

Sylvia Walby's Six Structures of Patriarchal Society and Sarah Daniels's Play *The Gut Girls*

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Abstract

The concept of patriarchy has got immense value while studying the literature of any nation. Many critics including feminists, tried to bring in to focus the patriarchal aspects and their relevance in writing of any work of literature such as poem, drama, novel and other types. British Sociologist Sylvia Walby has discussed six structures of patriarchy in her book Theorizing Patriarchy (1990). In this paper, an attempt has been made to explore Walby's six structures of patriarchy in Sarah Daniels's influential play, The Gut Girls(1988). In fact Daniels shows almost five of these structures of patriarchal society by presenting apt situations with relevant characterization and action in the play.

Keywords: Patriarchal, state, household, culture, violence, paid work, sexuality, domination, oppression

Introduction

M. H. Abrams in his book *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (2003) defines the term 'patriarchal' as "rule by the father- that is, it is male-centered and controlled, and is organized in such a way to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic."(89)

Sylvia Walby is a British sociologist and professor in sociology in Lancaster University. In her book *Theorizing Patriarchy*(1990),she has not only defined patriarchy but also has given six structures of society in which male supremacy has been protected and

women are oppressed by their male counterparts in such type of society. In the following lines she explains six structures of the patriarchal society:

... a patriarchal mode of production in which women's labour is expropriated by their husbands; patriarchal relations within waged labour; the patriarchal state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality and patriarchal culture. (20-21)

In fact her above description can be categorised in the following sections:

1. The state: Women according to this structure of patriarchal society do not possess formal power and their representation in the society. On the contrary men possess power in almost fields of society.
2. The household: Women are only supposed to perform their house related duties and raise children.
3. Violence: women are more prone to being abused Women are more likely to tolerate violence and abuses.
4. Paid work: According to this structure women are paid less as compared to men.
5. Sexuality: women's sexuality is treated negatively and they are the object of sexual pleasure for men of the society.
6. Culture: Women are misrepresented in media and culture.¹

Sarah Daniels (1957-) is a twentieth century British woman playwright. She is more radical in her depiction of feminist issues in almost all her plays. She uses experimental dramatic techniques to point out the secondary status of women in the male dominated society. The playwright mostly deals with women's problem, social and political subjects and female experiences in her plays. The essence of all her plays is to highlight the status of women in almost all fields of society and bring out the male supremacy and female subjugation in the male-defined social structure of the society. There are many plays to her credit such as *Ripen Our Darkness* (1981), *Masterpieces*(1983), *The Devil's Gateway*(1983), *Neaptide*(1984), *Byrthrite*(1987), *The Gut Girls* (1988), *Beside Herself* (1990) and so on.

The Gut Girls

Sarah Daniels's *The Gut Girls* (1988) is a play about girls working in foreign cattle market at the turn of century in Deptford. Initially the gut girls seems to be enjoying their financial independence by working in the the horrible conditions of the gutting shed. But, especially, in the second part of the play, all gut girls loose their jobs and most of them work as maid servant in the second act of the play. In the course of action the character of Lady

Helena opens a club for the gut girls to train them as maid servants and teach them ladylike manners. Moreover, Arthur-Priscilla sub plot of the play brings to front husband-wife relationship in which a woman is treated as subsidiary and is supposed to perform her household duties as per her husband's choice. Infact, the play brings to front economic and class oppresions, patriarchal society, male dominance and female subordination at the turn of the century.

While discussing the play with respect to sociologist Sylvia Walby's six structures of the society as mentioned in the introductory part of the study, it shows five structures with apt and suggestive situations, characters, scenes and actions of the play. In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight all these structures with evidences from the play.

First of all, *The Gut Girls* perfectly explores Walby's first structure of patriarchal society, that is, The State. As per this structure of the society women do not possess formal powers and rights. But on the contrary men act as more powerful and authoritative in such type of society. Men characters always control each and every move of women characters in the play. We get the first example from the play when Maggie, one of the gut girls, reveals the fact that Maud, a girl working with them, has been expelled from the job without any warning and intimation by her male authorities. While introducing a new girl Annie at workplace, Maggie says:

MAGGIE. ... I'm Maggie. She's Ellen. Her with the offal jokes is pollyand the little madam here is Kate. You start by helping Kate. Then when we get a chance we'll show you what else you got to do, but you've got to keep your eyes and brain on what you're doing, otherwise you'll end up like Maud. (4)

The fact is that women do not have any right and power to defend themselves against the male power and authority. Furthermore, Ellen, one of the gut girls, also reveals the fact they do not possess power to secure their jobs. It is men who possess power to control women including the gut girls at workplaces. Ellen reveals: "Being treated like you're not worth a light. No pay when you're ill. No compensation when you chop your hand off. Laid off with no warning." (7) In this dialogue Ellen introduces the true condition at gutting shed where all gut girls must obey and follow the male power and commands.

Men are more powerful in the patriarchal society. They show their power not only in households but also at other workplaces and institutions like religion, law, court etc. Harry is such a character who shows his male power by giving orders to the gut girls while working in the gutting sheds. Harry seems to be instructing all girls to work properly and should not waste their time:

HARRY. Now you've all stopped to have a good boggle at a lady, something you lot will never be if yer lives to be a hundred, don't think you'll be stopping again for yer dinner break. Also we don't want yer sloping off outside. 'cos they're uploading. We don't want the cows getting frightened before they reach the slaughtering pens. (He goes).

ELLEN. But Harry, we need some fresh air. (17)

Such is the power in the hands of men where women literally cannot take even a fresh air at workplaces. In fact the gut girls are destined to follow orders without any disapproval. The play gives one of the finest examples which show the helplessness of women and gut girls in front of their male counterparts in the society. According to patriarchal norms, it is male power that should be obeyed by every woman of the society not only in family matters but also in all sectors of life. In scene eight of the first act, Harry orders all gut girls to go back to work. At the same time he instructs Ellen to help Jim in his work.

HARRY. Time to get back to work, girls. Not you, Ellen. You can take over from Jim this afternoon.

ELLEN. That's not my job.

HARRY. He's needed in the slaughtering pens. (To Ellen) unless you don't want a job at all, (39)

The above dialogue between Ellen and Jim, itself shows the fact that the gut girls do not have other options but to follow male orders without hesitation. In Act II, scene i, Daniels's reference to Mary Magdalene and her crucifixion and power of lord Jesus (54-55), is a good example which shows even gods were more powerful than female deities in ancient time and the same tradition has been extended up to the contemporary men and women of the society.

Particularly, through Arthur- Priscilla sub-plot of the play, Daniels shows the male power over wife and maid servants in the family. Arthur seems to exercise his power over Priscilla, his wife and Polly, a maid servant. They both seem to be behaving as per his own choice. Priscilla is presented as possessing no power whereas Arthur, an authoritative and commanding husband.

PRISCILLA. (Timidly) Please, you go dear. I don't feel well enough.

ARTHUR. You are my wife. It's your duty to come with me. Besides I promised Helena You'd be there. Stop this nonsense....(84)

Moreover, Arthur being owner in the family also shows his power to Polly, his maid servant. Such is the condition for women even in domestic matters. She is tolerating the power of men. Priscilla is helping Lady Helena in setting club against her will. It is Arthur who imposed his wish on Priscilla to help Helena in her club for the gut girls.

Apart from the first structure of the patriarchal society, the play also points out the second structure called, The Household. In this structure, basically women in all families are supposed to perform house related duties along with raising children and look after them daily. Women characters in the play seem to be performing these household duties against their will but as per the orders of the male head of the family. There are many instances in play which show and represent women's subsidiary status in domestic matters. For example, after leaving the job in gutting shed, Maud, one of the gut girls, got married and started doing house wife duties and procuring children. It is seen in the following situation of the play where the gut girls Polly, Kate, Maggie and Annie are discussing about Maud.

ANNIE. What happened to her (Maud)?

POLLY. She went in to production of off-spring. (5)

Here, the point is that after marriage, women need to perform their womanly duties as determined by the patriarchal system of the society. Even the gut girls presented in the play, after whole day's work are seen doing other family duties such as to help to get tea, put their younger brothers and sisters to bed. (15) Furthermore, Priscilla's role in house perfectly justifies this patriarchal structure of the society. Arthur explains to Lady Helena the fact that his wife Priscilla is not suitable to work at club, rather she is more suitable to work as house wife. In scene six of act One, there are dialogues between Annie and Polly. Particularly, Annie's dialogues focus women's supposed duties in her house.

ANNIE. (to Polly) You've heard of peeling potatoes, polishing floors, cleaning steps, washing curtains, washing pots, making tea, making a fire. They ain't going to ask you to fly in the air. (72)

Here, Annie exposes the assigned duties to women in the household matters. Women are bound to do these duties as per system of patriarchy. The play also shows that Lady Helena is establishing a club for the gut girls to teach them lady like manners and etiquettes. She wants to convert them as household maid servants instead of letting them work in cattle market. Lastly she succeeds in her work and says: "Two hundred and fifty of them placed to date in good household." (93) Other side of setting the club for these gut girls is to show women that they are not supposed to work outside fields of society, but are destined to perform household duties and look after their children.

Along with the given two structures of the society, Daniels's play also highlights Walby's third structure of the patriarchal society called Violence. According to this structure of the society women are likely to bear men's violence and they are prone to be abused. *The Gut Girls* presents men acting as more violent and they are free to abuse all women in the society. They seem to be showing their violent nature while talking with other women characters in the play.

Particularly, Edwin uses violence and abuses Maggie in scene two of act two. Edwin after trying to seduce her, uses abusive language and threatens her by showing a knife. These are types of violence generally practiced by men while behaving with women in the society. Edwin in the following dialogues seems to be showing his violent nature:

EDWIN. (Pushing her. Suddenly produces a small pocket knife. And points it at her) Now this is not the way I normally like to conduct my business.
(57)

...

EDWIN. (backing off) I'll get you for this, you slut. Don't think I don't know who you are, where you work. I will find you next... (58)

In the last dialogue Edwin throws many abusive words when Maggie stops and defends herself from his seductive behavior with her. Arthur- Priscilla sub-plot also gives examples of violence and abuse in the play. Here Arthur, being the head of family abuses, Priscilla for protecting and giving importance to maid servants.

ARTHUR. (to Priscilla) You stupid woman, the girls' clumsy, incompetent and hopeless... (84)

Moreover, Arthur is trying to hit Polly, his maid servant on very trivial matters. Arthur becomes angry and exercises violence by trying to hit and abuse her.

ARTHUR. I'll teach you a lesson you'll not forget.

POLLY. Er.no, look sir, say what you like, I'm sorry. But don't me.

ARTHUR. I can do what I like to you, I'm paying for you. Some men I know box their servants' ears for putting cutlery in the wrong drawer.
(86)

Daniels, by presenting the actual situations like the male violence and abuse against women in the patriarchal system of the society at the turn of the century, is trying to underline men's violent nature in the society.

Daniels presents one more structure of the society, that is, Paid Work. According to this structure of the society women get fewer wages than men even though they work for whole day. The gut girls in the cattle market seem to be working for thirteen hours a day. They come at work at 7.00 am in the morning and depart at 8.00pm in the evening. Fact is that they get less money whereas men get more. Such is economic oppression of women at the turn of century in the social system of patriarchy. Daniels intends to bring this fact to front in her play. Harry, Jim and Len are the men characters in play who also work in the gutting sheds, but they are paid half again than Polly, Maggie, Kate, Ellen and Annie. There are many instances in the play which show this economic inequality between men and

women in the society. When Annie, Polly, Kate, Maggie are talking about Jim, the true fact about wages is highlighted:

POLLY. I feel sorry for him an'll. It's not right at that, that a frail young lad like that should be having to do this sort of work.

ELLEN. Don't forget he's getting paid half again what we are. (5)

There is also conversation between Kate and Jim about Lady Helena's club for gut girls. In this dialogues itself Kate reveals the fact of more wages to men at work place.

KATE. She's set up some poxy club.

JIM. Where? Why don't we go there now 'stead of being out here by the river.

KATE. It's only for girls.

JIM. That's not fair.

KATE. You earn more than me.

JIM. So.

KATE. That's not fair either. (34)

Sexuality is the fifth structure in the play that Daniels brings in to focus. According to this structure, women's sexuality is always treated negatively whereas male sex is glorified and always admired by the men of the society. Women are merely treated as the object of sexual pleasure. Men treat them as objects rather than human beings. *The Gut Girls* gives many examples to prove the said fact. The life story of Annie is the living example which proves that female sexuality is treated in negative manner. In fact woman becomes the victim of men's sexual desire. Before working in the gutting shed, Annie was working as maid-servant in the house in Black heath. When she is talking about her past to other gut girls, she reveals the fact that before marriage at the age of 16, she became mother of a child, born dead. In this matter, actually she becomes the victim of sexual desire of son of her master and mistress.

KATE. 'Ere, how old are you?

ANNIE. Sixteen.

...

MAGGIE. So you had a baby then?

ANNIE. Born Dead. (8)

In the next dialogue Annie also reveals her sexual harassment by the son of her owner. They treated her like a prostitute. As she says, "In front of anybody, I mean, he treated me like dirt, but would creep up on me when no one was about...; to them I was a prostitute...."(33-34). She, for the first time, starts to cry. This is the actual treatment of female sexuality in the male dominated society. Furthermore, Edwin's act of seducing Maggie is one more example

in the play which exemplifies this fifth structure of the society. In this incident, Edwin tries to seduce Maggie when there was no one at the place. He just wants to fulfill his sexual desire. When Maggie opposes, he threatens her by showing a knife.

EDWIN. (Takes her arm) How would you like to earn shilling?

MAGGIE. (Removes his hand. Nervous) Don't touch what you can't afford, sir.

EDWIN. Oh, but I can afford anything I want... (57)

Daniels is showing here the fact that in this patriarchal society women's sexuality is treated negatively by the men of the society. They treat them as an object used to satisfy their sexual desires.

Daniels, so far as Walby's sixth structure, that is Culture, of the patriarchal society, is concerned, she doesn't seem to highlight women's misrepresentation in media and culture in the male dominated society. In fact she exposes the misrepresentation and negative image of women in her another play entitled *Masterpieces* (1983), a play about pornography and its effects on women's lives.

Conclusion:

After analyzing the play from the perspectives of Walby's six structures of the patriarchal society, in the conclusion it can be said that Daniels exposes first five structures out of the six structures of the patriarchal society. She seems to be presenting very apt and meaningful situations, characters and actions in the play which bring to front women's subsidiary status in men defined society of the turn of the century.

While comparing the representation of all these structures in her play, she equally insists to focus the first five structures very scrupulously. It is her honest attempt to show readers, oppression of women in almost all fields of the society. Men seem to control every move of women to protect their domination, supremacy over them. And that seems to be the true motif behind the writing of the play, *The Gut Girls*.

Notes:

1. Web. 15 August. 2017. <<http://www.earlhamsociologypages.co.uk/patriarchy.html>>.

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