



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE SELF IN LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON'S SPEAK

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Abstract

Identifying the self is a serious issue pertaining in the society whichever place one survives. Everyone is in an urge to realise their true self which becomes a tougher task. They should know their state in the society where they are, who they are, and how they are. Women's position is more perilous compared to men and they strive to find a place for them in the society. Americans are considered to be enjoying their utmost freedom and men as well as women are in equal state. Women of other world think that American women are given their full rights and they are respected by everyone free from harassments. But to their dismay, it is not so. Though American women are in the First World with multi-cultural assimilated society, they are also like other world women with oppression and suppressions. Only the ratio varies, but the physical and mental harassments faced by them are unexplainable. It is related to feelings which make one to be physically and mentally sick. Women wherever they are, they are not considered to be human with flesh and blood wrapped with feelings. The stress which the women borne make them to lose their self and caught with the complex issues. This complex issue makes them to have the psychological problems which are very difficult to cure. Unless, they come to know the true state, the rectification is highly impossible. This paper analyses the concept of psychological impact with Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Speak*. It shows us how the protagonist of the novel undergoes psychological problems and how it is possible for her to come out of the hazards.

Key Words

Discrimination in the society, consternation of First World women, appraisal of Melinda's character, psychological impact of the self.

Introduction

Identity of a person is very important in one's life and without it they are considered to be nullified. The outer mask of a person depicts their individual identity and if it is not framed accordingly, they lose their identity. They have to wear the mask given by the society or the place which they dwell and due to that they lose their identical identity. Identity depicts the individuality of a person and how they react to the societal constructed isms.

Identity is perhaps best understood as a limited and temporary fixing for the individual of a particular mode of subjectivity as apparently what one is. One of the key ideological roles of identity is to curtail the plural possibilities of subjectivity inherent in the wider discursive field and to give individuals a singular sense of who they are and where they belong. (Weedon 19)

Realisation of self is a tougher task in the societal constructed isms and one has to undergo the challenges which reflect physical and mental harassments. Though it is a serious issue, people undergo repeated blast to realise their self. One should know their position in the society where they are, how they are, and what they are. Tracing one's identity can be done with the help of comrades and through their support the societal constructed images can be diluted. The societal constructed isms are manmade and so it diplomatically favours men community. So without the support of men, isms or the mask of a person cannot be changed into reality. Identity as well as societal constructed isms of a person varies with the geographical place and they struggle to find their identity accordingly. The colonised and immigrant society men though under the pressures of the surviving place somehow escape the isms for being men. The most deteriorating position is that of women and they suffer for being the secondary sex.

Discrimination in the Society

Discrimination is a serious issue which separates the human and their freedom of living. The patriarchal society dominates women and they are not bothered about the feelings of women. Men and women are created by God and only the biological features vary giving difference in physical features. Men consider that women are weaker than them because of their physical features. So, the societal constructed isms have drafted the isms as per their body and allot work accordingly.

One not born, but rather becomes, a woman,. No biological, psychical or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. (Beauvoir 293)

Men are in an assumption that women are created by God for doing service to men, production, and also entertainment. They tightened the domination chain for they do not want women to act independently. Men are not ready to pay heed to the words of women for they do not them to bring to focus. Due to this, women undergo physical and mental harassments and confine themselves in a nutshell. Though they have their own desires and skills to be exhibited, they have to restrict. The pressures borne due to this, makes them to be mentally sick. Women wherever they are undergo the harassments and only the ratio varies with that of the geographical place.

Consternation of First World Women

America is a developed country with hi-tech technology and it is taken as paradigm by all other countries. It is considered to be the First World for its developed state and everyone wants to be a part of it. It is known for its multiculturalism due to the accumulation of people from various parts of the world. Women of other world assume that the women of American society are homogenous in nature and they enjoy their utmost freedom and equality. They dress as per their wish with latest fashion and speak in English. But to their dismay, it is not so. The American women dress as per their climate and English is their mother tongue. Admiration and adaptation seems to be a mirage and it proves the saying that appearances are deceptive. Due to the melting pot society, they are heterogeneous in nature. Though the American women partially enjoy their rights, they too are under domination undergoing physical and mental stress. Only the ratio varies with that of their nativity. Due to the assimilated nature, the American women are considered to be superior to the other adapted society women. The discrimination of American women does not transpire with race or caste, but with class and gender. Reasons are given by men for the framed isms with substantiation which make the women community to be under pressures leading to psychological problems. This disfigures the life of an individual without an identity and collapses their routine life. This concept is analysed with the novel of Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* (1999). In this novel, the protagonist Melinda suffers with psychological stress due to the rape incident and the author clearly depicts the changes undergone in the mind of the victim of sexual assault character. In an interview with Jensen, Anderson states, "every girl, every woman deserves agency, recognition, and respect just as every boy and man does. Respecting all lives as equal and important is the next great leap for culture to take."

Appraisal of Melinda's Character

Melinda Sordino, a young school going girl is a victim of sexual assault and she was raped by her senior student Andy Evans in a party. She is disturbed due to the rape incident and do not have courage to let it out. "I am the victim" (Anderson 35). She has curbed all her activities and her self in a shell and wants to be aloof. She fears for everyone in the society. "Nobody really wants to hear what you have to say" (Anderson 9). Even her friends are not able to identify her pressures and rectify it. Melinda's parents are busy with their work and they fail to note the changes within her or spend time with her. "We communicate with notes on the kitchen counter" (Anderson 14). Melinda began to skip from her routine activities which grabbed the attention of the school authorities. Her lab partner David Petrakis and the art master Mr. Freeman made to realise her self. Mr. freeman's motivation and David's friendship give her the power to come out of the confined place. The art tree, colours of cubism, and the Picasso painting made her to think and rethink. "Breathe life into it. Make it bend-trees are flexible, so they don't snap. Scar it, give it a twisted branch-perfect trees don't exist. Nothing is perfect. Flaws are interesting. Be the tree" (Anderson 153). Her repeated effort with the motivation of the art teacher made her to engage with art to bring her confidence and voice back. She slowly comes out of her confined world of Maya Angelou's paintings, abandoned janitor's closet, and her turkey bones with fork. When Andy began to harass her, Melinda shouted and suddenly reacts to his actions which stunned him. Her voice made everyone to know the actual thing happened. "Let me tell you about it" (Anderson 198). In the end of the novel, she began to narrate the incident to her art master which shows that she has come out of her hallucination world. The story ends with regaining voice and Melinda identifies her self. She comes to know how to react with the situations, the ups and downs of the society, and defining characters. Due to her psychological impact, Melinda began to lose her confidence and this is reflected by the author which made everyone to feel for the character. The preface of the poem depicts how many of them are affected by the sexual assault. Anderson cares for the young girls and she does not want the girls to enroll into the psychological stress of that of her character for it creates a heavy pain on their physical and mental state.

Psychological Impact of the Self

Women endure the pain physically and mentally due to the societal constructed isms and they have to act as per the instructions of the patriarchal society. Men consider women as physical pleasure and do not bother about their feel. American women can be contented that they are superior to other world women. But the harassment remains the same and the psychological pressures borne by them are unexplainable. This is what happened with the character of Melinda in the novel. Anderson has depicted the internal feel and how the complex has slowly swallowed her voice and activeness. "Good things my lips are stitched together or I'd throw up" (Anderson 46). Her complex issues are observed with her behaviour of her first day of school in Merryweather High. She keeps herself aloof from others even from her self. Melinda is practiced with excuses for restricting her activities. She even hurts her physically and with that pain, she forgets the mental depression for time being. "I wash my face in the sink until there is nothing left of it, no eyes, no nose, no mouth. A slick nothing" (Anderson 45). The constriction of her activities makes her to be abnormal. Her mind suffers with the memories of the worst incident. Due to fear of the society and people around her, she silenced herself. "As Melinda's sense of identity begins to emerge, she also gives her janitor's closet an identity that reflects her own. She transforms her closet into a higher and brighter space of hope, triumph, and resistance; ultimately, it will become the only place she can comfortably sleep" (Schiffman 54).

In many situations, Melinda hides herself behind the posture of Maya Angelou or the closet of the abandoned janitor's. The memories of harassment make her to bit the nails till it bleed. "I pull my lower lip all the way in between my teeth. If I try hard enough, may be I can gobble my whole self in this way" (Anderson 39). Her mental depression is known with her selection of the nail polish. "I don't buy the golden eye shadow, but I do pick up a bottle of black death nail polish. It's gloomy, with squiggly lines of red in it. My nails are bitten to the bleeding point, so it will look natural. I need to get a shirt that matches. Something in a tubercular gray" (Anderson 83). The art too comes as an incomplete task due to her disturbed mind. Melinda's friend Heather tried to be a good companion to her. But due to her silence, Heather wants to break her friendship. Heather joins with the Marthas and began to mock at Melinda for keeping silent. But Melinda began to raise her voice in a

meeq way, when the Marthas tried to exploit her in work. Everyone started to blame her, and so she remained silent for she was afraid that her reason for silent would be known to everyone and they will blame her. Once again, silence revolves around her environment which made her to engage with art and the teacher's guidance. She began to work with her art tree and it seems to be Melinda's mental strength.

Conclusion

Women wherever they are, they have to find their own loop holes for their problem and sort it out without reliable source. As women are considered to be meek one/secondary sex, they are not supported and they have to raise themselves. Only some men act as comrades for the concern of women community. Women knowing their state in the society have to find out the ways for coming out of the harassments or it will kill them. Melinda's mind or the depression is known with her body language as well as her art tree. When Melinda completely lost her self, the art tree too was dull, thin, and the theme seems to be nullified. She does not know the ways how to make the tree as a perfect one. She began to toil herself and completely restricts her mind towards the art tree which made her to come out of the bad memories. Though Melinda was caught in the psychological stress due to sexual harassment, she wants to help her friend. Her friend Rachael did not speak with her for not letting out the reason for disturbing the party. But Melinda wants to help her for she knows how the mental pain would be when someone involved in harassments. That too, young girls like Rachael who is not exposed to the societal life. Melinda let out the brutal incident to her friend which made her to regain her voice at snail's pace. The other incident which made her to realise her self is that when her father told the gardener to cut off the rotten part of the tree. Melinda comes to know that the disturbed mind also can be treated and there is no fault on her side. "When the future is open to her, she no longer hangs on to the past. When women are concretely called to action, when they identify with the designated aims, they are as strong and brave as men" (Beauvoir 658).

The incidents which cause an impact in her mind made her to be confident and the art tree symbolises how perfectly she has drawn. It symbolises the mental strength of Melinda. "My tree is definitely breathing; little shallow breaths like it just shot up through the ground this morning. This one is not perfectly symmetrical" (Anderson 196). When Andy attacks her for letting out the secret, she began to scream and hit him with the broken mirror of the closet. She began to defend by gathering mental strength which raised her confident level. She has got her voice and confidence back and began to explain to everyone what has happened to her in the party. "Melinda's narrative reflects her strong sense that gender and identity are performative, and one suspects that this awareness has developed since, and probably because of, her rape. She notices, with some consternation, how fluid identity can be" (Latham 372). Women have to defend themselves and be in a secured zone with their physical and mental activities. Proving their self is an important one in life for without identity everyone will be losing their face of survival. Individual identity has to be traced out revealing their true self to the society where they are living and make their environment as paradise.

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