

Quest for Identity in The Novels of Angela Carter

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The aim of the research paper is to study the women's character and her quest for identity under patriarchal oppression in a male-dominated society in the novels of Angela Carter. The identity of the woman as female is based on sexuality and gender roles which are formed by patriarchy. The paper attempts to reflect a woman's quest for self-identity by the use of magical elements like a fairy tale, fantasy, incest, puppet show, and imaginations. It describes the construction of female identity for women in a patriarchal system from a critical point of view. It, therefore, becomes necessary to learn the background that how does women lost her identity and subsequently her role to search her identity. There are two thoughts generally present in the minds of people. These two thoughts are women's view of sexuality and society's view on women's sexuality. These thoughts create a gender-based society and create a problem related to a woman's identity. These two categories are so strong that they create gender divisions and have no other alternative genders. The problems of men and women are avoided in the formation of gender roles. In this process, the role of the female is considered subordinate to that of males. It creates a social distinction and soon became traditions. This develops two-phases that are, sexuality and gender roles in society. As a result, society accepts sexuality about gender roles and described them as male and female. The male is considered superior and the female is sexually inferior to that of males. Female and male roles are thus cleared by this social structure. The social structure creates pressure in the relations and this creates the point of challenge and turns into the clash between sexuality and gender roles.

The so-called new gender-based social system disturbs the identity of women. The women thought that she has lost her identity and they don't have the power of decisions. It disturbs a woman's identity more than the man's identity because it accepts man as superior to woman. The inferior woman is subordinated to man. The gender phenomenon subjects woman to social oppression in her activities and decisions. She is forcibly given the subordinate roles like mother, wife, and sister to that of male authority. Thus she lost her identity in society. In this way, society develops female sexual identity and gradually forces her to follow other responsibilities related to women's roles. That is to say, society expects the woman to behave as typical females ignoring her sexual identity. This creates the clash between her perception of sexuality and the view of society on woman's sexuality. Angela Carter, in her novels dealt with the same theme of the quest of the identity of the woman. When we read the works of Angela Carter, we come across the common point that, in most of her works, Carter depicts women's oppressive position and similarly her opposite view against the male authority in society. In her work, Carter always tries to presents the place of women in a proper manner. Carter believes that sexual identity is part of the process of society. So Carter works on how society affects women through her novels. She highly emphasizes the place and the subordinate roles of women in society. She does not hesitate to describe the female body as a material object. In this way, she claims that gender is a social construct that is based on biological sex differences. It reflects how male authority is overpowered over her identity through gender division. Carter also highlights the idea that the woman is created as an object so to exercise the female role by male society. Carter also

attacked the role of patriarchy which is based on the power structure that disturbs the identity of a woman's sexuality. She has analyzed patriarchy and criticized the roles of females, male and society. She has explained the role of the family as the basis of sexual actions that results in the separation of women and the dominance of male power. In her novels woman is shown who innocently accepts her female identity in the gender-based society and thus divided into the female image and separated from the rest of the society. Her sexual position and desire which is a part of her identity are ignored by the family and society and thus she is separated from her own identity. As opposed to man, the woman is given no respect and identity in society. This creates an atmosphere for the women to search for her identity and recognition.

As Gamble explains in her book, Carter plays with the roots of the patriarchal system which constructs even individuals' identities. She points to the idea that all system is based on the superiority of the male gender which is created by sex difference. She refers to the association of power with the male individual as opposed to passivity and submission with the female. She places the rape as the climax and makes her closure with a confession of an incestuous relationship. Carter's point is to emphasize the understanding that women are exposed to make decisions and commands. She is subject to him in all senses. No matter how violent the act is, "rape is a sign of male power and authority over female" The matter is that male domination is based on sexual grounds. Carter points to the sex violence association to ensure male power in gender relations. What it conveys is about the roles of male and female genders within and outside the house.

To clarify, patriarchy is based on the power structure which gives no recognition for woman's sexuality. In line with this, all individuals are subject to the castration process which inflects identities according to genders. A woman is expected to become conformists as the female gender even though patriarchal gendering ignores her sexuality. Her women's sexual formation develops quite in parallel to the socially accepted path. Carter aims at projecting woman who is both Eve and at the same time any woman under patriarchy. No matter where

her woman lives, she acts as if she is born with the alienated self that dictates her to appeal best to male taste. Carter reflects the alienation of a conventional woman through Melanie. She criticizes that conventional women are not even aware that they live with false identities. Their minds are fully kept with the idea of being complementary to men in some ways. They are not aware of their perceptions of sexuality. Thus they are alienated from their pure identity. Thus she depicts the possible results of oppression on women. Women who are alienated from their conventional female image could reveal their desires through unacceptable ways. Thus Carter points to the fact that women are doomed to be alienated into the female image. Any heterodoxy by women causes further oppression and alienation.

To conclude, Carter objects to patriarchal oppression which castrates women's sexuality to ensure male superiority. She opposes the dictation of sexual preferences because it ignores women's perception of sexuality. Women are given no chance to explore their perceptions of sexuality. The women who are expected to become the female are alienated into false identities. They become alienated from their pure identities. That is why Carter opposed the idea of gender-based on biological sexes. She also points out the ambiguities in women's position in society through her protagonist Melanie. She specifically opposes the financial dependence of women on men. Carter simply suggests equality for females and males. She supports the idea of privacy for women to ensure freedom of sexual preference, tendency, and behavior. She gives the idea that the problem of oppression especially on women's sexuality could be worked out through independence for women and equal rights in education and the house. Thus she means to destroy the idea of gender as a social construct because it leads women into alienation.

Feminist ideology is mainly based on the idea of equal rights of male and female. The works by feminist authors deal with women's oppression in a male-dominated society. The patriarchal system which is based on male superiority over the female does not let a woman have the same rights as men. Women's lack stems from social disadvantages like financial dependence, exclusion from education and lack of privacy in the house. As it is clear, a woman

who is accepted as “female gender” is given no chance to explore her sexuality. She is led to the female image that is prescribed by patriarchy. She is supposed to have the sexual perception expected from her. Thus woman is described with the idea of lack in comparison to man’s superiority. Accordingly, she is subordinated to male in all her deeds. She is thought to be a complement to man’s existence. The idea of inferiority of women by biology brings the subject of identity. The only way women could be complete is through marriage. Through marriage, she gains identity. However, even the idea of marriage means the dependence of the female on the male. The problem of woman’s identity is depicted in the development of female sexuality, sexual perceptions and gender roles within society. Women are expected to choose the right sexual path and behave according to the female gender. Thus they are alienated into false identities.

As postmodern feminist authors, Angela Carter reflects women’s oppression in her novels. Carter describes a woman who is on the verge of developing sexual identity. She depicts a young woman who is exposed to the oppression of society she lives in. Carter approaches the matter from the conformist’s point of view, works in terms of women’s sexual preference, perception and gender roles. Carter’s novel has a postmodern style since she displays the story of the female protagonists. Furthermore, Carter’s works mock the fairy tales which are constituted suitably for the patriarchal system. Nevertheless, she unites with her female identity alienated from pure self. She questions the system of belief as to the origin of oppression on the female. The matter of sexual perception is the first thing that is dictated by society. Since sexuality is the first determiner of identity, social norms firstly dictate one’s sexual preferences. Heterosexual hegemony is so strictly defined that individuals are supposed to choose one way according to their biological sex. What Carter criticizes is this logic of constituting genders according to biological sexes. She criticizes that sexual perceptions of individuals are ignored in the development of sexuality thus they are pushed into alienation.

In this way, she challenges gender roles in the traditional sense. She criticizes the simplistic mentality that a woman is in the kitchen to prepare

food and take care of everything in the house. In other words, she criticizes the male mind that accepts a woman who is subordinate to him. That is why, in traditional societies, the only way for women to gain identity is to get married. However, she is subordinated to her husband this time. Moreover, she is subject to her husband even in discovering her sexuality, which makes her an identity that belongs to her husband. It makes her an identity although it is a false identity. Thus it is proved that the roles attached to females are so restricting that women have no identity.

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