

Treatment Of Women In 18th And 19th Century

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Introduction

Women from prehistoric times have consistently faced the problem of proper treatment. There are debates, research, and discussions of what the role of women should be in human society. Since the early times of its creation, women have continuously confronted unequal treatment. From the birth of humans to the Greek culture, it was humiliated in different ways. Similarly, in 18th and 19th-century society, the treatment of women was the same as before. The community considers women as weaker than male members of the community. All the domestic works performed by the women in the pre-industrial times. The females were rated as second-class humans, along with restrictions on outside activity, which included voting, education, and related activities.

Discussion

The society of the 18th and 19th centuries was explored through a number of writings. In English literature, the era is considered the most uncertain time for women to perform their due functions and roles. Romantic and Victorian societies followed the treatment of women, which had been going on since prehistoric times. The males mostly played the major or the influential role. These include hunting, plowing, and other hard work. On the contrary, women were subjected to staying at home and looking after their children. They have to perform duties mostly as homemakers. Similarly, there was no concept of education for the women. Males and the patriarchal society use women to fulfill their needs. The society also did not expect a more significant or revolutionary role from the female members of their communities.

The women were also placed at home with the concept that they were unable to perform any affirmative action to help their husbands. However, there were certain reforms in the Victorian era, like the revolution in the industrial sector, the voice against poverty, and the development of scientific research (Fisher, 511). The development of the Victorian and Romantic societies did not have considerable effects on the lives of women, and their commitment was restricted within their families. They were not allowed to participate in activities other than those that were limited by the males of the society.

The literature and the writings of both eras, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reveal the real condition of women along with their functions in society. The Doll House a play was written by the Henrik Ibsen unfold the bleak picture of the women of the society. The sacrificial role is held by

women from all classes of the community. In the play, the writer exemplified the female character named Nora as men never sacrifice their integrity. On the contrary, women have to sacrifice for males (Williams, 112). Nora has abandoned her love to marry a wealthy man. However, Torvalds has no respect or honor for her wife. It was an advantage for Nora to be the wife of a wealthy man. However, the critical aspect is the burden that is placed on the shoulders of Nora.

Society dictates to Nora that she must accept the dominance of the Torvalds as her husband. Her husband issues a decree and shows his superiority towards her without realizing the real condition of the wife. The rich man never accepted the idea that his wife borrowed a loan from the blackmailer Krogstad. She must work secretly to repay the said loan but should not have informed her husband. It was a crime in Nora's society to take credit without the permission of their husband. She saves the life of her husband by managing the loan issue. The males, including the Krogstad who had given her credit, betrayed her. The reaction and the motivation towards deception and the worse attitude of the Torvalds left her vulnerable to Krogstad to blackmail her.

The abandonment of the children by Nora could be interpreted as an act of self-sacrifice. She had a love for her children, but she left them because of the fear of being corrupted by her husband (Lynch, 297). She realizes and believes that Nanny will be a kind mother. She left her children for their best interest. With the ideas and conversation of Doctor Rank, one of the leading characters of the play, Torvalds restricts her wife from visiting their children after the deceit. The husband fears that she might corrupt his children. Such feelings and actions show the actual position of eighteenth-century society. If the same act of deceit could happen by the Torvalds, he would be free from any restriction.

The text of the play shows the actual role and the emotions of women in a pre-industrialist society. *"From now on, forget happiness. Now it is about saving the remains, the wreckage, the appearance". These words were spoken by the Torvalds toward Nora in Act III of the play.* The conversation and the thoughts of Torvalds reveal his greed and pride over her wife. These remarks come after the Torvalds learn about the forgery and the Krogstad's exposition of Nora. The husband has no attention and thinks of the emotions of the wife; instead, he is more focused on looking for a dignified and honorable person among his colleagues. It also shows the value and worth of the women in the society. Happiness, according to Torvalds, is not more important than his personality and his values.

The crime of Nora was for her husband. However, the words and the text of the play show that Nora's husband's expectation of a gallant reaction was a foolish dream. The husband wanted to ensure his reputation was secured no matter what the price Nora would pay. Torvalds proves that he is the real picture of his society that supports only the roles and actions of the males (Marin, 220). Other than the writing that explores the actual face of Victorian and Romantic societies, certain short stories depicted the worthless sacrifices and humiliation of women. Like the play Doll House, there is another story that unfolded the real role of women. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the American writer Charlotte Perkins has beautifully described the feministic approach.

The writer in the yellow wallpaper unfolded the attitudes of 19th-century society towards women. The

physician husband of the woman rented an old mansion to pass the summer. The couple, lifting other rooms, started living in the upstairs nursery. The competent physician as an intervention process for the ill health wife to stay away from working and live in the room. The scratch floor of the nursery, along with the barred windows, was for the women who were already facing temporary depression after the birth of their child. The narrator of the story reveals that most of the damage has already reached the sick women. The description of the wallpaper inside the room smears on the clothes of women who were locked up. The story was a protest against the oppression by the professional staff towards the women.

Gilman, the writer of the short story, reveals that the patriarchal society restricted the role of American women in the 19th century. The husband locks his wife inside a room, which is a place not for humans, and acts like women are weak and mentally fragile. At that time, those propagating for women's rights believed that it would be a manifestation of males' regarding the roles they were allowed to women in the dominant male society. The women of the 19th century were also restricted from writing because it was a fear that they would get a certain identity. The women in the short story were patients with depression. The husband of the female was a physician who prescribed her the rest cure.

The rest cure that was prescribed by the doctor included the life to live as domestic as possible. The women other than yellow paper were not allowed to touch even the pen and other related things. She was also restricted from any mental stimulation for a whole day. After spending some time inside the closed room, the woman named Jane became overstressed and attacked by a psychological illness called hallucination (Barker 56). The treatment of the patriarchal society has made healthy women as mad. The remaining functions and the senses of the women were destroyed, and she became a burden on the sick culture of the 19th century.

The yellow wallpaper is an example that illustrates the misdiagnosis complaint of a woman whose life was destroyed by her husband. The writer of the short story has also faced the same problem of mental illness and depression. Many writers, in fact, consider the story as her reflection of what happened to her. The publication of the yellow wallpaper was also interested in providing the assessment to those hospitals that diagnose the women of patriarchal society through the rest cure measures. The story also emphasizes the gender practices that were prevalent at the time of 19th-century culture.

The writer depicted John, who was the husband of the woman in the story, as faithful to his wife. He misunderstood the mental illness of her wife. His misunderstanding reveals that the practices of society against women were frequent. On the end day of the summer, the women lock themselves to strip the remains of the wallpapers. When the physician opened the door, he found her creeping around the room, circling and touching the wallpapers. The husband became faint and looked at the wife, who was wheeling and stepping over his body (Wilkes, 95). The writing of the story was a significant contribution of Gilman, who unfolded the actual picture of society regarding the treatment of women. The story also reveals that women in American society were not free to perform any

growing role. The freedom of expression of women was severely halted and humiliated by the dominant male culture. The feministic critics have applauded the work. They also term it as one of Gilman's significant contributions towards women's rights.

Conclusion

Concluding the discussion on the treatment of women in the late 18th and early 19th-century society, it is worth mentioning that women were severely humiliated by the dominant male societies. The literature of both centuries explores that there was an increased number of restrictions on the roles and functions of women. The depiction of women as a weaker and limited gender is one of the critical factors that was discussed by many writers. Women in the old centuries and still today are striving for their parallel role in society. However, it seems difficult for women to take over the part of the male gender in the community.

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