

REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA AND OPPRESSION IN POST-MILLENNIAL KOREAN FICTION

Rajesh. K

Assistant Professor, P.T.M Government College, Perinthalmanna, Kerala, India

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ABSTRACT

*The integrity of women was questioned in war zones, in ways unimaginable to us, including the perpetuation of sex slavery. The denial of their basic right to life was the result of the perpetuation of patriarchal assumptions of society. The Neo liberal land scape of the post millennia have raised questions on these attitudes. The opening up of the world have given chances for women to come up with the narration of these gruesome experiences before the society; comfort women narrative being one such type of writing that emerged in the second decade of this century. This paper explores the traumatic experiences of the denial of rights in relation to the stories of the women of Korea in *Daughters of the Dragon: A Comfort Woman's Story* (2014). The paper would locate the terrible experiences of these hapless women by tracing the representational strategy in the denial of the inalienable rights, legitimizing the unreasonable social custom locating it in patriarchy and militarism.*

KEYWORDS: *Sex Slavery, Militarism, Post Millennium Patriarchy, Rights, Comfort Women*

INTRODUCTION

War brings the trespassing of the individual rights, violations on human conscience and stampeding the dignity of all, especially women and children. All conflict zones will have mutilated stories of women and children to narrate. Women suffer double oppression as they are used as spoils of war, as an act of retribution to demonstrate the defeat and humiliation cast on the opponent. The body of women is used as a space where injuries could be done even after their death, as they are treated as commodities. This paper focusses on one such narrative William Andrews' on the comfort women of Korea titled *Daughters of the Dragon: A Comfort Woman's Story*. It aims to fore ground the untold miseries of women and children in the face of brutal war, contextualizing it with in the patriarchal and right frame.

The military establishment of the Government of Japan introduced a vile system, in the 1900's called comfort stations in which the deceived and stolen women were kept with a view to use them for sexual pleasure by the men in the military. These girls called as *Jugun Ianfu* or *Ianfu* in Japanese and were asked to provide sexual pleasure the men in uniform in the imperial army. They were made to live in dirty conditions forced to multiple sexual encounters for prolonged periods and were kept under the custody of the army, depriving their essential right to life with dignity. At the end of the war, most of them were abandoned by the members of the imperial army. They had legitimized the practices even by constructing comfort houses by making use of the seized articles in the whole of Asia-Pacific region. The women from different countries like the Netherlands, Korea, China, Taiwan, Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Burma were subjected to brutal treatment.

Comfort women who were stationed near the camps were made to follow certain particular way of behaviour. They were allocated to specific contingents or individuals as desired by the army. Though the food and clothing were provided by the army, the ill treatment as well as the mishandling of these hapless women amount to the gross injustice done to women as a group. The deprival of their rights could be located the pot hole of patriarchy. These stories were hidden under the carpet for quite a long period till the comfort women described their harrowing experiences in the post millennial century. Primarily, the comfort women narratives deal with the victimization of the Chinese and Korean women and its impact on them, physically as well as psychologically. The comfort women narratives, often describe the miserable condition of these trapped women with a view to provide the depth of their marginalization and degradation which is evident in works like Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Women (1997)* and In-hwan Park's *Can You Hear Us :The Untold Narrative of Comfort Women (2015)*. The present paper would unravel the disturbing experiences of the comfort women and how their rights are dishonored and provide a nuanced understanding of their physical, mental and social atrocities.

The stories reveal the subversions in the representational mode of these harrowing experiences in the fictional accounts and the ideological bend of the language in the re-telling of these events. The cruelties of the representation of these cruelties reveal the crude, unsophisticated, patriarchal nature of languages. The World War II is the setting of *Daughters of the Dragon: A Comfort Woman's Story*. The Japanese imperial army forced around 2,00,000 young Korean women to be sex slaves for their soldiers, and Ja-hee and her sister were taken from their family. The dreaded life and her escape leaving her sister leaves indelible marks on her conscience. Violence on her body continued, even after fleeing from the location as it left a permeant mark on her mind. *Daughters of the Dragon: A Comfort Woman's Story* can only be read as a story of survival and tenacity. Ja-hee's world is resolute, dark, and filled with struggle; hence, readers are swept along into her confrontations with Japanese viciousness and wartime catastrophic events. The primary difference between the women who were in prostitution and as sex slave was that the former was given entry to the social fabric, once they leave it, while the latter were permanently ostracized by the Korean society. Their return to the social order was made impossible and were left with no ray of hope. They were subjected brutal isolation and were forced to live in isolation and treated as misfits for a normal life.

The Japanese government has never agreed that such a nasty practice existed under their control. But the fictional rendering of this condition has exposed the hypocrisy and double standards of administration as well as the civil society. The unheard voice of these girls virtually shocked the modern conscience. The story revealed the deep wounds in the minds of the victims and the sense of fear, sadness, disorientation and helplessness as a backlash of the bestial victimization of these girls. The sheer desperation of these women indicates the extend of the traumatization that they had undergone. Jae-hee experienced that her once proud grandmother is left alone by the society by engaging in a witch hunting on her and her family. Though she had never been insensitive in her life time, the whole society turned down on her. She was afraid to walk through the street at night time as she was scared of even the people who looked at her from the street. The after math of rape is crueller than the very act of being subjected to it. The social norms and mores are more disturbing than the crime that they had been subjected to. The narratives that prevailed demonstrates the intensity of the humiliation that the women had been subjected to. These captive women symbolize the rape as an agency to subordinate the women, who could never escape from it. It shows the depth of male versions of their actions, impinging the female right to life. Rape here becomes a political act meant to subjugate and enslave women; hence they could be treated as captives. In addition to the breach of international conventions, it shows how power acts within social groups to the disadvantage of the female.

The trauma experienced by the rape victim, in this case the comfort women trespass the limits of human imagination. Even progressive societies were also impinging on the rights of women. Rape in all the narratives becomes grossly gender biased and it becomes a declaration of the right to possess the female body, often found in the male fantasizing. Even after the war, the comfort women were deprived their right to live with dignity, as the very same male consciousness ostracized the victims, declaring them to be ugly and spoilt. This social stigmatization is another tool employed by the patriarchy to put the onus on the hapless victims for the miserable condition. They cut off all their relations with the comfort women doubled the oppression on women. Their identity was questioned by the very same social order and were disconnected from the main stream of the society. They were silenced pointing out that they had lost the chastity and taught that they don't have the moral right to stand up in society. They were silenced due to their strained family relations, poor economic condition and the social pressure in the name of chastity. The fictional narrative depicts their condition as:

After that, whenever she saw someone with boots tied tight, she knew she would be humiliated. But there were many others. A soldier with dirty, untied boots would be careless and quick. A soldier who kept his boots on would often hurt me. If his boots were clean and polished, he would want me to pretend she was enjoying him. Examining their boots was just something she did. But knowing what was going to happen to me did not help.

The reason for the traumatic condition includes the fact that the victims were subjected to massive sexual violence. Anxiety and sleeplessness are the main symptoms of this disorder. In addition to it the mutilated bodies never recovered from the shock afterwards. Having physical relationship with more than thirty soldiers a day had shattered them to such an extent that reality is blurred in their eyes right now. The moral sense of right and wrong dangle before them and a definitive answer to their questions were absent. Hence, comfort women survivors have recorded more mental disturbance than the victims of any other assault including Holocaust. Jae - hee and Soo-hee who came to comfort station at the age of fourteen and twelve were victims of child abuse and sexual slavery. The early life trauma recounted is clearer than the later ones. Both lost sensitivity at one point in their life is indicative of the pressures exerted on them by the aggressors. They were completely disengaged with the social reality in their later stage. The relentless torture destroyed their sense of dignity and over a period of time lost the delicate balance which led them to a stage of delusion. Stigmatization, self-condemnation and humiliation have caused tremendous pressure on them. The only thing left in them was helplessness. The self-torture and witnessing of others torture created an unpredictable condition which led to the complete disillusionment of the individuals. The low self esteem among the survivors also was very evident to the strict conditioning of the society. Emotional regulation as well as impulse control came to the lowest end in the survivors. They had shown signs of yelling at night and screaming at strangers. The slightest instance of the memory of the fore gone period is enough to create mental turbulence in the survivors. A situation like this is described as "...I was sorry – sorry for being a stupid Korean, sorry for not being good Japanese subject, sorry for not being able to please him. Outside, the trees swayed in the wind. I felt another blow against my face." (Andrews, 86). The Korean comfort women have thus become the site for instantiations of gender violence across the globe.

Their condition constantly reminds us of issues of citizenship, race, gender and human right. The description of their suffering has rendered a total change as the once enslaved, fearful women have re written the history of oppression, forcing people for attitudinal change in their concepts of gender. The fictional narrative had shown the type of social order created by the military order and the process of legitimization of it by the society was exposed by the out spoken rendering

of these experiences. The articulation of their miserable experiences by the comfort women forced the Japanese government to own the responsibility. The governments of the different countries were hand in glove in the sale of women was also revealed. Justice can be delivered to these girls only by exposing the credulity before the people and by unveiling the hypocrisy of the society which kept it under the carpet for a long period. The inordinate delay in exposing this shows the deeply entrenched male concepts ruling the world, even in the 21 centuries. Patriarchy even tried to cover up the issue by conveniently making it an inter-governmental issue. Since all the personal is political, the miserable story of the comfort women should be placed before the broad day light, to force the society to rethink its own practices of the yester years. The oppressors must face the past and this would ensure that gross crimes of this magnitude are not repeated in future. The governments should do reparations to the victims as a form of penance. Like any other memoir, these narratives too can have limitations. But it should not desist the authorities in bringing the truth to the day light. A mere attack on the male logos would in no way result in any change. A deep rethinking of the ways past events is called for so that victims like comfort women could be rendered justice.

Being an anti-establishment voice, it should be analyzed thread bare and the culprits should be shown in history, to avoid repetition of similar events in future. This would put an end to the whole process of legitimizing the gross crimes of the past. The unheard voices of the oppressed are heard in the narrative. The narrative was successful in deciphering patriarchy and militarism. The multiple layers of the oppression were exposed by the comfort women narrative. Guaranteeing the rights to the oppressed class seems to be the only solution to put an end to practices like this. Equality in all respects: pay, various rights and freedom from violence, both physical and epistemic should be realized. The strict regimentation of female body should be questioned and all sorts of coercion should be uprooted. This can happen not through legislation but through building the consciousness. Gender identities should become more flexible and the binary construct with precedence for men should come to an end. Comfort women narrative a step in that direction.

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