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SENSE OF BETRAYAL AND SUPPRESSION IN ELISA IN JOHN STEINBECK'S SHORT STORY, "THE CHRYSANTHEMUMS"

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Abstract: The story "The Chrysanthemums" revolves around the protagonist Elisa Allen who is a stern representative of the suppressed and betrayed female society trying to take her stance against the male-dominated and patriarchal Americans. The setting and natural phenomenon of the Salinas Valley clearly exhibits the inner self of Elisa and her struggle to establish her identity. As usual Elisa could not fulfill her wish due to her husband's domination and limitation in her domestic periphery. This issue is apparently revealed in Elisa's relationship with her husband and her correspondence with a stranger, Tinker, who visits the ranch. Being mentally sturdy and courageous in her characteristics, she is not happy in her personal and family affairs. Despite having several restrictions and servitudes, she devoted herself completely in gardening to find meaning and purpose in life which was dashed by the disloyalty and treachery of the Tinker. The paper aims to enquire about the emotional state of Elisa with reference to the sense of betrayal and depression as well as a general condition of women in American society at that time.

Keywords: Suppression, betrayal, patriarchy, loneliness

I. INTRODUCTION

Peter Lisca in *The Wide World of John Steinbeck* comments that “in the world of his (Steinbeck’s) fiction, women seem compelled to choose between homemaking and whoredom” (Lisca, 18). John Steinbeck’s short story “The Chrysanthemums” portrays a woman’s struggle with accepting her life and role as a female. As images are connoting various implications, they have been a part of common lives. During that time authors like John Steinbeck, Edgar Allan Poe and William Blake started incorporating imageries in their works to express human emotions. Through the viewpoint of the protagonist, Elisa, the story mirrors the intermittent issues which females need to convey. “The Chrysanthemums” shows Elisa’s despondency, exhibiting that woman did not experience fairness up to the last nineteenth century.

Due to Henry’s unapproachable conduct, Elisa represents the then female community who were living in the early years of the twentieth century. The story portrays the agonies of a rural woman Elisa in two aspects, her limited social freedom and the human rights concept causing suppression and the sense of betrayal in her psyche. In an article, “A Story of Repressed Feminism: Exploring Steinbeck’s Women Characters with Special Reference to ‘The Chrysanthemums’”, the author, Avik Maity rightly mentioned

...there are a few women in Steinbeck’s fiction who, in addition to their roles as wives, seem to fulfill, more specifically, the role of mother. However, the most significant of the qualities of Steinbeck’s women, is knowledge, despite their own apparent lack of experience. (Maity, 13)

This paper is concerned with the two significant elements of any society, betrayal and suppression of women through the character of Elisa depicted by John Steinbeck in “The Chrysanthemums”. In his novels like *In Debious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), the author shows the world of power is the world of men. These notable works are also hugely inspired by the age of ‘Great Depression’ and societal issues of America during the year of 1930s. Although a considerable lot of Steinbeck’s works related to political issues and belief system, the author likewise looked past issues and portrayed the antagonistic results of the inflexible examples of conduct according to individuals’ lives. “The Chrysanthemums” is an ideal example, the story got a lot of basic consideration for its grandstand of male and female epic showdowns. In this story, the author figured out how to challenge the customary perspectives on gender orientation and exhibited the awfulness of an individual obliged by the current request. “The Chrysanthemums” pictures people in the stale world and distinguishes the good examples run of the mill of ladies and men through the case of three characters: Elisa, Henry, and the tinker.

The story is told by a third-person narrator, and it does not just offer the chance to examine the occasions dispassionately yet additionally makes the impact of distance. The portrayal of nature toward the start of the story hardens it, the hazed land, the sky, and the cloud assist with perceiving similar propensities among individuals. While the men are unequipped for valuing their chances, Elisa makes progress toward acknowledgment. The gathering with the tinker has an extensive effect on her. Even though she starts to accept that this individual can comprehend her, the assumptions are not in the end fulfilled. The story closes with the fundamental person’s endeavors to disguise her tears and void casual conversation. “The Chrysanthemums”

is a mix of story which feature the battle of the power between male and female in this patriarchal society. In his works, he has given significant stress on the hardships of the lower class which is known as the working class, and the difficulties faced by the people on the American economic condition as he belongs to a lower-class peasant family. John Steinbeck's works, as well as characters, are the replica of the age of the 'Great Depression' of America during the 1920s. In Steinbeck's novel male characters and male relations dominate many women characters like Liza Hamilton in *East of Eden*, Elisa Allen in "The Chrysanthemums", Alicia in *The Pastures of Heaven*, Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Elizabeth and Rama in *To a God Unknown* and Juana in *The Pearl*, although they are all unique and deserves scholastic consideration. He has not assigned these female characters with an independent identity, rather he discovers their relationship from the viewpoint of their relationships with the male populations of the narratives by their presence in both professional and personal spheres or from the distinctive perspective of male expectations. In the story "The Chrysanthemums" Steinbeck displays women's unhappiness, inequality with males that they experience in their daily life.

Various explorations have been executed on "The Chrysanthemums" yet not very many investigations have been endeavored till date on the personality of Elisa from the perspective of mental state and self-attempt of the protagonist. Emre Aydogan has investigated the female characters of Steinbeck's works in his proposition named, 'The American Society through Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*' like "She is like a bird who lives in the case. Her situation can help us to make a connection with the women's mood in the society during the 1930s." (Aydogan, 5) The present review has been made to fill the gap in Steinbeck's writing "The Chrysanthemums". Indah Damayanti's "Feminism Identities in John Steinbeck's short stories" (2013) scrutinizes the work of Steinbeck in the context of feminist identity, female characters which are dependent eternally in the patriarchal society and independent internally to their own lives and deeds. Maryam Omrany, the author of "Female Character's Rule in Rise and Fall of Modern American Society: A case Study of John Steinbeck's Masterpieces" talked about Feminist Literary Criticism:

Feminist criticism has shown that traditional criticism reinforces images of women and behavior and encourages them to accept subordination by praising women for virtues like humility, passivity and subordination. It is through feminist criticism that women confront patriarchal values and unveil the prejudices against them expressed in male texts. (Omrany, 10)

The sentiment of Steinbeck's male characters has been analyzed in this paper as "Men often felt burdened with the responsibility of being the bread winner, and women often felt trapped within the limiting domestic roles of wife and mother." (Omrany, 13)

The portrayal of women in American Literature is often influenced by an author's personal experience or a frequent societal stereotype of women and their position. Steinbeck's novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Ma Joad* and *Rose of Sharon* graphically portray the theme of women as self-sacrificing and nurturing mothers in the migrant family during the great depression. John Steinbeck has portrayed women in different avatars. John Steinbeck has portrayed women in different avatars. (Omrany, 13)

Sandra Beatty in her *Steinbeck's Women: Essays in Criticism* adds to the characterization of Steinbeck's women that "many of [his] wives seem to be domesticity personified." (Betty, 22) According to Beatty, "Steinbeck's women often possess 'unshakeable strength' and 'knowledge.'" Beatty believes all of these female characters who "epitomizes what Steinbeck seems to view as a distinctly female wisdom," Steinbeck's inspiration in depicting Elisa's character in "The Chrysanthemums" is to mirror the lives of the women in general. Louis Owens observed in his "John Steinbeck's Revision of America" that women are not evil in the mythical garden of *Of Mice and the Man*, rather than he proposed that "The real serpent is loneliness and the barriers between men and women that create and reinforce this loneliness". (Owens, 8)

The textual analysis and the biographical analysis methods have been involved here in this research paper. The textual analysis research methodology assisted with examining and understanding the text. It helps a researcher to explore the themes, images, symbols, language of the text. Through this technique, the essential message has been dissected and the exploration point has been attempted to be laid out. The personal investigation technique assists an analyst with seriously examining the entire or part of the author's life. This methodology has been embraced to examine the existence of John Steinbeck in this research paper.

The setting of the story is in Salinas Valley, California during the winter season. The sun is not sparkling, and mist covers the valley. On Henry Allen's lower district ranch, the cutting, binding and storing of harvests have been done, and the plants are anxiously sitting tight for a downpour. Elisa Allen, Henry's wife is working in her nursery and sees her husband conversing with two cigarette-smoking outsiders. Elisa is thirty-five years old, engaging, and clear-eyed, regardless of the way that right now clad in a manly planting outfit with men's shoes and a man's cap. She wears aprons to cover her dress and gloves to cover her hands. The nursery was close to her home, and it was perfect and clean. The outcasts get into their Ford roadster and leave. Elisa peers down at the stems of her blooms, which she has kept totally freed from pets. Henry appears and recognizes her work. Elisa has all the earmarks of being fulfilled and satisfied. Henry says he wishes she would turn her capacities to the ranch. She responds eagerly to this thought, yet it seems he was simply joking. Exactly when she asks, he tells her that the men were from the Western Meat Company and bought thirty of his cows at a fair expense. He proposes they go to the town of Salinas for dinner and a film to celebrate. He prods her, finding out if she might want to see the battles, and she says she would not.

The story revolves around the protagonist, Elisa, an intelligent and creative woman but isolated, suppressed and betrayed by her husband and the society. Protagonist Elisa's wishes, dreams and desires were closed off from all aspects in a closed pot. Elisa's husband Henry who is a ranch owner, fails to understand Elisa's thoughts. Henry has been presented as a successful, materialistic, practical and rational ranch owner. Elisa is a typical victim of the bent cultural request that legitimizes the lower position of ladies and their failure to apply their abilities to rehearse. The analogy of the valley as the closed pot is indicative: it addresses the strained connections among ladies and the climate. For example, Elisa's husband does not allow her to take part in what is accepted to be 'male' business, he should have never imagined that his wife was discontent with her situation. When he converses with the men and tackles issues autonomously, Elisa is disregarded on the grounds that her roles are minor. The lady is seen distinctly as a servant, and she is

additionally permitted to work in the nursery – Elisa’s affection for nurturing and growing chrysanthemums and wearing manly garments might be viewed as impulses yet they are, nevertheless, tolerable. Under these conditions, she investigates every possibility, since she is overflowing with energy, she should channel it someplace. William Osborne in his article “The Education of Elisa Allen: Another Reading of John Steinbeck’s “The Chrysanthemums” quotes:

Like most romantics, Elisa perceives through intuition a mystical relationship between Nature and Man, a perception which she has been unable to communicate to her husband, whose inclinations are thoroughly utilitarian. Early in the story he suggests that she turns her flower-growing talent to the raising of larger apples, a suggestion neither one of them takes very seriously. Her matter-of-fact response about having “planters’ hands that knew how to do it” is in remarkable contrast to her emotion-charged explanation later to the tinker when the same subject comes up. Thus, Elisa has for so long tended to deny or disguise her real feelings that her behavior appears confused, contradictory, or ambivalent to the reader. To dramatize her response to claims of two different ways of life, Steinbeck provides us with two symbols: the tinker and his covered wagon, a man and a way of life which appeal to her restlessness and desire for identity; and the tractor, the “little Fordson” mentioned at the beginning of the story and linked with Henry Allen and a utilitarian life which was to Elisa unchallenging and unexciting. The literary pattern in which Elisa’s ambivalence is most obviously dramatized is her unconscious blurring of her sexual identity—her behaving at one moment in a feminine and romantic manner, and then again in a ruggedly masculine and virile manner. (Osborne, 7)

Elisa Allen finds herself free and liberal from all domestic bonds and blocks in her garden nurturing the plants of chrysanthemums. She treats chrysanthemums as her other self or her children and protects them from all kinds of dangers and threats with her ‘terrier fingers’. The sudden appearance of the Tinker in the story opens another aspect. The tinker appeared with harsh and curious music of the ‘squeak of wheels’ and ‘plod of hoops’. Tinker’s charm arrested Elisa. Tinker started praising ‘strong new crops’ and robbed her emotion as well. The Tinker deceived Elisa with his false and concocted tale to make a business out of her emotion. Elisa’s passionate and emotionally charged words reveal her strength and desire to erupt, ‘Hot and sharp and lovely’ but there is trading with her emotions. The betrayal from her husband and the Tinker leads Elisa to an identity crisis that is prominent in Elisa’s relationship to her husband and the tinker.

As she is portrayed according to alternate points of view, she is a round character, and peruses cannot resist the urge to appreciate her solidarity. Her home is perfect and wonderful, and the way that “her terrier fingers obliterated such irritations before they could begin” demonstrates that she invests a lot of energy in the nursery (Steinbeck, 1). Finally, she suffers from the thoughts that greater opportunities are unavailable. As a matter of fact, she is envious of men who can maintain a business or see the entire world driving a cart. Hence, this character is an amazing delineation of the consequences of the stale-smelling thoughts established before the individual is broken, and the snapshot of relaxing might have been the start of changes. The bathing scene represents the break from the soil of the past and the promising future. In any case, everything closes before

it even beginnings. It was her last opportunity, and it was lost until the end of time. Accordingly, attributable to such changes, Elisa is a unique person, and one can feel her misfortune profoundly.

Male characters act as the instruments to get the hero. Henry, one of the delegates of the 'male world,' appears to be a decent and caring spouse who takes Elisa out and holds her in regard. In any case, he is not quite as insightful as his wife: he converses with her like to a youngster when he respects the blossoms and neglects to perceive her actual sentiments. He can't see that Elisa is tired of their standard exercises. Motherhood could most likely be an exit plan for Elisa. Still, the couple does not have children, and it might be possible because of Henry. The author demonstrates that he works with steers, and it is one of the symbols: it is the husband's responsibility.

At last, the tinker is another male person who discloses the protagonist's personality: he is by all accounts the image of what Elisa generally imagined, and it draws in her. This warmth is the aftereffect of her visual deficiency brought about by the longing to find a perfect partner. As she meets the tinker who has lost himself, the protagonist can see her life from another point. The discussion about driving a cart and the stars is the defining moment: it stirs Elisa and causes her to feel invigorated. All the while, his compassion was just the deception: he needed to find a new line of work and deceived to accomplish his objective. Since this man appeared to be a great individual Elisa knew, she was broken: her expectations were a simple delusion. She was harmed so much since she could see a better tomorrow of which she was denied. Tinker's activities demolished everything. Taking everything into an account, the author exhibited the run of the mill models of female and male conduct directed by the man centric culture. Elisa and different characters delineate the possibility that this request is hurtful since it annihilates the capability of incredible individuals for the sole explanation that an individual is a lady.

Henry leaves, and Elisa turns her thought back to her chrysanthemums. A truck with a material top driven by a gigantic bristly man appears making the rounds in the distance. A mistakenly spelled sign advances the man's administration as a Tinker who fixes pots and holders. The truck stops in Elisa's yard. Her dog and the man's dog start sniffing one another, and the Tinker pokes fun at the savagery of his creature. Right when he gets away from the truck, Elisa sees that he is tall and not incredibly old. He wears a battered, chaotic suit, and his hands are disagreeable. They continue to make easygoing discussions, and Elisa is charmed when the jack of all trades says he simply follows an extraordinary environment. He sees whether she has any work for him, and when she on and on says no, he cries, saying he has no business and is eager. Then, he gets some information about Elisa's chrysanthemums, and her disturbance vanishes. They talk about the blooms, and the Tinker says that he has a client who needs to raise chrysanthemums. Fortified, Elisa says he can take her a couple of shoots in a pot stacked up with drenched sand. She eliminates her cap and gloves and fills a red pot with soil and the shoots.

As the Tinker works, she inquires as to whether he sleeps in the cart. She says that she wishes ladies could carry on with the sort of life he does. He says it would not be appropriate, and she asks how he knows. After paying him fifty pennies, she says that she can accomplish a similar work he does. He says his life would be solitary and startling for a lady. Before he leaves, she reminds him to keep the sand around the chrysanthemums clammy. Briefly, he appears to fail to remember that she gave him the blossoms. Elisa watches the cart trundle away, murmuring to herself as the author mentions, "Elisa stood in front of her wire fence watching the slow progress of the caravan. Her shoulders were straight, her head thrown back, her eyes half-closed, so that the scene came vaguely into them...she whispered, that's a bright direction, there is a glowing." (8) She goes into the house and takes bath, cleaning her skin with pumice until it hurts. She dresses in new apparel and a dress and does her hair and beauty care products. Henry gets back and prepares. Elisa sets out his pieces of clothing and a short time later goes to sit on the patio. Right when Henry emerges, he says that she looks lovely, sounding shocked. She asks him what he means, and he says she looks "changed, solid and blissful." (Steinbeck, 7) Confounded, he says that she is playing a game and a short time later explains that she seems like she could break a calf and eat it. Elisa loses her self-control momentarily and a while later agrees with him. As they drive along the road toward Salinas, Elisa sees a faint spot up ahead and cannot keep herself from looking at it, sure that it is a heap of discarded chrysanthemum shoots that the Tinker has disposed of. Elisa accepts that he could have basically disposed of them off the road, and a while later recognizes he expected to keep the pot. They pass the Tinker's truck, and Elisa does not look. She says that she is expecting dinner. Henry says she is different again, but by then says thoughtfully that he ought to take her out more oftentimes. She sees whether they can have wine at dinner, and he concurred. Elisa says she has scrutinized that at the fights the men beat each other until their boxing gloves are soaked with blood. She sees whether women go to the fights, and Henry says that some do and that he will take her to one accepting she should go. She diminishes and pulls her coat neck area over her face so Henry cannot see her crying.

In "The Chrysanthemums," Elisa represents the disparity among sexual orientations which is the root cause of the problems like suppression, depression and betrayal portrayed in this paper. Discussing gender inequality by considering women as inferior and making them meaningless was constrained by a mindset that gave female no option to lead their lives. As discussed in the paper, men did not plan to entitle ladies in any justified way by thinking about them as a rich source, rather ignoring their shrewd and valid turn of the cerebrum. Men had attempted to marry woman instead of educating them. In 'The Chrysanthemums', Elisa looks after her domestic affairs and nurtures her plants in the garden, and just at the time Henry asks that she go out, she surrenders. Social structure compelled women to perform a passive role and resulted turning men as the center of bourgeois society. In this was the title of the research paper has been justified with reference to the emotional state of Elisa as well as the entire feminine community of the nineteenth-century America.

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