

Women and Patriarchy in King Lear and The Wife of Bath

Posted on October 24, 2019

Introduction

Males and females are portrayed as the only known genders in the whole world. Many sociologists, as well as advocates, have spoken about the issue of gender equality, but up to now, the issue has not been addressed properly because gender discrimination is still existing even in our current world. Women have always been discriminated against by men. In the patriarchal society, males were considered to be the head of the household, and they were the ones to make rules in the family (Shakespeare and Furness).

In many families, men are considered to be the supreme authority, and women are under them. Where in our current society, we get that what is happening is not different from what happened in a patriarchal and none of the women in the society has ever gone through any discrimination but at least once in her life. This is an issue that should be addressed very seriously to allow women to feel they fully belong to society, which will create confidence for them to continue delivering their ideologies that will be of great benefit to the world. In this paper, I will discuss how women are depicted and how they fight back against patriarchal, anti-feminist society in King Lear and the Wife of the Bath. Therefore, depicting the role of women in the medieval and Renaissance and the modern view.

King Lear

King Lear is an awful play that was written by Shakespeare. The play starts with an elderly British king, King Lear, retiring and dividing his kingdom among his daughters. Regan, Cordelia, and General. Before dividing his kingdom, He requests the daughters to express their love towards him. Goneril and Regan, the eldest daughters of King Lear, gave their best claims about their love for their father. They did their best to make their father happy. However, Cornella, the youngest daughter, took a different approach (Shakespeare and Furness). She disclosed that at no given time could she depict her love for her father in words. The father failed to understand her and banished her. She accepted the proposal from the French king. Similarly, the Earl of Kent, Cornella's friend, was also banished for standing for Cornella in public. The daughter later turns against their father and takes all her political power. However, Kent remains loyal to the king despite being banished. More then, Cornella comes with the French army to rescue her father from the acts of her sister (Shakespeare and Furness).

Women In King Lear

The book is based on three women who have different traits. Cordelia is shown as a stereotypical lady in the medieval era. She is not after the wealth of King Lear, his throne, or any of the things that he owns. She did not accept his father's request to show her love for him. As a result, she does not participate in the drama that took place in the King'sd courtyard. She loved her father much and never wanted to mock him in the drama. On the other hand, Regan and Goneril have opposite traits. She depicts them as monsters and demons. They are human enemies that destroy without caring. "I must change names at home and give the distaff/into my husband's hands." It is evident that their love diminished with time (Shakespeare and Furness). They are the ones who cause chaos.

In the play King Lear, the author, Shakespeare, challenges the traditional gender roles and discloses that when women are placed in power positions, failure is unavoidable. This daughter causes the King to fall into the madness and finally return to his identity. However, Cordella has worked to counteract this picture of women by restoring and redeeming it (Shakespeare and Furness).

Act two as well is depicted as anti-feminist. Luce Irigaray says, "Man and woman, woman and man are therefore always meeting as though for the first time since they cannot stand in for one another. I shall never take the place of a man, never will a man take mine". The sisters, in a continuous way, tried to take the opposite sex. They could get to power without intentionally belittling their father. Their relationship with their husbands shows that they dominated their relationship. This is clear when they refuse to heed their husband's advice about the need to treat their father well (Shakespeare and Furness).

Women In The Wife Of The Bath

In [The Wife of Bath](#), Bath's wife is a fascinating character because she encounters all the preconceptions that the medieval congregation may have had concerning women's roles. In her introduction, she starts by giving out various double standards existing between women and men pertaining to sexual partner numbers they may be expected to have. She portrays that " here the ways king, damn salomon/1 trowe he hadde wyves mo than one" King Solomon in the bible contained numerous wives. She had received various criticisms because she had been in five other marriages. Women in this period were expected to remain chaste; however, the wife said, "I will not keep myself chaste in everything" (Chaucer). She said that not keeping herself chaste as society expected was to make her feel better in the next marriage, her sixth marriage. She argued that God said that people should grow fruitful as well as multiply. As a result, men's advice cannot be interpreted as binding. She also said that virginity was a great perfection; however, it is not for each woman in society. Evidently, the wife is older "the flor of al my age." She explains that this is to the advantage of the men she marries. At the same time, she is not specifically beautiful but rather rotund and red. She rejects any shame concerning her sexuality and proclaims her right to own her body. She states, "My

husband shall have it both evenings and mornings” (Chaucer).

This proto-feminist approach that every woman needs to control her affairs as well as be allowed to make her choices continues in the wife’s tales. This tale is different from a loathly lady tale recurring throughout medieval literature, and it is closely associated with “The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle.” The introduction of the story is fairly surprising. A woman is raped by Knight in King Arthur’s court. Arthur and all his knights had to decide how he would be punished. Men in the court decided that this man had to die; however, the women in the court gave a different opinion. They suggested that for this man to understand who women are in society, he had to live.

The Knight correctly understood that the greatest thing that women need in society is the right to choose their ways. He was given a reward when an old woman looked at his perfect bride, a young, good-looking lady who was faithful to him (Chaucer). In different views, this was a shocking act for the Knight who had committed the crime of rapping. However, man has learned a lesson that every man in society needs to learn. Therefore, this tale portrays the role of women in society and clearly shows how this woman argues her views more convincingly.

The Role Of Women In The Medieval And Renaissance Period

The two pieces raise the question of the role of women in the medieval and the Renaissance. They embody numerous patriarchal values. These patriarchal values form the full medieval society as well as culture. These two pieces display the role of a woman in a situation similar to that of Elizabeth (Bolton). The role of a woman was particularly complex since Elizabeth was a strong as well as a popular ruler. Her feminism was celebrated in her court of love (Bolton). In spite of the celebration of her as a leader anointed by the gods, the role of women is displayed in various ways.

First, the women are given education depending on their background. For instance, women from noble families were given an opportunity to acquire an education. Most of the girls from the noble families were taught on how to give birth at home by specific tutors, on the same note the women of the age of five and below, they received teachings on languages, like Greek, French and even Latin. Music and dancing skills were vital for the women. Unfortunately, they were not allowed to proceed to the university. At home, the women never attended school to receive a formal education. Rather, they were taught how to govern the household and gain skills on how to take responsibilities concerning housewifely duties. The kind of education the women received was purely related to domestic nature. This was meant to prepare the women o real career option for the future marriage (Greenblatt and Christ). Sometimes, a single woman was chosen during this time who was looked upon with a lot of suspicions; the same single woman was educated on how to become a witch by their neighbors. The women were expected to get married, and they were expected to depend on their husbands for the rest of their lives time.

In the society, the unmarried women spent most of their time in life in the convent nunnery, but it became not an option due to the resolutions of the monasteries. Domestic service was the only alternative where they moved from the lower classes to marriage (Parsons). Married women were considered desirable by the whole generation of women of the lower classes. With the aid of parental freedom, it was legal for the women to marry at the age twelve though it was not recommended to get marriages at that young age.

In marriage, the women were expected to pay a dowry to the marriage, this dependent on the preference of the family. For instance, they were a form of money, goods, and any other property that the bride would have brought to the marriage. This was considered as her marriage portion. After marriage, the women were expected to carry out the household chores and give birth to their children. The bigger families according to the customs the rate for mortality children was very high, this made the women make prior arrangements for the care of their children in the case where themselves passed on while giving birth.

The women of this period were raised knowing that they were inferior in society. The church had a notion and quoted the bible to ensure continued adherence to the principle. According to the Protestant leader John Knox, "Woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man. This made the women to be dominated by their husbands in their various families. They were required to follow instructions from both their fathers and brothers and any other male member of the society (Le Goff). The penalty for going against was the issue of whipping stool; the women were beaten into submission, and going against was considered a crime against religion. The women were not supposed to inherit the father's property because it could have passed from father to son or brother to the father, depending on the situation, but in case of the monarchy the inheritance of women was accepted.

The Depiction Of Women In The Modern Society

Due to the emergence of the woman's liberation movements, their role in cultural, political, social, and even economic lifestyles has drastically changed and progressed to an improved life. Giving men equal chances in many aspects of life (Dronke). Women have made tremendous advancements that have translated to popular culture and the media like radio, television, and other social media that portray how different identities of women, their sense of selfhood, and the notion of what it means to be a woman. In our modern society, women have adhered to various patriarchal structures. This has changed with time, bringing about the issue of female empowerment and independence in society (Dronke).

In politics in our current societies, women have an equal opportunity to men to participate in seeking various seats in administering at different levels. They are assigned different duties in the government to serve the nation, unlike in the Renaissance period when they were not given such opportunity to participate in the government. During the period of choosing leaders, women have

equal opportunity to participate in voting to choose the leaders of their choice, hence creating fairness in society (Bolton).

In the education sector, modern women have an equal opportunity to access formal education. They have an opportunity to acquire education up to the university level and beyond. The education they acquire is very important because it prepares them to acquire skills to assist in the world's advancement. The skills also assist them in knowing their responsibilities in the different departments, especially in fighting for their rights and freedoms in the government.

In the religion, women have respect. They have equal opportunity to be chosen to serve in different positions in the church, which prepares them to be good leaders, especially in serving people of different categories. The role in the family has changed because the woman can care about the family as well and the man can take care of the babies in families this changing of the roles in the family has led to great change giving a woman to participate in another outside activities other than being the territory of a man (Bolton).

In the family affairs, the women have equal opportunities with their brothers in the family. The daughter of the family has an opportunity of inheriting the property of the father as well as the son. The responsibilities are equally distributed in our societies without discriminating against gender. This has empowered women to think positively about the essence of belonging to a specific family, hence creating confidence in the members of the family (Bolton).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the book *The Wife of Bath* and *King Lear* depicts women in the medieval period. The women were negatively perceived in the community. *The Wife of Bath* emphasizes that women need to have their rights and make their own choices. At the time, Shakespeare portrays women as weak creatures who only cause chaos. However, this book, *King Lear*, shows a good woman, Cordelia. She only shows patriarchal character to her father, but she also redeems the character of women (Bolton). The roles of women clearly show that they are the same as the role of women in the medieval period. However, the modern society has improved the description of women in the current society. However, in real practical life women have not achieved the true picture.

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