



A portrait of a bride in Taufiq Rafat's poem, *Wedding in the Flood*: a feminist analysis

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Abstract

*This study endeavors to analyze Taufiq Rafat's poem *Wedding in the Flood* in the light of feminist theory. Feminist literary theory is difficult to define because feminism itself is difficult to define. The term feminism does not claim to account for all women's experiences in exactly the same way because women have different experiences based on race, religion, sexual orientation, class, age, heritage, geographical location, physical appearance, etc. There is great diversity within feminism. However, this study shows how the women are easily suppressed, subjugated, and marginalized in the name of traditions and customs made by the male-dominating society to control the women. The whole poem revolves around a bride and elements like dowry. So, the main aim of this research is to find out to what extent Taufiq Rafat's poem *Wedding in the Flood* corresponds to the principles of feminism in a patriarchal society.*

Keywords: *Patriarchy, Feminism, Female Suppression, Marginalization, Traditions*

Introduction

Taufiq Rafat is a prominent figure in the history of twentieth-century literature and is best known for his natural and cultural poetry. In 1927, Taufiq Rafat was born in the city of Sialkot. Khuwaja Ghulam Muhammad Hazir was his father and he worked as a supply contractor for the British Indian Army during the Second World War. Eventually, his father relocated to Dehradun. His family moved back to Pakistan following the division of the Subcontinent and lived in Sialkot. In Dehradun, he completed his early education. He later pursued his studies at Lahore and Aligarh, respectively. At the Lahore-based Hailey College of Commerce, he completed his graduation. He later rose to the position of executive in a company. Rahana Rafat was his wife. She was from the same family of Kashmiris as Taufiq Rafat. She worked in social services, and she was also an advocate for women's rights.

Taufiq Rafat is regarded as the first poet from Pakistan to adopt English to portray Pakistani society and he is best known for creating Pakistani idioms in English language. He uses the English language in his poetry to convey the sensibility, emotions, values, desires, norms, and traditions of the local people. He was possibly the best and most underappreciated English-language poet in Pakistan. Rafat's poetry is rich with cultural knowledge. The only poet whose work has been included in each of Pakistan's anthologies. Taufiq Rafat's important works include *First Voices* (1965), *Pieces of Eight* (1971), and *World Fall* (1975). His work is basically divided into two portions. His first work, *Arrival of the Monsoon* (1974-1978), was published in 1985, and this section consists of 35 poems with a variety of themes. His second work, *Half Moon* (1979-1983), was published in 2008, after his death. He also wrote a play, "The Foothold," which has not been published but was staged by the Government College dramatic club. He also translated the punjabi work of a sufi poet, Bulleh Shah, into English.

Rafat used the cultural depiction as a vehicle to express human concerns. He depicted the real culture of Pakistani society and wrote about humanism. His poems show different aspects of modern life. He uses very simple, straight-forward, and conversational language to convey his ideas about what was happening in society. "According to Taufiq Rafat, poetry emanates from the very land in which it is written. The cultural substratum that gives anchorage to its roots remains a variable source from which it gains nourishment and defines the self of the poet." (Hazrat Hayat, Pakistaniness in Taufiq Rafat's Selected Poems, IJIR, Vol. 2, p. 1).

His poetry mostly deals with the themes of nature, Pakistani culture, the seasons, and various aspects of life. He talks about Pakistani culture and human issues with the help of natural images. Due to his imagist poetry, he is considered the Ezra Pound of Pakistan. So, it is impossible to imagine Rafat's poetry without the images of nature. In some of his famous poems, like *Wedding in the Flood*, he also talks about the injustice and cruelty of nature on humans with the help of many images. "Wedding in the Flood" is one of his most famous poems. This poem is basically written in free verse, and juxtaposed technique is used in the title, like "Wedding" and "Flood," which indicate light and dark. In this poem, Taufiq Rafat talks about Pakistani culture, the economic situation of people, particularly in Punjab, and uses many images like rain, palankeen, the cot, the trunk, a looking glass, river, a couple of oxen, and ploughing, etc. to illustrate the behaviour of nature on poor people. Major themes of this poem are cultural depiction, nature, and myth, while fear, wishes, expectations, fate, time, and a wedding based on risk are its minor themes. His poems reflected the lifestyle, customs, traditions, culture, emotions, and concerns of his own people.

Research Questions

The following questions are attempted to be answered by this study:

- How are women suppressed in patriarchal society in the name of traditions?
- In what specific ways does the poem's treatment of women reflect patriarchal oppression?

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The goal of the current study is to describe how women are treated in patriarchal culture in the poem “Wedding in the Flood” by Taufiq Rafat in the context of feminist theory. Basically, the Latin term “femina,” which means “woman,” is the root of the word “feminism,” and the suffix “-isme” is derived from the Latin “-ismus,” which transforms a noun into a notion or concept. A French philosopher named Charles Fourier first used and invented the term “feminism” in 1837, and he was a fervent advocate for the rights of women. He was against patriarchy and valued the place of women in European civilization. Since then, it has been gradually used and known by the people of the world. Emily Charlotte Bronte constituted feminism as a movement in the 19th century. Charlotte’s work, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), focuses on feminism. Hence, feminism is an ideology or movement that promotes equal social, political, economic and women’s legal rights in society. This theory talks about women’s suffering, and it strives to define, create, and protect equal rights for women at the political, social, educational, religious, cultural, and financial levels. A feminist promotes, backs, and upholds women’s equality in society. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines feminism as “the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men; the struggle to achieve this aim” (A.S. Hornby, p. 560). Feminism comes into existence against the society’s practice of injustice over the course of history. Since the very beginning, women have experienced suffering and a variety of challenges. Aristotle considered women “imperfect creatures.” He said that “the relation of male to female is by nature a relation of superior to inferior and ruler to ruled.” After that, in Christianity, it is said that a woman is not God’s first creature and that the first sin done in this world is due to a woman. So, against all these traditional notions, feminism comes into existence and fights for societal equality between men and women. The history of feminism consists of four waves. The primary goal of the first wave, which began in the 19th century and lasted until the early 20th century, was to secure the right of women to vote. Beginning in the 1960s, the second wave of feminism sought to advance women’s rights to equal pay, protection from domestic abuse, and sexual freedom, and this wave continued until the 1970s. The third feminist wave is started in the 1990s, and it takes things like ethnicity, gender, race, etc. The fourth wave started in 2012 and continues to be present. According to Deborah Madsen (2000), “feminism deals with women and their status in society and asks questions about oppression, consciousness, and gender.” Thus, as a social and literary movement, it believes that equal rights for men and women should be mandated in society, regardless of color, class, religion, culture, and creed, because they are both equal. As given by Ajit Kumar and Baliram Gaikwad in “Representations of Fertility,”

Feminism is a cultural, political, and intellectual movement that recognizes the fact that women are subjugated and need to be liberated. Feminism aspires to fight for equal rights and opportunities for women. For achieving this aim, it demands more concern, respect, and consideration from the male counterparts. (p. 113).

To elaborate feminism more clearly, Simon de Beauvoir said in his famous work, “The Second Sex,” “the term masculine and feminine are used systematically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. Actually, the relation of the sexes is not quite as if that of the two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and negative whereas, women represent only the negative.” (97). And he also said that: “Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female- whenever she behaves as a human being, she is said to imitate man” (p. 226). This demonstrates the thoughts of evil-minded males about women in society and woman’s status in society. Yet, feminism spoke out against this patriarchal oppression and raised awareness of topics that are crucial to women’s societal rights. The topics covered under this theory include patriarchy and how it oppresses women, conventional gender norms, as well as the marginalization, objectification, victimization, and subjugation of women. However, the current study examines how the girl who is the bride in the poem, “Wedding in the Flood,” has been marginalized in view of the particular terms mentioned above.

The current research is qualitative in nature. Different secondary resources were used to further the project while answering the questions posed. To locate and evaluate the feminism-related elements in the poem, a close reading approach (textual analysis) is used.

Discussion and Analysis

Taufiq Rafat depicts natural and cultural elements in all his poems; he is a good observer of societal concerns in this regard. He draws attention to societal and cultural discrimination against women and talks about how women are overlooked and marginalized by the males of a patriarchal society. To present these issues among people, he applies direct and free use of language in all his poems. As Kaleem Omar, a renowned essayist, said that Taufiq Rafat was a language artist who had complete control over how his thoughts and feelings were expressed. M. Tahir Athar, a notable essayist and a pupil of Taufiq Rafat added that he was a creative writer and a true master of nature’s crafts. Sarwat Ali stated in his essay that everything in Taufiq Rafat’s poem was close by and situated inside the context of Pakistani culture. Thus, Taufiq Rafat, in his poem, “Wedding in the Flood,” has described the societal issues related to women and described them as victims of patriarchal setup. Yet here, the question is: why is a woman the victim? And what value does a woman have in a patriarchal culture, and how is she treated? In a patriarchal setup, a woman is associated with a man, and she is defined by the man in relation to himself. In a patriarchal society, men are viewed as crucial and significant, while women are regarded as something unimportant and inferior. This attitude towards women is also evident in the poem “Wedding in the Flood.”

The poem “Wedding in the Flood” is in free verse, and it appears from the title that a marriage is taking place during the flood season. The poem’s entire narrative is revolved around a girl who is a bride. There are five stanzas in the poem, and each stanza has a different narrator. In each stanza, only the girl is blamed and suppressed by different characters. Everyone, including the bride, bride’s mother, groom, groom’s father, and ferryman appears perplexed. The first stanza is narrated by the mother of the bride who is worried about her daughter’s departure, as she is

aware about the status of women in a society where patriarchy exists, like in some areas of Pakistan. In a patriarchal setup, a man is considered superior, better, and stronger, and he is the only one who can make decisions by himself. He holds every position of power and authority in a relationship and is considered superior in all ways. Whereas a woman is considered inferior and she cannot contribute in any more ways than just doing the household chores and bearing children. In a relationship like marriage, men consider women their property, and she will do what her husband wants her to do. By keeping these things in mind, the mother is worried about her daughter, and it is stated in the poem as:

The are taking my girl away forever,
Sobs the bride's mother, as the procession
forms slowly to the whine of the clarinet.
She was the shy one. How will she fare?
In that cold house, among these strangers?

So, the first stanza of the poem shows that the bride's mother is confused and worried about her daughter, and she is unsure whether they will treat her happily or cruelly. The use of palankeen is also mentioned in the poem. Palankeen is basically a type of vehicle without wheels carried by four people and is used to transport the bride from her mother's home to her in-laws. This custom was common in Pakistan, particularly in rural Punjab. Here, the use of palankeen also symbolizes a funeral, which is also taken by four persons, and the brides' mother also thinks that they are taking her daughter away forever. In Pakistani society, it is said to the bride on her marriage day that now you must live and survive in your new final home whatever the situation is or whatever the circumstances are. Now there is no way for you to return, your funeral should be held at your final home. This shows the helplessness and suppresses condition of females in patriarchal societies. So, this is how Taufiq Rafat links marriage to death: when a girl gets married, she is expected to cut herself off from her family and focus solely on her in-laws. The bride in the poem is also worried about her husband's nature and future. She also thinks about the journey and worried about her dowry and it is mentioned in the poem as:

What sort of man is my husband?
They would hurry, but their feet are sleeping.

These lines show that she is worried about her husband's nature because, in a male-dominating society, the future of women depends upon men. That's why she is thinking like this. There is a hidden meaning in the next line, as the bride says that they would hurry but their feet are sleeping, and this slipping of feet is also associated with her in a negative way because all the characters in the poem are blaming only the bride and they are saying that the rain is falling due to her habit of pot licking. So, if the people's feet sleep, they will blame the bride, and the bride is worried due to this. It seems that the bride has not enthusiasm for her marriage, and in her

opinion, marriage is as dangerous as a flooded river. This demonstrates the status of women as victims in patriarchal societies.

Taufiq Rafat, in his poetry, depicted the characters as they are in daily life. He presented all the things in such a manner that readers felt as if they were happening before their own eyes. All the worries mentioned above show women as victims of a patriarchal society in which women are suppressed in the name of traditions and customs. The narration of bridegroom also shows a male's point of view about women in patriarchal society. Arranged marriages are very common in Pakistan and the boy is not allowed to see his fiancée before marriage. So, in the poem, the husband is attempting to determine his wife's beauty by looking at her hands. He is beauty conscious, and he says that if his wife is beautiful, he will forgive her for not taking more dowry. Here, the question arises: if she is not beautiful what are the circumstances? He also thinks that she should be respectful to my mother and this shows the pressure on the bride that the males have over their wives. It is stated in the poem as:

If only her face matches her hands,
and she gives me no mother-in-law problem,
I forgive her the cot and the trunk and the looking glass.

The aforementioned elements of patriarchal society show women as victims of patriarchal setup and highlight feminism. Another very important element of feminism found in this poem is myth, which is very popular in Pakistan, particularly in rural Punjab, regarding girls' and boys' marriage days weather. If the wedding day is rained out, everyone accuses the boy and girl that this happened due to their practise of "licking the pot" in childhood. Yet only the girl is held accountable in this poem. All the characters including the bride's mother, her husband, and her father-in-law are blaming her, saying that she is only responsible for this falling rain. Nobody can imagine how a woman could be in charge of such activities. As her husband thinks that:

It was my luck to get a pot-licking wench.

This shows the unequal traditional rules and regulations made by a male-oriented society. It is a satire on Pakistani traditional marriages in which people build some specific notions and ideas and they completely sneak up on them.

Dowry is another important element of feminism and a social evil. The tradition of giving dowry to daughters is very common in Pakistan. Dowry is a social evil as well as a burden on families, and the pressure of dowry sometimes pushes parents to take out loans to fulfill the obligations of their daughter's in-laws. Sometimes the poor parents are unable to give more dowry to their daughters, and this creates a lot of problems for their daughters. They are tortured, emotional abused, and injured...even killed...by their in-laws. Women get respect if they bring a lot of dowries with them. Dowry is hence highly valued in Pakistani society. Dowry is mentioned in every stanza of the poem. The bride's mother's method of counting the dowry goods shows their bad economic condition. The father of the bride groom complains over dowry.

He thinks that the cot, the trunk, and the looking glass are for their daughter's use. He has a materialistic mindset and thinks that she should have brought a couple of oxen for him. This shows his selfishness and greed in the name of tradition. In addition, he attributes all of the difficulties there to the bride. He doesn't think that she will take care of them, follow their orders, and will make their house a lovely place to live, but instead of all this, he is just thinking about more dowry. It is mentioned in the poem as:

They might have given a bullock at least,
Grumbles the bride groom's father; a couple of oxen
Would have come in handy at the next ploughing.
Instead, we are landed with a cot, a tin trunk and looking glass,
All the things that she Will use!

Thus, dowry is also regarded as a feminist element, which is discussed in the poem, as it leads crimes against women ranging from emotional abuse, torture, and injury to even death.

6. Conclusion

After analyzing the poem "Wedding in the flood" in the context of feminist theory, it could be stated that women are victims of patriarchal oppression in the name of traditions. So, Taufiq Rafat's poem offers a distinct perspective in which the patriarchal system completely subjugates women. Despite all this, women are not inferior; instead, both men and women are responsible for setting up a peaceful society. Therefore, women must be treated equally in all aspects of life because, without women's role in society, it is impossible for a society to remain viable.

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