

The Thematic Analysis of Scourge of Dowry in Dina Mehta's *Brides Are Not For Burning*

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Abstract

Dina Mehta is a prolific writer, has distinguished herself as a playwright for the stage, radio, and television. She has been awarded several prizes, notably an international award from the BBC. He daringly expressed the women issues in her plays. Her play Brides are not for Burning bring out the post-colonial issue related to the existence of women in the country. It reveals the fact that women are still burning in a flames under a patriarchal system. The issue of dehumanization is dealt here with in realistic consideration. This paper aims to bring out the scourge of dowry and how it is role played in the patriarchal society.

Keywords: Dowry, Silence, Tormented soul, Marginalizing woman

In the play, Laxmi has been portrayed as a bride who has been burnt alive for a meager dowry that she has brought to her husband's family. She has been brought up in a middle-class family. She has been named after the Goddess of wealth, laxmi, by her father, who had been a government officer. Laxmi had to marry Vinod. Laxmi has huge expectation about her marriage life. But later, her happiness turns into a bitter sadness. The characters of Laxmi and Malini stand at two ends of the spectrum of Indian womanhood. While Laxmi is the conventional, submissive daughter-in-law, who is tortured and humiliated for bringing insufficient dowry, her sister, Malini, is a fighter. The play is dedicated to all the angry young women. The vulnerable girl child, the trauma of child sexual abuse, childlessness and infidelity are the issues dealt with in this play.

In *Brides are not for Burning*, it is remarkable that Laxmi, in spite of her earlier boisterousness, maintains silence. Her silence is not the weakness of her femininity. It is the voice of femininity. It becomes the strength of the dramatic structure of the play. It is manipulated as time of pause for the self-defiance and the self realization of Laxmi. It becomes an inevitable need to speak on an issue that is closely related with her feminine dignity, social dignity and the psychological integrity of the self. Mehta as a post-modernist feminist advocates that feminist weakness is not an inherent phenomenon but like the ideology of gender discrimination, it is a socially constructed myth. It is a most radical play to construct the voice of a woman against the set conventions of patriarchal society. The sufferings/plights of Laxmi are a justification of the convention that in all societies and in all ages it is only the woman who is to be a scapegoat.

Woman as Object

The very titles of the play, *Brides are not for Burning* is a theatrical presentation of the violence against women by the so-called pillars (family or in-Laws) of the society.

In the very beginning of the play is engulfed with the news of the death of Laxmi. The word ‘death’ proves itself a misnomer for the deliberate suicide of the tortured and tormented lady by her in – laws for extorting more and more money and consumer goods from her parental home. The play reveals how the gendered subaltern passively bears the tyrannical attitudes of the society. She is treated as ‘an object’ without being perceived as a subject. The dramatist, with this sensitive issue of bride- burning, questions the different institutions of society which are held responsible for its smooth running. The present social issue, that is burning a bride, is clearly related to Indian society. It may be termed as a negative metaphor of the nativist’s culture. In this way, the play appears to be a strong disapproval of colonial hangover. The play unravels the story of a lower middle class Gujarati family. It is not all about this particular family rather it is a prelude to a meaningful and larger narrative lying outside the closed spaces of the Desai’s tenement room, Sanjay’s living room, Vinod’s office, Tarla’s kitchen, Roy’s apartment and Laxmi’s in-laws’ living – cum – dining room.

Accident or Suicide

The plot of the play is structured in the form of the compulsive suicide of Laxmi. It is presented as an accident by her in – laws. The investigating agency proves the same. Malini, sister of the victim Laxmi, tries her level best to dig out the truth behind her sister’s suicide. She gets help neither from her family members, especially her brother Anil, nor from society in general which is constituted of Laxmi’s friend Tarla and Malini’s boy friend Sanjay. Though she succeeds in bringing the naked truth, she fails to bring justice to her dead sister and pacify her discontented soul.

Laxmi Tormented

Laxmi from the beginning of her life is a tormented soul. She has to quit her studies in order to look after her younger brother and sister. She is married off by her father who gives her dowry exceeding his capacity. Her in – laws despite being affluent, being to torture her. She is married for five years but fails to conceive. Her husband is an impotent. But the blame of not bearing a child also falls on Laxmi. The tragic and pathetic tale of Laxmi is not her own suffering.

It is the tale of countless Indian women whose suffering strike the playwright’s sensitivity and she feels compelled to look at the domestic violence in a broader perspective.

Marginalizing Women

It is the patriarchal social set up which has marginalized woman to fit into the category of ‘subaltern’ a woman’s social position is determined by her relationship to men. Sexism is ideology. It justifies the power of men over women. The extent to which women believe in the precepts of sexist ideology is only a reflection of the powers coercion and social control. Gender reflections in society are so pervasive that most of them are not even aware of their manifestations. Social scientists have questioned the stereotyped assumptions of women’s roles and the ways in which gender relations are structured in the society.

Conclusion

Thus, the play highlights the society’s response to the issue of bride – burning through silence which permeates each and every stratum of society. Malini, the inconsolable sister of Laxmi, puts an effort to bring justice to her dead sister but the responses of Anil, her brother and others make it clear how the society would like to wear the grab of silence after an inhuman act of bride – burning has been committed.

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