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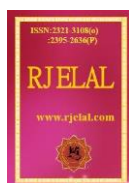
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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY IN KIRAN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

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Abstract

The present paper aims to critically analyze the domestic violence and patriarchal ideology in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, published in 2006, as a Booker Prize-winning novel. The concept of domestic violence is associated with the patriarchal system that has been in existence for centuries and persists in every society. It remains invisible in the public sphere because it happens within the four walls of the house and is considered as a private matter. It has numerous faces namely physical, emotional, verbal, economic, and sexual abuse, etc. It exists across countries and cultures worldwide because of the existing patriarchal ideology. The theory of Louis Althusser's Ideology, Ideological State Apparatus assists in understanding the dominant nature of patriarchal society which was inherited in Jemubhai Patel, the character of the novel, and made the cause of the ill-treatment of his wife, Nimi. The study also analyzes the moment of 'interpellation' by critically evaluating the text of the novel and reveals how the characters blindly accept these patriarchal beliefs and ideologies and normalize domestic violence.

Keywords: domestic violence, patriarchal ideology, ideological state apparatus, oppression, interpellation.

Introduction

Domestic violence is a widely used term for acts of violence that take place in households with the intent of harm. Although it can encompass child and elder abuse as well. The term is mostly used to refer to violence between individuals sharing an intimate relationship. It often involves one partner using intimidation and assault to assert control over the other. It is not a recent occurrence but has a long history and is associated with the patriarchal ideology, which defends the dominance of men over women. It has been a part of many cultures around the world for millennia. In its broadest sense, patriarchy which is the main reason for domestic violence refers to the institutionalization of male

control over females and children in the home as well as the extension of that domination to women in society at large. It implies that "men hold power in all the important institutions of society" and that "women are deprived of access to such power." However, it does not imply that "women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources" (Lerner 239). A patriarchal system of social organization and behavior is one in which men control and oppress women. The unique feature of this system is its ideology, which maintains the predominance of the notion that males are superior to women and that men can or should govern women. Women are viewed as the property of men in this system. According to the ancient text "The wife, the son, the slave, the

servant, and the uterine brother shall be beaten with a rope or a split bamboo when they have committed a fault" (Manusmriti 2.899). This very statement has emphasized domestic violence against women in the Indian society. The ancient text *Manusmriti* recommends husbands beat their wives when they commit a fault or act without their permission.

Domestic violence against women has been accepted and even condoned throughout history. The wives are no more than a slave who has to suffer the aggravated assaults committed by their husband. They become victims of oppression and exploitation within their own house and the violence against women is the result of a deeply entrenched patriarchal ideology that encourages and rewards male domination. It happens within the four walls of the home and is viewed as a family issue that should be handled privately. That is why it has not been acknowledged by the legal system and continued. But with the awakening of women, the autonomous women's movement raises awareness on the issues of violence against women, especially sexual assault, and dowry-related deaths. In 1983, the Indian Panel Code was amended, specifically to address domestic violence, making it illegal for a woman's husband or in-laws to treat her cruelly. However, this amendment only restricted the definition of domestic violence to dowry-related cruelty. After that, in 2005, the Indian government passed a law titled "The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence" that expanded the definition of "domestic violence to include physical, mental, emotional, financial, and sexual abuse against women in a domestic relationship" (Gangoli 117). Despite this law, it remains highly prevalent regardless of background, career, race, or age because of inherited patriarchal ideologies.

The present paper aims to investigate the role of Ideological State Apparatuses, defined by the French philosopher Louis Althusser (2001), in domestic violence against the protagonist of the Booker Prize-winning novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), written by a renowned novelist Kiran Desai. The novel voices against violence being committed against women in this patriarchal society. The novel's character Nimi is affected by these patriarchal ideological practices. Althusser states,

"Ideology functions in such a way that it transforms the individual into subjects". These forms of subjection are accepted by the subject in such a manner that it appears to be an obvious and natural fact. So, this ideology enables the dominant class to reinforce the power of the less privileged. In order to institutionalize this ideology, the dominant needs to require the subject that is common people or society. This ideology is institutionalized by different Ideological State Apparatuses such as religious institutions, culture and tradition, educational institutions, and society, etc. And the concept of 'interpellation' is used to infiltrate the minds of persons so that they start doing what the exploiter wants with no amount of resistance. In the same way, the patriarchal society represents women are subjected to male dominance and this ideology is presented by the social institutions such as school, family, culture and tradition, religion, law, and media in such a manner that it is believed to be true. This socio-cultural ideology creates gender inequality where women are considered inferior as compared to men, living even in the same house. This leads to their exploitation and suffering from physical, psychological, emotional, and verbal violence by the dominating male and through the interpellation, women are forced to realize their oppression and exploitation as something natural rather than as the result of a repressive patriarchal ideology.

Friedrich Engels was the first person who used the term 'Patriarchy' to define male dominance over women. Further, he defines patriarchy as "the world-historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children" (Engels 120-121). According to Bell Hooks "Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the rights to dominate over weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence" (2). Kiran Desai, an exceptionally talented writer, in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* deals with the domestic violence

against Nimi in this patriarchal society by her husband Jemubhai Patel, a judge. The status of Mr. Patel shows that no matter how intellectual a person would be, the ideology of patriarchy is inherited in him which makes him inhuman. Nimi and Jemubhai Patel were married only for a utilitarian purpose. There is no room for feelings between them. Jemubhai was the first boy in his community to go to England to study, but his family did not have enough money to send even after borrowing. So, his father started to look for a bride for him who could bring dowry and Nimi's father agreed to know that her daughter might be getting married to one of the most powerful men in India. But she was become valued for the wealth that her father provided to them. After getting married she lost her identity and became Nimi Patel from Bela, the name that was given by one of the Jemubhai family members that shows the logical outgrowth of the patriarchy and of male priority and privilege. Sylvia Walby defines "Patriarchy is defined as a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women" (20). As Jemubhai's behavior fulfills this definition when on the wedding night he pulled off Nimi's sari as per the advice of his uncle but discovered that she was uncomfortable and terrified, so he let her go. The next morning, uncles were laughing that he could not have a physical relationship with her. But after passing two days, when the family started getting wondered, about how she could not be happy with their successful son, then the worried family had only one solution and they advised him that if she did not agree, raped her to maintain the manhood of their family. According to Althusser's *Theory of Ideology, Ideological State Apparatuses*, our tradition as a form of apparatus, have imposed an ideology on us that the meaning of husband (Pati) is the owner. If one is the owner, the other would be a slave. In our language, there is no other definition of a husband-wife relationship and interpellation internalizes it in our heads. So, we accept, he is her owner, he will beat her, put her in place, and even rape her if she would not agree for having sex.

When the judge returned from England, he had entirely forgotten that he had a wife. However, Nimi was still lost in the old beautiful memories that

they have spent together like bicycle rides and levitating love. She was more attracted to Jemubhai Patel as well as the western things that he brought. She applied the powder puff brought by the judge to her breast and as childish thieving hid it in her blouse. When the judge found it disappeared, he questioned the women in his house. They started laughing at him for becoming a lady and began to make fun of him. Instead of laughing, he accused Nimi when he got acquainted that it was she, who had stolen and made them laugh at him. He grabbed her and brought her into the room. She tried to escape but the door was locked and the judge was grabbing and scratching her, she was slipping and finally, he had forcibly sex with her by slamming her and put down on the ground. Thus, Nimi got punishment and humiliation for a relatively harmless crime in the form of rape. Hooks argues that "Patriarchy requires male dominance by any means necessary, hence, it supports, promotes, and condones the sexiest violence" (3) that Jemubhai did with his wife Nimi. Here is a patriarchal ideology that I am powerful, head of the family. So, I am the right one and it does not matter what I do. Though she was uncomfortable with forced sexual intercourse he repeated this vulgar act again and again. Sexual violence is the most pervasive form of violence against women in married life. The majority of women tend to avoid reporting these experiences due to associated shame. It is a silent suffering of domestic violence.

Even after many years of marriage, Jemubhai Patel never spoke to Nimi and did not even look at her publicly. He never loved her, but he used to annoy her face. She had become accustomed to his detached behavior, and she had fallen out of life altogether. The judge's isolation and irritating behavior led to emotional and psychological abuse which is the most common form of domestic violence between the married couple. Almost all the women in our society are suffering from this psychological violence. It is a systematic use of non-physical acts that are intended to cause mental pain, anguish, and suffering. It is the most difficult form of violence to identify because it is not visible from the front and most women couldn't explain it. Women have subscribed to the same patriarchal ideologies

that men have espoused. In our society, Ideological apparatuses like religion, culture, and tradition interpellated the same patriarchal ideology among us. These agents impose patriarchal ideologies on us and inherited in our minds that men are superior and women are inferior. Nimi was also affected by this ideology and followed it silently. Even in Bonda, Jemubhai never took Nimi with him on tour. There she was left alone as well as uncared for. She became desolate even servants used to disrespect her. The judge grew more and more annoyed by Nimi's facial expressions. He hated her because she didn't look like an English woman. He was upset by her blackness. She took off her bangles and threw away her hair oils. When he saw that she was squatting on the toilet seats from her footprints he couldn't control his outrage and pushed her head into the toilet bowl. After this incident, Nimi couldn't see herself in the mirror. "She couldn't bear to spend a moment in dressing and combing activities that were only for the happy and the loved" (Desai 173). In our society, there is an ideology, the role of women is that of wife, to help and serve the head of the house means husband and fulfilling the expectation that the mother nurtures and raises the children. When the women do not live up to it, they have to face domestic violence. Nimi was a *desi* woman who could not live up to the expectation of the judge because of that he left Nimi.

In this novel, the judge thinks back to the main reason for sending Nimi to the house of her father. One day in Bonda, a Congresswoman Mrs. Mohan brought Nimi into a political function. She was completely ignorant of who Nehru is and does not fully understand what is happening around her. But Nimi's presence at the rally represents an embarrassment for the judge and blocks his promotion. He does not know that she went there unintentionally, but regardless, his anger was at its peak. He took a glass of alcohol and started questioning Nimi in a very violent way:

Are you just a country bumkin?

Pause.

Are you a liar?

Pause.

Are you playing foolish female game?

Pause.

Are you trying deliberately to make me angry?

Long long pause.

Then, a venomous spat-out sentence:

Or are you just incredibly stupid

When she said nothing, he waited.

Which of the above? We are not ending this conversation until you reply.

Longer wait.

Which? Are you bloody stupid, I ask you?

Silence.

Well, I will have to conclude that it is all of the above. Is it all of the above??"

(Desai 304).

When Nimi tried to stand up for herself and spoke a sentence against him "you are the one who is stupid" (Desai 304) this only led to more abuse. The judge first time hit her although, he had wanted to hit her before but controlled his anger. "He emptied his glass on her head and sent a jug of water swinging into her face. He no longer found her beautiful and filled her ears with leaping soda water. Then, when this was not enough to assuage his rage, he hammered down with his fists..." (Desai 304). In the patriarchal society, only the husband or male has the right to abuse or beat his wife, the wife could not raise her voice against wrong deeds. Brownmiller argues that "male violence is the basis of men's control over women. Men are brought up to be macho and accustomed to using violence to settle disputes" (471). The judge couldn't bear her face anymore and then, decided to send her back to her family. She refused to go back. But it was an exceedingly difficult situation for her, she could neither stay here nor could she return home to embarrass her family. The judge said, if you did not go back "I will kill you. And I don't want to be blamed for such a crime, so you have to go" (Desai 305). He was not even happy to hear the news of the birth of his daughter after six months and got drunk that

night in distaste. "Far away, Nimi was staring at her daughter. She was fast asleep, and in those early months of life, peace seemed to be deeply anchored in her nature" (Desai 305-306). Nimi's life became even worse when her uncle wrote to the judge, to come and take her wife away, she is ready to go back. The judge sent the money along with a letter refusing to bring her. In turn, Nimi's uncle blames her and asked to apologize to her husband. Our patriarchal society believes women are responsible for any dispute in married life, but women have very few rights when they come to their husbands. Nimi spent the rest of her life with her sister, but her brother-in-law never liked her to stay there. All her life she did not get empathy from anyone. The judge's father arrived at his home to plead for Nimi but, the judge refused to bring her back saying she didn't deserve him.

In this novel, the judge finally realized that he had killed his wife for the sake of false ideals. He had "stolen her dignity, shamed his family, shamed hers, and turned her into the embodiment of their humiliation. Even they could not accept her then, and her life could only be useless after that, and his daughter could only be useless and absurd" (Desai 308). Finally, the novel describes the patriarchy as dehumanizing males and destroying humanness. The judge was a man who loved animals too. But the patriarchal ideology made him inhuman and he was doing violence with his wife and making her life hell.

Conclusion

Patriarchal ideology has established culture and social norms in such a way that male and female position is distributed and it creates gender inequality in society. This ideology is the result of the Ideological State Apparatus that imposed ideas that appear to be natural. Men are considered superior, and females are inferior, making women victims of these patriarchal prejudices and suffering domestic violence.

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