RESEARCH ARTICLE

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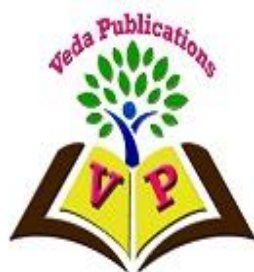# DELINEATING THE FEMALE IDENTITY AS A FICTITIOUS CONSTRUCTION IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Female identity is a very critical issue in the Post Modern world. Identity has been discussed in various communities that are interrelated with sexuality, gender, race and migration. To know about female identity a woman has to know about herself. Being an educated middle-class woman why are they are silent, isolated, frustrated in their families. Female identity is bound with social norms, structure and conventions. Therefore, the inferiority complex, Patriarchal manifestation and subjugation make them feel inferior throughout her life. Thus, the social construction and traditional values are imposed on them. Sometimes, while performing their prescribed role in the domestic sphere they didn't recognise their individuality. Therefore, postmodern feminist writers pen down for the equal right to man and woman. Identity is a polemical issue which is linked with social norms, gender, and sexuality. It is a fictitious construction because it is fabricated in the society.

Keywords: *Female Identity, Patriarchy. Social Construction, Subjugation, Marginalisation.*

Female identity is a very critical issue in the Post Modern world. Identity has been discussed in various communities that are interrelated with sexuality, gender, race and migration. Literature has always been the site of life, social politics, inequality, domination, dispute, racism, hunger, poverty, identity or any other aspect of reality. The issue of identity has been a major issue in contemporary psychology, social theory, cultural studies and literary criticism. Many critics have described it in different perspectives like social, culture, politics, religion, etc. There have been describing their views regarding Identity formation the patriarchal society. Erik Homburger Erikson a well-known German American psychologist explains the construction of identity and female identity says:

> Identity as a core construct for development, it is also a part of the psychological analysis, identity formation for the female needs to be understood in the broader sense that addresses the question of how one's individuality and continuity fit within the communal sense of wholeness.(qtd. in Gatobu 7)

In the context of female identity Erik Erikson opines out that how one identity creates a question of an entity. Identity formation describes the changing Senario of the society. Amartya Sen explains elements that forms an identity that: "A person's citizenship, residence, geographic origin, gender, class, politics, profession, employment, food habits, sports, interest, taste in music, social commitments, etc. make us members of a variety of groups. Therefore a woman has to go through the many phases to develop her identity.Thus, Erik Erikson Emphasises in Anne kiome Gatobu's book *Identity formation and Response to Intimate Violence* emphasis:

> Development of the sense of self is a function of the internalised social, cultural and religious influences on the individual aspirations to identify with and attain wholeness in the society. In other words, aspects of

identity formation of females may be traced to the social, cultural and religious environment which nurtures the developing child and engenders a sense of self in that child. (qtd. in Gatobu 7)

Erik Erikson emphasises the impact of the social Psycho discourse on the construction of identity. Therefore, cultural ideology binds these influences with every individual. The term identity explores the demand of one's individuality. A woman has to take care of all the customs and historical background, languages and cultural aspects in order to describe his identity. Amartya Sen a famous economist and philosopher encapsulates in his book *Identity and Violence*:

> A person's citizenship, residence, geographic origin, gender, class, politics, profession, employment, food habits, sports interests, taste in music, social commitments, etc., make us members of a variety of groups. Each of these collectivises, to all of which this person simultaneously belongs, gives her a particular identity. None of them can be taken to be the person's only identity or singular membership category.(34)

Thus, Amartya Sen describes the cultural discourses and conventions in the construction of identity. Thereby, Sen describes the historical elements of a woman for her identification.. However, identity mix itself with the society that what are the taboos that related to us. As Erik Erikson explains "Identity comprises not only 'who you think you are' but also who you act as being in interpersonal and intergroup interactions and social recognition or otherwise that these receive from individuals or groups" (34). Erikson describes identity gives us the identification with the mirror stage. Identity develops through by the performativity e.g a woman has to play her roles according to the societal norms   Identity is a biography of a person as his /her birth, age, and profession. Society constructs identity by the cultural

aspects that they can be fit in a particular role which they have decided for every individual. Wherein, society already perceives their image for a male and female.

To know about female identity a woman has to know about herself. Being an educated middle-class woman why are they are silent, isolated, frustrated in their families. Female identity is bound with social norms, structure and conventions. As Simon de Beauvoir and Anne Kiome Gatobu describe that the female identity is reliant on the psychological formation of the self. Therefore, the inferiority complex, Patriarchal manifestation and subjugation make her feel inferior throughout her life. Thus, the social construction, traditional and values are imposed on them. Sometimes, while performing their prescribed role in the domestic sphere they didn't recognise their individuality. Therefore, postmodern feminist writers pen down for the equal right to man and woman.

Identity is a polemical issue which is linked with social norms, gender, and sexuality. It is a fictitious construction because it is fabricated in the society. Identity is socially produced, socially constructed and worked out in people's everyday social lives. Jurden Straub in his book *Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness* describes, "Identity is however still considered to be a social norm in postmodern societies" (280). It is generally assumed that there are two genders i.e. male and female. They are part of any social justice because if there is some kind of injustice, they are exploited as socially, culturally, economically, and politically. When it comes to thinking about identities it cannot adequately address the issues of what identity is and how it is possible. Identity is formed by social processes and is continuously maintained, modified or even reshaped by social relations and social culture. Berger–Luckman define identity as the interplay of "organism", "individual consciousness" and "social structure" (194). Elaine Showalter argues that "woman's identity is not defined solely by her relation to a male world and a male literary tradition. She considers the bonds between women powerful and crucial factors in women's lives (201). A woman's life is a mixture of responsibilities, tradition, culture

and male domination which make her inferior and superior. In this way, her identity formed in the patriarchal society.

Patriarchy literally means male domination of a person in a family. In the social set up all the roles are constructed in order to be performed by males and females. Sylvia Theresa Walby a British Sociologist describes in her book *"Theorising Patriarchy"* calls it "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby 27). They consider women as child producing machines and on this basis they exploit them. Gerda Lerner an eminent American Historian describes in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy*:

> Patriarchy means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. (239)

Gerda Lerner explains the manifestations and agencies which are constructed under the male dominance in the society which dominates women and children in the society. Wherein, a woman cannot avail her rights in society. Thus, it is important to understand patriarchy in terms of its multiplicity, complexities, and dynamics. Sheila Rowbotham, a British sociologist and feminist writer opines in her book *The Trouble Patriarchy* also argues:

> The term patriarchy necessarily implies a conception of women's oppression that is universalistic, a historic and essentially biologistic and that it incorrectly leads to a search for a single cause of women's oppression either in a base super-structure model or as a quest for ultimate origins from capitalist relations. (30)

Sheila Rowbotham describes that patriarchy is mainly considered as male domination of a man upon a woman. Thus, in the domestic way a woman is the one who has been subjugated politically, economically, physically, and mentally. Therefore, it emphasises that patriarchy oppresses woman capitalists take advantage of it. As Bhasin Khan explains in his book *What is Patriarchy that:*

> Feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women's labour, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation"(Khan 3).Bhasin Khan describes that feminism makes an effort to spread awareness for the reasons which are demeaning female's emancipation.

In this context, Zillah Eisenstein in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* argues that 'male supremacy and capitalism are the core relations which determine oppression of women' She defines patriarchy as a "sexual system of power in which the male possesses superior power and economic privilege'(Eisenstein 17). All powers are in the hands of man which he enjoys in the name of the on-going social structure. Kate Millet's theory of subordination argues that "women are a dependent sex class under patriarchal domination" (Millet 77). Gender discrimination is also a prominent issue in Indian society. The woman is considered as the weaker sex who creates the gender politics that divides the powers. Thus, Wallaby describes the system of economic power in the society which dominates the woman. "In this system women's labour power, women's reproduction, women's sexuality, women's mobility and property and other economic resources – are under patriarchal control" (Walby 20). In Indian patriarchal social structure, a man is the ruler of his family who dominates the other for his honour, respect, culture and society. Likewise, he deconstructs the ideologies which are

related to gender politics and discriminates between the male child and female child which make gender inequality.

Female identity is a process for the most fundamental of these differences. It relates to self-image, self-esteem, individuality and usually refers to the individuality of the women protagonists who submit themselves under the forced norms of the male-dominated society and their families. As Christine Gomes describes the difficult condition of a female in the patriarchal society in her book *On-going Quest of Bharati Mukherji from Expatriation to Immigration*:

> Women's struggle for self-realisation and self-definitions quest for her identity, her pursuit of freedom, equality, and transcendence her rebellion and protest against oppression at every level. Sex role, Stereotyping in society, debates over the double moral standard in society, various aspect of female experience such as domestic violence, rape, pregnancy, abortion, motherhood, being single, and so on. The evolving of feminine consciousness out of female experience, the internal conflict and ambivalent of women forced to choose between feminist goals and traditional feminine goals between total independence and the need for romantic love and emotional fulfilment, the bonding between women forming sisterhood or a mother-daughter relationship and the alienation of women as an outsider, as the object as the other. (92)

Christine Gomes opines the struggle of a female in the patriarchal society i.e violence, rape humiliation, domestic violence, discrimination etc. An American Psychologist Nancy Chodorow's explanation about female identity in her book *Feminism and Psychoanalytical Theory*, she gives a descriptive

generalisation of sexism, patriarchy or male supremacy to analyse how sexual asymmetry and inequality are constituted, reproduced and changed. As Valerie Bryson, a British Political Scientist encapsulates women's situation in her book *Feminist Political Theory* that "Whatever system of the labour….whatever system of government ….under every vicissitude of man's condition he has always retained woman's slave."(196). She further explains women's suppression is rooted in a traditional society in religious doctrine and practices, within the education and legal system, and within families. Male domination in a woman's life is a natural phenomenon in a patriarchal society. Women are struggling on their own to break the shackles of their traditional position and search for their identity as an individual, rather than sacrificing at every step for the sake of their husbands and children. `

Traditionally, a woman has been known to bear primary responsibility for the well-being of her family. She is discriminated against systematically and deprived of access to resources such as education, health care, services, jobs etc. According to Millet in her *Sexual Politics* "Sex is determined biologically, whereas gender is cultural, socially, psychologically constituted through sex-role stereotyping and historical conditioning" (13). Psychological discourse also plays a major role to demonstrate the image of a woman, who because of the social changes has to accept all the deviations which have been imparted on her. She prefers to stay silent and this discreet thinking goes to her unconsciousness and this affects her psyche. Anita Myles in her book *Feminism and the Post-modernist Indian Women* rightly points out:

> A woman's experience of life as a member of a gender-based society formulates her psyche. Moreover, she is bound by certain other factors such as her individual circumstances, societies expectations related to age, class, race, etc. Thus each women experience of life is different and therefore, unique. (95)

Therefore, Anita explains the position of woman in the gender-based society and she survives according to the patriarchal structure. She has to change her identity as a daughter, sister, wife, mother etc. Elaine Showalter, a feminist critic too seek insight into self-definition and says "Throughout history and across national boundaries in the recurring images, themes and plots that emerge from social, psychological and aesthetic in male-dominated culture" (6). In society, a woman does not have her own identity because for woman all the tradition and way of talking and behaviour in society is constructed by the social set up. Carolyn Gold an American Author Heilbrun in her book *Reinventing Womanhood* writes:

> Successful women are 'male-identified' but that it is a failure for a woman to take her identity from her man. Women never form a self because they never have undergone an identity to lose; the price of wifehood is abandonment to self. (103)

In the patriarchal society woman is the one who has been the victim and she has always been associated with her father and husband's name. Therefore Beauvoir in her book *Second Sex* says:

> A Woman is defined in relation to men and not as an independent separate entity, she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is absolute, she is the other. (307)

A woman is always identified with reference to man. The Indian woman has been a silent sufferer of the old traditional system. Education imparts a sense of individuality amongst women and brings a new awareness to the society. In this context, Virginia Wolf encapsulates the whole situation:

> Intellectual freedom depends upon material things. Poetry depends on intellectual freedom. And women

have always been poor, not for two hundred years merely, but from the beginning of time, Women have had less intellectual freedom. (45)

Virginia wolf explains the importance of education for a woman she explains thata woman should be educated to know her rights and her identity. Similarly,Heilburn says in her book Reinventing Womanhood:

> A woman must learn to call whatever she is or does female. For whatever she is does is female. Ultimately, there are no male models, there are only models of selfhood from which woman choose to learn. The hardest in the life of the woman is to learn to say, whatever I am is a woman. (140)

Therefore, Heilburn says that women should recognise their self to establish their status in the male-dominated society. For that feminist writers have been trying to write their point of view in the feministic theories which are very necessary for their emancipation. To describe the female identity is important for a woman to know about herself. Being an educated middle-class woman they are silent, isolated, frustrated in their families. Female identity is bound with the internalisation of social, political and religious aspects. As Simon de Beauvoir and Anne Kiome Gatobu describe that the female identity is reliant on the psychological formation of the self. Therefore, the exploitation humiliation and violence make them feel inferior throughout her life. Thus, these social taboos construct and impose the traditional values on them. Sometimes, while performing their prescribed role in the domestic sphere they didn't recognise their individuality.

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