

John Donne and Waris Shah: A Comparative Study of the Elements of Philogyny and Misogyny in their Poetry

Abstract

John Donne and Waris Shah hail from lands, cultures and customs far different from each other, yet their poetry bears captivating similarities. Both have marked their everlasting brilliance and given us gems of wisdom through their subtle poetry. Despite the fact that the poets belong to two different regions and societies, they express an astonishingly similar stance regarding women. The ways in which they express their affinity and abhorrence towards women, form the focus of this article.

Keywords: *everlasting brilliance, gems of wisdom, subtle, affinity, abhorrence*

INTRODUCTION

Writers from around the world have written in favor of womanhood and against it. Throughout history, the fair sex has intrigued writers and poets, from around the world, as a palpable subject for writing. John Donne emerged as a famous ‘Metaphysical’ poet in England during the 17th century whereas Waris Shah was an 18th century Sufi poet from Punjab who marked his everlasting eminence by creating his masterpiece ‘Heer’. This article highlights some remarkable similarities in the way both poets perceived womanhood.

Patriarchy has been dominant through most of history. This might offend some people but it is a truth that men have been dominant over the fair sex. History has shown us that men have loved their women and have even fought wars for them and over them. Yet they have expressed, in one or the other, sheer abhorrence towards women. They have made allegations about women, branded them as disloyal, treacherous, and the root cause of evil, and inflicted both physical, and psychological violence upon them. And yet history is also replete with remarkable examples of men’s love for women. The famous *TajMahal* for instance was built by a Mughal emperor Shah Jehan in the memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal. Patriarchy has been dominant during the course of history. This might offend some people but it is a truth that men have been dominant over the fair sex. History has shown us that men have loved their women and have even fought wars for them and over them. Yet

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they have expressed, in one or the other, sheer abhorrence towards women. They have made allegations about women, branded them as disloyal, treacherous, and the root cause of evil, and inflicted both physical, and psychological violence upon them. And yet history is also replete with remarkable examples of men's love for women. The famous *TajMahal* for instance was built by a Mughal emperor Shah Jehan in the memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal.

They say that the zenith of any language can be reflected through its poetry. Poetry is another word for wit, wisdom, and eloquence. Hence the viewpoint of the poets regarding women carries seminal significance. This dual behavior of man toward woman – misogynistic and philogynistic – is universal as it is instinctive. No matter where the poet hails from, instinctively he would carry sentiments similar to the one sitting thousands of miles away, regardless of varying culture and societal setups.

Statement of the Problem

Waris Shah is hailed as the epitome of Punjabi poetry, and Donne is a famous Metaphysical English poet. Though remote from each other in terms of geographical region, culture, and language, the stalwarts of poetry share astonishingly similar thoughts and beliefs regarding the fair sex with their poetry carrying vivid glimpses of philogynistic and misogynistic elements.

Delimitation

This article highlights the elements of philogyny and misogyny in the poetry of John Donne and Waris Shah. As a researcher, I shall analyze the poetry of both John Donne and Waris Shah with respect to the elements of philogyny and misogyny.

Research Objective

The objective of this research is to highlight the shared elements of philogyny and misogyny in the poetic works of John Donne and Waris Shah with the help of textual references.

Research Question

What are the congruent philogynistic and misogynistic elements in the poetic endeavors of John Donne and Waris Shah?

Significance of the Study

Philogyny and misogyny are the two terms, antonyms in nature, which define a person's stance toward womanhood. Philogyny, according to The Oxford Dictionary of English, is fondness for women, whereas misogyny is "hatred of women" (Mifflin, 1992). The significance of this study is that this article focuses on the poetry of John Donne and Waris Shah and attempts to compare it from the perspectives of philogyny

and misogyny. This comparison intends to highlight affinities between cultures and certify the fact that despite geographical, lingual and cultural dissimilarities, great minds tend to think alike. It is vital to point out likeness and similitude among nations and civilization when the world is experiencing ‘The Clash of Civilizations’ (Huntington, 1996). Literature has its own functions, one of which is to bring together mankind and contain the divisiveness that has become so dominant therein. This study intends to find similarities between the western and eastern poets’ stances toward women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The genre under consideration in this study is poetry.

This research highlights only the similarities and does not focus on the many dissimilarities in the poetry of John Donne and Waris Shah. It is evident that the two poets belonging to different regions and cultures must have dissimilarities and contradicting elements in their poetry. This research, however, focuses only on the noteworthy similarities on the grounds of philogyny and misogyny in John Donne and Waris Shah’s poetry and does not focus on similarities on any other basis.

It is a well-known fact that women have always been the center of attention for men. Men have loved their women and at the same time inflicted great oppression and repudiation upon them. History has borne both the philogynist and misogynist models of patriarchal societies. The theoretical framework of this research rests upon the fact that wherever there has been a society dominated by men, the sentiments of misogyny and philogyny have been fairly evocative.

Theoretical Framework

The term **misogyny** means dislike, hatred, or repugnance for women. It can be in any form i.e. prejudice, mental and physical violence, social marginalization etc. Misogyny is “a central part of sexist prejudice and ideology and, as such, is an important basis for the oppression of females in male-dominated societies. Misogyny is manifested in many different ways, from jokes to pornography to violence to the self-contempt women may be taught to feel toward their own bodies” (Johnson, 2000). This term – misogyny – was adopted by the English from a Greek word ‘misogunia’ meaning hatred for women. Long before comedy and tragedy, misogyny used to be the convention in Greek literature (Robert, 2002). **Philogyny** on the other hand means affinity and fondness for women. This word has its roots in the Greek language as ‘philo’ means loving and ‘gyne’ means woman in Greek language.

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contradicting elements in their poetry. However, this research focuses only on the noteworthy similarities on the grounds of philogyny and misogyny in John Donne and Waris Shah's poetry and does not highlight similarities on any other basis.

Seldom have these poets been compared on any grounds, in critical studies although their works have, many a time, been analysed without regard to the other author's texts and criticised with respect to representations of womanhood. With regard to Donne, an article by Sarangi (2013), states that the poet exhibits his misogynistic bent of mind and his anger for his partner whether she is a wife or a lover (p.2). In another article, it has been maintained by Halsey (2009), that John Donne has an obsession with representing women that challenges modern-day gender stereotypes in a distinctly misogynistic tone (p.4).

The Pakistani researcher Ahmed (2013) draws a similitude between the thoughts of various Eastern writers and those of John Donne. While quoting the misogynistic mind-set of Donne, Ahmed (2013) cites a verse of Waris Shah translated as:

"A woman, a beggar, a sword and a horse are loyal to none" (p.284)

In the article titled "The Feminine Stereotypes in Heer by Waris Shah" by Sadaf Mehmood, 2014, the writer has discussed the fact that women are inferior and a superfluous creature according to men. They, i.e. the women, seldom satisfy the expectations of loyalty that men have of them (Mehmood, 2014, p.79). The writer also highlights Waris Shah's feminist, i.e. philogynistic stance by saying that Shah has formed a strong and stubborn female character *Heer* and admires both her virility and beauty. Nevertheless, Mehmood (2014) concludes the article saying that women have always been subjugated in a patriarchal society and that Waris Shah's poetry is a symbol of man's intolerance toward the fair sex (p.84). This article highlights only the similitude in philogyny and misogyny in the poetry of John Donne and Waris Shah.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research paradigm

Qualitative research has been carried out comparing the two poets' works.

Content

Waris Shah's 'Heer' and John Donne's 'Elegy XIX', 'The Sun Rising', 'Song: Go and catch a falling star', and 'Woman's Constancy' shall be used as content for this study.

Method

Content Analysis (Comparative Study) is used as a method to carry out this comparative study.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

There are numerous misogynistic elements in the poetry of both John Donne and Waris Shah. Faithfulness and loyalty are two of the most significant human values, and it is derogatory, hurtful, and shameful if these values are challenged, or deemed dubious. Misogyny includes remarks of hatred and repudiation when they constitute a pattern deployed against women. What could show more hatred toward a person than calling them disloyal and unfaithful? John Donne's famous, '**Song: Go And Catch A Falling Star**' is imbued with the message that anything seemingly impossible can happen except for a woman being loyal. During the whole poem, John Donne builds up a tone of suspense and romance by suggesting that readers can perform some tasks which are so difficult that they seem impossible. But at the end of the song he opens up and says that out of all the hard to achieve things in the entire world, finding a loyal woman is the most difficult if not impossible task. He says:

*"...And swear,
No where
Lives a woman true, and fair..."* (Donne, 1631, p. 2)

Waris Shah, in his Heer, maintains similar thoughts. He too expresses negative remarks regarding the loyalty of a woman. Like Donne, it appears that Waris Shah too had a bitter experience with women that made him pass such misogynistic remarks. He says:

تساں ولی تے غوث تے قطب مارے مگراں نال سبھے پریاریو نی
وارث رن دی ذات بیوفا ہوندی پوری نال نہ کسے اتاریو نی

*"You got saints, mystics, and the pious killed by your cunning stratagem,
O Waris, the very creed of the women is unfaithful – they prove loyal to none."* (Shah, stanza. 17)

Both poets express their viewpoints in sweeping statements; both poets are judgemental and seem to have a decided opinion, regarding a woman's unfaithfulness. From the previously quoted verses we can clearly see that both Donne and Shah have astonishingly similar misogynistic views regarding women. In 'Heer' we come across many verses that show the misogynistic stance of Waris Shah –

misogynistic in the sense that they deem women inferior, unsteady, or treacherous at some level. At one point he writes:

وارث رن، فقیر، تلوار، گھوڑا، چارے تھوک ایہہ کسے دے یار نہیں

“O Waris, a woman, a mendicant, a sword, and a steed are loyal to no one” (Shah, stanza. 352)

Likewise in his ‘**Song: Go and catch a falling star**’ John Donne says that a woman cannot prove loyal.

“...If thou find'st one, let me know,
Such a pilgrimage were sweet;
Yet do not, I would not go,
Though at next door we might meet;
Though she were true, when you met her,
And last, till you write your letter,
Yet she
Will be
False, ere I come, to two, or three...” (Donne, 1631, p. 2)

Donne here is of the view that women cannot be trusted even for a short time and that it is extraordinary if one finds a loyal woman – loyal even for a temporary period. This might seem insulting and rather ludicrous to most of us but it remains a fact that Donne expresses abhorrence for women. Similarly Waris Shah says that a woman bears prowess in deception and cunningness. She is as menacing as a lizard. He says:

دفتر مکر فریب تے نچر وایاں انھاں پستیاں وچ ملفوف ہے نی

“Women have learnt all the volumes of swindling and deception.” (Shah, stanza. 361)

In drawing similarities between the viewpoints of Donne and Shah, the above mentioned verses prove our thesis, despite having no cultural and geographical affinity, both poets share astonishing similitude of thoughts regarding women. Waris Shah uses his female characters to show his misogynistic ideas.

Donne criticises the adulterous nature of a woman in his poem, “Woman's Constancy” and claims that a woman is merely a fair weather friend and she will stay

with a person briefly. In this poem he exclaims to his lover that after she has passed a night with him, rather than staying loyal to him, she plans to seek a new partner or lover:

*“Now thou hast loved me one whole day,
Tomorrow when you leav’st, what wilt thou say?
Wilt thou then antedate some new-made vow?”*(Donne, 1631, p. 3)

Waris Shah offers additional complaints about women by directly belittling women through the speech of his major character Ranjha. He is of the view that women have limited vision and intellectual competence as compared to men. It is evident that chauvinistic and misogynistic sentiments are present in the poetry of John Donne and Waris Shah. Waris Shah says:

مرد صاد ہیں چہرے نیکیاں دے صورت رن دی میم موقوف ہے نی
مرد عالم فاضل اتے اصل قابل کسے رن نوں کون وقوف ہے نی

*“Men are proven faces of virtue, but a woman is merely a superfluous creature.
Men are learned, competent, and rational, but a woman is devoid of wisdom.”* (Shah, stanza. 361)

These verses clearly show disdain for a woman not only because she lacks virtue but because she is considered intellectually inferior to a man. Chauvinistically, it also asserts a man’s superiority. Indirectly, it implies that men consider women inferior and dislike them. Waris Shah says, through his protagonist *Ranjha*, that woman is like a piece of cake before him and can never overpower or even be equal to a man. He says:

کیہاں آن پنچائیتیاں جوڑیاں نی اسیں رن نوں ریوڑی جانے ہاں
پھڑیے چتھہ کے لینے لنگھا پل وچ تنبو ویر دے نت نہ تانے ہاں

*“How could you dare to probe me? I consider a woman mere a sweet snack.
I can catch, chew and swallow her, you’re lucky I seldom get into a fight.”*(Shah, stanza. 351)

Other evidence of men's misogyny is that Waris Shah uses his female characters to give them scatological dialogue. The language that his female characters use is rude, taunting, and teeming with venomous expressions – as if their words carried fire.

Both poets' works are imbued with elements of love and affinity towards women as well as misogyny against them. Both poets cherish and praise women in a singular manner. John Donne's poem "**Elegies XIX. Whoever loves, if he do not propose**" is an example that reveals his philogynistic bent of mind. In this poem he praises nearly every part of his lover's body. Waris Shah's style of description of the female protagonist, *Heer*, carries astonishing similarity with that of Donne's. Shah too praises *Heer* as if she was the most beautiful maiden on earth. The following paragraphs draw a parallel between both men's description of a beautiful woman.

John Donne writes:

*"Her swelling lips, to which when we are come,
We anchor there, and think ourselves at home,
For they seem all ; there Sirens' songs and there
Wise Delphic oracles do fill the ear.
There, in a creek where chosen pearls do swell,
The remora, her cleaving tongue, doth dwell.
These and the glorious promontory, her chin,"* (Donne, 1631)

Waris Shah writes:

ہوٹھ سرخ یاقوت جیویں لعل چمکن تھوڈی سیب ولایتی سار وچوں
دند چنے دی لڑی کہ ہنس موتی دانے نکلے حسن انار وچوں

*"Thy lips are red as a ruby, your chin, gently cleft as an apple, singular.
Your teeth as white as a garland of Jasmine flowers, or brilliant white pearls as
well-placed as seeds in a pomegranate."*(Shah, stanza. 57)

If we analyse these verses, it is evident that both poets express philogynistic traits in an astonishingly similar manner. John Donne praises the lips of a young maiden and so does Waris Shah. Donne admires the shape of the lips and Shah praises the colour of *Heer*'s lips; both poets appreciate the chin of the woman, while comparing the teeth with pearls. This similitude in the description of a woman's beauty is both exciting and fascinating, with their philogynistic thoughts being well presented in the above mentioned verses. Both poets also praise and define the beauty of their bodies. In "Elegy XIX", Donne writes:

“O'erpast, and the straight Hellespont between
 The Sestos and Abydos of her breasts,
 Not of two lovers, but two loves, the nests,
 Succeeds a boundless sea, but yet thine eye
 Some island moles may scattered there descry ;
 And sailing towards her India, in that way
 Shall at her fair Atlantic navel stay.”(Donne, 1631)

Similarly Shah writes:

چھاتی ٹھاٹھ دی ابھری پٹ کھیوں سب بلخدے چنے انبار وچوں
 دھنی بہشت دے حوض دا مشک کلبہ پیڈو مخلی خاص سرکار وچو

“Her breasts drop with elegant swell, as if the apples of Balakh city, carefully chosen from a mass.

Her navel, as graceful and fragrant as a pool in Heaven, as soft as velvet” (Shah, stanza. 57)

Both John Donne, and Waris Shah have described the body of a beautiful woman, using similar words and phrases as well as style, showing that their love for the fair sex, or philogyny is evident in their physical description of the woman’s face and body.

CONCLUSION

A detailed analysis of the selected works of the two poets shows that there does exist a remarkable similarity in the way John Donne, and Waris Shah perceive womanhood. Their philogynistic, and misogynistic stances are comparable. As recommendation for future research, it is suggested that the works of both poets John Donne and Waris Shah be compared on other grounds like **philandry**, and **misandry**. Hence it can rightly be concluded that there do exist remarkable similarities that both poets share regarding their stance toward womanhood. This article is intended to highlight philogynistic and misogynistic elements found in their poetry. From the above cited examples from their poetry it does become evident that both of them carried similar misogynistic and philogynistic viewpoints.

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