in the paper is trying to get away, so she crawls around the paper, looking for a way to get rid of it. This situation is similar to that of women, including herself, during her time trapped in patriarchal hegemony. Many creative women were prohibited from working or expressing their ideas. No matter how hard they try, there will always be barriers that dehumanize people and convert them into child-producing machines. This way, she gives herself one final shot with John, believing that if John listens to her, this key will fix the problem. Finally, the narrator is upset when she observes John breaking the door with an axe. The narrator becomes one of those women labelled as mentally ill, but a type of resistance was hiding behind the lunacy.

II. CONCLUSION

Finally, the helpless angel discovers the source of her power in her craziness and tears up the wallpaper to liberate the woman in it. She also frees herself in this way. *The Yellow Wallpaper* serves as a powerful commentary on the oppression of women in patriarchal societies, emphasizing the need for gender equality and challenging the societal norms and expectations that limit woman's autonomy and well-being.

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