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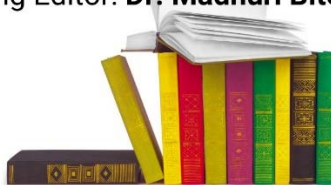
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Exploring the Universality of Patriarchy in Selected Characters of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*

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Abstract:

This research paper explores the expedition of patriarchy through time by studying minor characters such as Marcela and Grisóstomo in *Don Quixote* (1605) by Miguel de Cervantes. Grisóstomo was a shepherd who committed suicide upon Marcela's rejection of his love. Marcela being antagonised at Grisóstomo's funeral shows the unity of patriarchal thoughts. This paper compares contemporary socio-political issues regarding male rights activism with events set in 16th-century Spain through fiction, establishing the universality of patriarchy and the resistance that occurs while patriarchy is being broken. Don Quixote's reaction to the events will be analysed as he is a unique character, considered odd by the rest of the characters in the story. This paper gives a perspective on the reactionary nature fostered by men against feminism and tries to provide a solution for the gender separatist sentiments that lead to the denial of women's rights.

Keywords: Patriarchy, male ego, feminism, resistance.

Introduction:

Miguel de Cervantes was born on 1547 at Alcalá de Henares, Spain. He had served in the Spanish military and had even lost the use of his left hand due to a severe injury during the war. He had written a few dramas and novels before *Don Quixote*. However, none had garnered much attention until he wrote *Don Quixote* in 1605. He would publish the second part 10 years later. *Don Quixote* remains his magnum opus. *Don Quixote* would make him financially stable but he would pass away in 1616 – 11 years after the publication of *Don Quixote*. As it is a social satire, it is important to know the cultural context in which the novel exists. Cervantes uses satire to critique the absurdities of the time. Spain had been under Islamic rule for nearly 100 years and 'The Reconquista' was a Christian quest to regain power. The novel is set after the events of Reconquista. Another important historical fact is the infamous Spanish Inquisition established under King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabela I of Castile. Understanding these historical events helps the reader to sense the political tension of the time which would have affected the common people. The Eponymous Don Quixote is an old man who reads a lot of Chivalric novels and starts thinking of himself as a knight errant. He embarks on a journey with his squire Sancho Panza to rid the world of injustices. The discourse between idealism and realism is an important theme in the novel. On his journey, Don Quixote finds shelter among a few goatherds. Don Quixote gets familiarised with Marcela - the shepherdess through a quarrel among the goatherds about a shepherd named Grisóstomo who had fallen in love with the beautiful Marcella and had committed suicide due to her indifference and rejection of his love. Marcella was born into a wealthy and respected family. The death of both her parents had left her with an enormous amount of wealth. However, in 16th-century Spain, women had no rights to property. All the wealth was being held by her uncle – a priest until she was married. After marriage, the wealth would be passed

on to her husband. Her beauty had become the talk of the town. Everyone was intrigued by the tale of a beautiful girl named Marcella who had chosen to be a shepherdess despite all her wealth. Men aspired to attain her. There was a lot to gain from courting Marcella. The fact that her courtship came with automatic wealth had made her a materialistic object of desire for men. Her beauty is commodified, as courting a lady with many suitors becomes a matter of pride.

Grisóstomo had wanted his dead body to be buried at the same place where he first laid eyes on Marcella. The suicide had put Marcella's reputation under question. Grisóstomo's last poem about the dejection he felt pursuing Marcela ends up being read aloud during his funeral despite his wish to have his poems burnt during his funeral. His friends argued among themselves on whether the poems should be read out loud or not. In the end, the poem ended up being read out loud. However, the poem does sound an awful lot like he wanted it to be read out loud. The poem starts -

“Since you, most cruel, wish all tongue to proclaim,

all men to know the harsh power of your will,

I will have hell itself teach a mournful song

to my grieving breast; then add to that discord

with the stridency of this my tuneless voice.

And, companion to my desire as it strives

to tell of my sorrow and your heartless deeds,

that fearful voice will resound; worse torment,

it will carry pieces of my wretched heart. [...]

My heartless agony will be carried by
A dead man's tongue, in words that will survive him,
To craggy heights or, bottomless ravines,..." (94-95).

These lines show resentment and an intention to have it read aloud. This shows that Grisóstomo was disingenuous in his wish for the poems not to be read aloud. It could even be speculated that he wanted a Mark Antonyesque situation to arise where Caesar's will being read aloud will cause unruliness in the crowd, making them realise the evil that was Brutus or in this case, Marcela. The resentment seems to have been built up due to the jealousy that he felt. His jealousy is apparent in these lines-

"Disdain can kill, suspicions true or false
Can bring down patience; and jealousy slays;
With grim ferocity; long absence can
Cofound a life; feared oblivion defeats
Surest hope for a life of happiness.
In all this, certain death cannot be fled;
but I-O, wonderous miracle!—I live on
jelous, absent, disdaint, and certain of
suspicions that feel me, forgotten by one
for whom I burn with ever hotter flame,

and in so much torment I can never see
even the shadow of hope that, in despair,
I do not attempt to find; rather to carry
my woe to the furthest extreme, I vow
eternally to live bereft of hope.” (95-96).

Jealousy can be considered a humane emotion that exists in men and women, but it is only justifiable when rooted in mutual love. The male ego is at the root of this emotion. The male ego is a term related to a man’s sense of self-importance or self-esteem. Such problems occur when a man’s self-esteem is dictated by a patriarchal society. Grisóstomo feels humiliated by Marcela’s rejection and can’t even bear the thought of her being courted by someone else. This thought births an inferiority complex within him as the male ego remains unsatisfied. The gen z term for such a person would be ‘incel’. Google states that an incel is a member of the online community that consists of young men who consider themselves incapable of attracting women - typically associated with views that are hostile towards men and women who are romantically active. Grisóstomo would be a 16th-century incel. His poems are a substitute for the online spaces provided in this day and age.

After the poem had been read aloud during the funeral, Marcela shows up to ‘answer for her crimes’. She comments on the perceived notions about her beauty by saying

“I know with natural understanding that God has given me, that everything beautiful is loveable, but I cannot grasp why, simply because it is loved, the thing loved for its beauty is obliged to love the one who loves it. Further, the lover of the

beautiful thing might be ugly, and since ugliness is worthy of being avoided, it is absurd for anyone to say: 'I love you because you are beautiful; you must love me even though I am ugly.' (99).

She questions the idea of conventional beauty standards and its relation to love. For Marcela, Love remains distant from commodified beauty. Beauty is admired, not loved. Besides, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. It is subjective. For Marcela, love contradicts materialistic desires. Materialistic desires are short-lived and trivial. She reminds everyone that she is a human being rather than an object to be possessed. Later on in her speech, she points out how the intentions of men contradict the biblical dogma regarding the chastity of a woman. She says

"Honor and virtue are adornments of the soul, without which the body is not truly beautiful, even if it seems to be so. And if chastity is one of the virtues that most adorn and beautify both body and soul, why should a woman loved for being beautiful, lose that virtue in order to satisfy the desire of a man who, for the sake of his pleasure, attempts with all his might and main to have her lose it?" (99).

This statement becomes particularly relevant in the context of the Spanish Inquisition that was going on at the time. Citizens of Spain who failed to follow religious beliefs and indulged in "scandalous" activities were persecuted. Why were male desires that went against religious beliefs not put under interrogation? Religion acts as a tool to oppress women and cement patriarchy. Marcela points out a contradiction in bending the rules to suit patriarchal ways. In response to Grisóstomo's letter, Marcela says

" If desires feed on hopes, and since I have given no hope to Grisóstomo or any other man regarding those desires, it is correct to say that his obstinacy, not my

cruelty, is what killed him. [...] As you know, I have wealth of my own and do not desire anyone else's; I am free and do not care to submit to another; I do not love or despise anyone. I do not deceive this one or solicit that one; I do not mock one or amuse myself with another" (99-100).

Marcela defends herself and clears herself of all the acquisitions.

Certain literary texts travel through time. *Don Quixote* is a text that remains relevant today. Not just the ideological discourse between idealism and realism or the satirical portrayal of the socio-political conditions of 16th-century Spain, minor characters such as Marcela and Grisóstomo leave a lasting impact on the reader. Despite the comedic undertone, Cervantes doesn't fail to capture the gravitas of matters. Marcela is a minor character who holds a lot of weight and appears in the vast fictional world of Don Quixote. It is obvious that we still live in a predominantly patriarchal society that caters to the needs of men. In the 21st century, the rise of technology and globalisation conjoined with progressive movements such as the Me Too movement had seen the world move towards a much more women-friendly atmosphere. However, In a world where women are starting to find their place, some men feel out of place. The contemporary socio-political atmosphere has seen the birth and uprising of male rights activism. Male rights activism resits feminism and its effects on the world. Men who subscribe to these views suffer from an identity crisis in this rapidly changing world. In an age where a lot of women aren't shy to express themselves and question inequalities, a lot of men feel dejected due to the cultural compromise of power. Whenever there is a revolution, there will be resistance to change. The formerly well-oiled machine that is patriarchy is being torn apart quite rapidly and it is natural for the breakage of a system to see resistance. This resistance is easy to spot in cultural and political contexts. The popularity and following that Andrew Tate gained in social media is a testament to this sentiment.

Andrew Tate is a British-American kickboxer/social media influencer who gained popularity during COVID-19. Tate's content revolved around encouraging men to work out, flaunting his wealth, and making misogynistic statements. His popularity had increased to an extent where his viewers were pouring their money into a subscription-based model called Hustler's University which initially turned out to be a pyramid scheme masked as an educational platform. With the unlimited exposition that Andrew Tate gets through social media, it is fair to say that Andrew Tate influenced a lot of young men in regressive ways. The fact that Andrew Tate persisted and stayed relevant despite numerous accusations of rape and sex trafficking for which he was even arrested shows the degree of things people tend to overlook if someone is pushing forward a misogynistic agenda. Another example of this sentiment is the gender wars in South Korea. The young men in South Korea continuously advocate for reactionary political policies against women even though South Korea already has the widest gender pay gap in the world. There are recorded cases of South Korean women facing oppression from the public and the government for expressing feminist ideologies. The tale of Marcella is a case of patriarchal resistance against women's rights. Comparison of a fictional event written in 16th-century Spain with the contemporary world and a comparison between a feudal society and a capitalist one might seem far-fetched, but the fact that fiction is largely influenced by facts and a deep understanding of the society makes it apparent that class segregation existed in different forms throughout the history of humankind makes this comparison legitimate. The fact that Marcela was born to a well-respected upper-class family gives her much more liberty and freedom of choice than most women in Spain during the time. This acts as an equaliser of time making the juxtaposition of Marcela with the contemporary woman with financial stability easier. Looking at both situations, it is apparent that when there is a balance

being struck in the gender roles and liberties, patriarchy tends to resist. This resistance is on display in the tale of Marcela and Grisóstomo.

Don Quixote in the story is viewed and portrayed as a fool. The narrator and most of the other characters in the novel see Don Quixote as a crazy old man who has lost it. Superficially, It does seem that way but as the reader goes on the absurd journey with Don Quixote, they realise that he is not a mad man in a virtuous world, instead, he is a virtuous man in a mad world. The madness blinds the virtue. We see often in the novel that Don Quixote fights for what is right. He sees the good in people when it isn't necessarily there. When Marcela is done with her speech at the funeral, she requests the men there not to follow her into the forest. After she leaves for the forest, Don Quixote in a typical Quixotic fashion, heroically stands up for Marcela and says

“Let no person, whatever his circumstances or condition, dare to follow the beautiful Marcela lest he fall victim to my fury and outrage.” (101).

Even a man who is continuously being mocked for being mentally unstable can see reason in this circumstance. Don Quixote's innocent perception of this world and this situation differentiates him from the unruly mob as he yet again stands up for what is right.

Conclusion:

This resistance by patriarchy can be looked at through a holistic lens. Resisting changes that seem alien and new is a natural human tendency and is not necessarily immoral since changes can be of virtue or vice. Hence, it is important to analyze the change that is happening. An empathetic frame of mind can see that the changes brought forth by feminism are for a liberated space for women to reside in. Gender equality may seem radical through a conservative lens but a shared space of equality is beneficial for both men and women as it frees men from extreme

patriarchal expectations. Sharing an equal space means sharing responsibilities, emotional burdens, respect, and love. Love attained through systematic oppression isn't real love, it is merely submission. Grisóstomo's love was made of patriarchal notions of attainment and ownership. There are a lot of Grisóstomos that exist in today's world too. They need to understand that loving and attaining are two different things. In an ideal world (the quest of Don Quixote), love is respect and acceptance of the other's choices. Love is not just personal, it is a universal phenomenon. Love is the only way to break patriarchy from within.

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