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Love in the Time of Cholera: Employing Sex to keep the Vow of Eternal Fidelity and Everlasting Love

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The present paper explores the duality that lies in the patriarchal society in terms of different code of conduct for different people in accordance to their gender. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* is replete with the instances where this gender duality and subalternity is palpable. In these conventional societies of worn-out traditions, women are considered as a mere sex object or a commodity. Equalitarianism and emancipation do remain just words in a traditional society in which women are just shadows, denied of their individuality and identity. Whenever we talk about this binary opposition – Man-Woman, words like masculine, decision-maker, head, supreme, King come to our mind whereas for women, feminine, fragile, delicate, dependent and subordinate and alike terms come swarming. And any discourse concerning women is bound to use terms like subjugation, exploitation, discrimination, subordination, suffocation, humiliation and lastly marginalization.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez is a Colombian writer, writing in Spanish and is famous for his Noble-prize winning novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Popularly known as 'Gabo', Marquez has made a distinction by popularizing one literary genre known which is Magic Realism. *Love in the Time of Cholera* was first published in 1985 in Spanish and later on in 1988 it was being translated in English by Edith. It narrates the story of Florentino Ariza who is obsessed with two things – Love and Sex. Florentino Ariza is typical intransigent lover who yearns for his ladylove Fermina Daza and after being rejected for the first time, he waits for fifty-one years, nine months and four days to take the vow of "eternal fidelity and everlasting love". His rejection and dejection leads him to become a sex-maniac which he considers a way "to have the feeling of love without the problems of love".

Love in the time of Cholera has raised many questions by portraying the patriarchal society. Many issues related to women have been put at the centre stage, giving scope to analyze the double-standards by which our patriarchal society is governed. The duality is very much transparent in the fact that Florentino begins to keep a notebook which describes his encounters with women and these descriptions were so many that he completes twenty-five notebooks with descriptions of six hundred, twenty two, serious relationships without adding the non-serious ones. Here "women were commodified as sexual creatures to serve male desire" (Lim 817). In the novel, Florentino is a man who has the control over his life and does what he wants. He is independent, self-willed and autonomous in his decisions and actions. But a woman is put under strict patriarchal rules, customs and rituals which restrict their self-will, movement and decisions, and choices in life. As a result of this restricture, Fermina Daza is seen as a person who has neither voice nor any agency at her

disposal. She is not asked by her father even for her marriage. Instead, her father chooses for her a doctor whom she not loved. A woman in the role of daughter is depicted here as a figure who cannot question the decision of her father and remains a figure denied of her basic rights; silently accepting the decisions imposed on her. She like an obedient daughter marries Dr. Urbino, a man whom she does not love, leaving behind, Florentino Ariza, a man of her dreams whom she loved. In those days, defiance and refusal to marry on the part of a woman was unthinkable. The concepts and attitude of patriarchal society towards the female sexuality is different from men. They don't have the freedom of a man in choosing her life partner and have no say in its decision. They have no right even over her bodies.

Rarely, a woman went beyond her limitations and asserted her right in marriage. History repeats itself and like her mother, she is forced to marry Dr. Urbino Juvenal when she could not imagine her happiness with somebody else other than Florentino Ariza. Ultimately, she helplessly accepts the choice of her father as her destiny. In a society which discriminates a woman in terms of her gender, a girl is always treated as vulnerable and dependent and the same society compels her to remain a girl "with her virgin's modesty". "A tremulous Voice" is an indication of her purity and identity which she could not defile. The mission of her life is in submission- submission to the male desires and needs. A woman's life is considered fulfilled if she must have been of use to a male's desires and wishes. Indeed societies like this "deny woman a personhood" (Jain 10). They lack individuality, agency and identity. Women are rendered speechless and silent. It is this silence suffering that gives testimony to their subaltern and unsavory position in the society. Spivak's famous negative answer to the question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" implies that silence is a critical component of subaltern identity. She is of the view that subaltern is a person or a group of people that have been excluded from society. They do not have a voice, and are lost in the world due to assimilation and colonialism. Implicit in the term are related questions of power, agency and representation. In different historical contexts, the subaltern has been understood as synonymous with women, children, colonial subjects, the poor, the illiterate, the proletariat, or the religious or ethnic minority. Today's subalternity scholars, however, do not intend for the term to be reduced to any single oppressed group or minority (Nehra 2)

Love in the Time of Cholera exposes the discrimination and marginalization of women in a myriad shades and hues. It is evident in the fact that when Fermina Daza is alone at home and doctor comes for routine check-up, she sends Gala Placidia out to give the message to Dr. Urbino Juvenal: "The senorita says you cannot come in now because her papa is not at home" (Marquez 116). Women are treated as if they don't have mind of their own and will lose control by just meeting a man in private or just looking at a male in privacy they would get hypnotized. They are considered as treasures which always need to be guarded and protected by a male member of the society, only name changes with time and nothing else. When she is born, it is her father, in growing years her brothers and once she enters the marriageable age, a man "who provide(s) her the security they need in order to face life." (Marquez 65). Women have been treated and nourished in a way that they themselves consider them as fragile, dependent and submissive. They harbor the notion that they need to have a man by her side to survive in this man-made world, which is the manifestation of her early gendering and girling.

As one reads *Love in the Time of Cholera* from the feminist point of view, one could clearly see the duality that lies. It is the height of duality that a man has no moral yardstick and he could bed with as many women as he likes but if a woman indulges in same pleasure outside her marriage, they are cursed, humiliated and ostracized from the society. When fifty year old Ausencia Santander starts sleeping with Florentino, somebody burglarize her home and before leaving writes a message on the wall saying: "This is what you get for fucking around" (178).

A different set of rules are made for women to harass, restrict and exploit them at every level. Sometimes they are exploited in the name of 'family honor', sometimes in the name of societal norms – 'What will people say' instead of understanding "what she says and feels" and at other times it is out of fear of God – "Some curse will befall on us for your evil deeds". Some other times, they are instilled with the fear of going against the Patriarchal laws which should not be violated. If in any case, somebody contravenes these rules, he will be ostracized and lose his identity as the outcome. In Patriarchal society, women have no value unless or until they are associated or related to men. In a nutshell, disassociating from men means losing your identity, if any. Abraham concludes that they "encounter all manners of obstacles in expressing themselves freely, and experience many forms of direct censorship simply because they are women" (1-2). Women have been subjected to restrictions because they have been suffering and accepting silently. They have been the recipient of these restraints because they neither challenge nor question the basis of inequality and discrimination that make them inferior as compared to men.

It seems that the sole onus of 'family's honor' is on women which at any given time can be spoiled and irreversibly destroyed if she by following her heart takes a single step. It is always a man who brings honor to the family by getting job and shouldering the responsibility of being a '*Kul Deepak*'. Girls are treated as if they are '*kul Kalankni*' who will spoil the hard-earned respect of centuries by liberating their selves.

How ironic it is that a woman addressed as the "Crowned Goddess" has no right to decide to whom she would like to marry; a woman who gets expelled from the church when she is caught writing a letter to a man of her dreams; a woman who against her wish marries a man who cheats on her, even when she remained devoted and committed to him entirely. Is a woman's hundred percent devotion, commitment and love also insufficient to win her a chaste man, entirely hers? Are chastity and virginity demanded from a woman alone? And that too from a woman who is considered delicate, fragile, helpless and vulnerable?

Unfortunately enough but one has to accept this fact that women are not regarded as an "autonomous being" and "appears essentially to the male as a sexual being" (Beauvoir, 16) which has been exemplified in the following lines: "Her name was Sara Noriega...she had several occasional lovers, but none with the intentions of matrimony, because it was difficult for a man of her time & place to marry a woman he had taken to bed" (Marquez 196-97). Women have been reduced to the status of a sex object whose service is to provide sexual pleasure and fulfillment to the male who owns her.

How convenient it is for a man to live with his mistresses, to have sex with "little birds", to have clandestine love-affair or to profess his love in front of the world and keep

on waiting for his love, it simply does not matter in the long wait how many times he has lost his virginity and even then his beloved will accept him wholeheartedly because after her husband's death, she is again unsafe and vulnerable and only a man, no matter of what moral stature, will "provide her the security she needs to face life". And after all these free-plays, it is women who get blames and are called by derogatory names like a whore, 'little bird', a prostitute, loose-charactered etc. Rajakumar has rightly remarked that women's bodies have become emblems of familial honor. Women were required to keep their sexuality for their husbands alone. Their bodies became the boundary marker between public life and the private cultural values defined by their nation. The privileges of men in family hierarchy allowed husbands, fathers, and brothers to exert social and sexual control over female family members in the hope of fashioning them into chaste and pure women at the family's center (Khan 464).

The Widow Nazaret often said to Florentino Ariza: "I adore you because you made me a whore" (Marquez 151). It is an irony that a woman who loses her husband will be called 'a widow'. In calling her a widow 'a dead man' lives while a living woman dies because she has no identity of her own and her husband's identity lives in her when he is dead. It is most treasure able gift that a woman wins- to be called something, which has any association with a man and it is perhaps this 'manly-fact' that provides value and importance to this title of being a widow.

Kate Millet in her book *Sexual Politics* advocates a society which may have a single standard of 'sex freedom' permissible to all, regardless of gender. Providing and permitting liberty and freedom on the basis of gender is wrong and one needs to give women the identity that has been denied to them. Gender should not be a deciding factor of somebody's freedom, one needs to think beyond the biological and physical aspect of woman and let them be a person they are without making them conscious about their gender.

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