



Representation of Feminine Psyche in Emily Pauline Johnson's

The Moccasin Maker



Patil Shashikant Gangadhar

Mahatma Gandhi College, Ahmedpur,

Dist. Latur, MS, India

Email ID: shashikantraopatil@gmail.com

Abstract : *Women writers present an insider's view of the feminine psyche and feminine longings, their inner turmoil and their peculiar responses to men and things. The artistic content of a woman writer reflects her vision and attitude; though her sensibility differs from age to age and it reflects the social ethos. Feminine sensibility is most clearly indicated by the choice and the treatment of themes, the choice of characters, the viewpoint, and the style and the vision of a woman writer. There are certain values, which naturally choose themes and characters closer to her heart. Psychoanalysis is an effective tool adopted by feminists not as supplement to or displacement of the history of sexuality and gender studies, but as questioning them, as containing the possibility of a different way of understanding gender oppression and psyche of female folk. The present paper aims to throw light on the feminine psyche of the protagonists in Emily Pauline Johnson's *The Moccasin Maker*, a collection of short-stories. In this work, Johnson deals with the feminine psyche of different characters. These characters represent the entire female race that has been subordinated in the patriarchal system. Hence, the author tries to bring forth the consequences of the suppressed feelings of women.*

Keywords : *feminism, hegemony, Patriarchy, psyche, neurosis, stereotype*

Research Paper :

Woman is the meaning of the word, breath, the touch, act woman that which reminds man of that which he is. Woman is growth, the god's inheritance; the woman is death, for it is through woman that one is born; a woman rules for it is she, the universe.¹

In psychology 'psyche' refers to the mindset as the central force in thought and emotion, which decides the behavior pattern and consciously or unconsciously adjusting or meditating the responses of the body to the social environment. The study, feminine psyche, is an effort to liberate women from those structures that have marginalized and confined them only to home and hearth; it is also an attempt to reinterpret their status in the world. In patriarchal system, the woman lost her importance and got subordinate position; she became merely the puppet in the hands of the man; just dependent and inferior. Her status in life and her identity is defined in relation with the male members, wings of her imagination are cut off and she is driven crazy.

Patriarchy perpetuates the power through the ideology to create hegemony among the oppressed; the women. They consider themselves inferior, vulnerable, inadequate and think that they must find their identity and self-fulfillment through masculine desire. Silencing of female voice became the tradition, which is carried forward by theorists and philosophers. In this context, Freud's theorizing of femininity constructs a model of woman's sexuality, which functions only to affirm the primacy of masculinity.

Feminists have been attempting to reevaluate patriarchy, and focus their attention on the intense pre-oedipal attachment of the child to its mother instead of concentrating, as Freud and Lacan do, on the Oedipal relationship with the prohibiting father. Silencing of the female voice or suppressed feelings among them took the form of the movement of women, which is known as 'Womenism' or 'Feminism'. Feminism is not a movement against man; instead it is a movement to liberate women from the patriarchal attitude and stereotyped behavioral pattern. Feminist writing focuses on the issues related to women such as the oppression, lack of freedom, to carry out her will, lack of freedom to carve out her niche, de-recognition of her decision-making capacities, exposure of her potentialities in a limited manner.

Simone de Beauvoir says that a woman should be understood as 'woman' only and not in relation to man. Beauvoir says... '[woman] is defined and differentiated with reference to her...He is the subject and he is the absolute she is the other.'² While Gayatri Spivak attributes silence of female as subaltern to failure of interpretation and not a failure of articulation. But the most important event in the history of woman's liberation movement was the publication of Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique*. She emphasized the right of

a woman to develop her potential to the maximum level. At the same time, she felt that a woman should fight against 'Mashismo'—that is the male tendency to dominate women. Many female writers express their feelings through their writing to reinterpret the feminine sensibility.

Neurosis is the natural consequence of interaction between the individual and society. In the manner of supporting ideas and expectations, which are usually oppressive and anti-human, society compels individuals to repress spontaneous impulses and the desire of exercising one's free will. Freud considered Neurosis to be an inconvenience of biological origin based on three-tier structure of personality comprising of Id, Ego and Super-ego. In this context, Phyllis Chesler describes neurosis in woman as, "an intense experience of female biology, sexual and cultural castration, and a doomed search for potency."³

Emily Pauline Johnson, one of the earliest Canadian writers, depicts her protagonists fighting against patriarchal oppression and race discrimination. Her works make important statements about issues generally ignored by major white male authors of the period. She vividly expresses in her writing her anger at the injustices experienced by women. The neurotic state of mind forces women either to revolt against patriarchy or to make compromise. In *My Mother*, the home atmosphere forced Elizabeth to make compromise for a loveless marriage with the Indian missionary. At the same time, it insisted love-hungry Lydia to fling herself into the arms of alien, Red Indian. Both the sisters left England, in fact they rescued themselves from the clutches of patriarchal system, their hypocrite father, who always talked about god's love but forgot to love his own children and their self-centered step mother.

Lydia, who later became a wife of chief of Mohwak, George Mansion accepted wholeheartedly Indian people, Indian rituals, Indian language, and imbibed in her children all the Indian values, "but above all their mother instilled into them from the very cradle that they were of their fathers people, not of hers."⁴ When George was attacked by white whiskey traders Lydia nursed him day and night. She always preferred to stay at home. Once George asked her to accompany him, she refused, "No, I was homeless so long that 'home' is now my ambition."⁵

Johnson combines the domestic romance with protest literature, expressing her anger at the injustices experienced by women and Indians in *Red Girl's Reasoning* and *As It Was in the Beginning*, two of the best stories in the collection. In both, she combines the plot of the mixed-blood woman betrayed by a weak white lover with a forceful attack on white religious hypocrisy. The neurotic state of minds of Elizabeth and Lydia is an attitude of

compromise while it is a moment of rebel by another protagonist, Esther, in *As It Was in the Beginning*, a Red Indian girl, who fell victim to the social evils; she was cheated by her white lover, Lawrence. But the neurotic state led her to kill her lover. The woman is known by her passivity and obedience and if she rebels against her situation, it automatically renders her abnormal or crazy or neurotic. Esther reaction represents the explosion of the inner turmoil against the social situation. Her past experiences in the missionary school led her towards a revolt. She was not allowed to wear Indian clothes, use of Cree language deserved for the punishment. She craved for her people and once tried escape from the church, but in vain. In another incident, when she overheard the conversation between Lawrence and missionary father Paul, whom she considered her 'white father', she became furious to hear the words; "The blood is a bad, bad mixture" father Paul called her 'strange snake'. These two words forced her to take revenge by killing her white lover, Lawrence. One day, while Lawrence was sleeping on the sofa, she took out the flint from her bag, which was dipped in the venom of some 'strange snake' and scratched his wrist twice with the arrow tip. She fulfilled her will and in a neurotic state she said, "They account for it by the fact that I am a Red skin, but I am something else, too—I am woman."⁶ The revenge taken by Esther is not just a murder of Lawrence but it is a big slap to the patriarchy, which considers women as inferior and subordinate.

Many of Johnson's women characters are built on strikingly original or independent insights into social and literary conventions. She has developed impressive literary skills such as strength in structuring fiction, stylistic polish, a penetrating sense of social interchange and interpersonal tensions. The diverse themes of the stories and her firm hold gives proof of the broad and varied taste of the contemporary audience. Johnson has beautifully woven the plot of the class conflict through the story, *Red Girl's Reasoning*. She has embodied the sexual interaction between English conquerors and Aboriginal subjects. Christine is betrayed by her white husband, Chirlie, who doesn't accept the sanctity of the rituals of Indian marriage and it compelled Christine to divert from her husband. She shows her protest saying, "Why should I recognize the rites of your nation when you do not acknowledge the rites of mine?"⁷ Her act of snatching off the wedding ring and tossing it across the room reflects the inner turmoil and suppressed feelings in her mind. She had lost the faith on her husband who considers her only as an object. She scornfully declared, "That thing is as empty to me as the Indian rites to you."⁷ Christine, in *Red Girl's Reasoning* after her marriage with Charlie, learned all the English manners and etiquettes, English language and clothing, dancing and singing in English way and tried to assimilate herself, at the same time she retained the Indian

identity and ethnicity, “she always dressed in velvet. No woman in Canada, as she but the faintest dash of native blood in her veins, but loves velvets and silk.”⁸The unjust treatment given by her husband represents the patriarchal oppression, which created feelings of revolt in her mind. She affirmed, “My people have no priest and my nation cringes not to law our priest is purity and our law is honour.” She cuts off the relationship with her husband saying, “You cannot make me come, neither church, nor law, nor even love can make a slave of red girl.”⁹

Esther and Christine represent revolutionary figures while many of Johnson’s heroines reflect indomitable spirit, an epitome of love, sacrifice, affection and devotion. Catherine from, *Catherine of the Crow’s Nest Pass* is so silent, so capable, so stubborn that something was behind her strength of depth of mournfulness. Catharine showered her love on an adopted child. The possessiveness reflects her motherly love and she became fierce and even did not allow Mr. Wingate to touch the child (when she knows that he is the father of the same child). The feeling of loneliness made her insecure; hence she found the affection in the lost child and loved her as only an Indian woman can love an adopted child. Catherine confesses her possessiveness when Mr. Wingate asks her why she changed her mind and returned the baby to him, she says, ‘I make one last fight to keep her, she mine so long, I want her; I want her till I die. Then I think many times I see your face at camp. It look like sky when sun does not shine—all cloud, no smile, no laugh. I know you think of your baby then. Then I watch you many times. Then after while my heart is sick for you, like you are my own boy, like I am your own mother. I hate see no sun in your face. I think I not good mother to you; if I was good mother I would give you your child; make the sun come in your face. To-day I make last fight to keep the child. She’s mine so long, I want her till I die. Then something in my heart say, ‘He’s like son to you, as if he your own boy; make him glad—happy. Oh, ver’ glad! Be like his own mother. Find him his baby’.¹⁰ Johnson fills the gap between White and Black by the strong love bond. When Mr. Wingate receives the baby, he says good bye to Catherine, but his mind reminds him something. He asks Catherine to come with him, ‘You said I was as your own son; will you be that good mother to me that you want to be? Will you do this for your white boy?’¹¹ Catherine smiled for the first time to be with her loved ones.

Johnson remained unparalleled story-teller; she blended sense and sensibility with wisdom in her stories. Storytelling allows us to escape our own predicaments in this physical world and free our minds to go beyond it. Johnson’s craftsmanship is observed in *Mother O’ the Men* by using ‘story within story’, the narrator of the story is a mother, Mrs. Lesley, who inculcates the values within her ten years son, Graham, and trains him by telling the story of a brave

Indian Sergeant Black, who fought single-handed. Little Graham thanks his mother, 'I'll have to fight it out alone and when I do, I'll try to remember Sergeant Black.'¹²

One of the characteristic features of Johnson's narration is the interpretation of feminine longings. Johnsonian heroines, Indian women have craze for Indian fabrics, they adore silk and velvet, and will have no cotton. Buckskin clothes and moccasin shoes is the identity of Indian women. Love-hungry Indian women show rare courage to sacrifice whatever they have. Marda in *The Tenas Klootchman* who lost her girl baby in a forest, Marda's life became colorless, she outstretched her arms—pitifully empty arms. Once in the agony she sang the song thinking that her baby is alive. It expresses Marda's state of mind. One day she met accidentally to another Indian woman who was ill and could not feed her baby. Marda took her baby at home and nourished both the woman and the baby. She saw her own Tenas Klootchman, the girl child, in that baby. She was so much possessive about that baby, "with the touch of that warm baby body, the bitterness faded. She walked slowly, fitting her steps to those of the sick woman, and jealously lengthening the time wherein she could hold and hug the baby in her yearning arms".¹³ And the woman fulfilled her wish by handling her baby to Marda, "Your cradle basket and your heart were empty before I come. Will you keep my Tenas Klootchman as your own? to fill them both again."¹⁴ Marda became very happy to have the baby, though she tried to save the woman, she lasts her breathe saying, 'Then I will go her, and be her mother, wherever she is, we will be but exchange our babies.'¹⁴ In this way, the woman handed over her baby to Marda and passed away. Here Marda who lost her baby fortunately received the 'girl child'. The psyche of Marda is seen when she becomes possessive about the child. Marda cared and nourished the woman and the baby. She called the doctor facing a storm for the whole night with a canoe. When the doctor announced the woman could not recover, Marda went to the shore, fighting this outrageous gladness, struggling it. The greed of having the baby entered her heart but she returned to her senses and devoted herself to bring the woman back from the jaws of death. She greeted the end of it all with a sorrowing, half-breaking heart, for she had learned to love the woman she had envied. Marda's consciousness shows the combination of greed and sense of gratitude. She says, 'the Great Spirit thought my baby would feel motherless in the far spirit Islands, I nursed for a mother; and He knew I was childless, and He gave me this child for my daughter.'¹⁵ The volume, *The Moccasin Maker*, depicts the Indian women taking care of their husbands and their young ones. Mrs. Henderson in *The Nest Builder*, is a kind and compassionate woman who served her husband, once she said, 'The children won't mind sleeping on 'shelves', for the bread-winners must have the bed.'¹⁶ Once again the wit and

wisdom in Mrs. Henderson is seen when she adroitly substituted hen's eggs for the wild ducks own and she saw little peeping chicks out of it. Johnson had cleverly metaphorized the nestling incident of the duck to the nestling of Indian couple.

Johnson has shown an indomitable spirit among her heroines who fought against either patriarchal system or against the poverty or the social evils. The psychic needs of every individual vary according to the cultural set up and the social status. Every society has its own particular problems related to women. It is the culture of a particular country, which determines the behavior of a woman. The Indian women though they are meek they showed the rare courage and confidence in the critical situations. The adversity made them strong enough to control their neurotic breakdown or to come out of their neurotic state of mind. Sorrows and sufferings are the part and parcel of the lives of Indian women. Tillicum, the narrator of *The Legend of Lillooet Falls* narrates the strange story of Lillooet Falls. It's a tale of an Indian mother who had six sons but one daughter named, 'Morning Mist' Johnson compares the intimacy between the girl child and mother with Moccasin and foot. The mother would murmur, 'thou art morning to me, thou art golden mid-day thou art slumberous nightfall to me my heart'.¹⁷ But unfortunately, the baby was lost in the forest and the mother wept bitterly, 'God my father, keep safe my Morning-child.' The weeping of the mother is compared to the Lillooet Falls. It is the powerful expression of a mourning mother. And when the mother got the baby back they had, heart upon heart, lips upon lips, the Morning-child and the mother caught each other in embrace.

ALaVonne Brown Ruoff has expressed her view about *The Moccasin Maker*; in her introduction to the 1987 edition of that work and in her article *Justice for Indians and Women: The Protest Fiction of Alice Callahan and Pauline Johnson* (1992)¹⁸ she examines Johnson's use of the domestic romance and the traditions of sentimentalism popular in nineteenth- and turn-of-the-century women's fiction as a vehicle for protesting injustices to Native American women. Feminist writers try to explore the problem of self definition faced by women in the traditional patriarchal society. Anger, anxiety and an innate desire for self-discovery, self-reliance and self-sufficiency characterize literature of the women writers. They have created the New Woman who defies the tradition; strives for self assertion but, does not negate her womanhood, rather endeavors to reclaim and redefine the positive aspects of womanhood. Feminist literary criticism can be said to have two dimensions - the first is concerned with woman as reader (i.e. woman as the consumer of male-created literature) and the second is concerned with woman as writer (i.e., woman as the creator of literature.) Feminists consider Freud and Lacan's views on formation of gender identity and sexuality as

reactionary, which confirm and sustain masculine dominance and prescribe women's inherent inferiority. Psychoanalytic feminists believe that gender inequality comes from early childhood experiences, which lead men to believe them to be masculine, and women to believe them feminine. It is also maintained that gender leads to a public system that is dominated by masculine, which in turn influences the individual psychosexual development. Johnson had the power to appeal the heart, with refinement, delicacy, pathos, and sincerity fusing the inner and outer world.

Thus, Johnson successfully describes the reflections of feminine psyche and the plight of Indian women, and the dire situations which force them to follow their consciousness. They establish themselves in the patriarchal system. Johnson's work reveals an optimistic view of man-woman relationship. Her fiction is an attempt to achieve a balance between sexes by recognizing the bond of symbiosis between men and women, and the same has been observed in this paper.

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