



MALE DOMINANCE AND FEMALE PASSIVITY: A GENDER STUDY OF ROBERT BROWNING'S "MY LAST DUCHESS"

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ABSTRACT :

Dominance of patriarchy and subjugation of woman are a continuous process through out the human civilization. Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess" is a wonderful poem and a representation of the societal norms which patriarchy makes. The whole poem represents the harsh reality of the society. The poet depicts the pathetic condition of female in the male dominant society.

KEYWORDS : *Dominance, patriarchy, authority subjugation, suppressed.*

INTRODUCTION:

The whole poem is the representation of the male dominants through the Duke. The speaker (The Duke) didn't want to allow his wife's joyful moments to be expressed in front of others. He did not like it at all. The speaker says–

*"Sir, 't was not
Her husband's presence only ..."*

The dominance of patriarchy was explicitly shown when the duke questioned over the Duchess' frankness and her friendly attitude with others. The duke even did not like that the duchess could show courage to smile in front of other person. He disgusted the duchess' attitude to be impressed. The speaker (the duke) says–

*"She had
A heart...how shall I say? ...too soon made glad, Too easily impressed;"*

Patriarchal civilization condemned woman to chastity; the right of man to relieve his sexual desire is more or less openly recognized, where as woman is confined within marriage: for her the act of the flesh, if not sanctified by the code, by a sacrament, is a fault, a fall, a defeat, a weakness; she is obliged to defend her virtue her honor; if she "gives in" or if she "falls", she arouses, disdain, where as even the blame inflicted on her vanquisher brings him admiration."

Robert Browning - My Last Duchess



Duke also tried to control and bound the Duchess' likings. The duke says-

*"She liked what e'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere,"*

The Duke did not love her whole heartedly and all time. We can say this because the duke says –

*"My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West"*

The duke had suffered in superiority complex. As a result of it, he did not allow his Duchess to meet with ordinary people and even did not want his wife could take any kind of gift from others. The dominating duke did not like his wife's speaking with smiley face with other people. The duke did not want his Duchess should thank other. It seemed to him that she thanked other people in the same way she thanked her husband. But the duke did not agree to be compared his nine hundred years old name with the gift of other people who were subjects of him. He wanted special attention from his wife. The duke says-

*"She thanked men-good! but thanked,
Somehow-I know not how-as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years old name
With anybody's gift."*

The patriarchal representation of the society is depicted here very clearly through the duke. The duke did not like duchess' smile in front of the other person. It is really ridiculous to me when the duke talked about different kind of smile for him and others. The duke says-

*"Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without,
Much the same smile?"*

The duke even did not bother to tell his wife that he did not like such kind of behaviour of her which were not may be preferable but correctionable. Without informing her guiltsto her, he started to suspect her. the arrogant duke said that it was beneath his dignity to correct her. He says-

*"Who'd stoop to blame
This short of trifling? Even had you skill*

In discourse – (which I have not)- to influence your will To very obvious to such a one, and state 'Just this Or that in you appalls me."

The duke showed his patriarchal authority while he said that he did not care to stoop, may be his stoop code correct the duchess and made their relationship a fruitful one. The duke says-

"E'en then would be some stooping, and I choose Never to stoop."

When it seemed to the duke, the duchess crossed her limit though it was the arrogance of the patriarchal mindset of the duke gave command to murder his won wife. The duke says-

*"This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together"*

The curse of dowry system was also shown in this poem when the duke said about the money of count's master with his daughter, the duke is going to marry at this time. The duke wanted to get the money from the count's master very cleverly. The duke says-

*"I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence*

*Is ample warrant that not just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed."*

It was really patriarchal representation of the duke when the duchess' portrait was only an art, nothing else to him. He compared the duchess' portrait with a bronze statue of Neptune's taming seahorse.

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