

Patriarchy's Notion of Beauty and Desire Reflected in Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress'

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Abstract

Women are always represented inferior in the society. They are deliberately intervened in the activity where they found themselves politically weak like religious and cultural dogmas. Simone De Beauvoir states in her essay 'The Second Sex' that 'women are not born women; but they are made women'. Here, she strongly emphasizes the representation of women in society as well as in literature. Women are always exploited culturally, politically and psychologically. Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' is not an exception to this. Even it is the outcome of patriarchal notions like Beauty and Desire. This paper hereby tries to elucidate trajectory of these notion's representation to reflection especially in Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress'. This 'Representation' is constrained to the reflection and the language in patriarchal society.

KEYWORDS: Representation, Patriarchy, Beauty and Desire etc.

Introduction:

Andrew Marvell is one of the best Metaphysical poets in 17th century who is known for his amorous verses like 'To His Coy Mistress', 'The Definition of Love', 'A Dialogue Between the Soul and Body' etc. Traditionally love and desire have been overstated by the men of letters. Marvell as love poet follows the rut of this tradition throughout his poems who has viewed and presented his patriarchal notions of beauty and desire in hyperbolic terms. The select poem 'To His Coy Mistress' is not an exception to this. The poem was first published in 1681, in 'Miscellaneous Poems' three years after the death of the poet. As a beseecher of love he entreats and woos a lady and impels her to think about his love and desire. From this exaggeration of beauty and desire there is an iota of hope to understand his feelings for her through a dominating male voice. Though Marvell praises for his greatness in writing poetry, especially for his themes and use of imagery. But at the end it can be drawn out that Marvell's psychology and philosophy as a man particularly by reading a poem 'To His Coy Mistress'.

The poem 'To His Coy Mistress' focuses on the lustful desires of man trying to allure a female virgin, the mistress, into sexual intimacy. The poem is dexterously crafted and structured by the poet so it is known as seduction poem. Wit, allusions and conceits are exploited in a logical argument. The speaker is progressing logically through the stages of persuasion in order to change lady's head and heart. He wishes to court and deflower her though she is reluctant. The poem is beautifully composed with the elements like rhyming, tone, form and content etc. But the content is nothing but the reflection men's psychology which represents social notions of patriarchy. And all these ideas or notions are questioned after 1960s by the feminist critics. This patriarchal ideology is examined on various levels like the images of women promulgated in literature, the socialization of

women, and exploration of the identity of women etc. All Feminist critics fight against the identity formation of woman. The patriarchal ideology is disseminated unapparently by means of language which helps in the process of womanisation. The poem 'To His Coy Mistress' encourages the ideas of womanisation.

Though knowledge and ideas are conceived from language, cannot be universal or the ultimate truth. It can be politicized too. The use of imagery helps a lot to form an identity of women in literature helps a lot in the process of womanisation. This is a systematic process where woman is treated as an object which can be used to fulfill desires or satisfactions of male. 'To His Coy Mistress' is the reflection of these notions. Although the poem shows initially an argument on the ideas like Platonic love or Carnal love, but it is also about beauty or desire. If we think on the images represent platonic love are specifically connected to the patriarchal notion of beauty. The parameters of beauty are closely connected to bodily aspects of women for example her eyes, hairs, breast, skin colour and her body shape. These notions of beauty are very helpful for the objectification of women. Here in the poem speaker ironically says that he is ready to adore her many years rather ages on each body parts of the Lady. In the view of speaker (male gaze) beauty is in physical objects of women therefore it seems to him that her coyness is an expectation to praise her physical beauty. He would praise her eyes, breast and her each body part for ages like beautiful objects of a doll. A beauty of a woman cannot be restricted to her physical look but this kind of representation is made by supporter of patriarchal notions and 'To His Coy Mistress' is the reflection of these notions.

This poem is not just a reflection but it also helps in a great extent to womanisation of the lady. Marvell's idea of women is purely patriarchal. Coyness does not seem a crime for him it's an ornament of the beauty for a woman. This coyness (bashfulness and Silence) can be interpreted as her powerlessness to speak in the society. In the world of patriarchy women have a specific code of conduct. She cannot speak freely on many of issues like 'sex'. It is one of the issues among them. All these codes of conduct are the part of the cultural practices in the society and woman has to follow the same. There are specific cultural notions which are related to coyness and the clothes of women. The representation of the lady in this poem is purely patriarchal rather it is a reflection of these notions in the image of lady.

Simone de Beauvoir or Judith Butler argue on the socialization of women that although men and women are biologically different but this difference is politically manipulated and represented through language and literature. Virginia Woolf and other feminist also noted their objection in their writings. They say that they are unable to break the shackles of patriarchy because of their feminine images in language which womanise them with emotion, sentiments and dependent. Marvell continues such imagery throughout his poem 'To His Coy Mistress'. It seems in the poem that the lady is politically helpless to present her wishes or her roll.

'Sex' is another topic in patriarchal world where women become a subject. And this subjectivity is enough to kill her existence in the society which kills her desire and she becomes an object for male. Marvell's poetry is not an exception to this. This is a poem where speaker tries to seduce the lady for the satisfaction of his sexual desire. While

seducing he does not consider social implication of this act to her personal and social life because in society there are unwritten rules regarding virginity and sexual life of a woman. Women are not allowed to do sex before her marriage. The same is applicable for men too but if he or she breaks this rule then problems would arise only in the life of women. The American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne sketched this well in his novel 'The Scarlet Letter'. Her coyness shows the fear regarding patriarchal social implication in the poetry. Her silence would be an outcome of the dominant patriarchal notions which cannot reveal whether his proposal is being accepted or rejected. But when we look at the speaker it seems to us how free and confident he is to present his wish before her. He deliberately uses the image like 'vegetable love'. The word 'vegetable' signifies fertility. Indirectly he assumes that she is born to satisfy his desire, she is incomplete without him. She is 'Other' in this patriarchal world and language, which spreads patriarchal notions only. Jacques Lacan, the French Psychoanalyst hypothesizes that in language woman exists as 'Other'. Marvell also treats the lady as 'other' where he looks at her as an object which can be used to seek pleasure only.

Fear is an ultimate source to pursue anybody in our favour. Marvell uses it at last to chase her by philosophizing with images like 'winged chariot', 'worm', and 'Marble vault'. He takes help of these images in order to intimidate her about death. Further he extends it that there is no use of this preserved virginity after death. Even he frightens her after death her flesh would be eaten by worm or insect in the Marble vault.

To conclude, the notions of patriarchy are deeply rooted in the society and literature is nothing but the reflection of society. And women are always treated as an object in the society. She is exploited through the cultural, political notions. Beauty and desire these are predominant presumption in the patriarchy. 'To His Coy Mistress' is an example of cultural, political and psychological exploitation of the Lady. Patriarchy is deeply rooted – so also ingrained in the speaker and the lady. They cannot live and think far away from this. Thus, throughout this paper, researcher has tried to expose the underlying meanings of beauty and desire in patriarchal framework.

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