



Research Paper

Erotic Narratives in Texts by Women as Weapons Against the Female Submission in the Patriarchal Society

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ABSTRACT

The many representations and perspectives of the female in art and literature form the base for the counter reflections of the social and psychological makeup of the society. Gender, is one of the central influences to the existence of the text and the society. The woman, as an identity has been shrouded under the sheet of culture and dignity of the 'feminine'. The general pseudo, stereotypical image of the woman has led to the suppressing of the woman's body as a taboo and sin; thus, degrading the status of the soul.

The hidden image of indignity and shame is the very weapon deployed by the women writers to create a platform in order to change these images. As the sexuality of man is very often a casually accepted study for the society, as already established with the wide acceptance of the Kamasutra etc. Though woman's physical and sexual world is a taboo and largely condemned, the works by women writers like Eve Ensler, Taslima Nasreen, Gray EL James, Kamala Das, Erica Jong, Shobhaa De, Abha Dawesar, Arundhati Roy, Meenakshi Madhavan Reddy, Advaita Kala and Anuja Chauhan, border erotic narratives to shock the world of literature, creating the awareness on the need to address the issues of the woman, both in the public and private arena of life.

KEYWORDS: Erotic Narratives, Gender, Feminism

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Print and visual media are highly influential media that create the individual and collective expression and impression of the society. Amongst the many themes of art, gender, is an inescapable aspect and love is unanimously one of the predominant themes. Though love and sex need equal participation of both the genders, the female is generally the docile receiver of pleasure in both reality and the represented world. Even the term 'Pleasure' is extensively a taboo for the female. The words related to sex and sexuality is associated to the female gender only when immoral or crime-related offences are committed by the individual.

I. MALE SEXUALITY

The understanding of the female gender's relationship with respect to the male reaches clarity only when the male world of sex and sexuality is assessed. The manuals, texts and visual art representing sex in the lives of male characters are seen as customary to the gender. The society thus reflects similar attitude of placing the authority to initiate, exhibit and exercise sex and sexuality to the male gender. The male gender is also forced to practice these roles of dominance. Thus, the individual accepting the dominance of the female gender in the aspects of relationships even in the most personal relationships, do not escape the clutches of the societal norms of male dominance. Therefore, both the genders are forced to play socialized roles dictated by the society. The predominant societal structure being patriarchal, the woman is largely regulated to conform to the strongholds of the system.

Male is the predominant gender presented in manuals, pornography, painting and literature involved in the act of sex or physical pleasure. As elaborated by many such as, John Berger in his observation of the painting states in "Ways of Seeing",

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This

determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object -- and most particularly an object of vision: a sight^{1,2}

In the observations of various paintings by men about women, as depicted in "Alone", for example and the many paintings, sculptures, the theatre and cinema present the women from the male gaze, which observes only the body.

This research online proves that sex manual sex is only for the male gender and are from the interests of the male pleasures. *The renowned sex manuals like Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana Medieval sex manuals include the lost works of Elephantis, by Constantine the African; Ananga Ranga, The Perfumed Garden for the Soul's Recreation, a Sheikh Nefzaoui, Speculum al foderi...³*

Nevertheless, the female gender has a sex manual to be released in the present times under the name the 'Muslimah Sex Manual'³.

The general tendency ingrained into the woman thus, is lack of sexuality which is considered the true essence of a woman or 'the good woman.' In addition, the effort to find the adjectives for a good woman state, a woman to be a good woman when she is of service to whims of the man and family in accordance to the patriarchal institution. Whereas the search for qualities of a good man leads to common, unbridged qualities free from the clutches of the society and culture.

FEMALE SEXUALITY IN THE VAGINAL MONOLOGUES AND OTHER TEXTS

As the realities and the disparities in the articulations of the gender is elucidated, the women writers and their works are discussed in the articles that have shocked, questioned and revolutionised the previous patriarchal perception of the woman's sexuality. The lives and the works of Eve Ensler, Taslima Nasrin, Kamala Das, Erica Jong, Shobhaa De, Abha Dawesar, Arundhati Roy, Advaita Kala and Anuja Chauhan, observed in the article reveal the Pro-Sex Feminism attitudes. Contradictory to general fiction, monologues and biographies, these texts offer the inert expressions of sexual energy and strength of the female 'self', surpassing the general image of taboo or characteristics of negative duality of the female – 'the slut'.

The Vaginal Monologues by Eve Ensler present a multitude of nearly 200 voices of women of diverse nature of race, culture, sexual preference, class etc. They create a common identification as an entity in the process of connecting with the audience. *The Vaginal Monologues* has also been transformed at every reading to suit the changing times and audience. The structure and true essence however, has been held intact.

The text initially speaks of the need to be worried about the 'vagina'. This has received several negative reviews as de-emphasising the woman to mean a 'vagina'. *The Vaginal Monologues* has various sections of monologues expressing various social issues and personal conflicts of the world and the individual. The stories include *The Short Skirt*, *The Sex Worker*, *I was There in the Room*, *The Transgender*, *The Flood*, *The Vagina Workshop*, *The Bosnian Rape Survivor*, *Because He Liked to Look at It*, *My Angry Vagina*, *My Vagina Was My Village*, *My Little Snorcher That Could* and the additions continue. These separate monologues have been stated by many Feminists as being too preoccupied with the vagina; that the vagina formed the whole entity of a woman.

Many of us were offended by Ensler's constant inaccurate use of the word 'vagina' when she meant 'vulva' - an ignorant and misleading misnomer that smacks of heterosexist. The vagina is of primary importance to heterosexual men in their sex act, which involves penetration. ⁴

They asserted the concept to be limited in nature and it should be held as merely a point from which they traverse beyond. Contravening these lines, *The Vaginal Monologues* could be perceived as a symbolic concern, to the non-existence or the ensconcing of the female and the need to unearth the buried.

The Vaginal Monologues could also be viewed as imploring the genders to accept the presence of the woman in all spheres, especially the sole sexual existence. Many women are socialized through the means of literature, media and art to succumb to male notion of the female. This acceptance of explorations of true self would lead to self-realisation of the competent 'self'.¹

The Short Skirt section speaks of women's rights to the choice of attire and lifestyle. The monologue represents characteristics of the famous 'Slutwalk' that happened in the early 21st century for the freedom of women to lead modern life; thus curbing the victim blame game of "she was raped for a reason". Many countries including India can be seen as the 'victim blaming nations'. This need to be free from the 'male gaze' is²³ the ongoing battle for long that has not seen much success, as socialization process even today for male gender is to hunt and female is to be the hunted. Kamala Das also recounts the act of such nature in her poems *The Looking Glass*, *An Introduction* and other poems where the female gender is just the mute spectator in the affair

or crime of love;

For, he drew a youth of sixteen into the Bedroom and closed the door, He did not beat me But my sad woman-body felt so beaten.

*The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me. I shrank Pitiful*⁵

The emotional existence of a woman is very closely associated to the woman's body. The body is veiled in the physical world to protect her very existence. Leading the soul to be veiled or rather obscured from the voice of self. This is evident in *The Bosnian Woman* wherein the woman is one among the millions who was systematically raped as a strategy by the army. This is true to many cultures where women have greater fear of being raped than of death, because they are forced to live with the shame of being raped. In addition, the trauma for the woman is beyond description as the woman recounts the insertion of rifle, bottles etc and raped for days by more than seven men. The act of rape is seen as the deserving device for the punishment of women. The woman's body as an image to the soul is evident in this monologue. Thus, her last few lines see the death of her river valley of life in the woman and she repeats "I don't live there now".

The sexual interests of the woman are discussed in *The Sex Workshop and The Moaner, Because He Liked to Look at It*, presenting the inability of the woman to be comfortable with her body. The body shaming and disfiguring of the self by the society in order to control the psyche can be observed. However, various texts have tried to generate the positive image of sex to the woman and to create candid imagery with the hopes for women to find and support their expressions and desires. Muddupalani's *Radhika Santhwanam*, Dewasar's *Babyji*, Erica Jong's *Zipless Fuck* in *The Fear of Flying* revolved around the stigma of the conventional 'vanilla woman'.

*The zipless fuck is absolutely pure. It is free of ulterior motives. There is no power game. The man is not "taking" and the woman is not "giving". No one is attempting to cuckold a husband or humiliate a wife. No one is trying to prove anything or get anything out of anyone. The zipless fuck is the purest thing there is. And it is rarer than the unicorn. And I have never had one.*⁶

Taslima Nasrin's autobiography *Exile the Memoir* and Muddupalani's *Radhika Santhwanam* form suitable examples in history to the treatment of works with sex represented in books produced by women. Beyond the content of the text, the gender of the writer is a greater threat to be questioned or rather judged and censored as a bad influence on the society and the women, who are to be controlled. The character of the writer is very often questioned. Muddupalani and Nagarathamma, (who tried to revive the lost text) were called lowly woman. Taslima Nasrin's *Exile* drafts a clear list of all the criticism laid against her character rather than the text. The credibility and the poetic art of the text was never credited but interdicted similar to the many books that present pro-sexual trends in women.

Lalithambika Anantharam's *The Goddess of Revenge* employs the woman's anger towards man's insolence to the faithful relationship of marriage, whereas the woman's body is the device of contempt and ultimate revenge. In *The Fear of Flying*, the Isadora Wing despite the contemptuous anger of various critics, exemplified the liberation of the female sexuality as an entity of its own, requiring equal status. *Exile* by Taslima Nasrin is the counter memoir to her extremely candid personal writings. *Exile* gives us the image of the disparities in the attitudes of the society to the documentation of the sexual nature of men and women. She retorts against the acceptance of the lives of Benjamin Franklin, Bertrand Russell, TS Eliot etc, elucidating the freedom men exercise in fiction and reality as sexual beings and the restricted, asexual existence forced on the female gender. *Babyji* by Abha Dewasar shows the lesbian emotions and expressions of pleasure that are fighting to be identified as realities of the society. All the texts from multiple perspectives present the status and existence of women in the society.

II. CONCLUSION

Radek Hall⁷ observes that the status of women in the society restricts the attitude and the psyche of the women at various levels, dictates the dressing styles of the women to safeguard the women from sexual pleasures, and modifies them to appease the man's interest of the hour glass figure. The male society conforms the woman to the duty of sex rather than the pleasure of sex. These attributes to the female gender is questioned at various strands by all the writers, however, the many weapons of silencing is manipulated against the benefit of the texts.

The texts are also criticized and interdicted for violence and sexual exploitation. It is necessary to understand that the images of violence and sexual vexation have a message for the society. They are suppressed to silence the voices of freedom. They are very often attenuated as inciting and scandalizing aspects for the author's credit, demeaning the value and the messages of the texts.

In context to the sexuality of the woman, there exists a purposeful blind eye to the woman's self under the sheets of culture and heritage. Hence undermining, assuming and hypothesising the female without the presence of the female voice or rather the silenced voice. This is the notion these writers have tried to rebuke. The efforts of the writers in creating awareness about the women and the society are to be credited beyond the judgments of the patriarchal silencing objectives. Thus, the criticism would recount to be an unbiased view of the text if observed beyond the conceivers (authors) and conceived (characters) female gender.

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