

Marginalization and the Manifestation of Gender-Biased Androcentric Male Gaze: The Problem of Opposing Female Oppression through the Narrative Structure in K.S. Maniam's "The Loved Flaw"

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Abstract:

This study tries to discover the male gaze in K.S. Maniam's "The Loved Flaw" (2001). It attempts to demonstrate how Maniam depicts the male gaze as a suppressive reaction towards marginalizing women. The study, therefore, examines this marginalization as a means for exploiting women for male desires regardless their position in society. As such, it unravels the male gaze, which is blatantly depicted in the plot, as an intimidating social phenomena which belittles women's rights and effective roles in their society. For this reason, the study looks into oppressive male gaze through the lens of feminism that approaches the position of women in negative social conditions; whereby they are mistreated and oppressed. It depends on the gender peculiarities of the male gaze to delve deep into the authentic impetus threatening the human and social value of women. Being so, it reveals Maniam's concern with empowering women's rights and stability as human beings capable of making their decisions. Thus, the female gaze will be explored as the lurking motivation of women's suppression portrayed in the plot.

KeyWords: Body, Family, Feminism, Male Gaze, Maniam

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التهميش وتجليات النظرة الذكورية المنحازة: إشكالية مقاومة اضطهاد المرأة من خلال البنية السردية في قصة ك. س. مانيام "العيب المحبوب"

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الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن النظرة الذكورية في قصة ك. س. مانيام "العيب المحبوب" (2001)، وتسعى إلى توضيح الكيفية التي يعرض بها مانيام هذه النظرة بوصفها آلية قمعية تُسهم في تهميش المرأة. وتبحث الدراسة في هذا التهميش بوصفه أداة لاستغلال النساء بما يخدم الرغبات الذكورية، من دون اعتبار لمكانتهن أو دورهن الاجتماعي. وتبرز الدراسة حضور النظرة الذكورية المتجسد بوضوح في بناء الحبكة، باعتبارها ظاهرة اجتماعية ذات طابع قهري تُضعف حقوق المرأة وتنتقص من أدوارها الفاعلة. ومن هذا المنطلق، تتناول الدراسة هذه النظرة من منظور النسوية بوصفها إطاراً نقدياً يُعالج وضع المرأة في سياقات اجتماعية سلبية تُمارس فيها عليها شتى أشكال الإساءة والاضطهاد. وترتكز الدراسة على الخصائص الجندرية للنظرة الذكورية للنفاذ إلى الدوافع الجوهرية التي تهدد القيمة الإنسانية والاجتماعية للمرأة. ومن خلال ذلك، تكشف عن اهتمام مانيام بتعزيز حقوق المرأة وترسيخ استقرارها بوصفها كياناً إنسانياً يمتلك القدرة على اتخاذ قراراته واستعادة agency الخاصة به. وبذلك، يتم استقصاء النظرة النسوية في النص بوصفها القوة المضادة الكامنة خلف تمثيل قمع المرأة في الحبكة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الجسد، الأسرة، النسوية، النظرة الذكورية، مانيام.

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1. Introduction

Feminism is a critical approach that generally deals with the problems of women and the possibility of mitigating these problems to provide good life for women. It seeks to shed light on the intricate social or cultural impasses that deprive women of their essential living conditions to avoid "violence and misogyny" (Kornfield 5). Furthermore, it tackles gender equality and how it influences the lives of women. Feminist critics attempt to find gender equilibrium among men and women because the traditional sense of the relationship between these genders is governed by the superiority of men over women. Therefore, their relation gets complicated and they could not cope with each other. As a result gender discrepancies and inequality emerges out (Goodman 73). In this respect, bridging the gender gaps between men and women is an ultimate objective of feminism. This is due to the fact that gender gaps create difficult obstacles to improve the social conditions of women.

Family is another integral issue raised by feminist critiques. Family represents the basic connection between men and women; and it should be enhanced and empowered in order to create social and human stability for reducing gender imbalance and male "supremacy" (Falcon 53). The role of family, in this regard, relates to the core conceptual perception of women as the nucleus of its needs. That is, women play the conventional role of taking care of children and other domestic duties (Storkey 1). Here, the role of women in the family is very influential; and it must be sustained to insure safe and good future for the whole family. This is because women participate in elevating the value of the family members. Consequently, feminism accentuates family in the context of women studies because of the fact that rarely any family could exist without women. Furthermore, feminism draws attention to the issue of marriage.

Marriage, which is the basic legal relationship between men and women, is tackled by explicating the danger of patriarchy upon its stability and progression (Jardim 118). To clarify, patriarchy threatens the possible continuation of marriage as it looks upon women as being inferior and subordinate to men (Turner 65). Moreover, women suffer from male gaze as a result of patriarchy. In fact, male gaze relates to the perception of women for their physical appearance i.e., women are oppressed and exploited by men for pleasure since women have attractive physical appearance. Accordingly, this study will focus on the portrayal of male gaze in Male K.S. Maniam's "The Loved Flaw" (2001). The following section will mainly review two studies before I embark an in-depth analysis of the story.

2. Research Methodology

This study applies a qualitative analysis of Maniam's "The Loved Flaw" (2001). It follows a close reading and textual analysis of the female characters

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and their sufferings at the hands of male-mainstream exerting male gaze. Therefore, the analysis will be primarily on the selected story's female characters and their social conditions engulfed by patriarchal supremacy mitigating their roles as being equal to men. Consequently, the discussion depends on the concept of male gaze to reveal Maniam's obsession with women's plights and the possibility of reducing them. The methodology is going to be feminist based on the gender inequalities and discriminations created by patriarchal hegemony. Thus, the character and the story's narrative point of view describing women's sufferings will be elaborated as the integral methodological interpretations of male gaze.

3. Analysis and Discussion

Maniam's "The Loved Flaw" (2001) is studied from different scholarly fields. Manimangai Mani examines the ethnicities of the story. This ethnicities are "harder indeed," and they "have broken their nationality of Indian origins" (1). By the same token, Peter Wicks approaches the Malaysian geographical landscapes in "Malaysian Landscapes in K. S. Maniam" (2001). Wicks contends that Maniam's hinges on critical interrogations about the women identity in their patriarchal societies (18). Hence, there is a concomitant relationship between women and the geographical territories in the bulk of the story's narrative; whereby the concepts of male gaze encompasses events depicting "transphobic violence and discrimination" (Brajato 2).

Male gaze, consequently, is a feminist concept is revealing "the highest feminist narrative authenticity, this connection remains undividable. The famed feminist narratives within any text construe the ostentatious form of the fictional plot. This is evident in the gender relations depicted in the story. Christine Delphy and Diana tackles the author's view of the feminist issues perceived in the contexts of the plot: "if females are, as it must be, human time-consciousness, male gaze, as its contrary, appears to take on the role of something more objective or cosmological here: something that exists on the outside of society, of discourse and of the mind" (96). In "The Loved Flaw," such gaze overwhelms the story's narrator at the onset of fictional events "my first thought is to expose her" (172). This statement embodies the narrator's predilection to encounter a female for a short span of time. Being so, the exposition of women in this way is an incarnation of male gaze which objectifies women a subjects of desires.

Moreover, the concept of male gaze refers to the "chronological temporality" which indicates the momentous encounter that the author projects his/her in the narrative text. This chronological narrative priority, here, incarnates the plot's sequence "once seen as aberrant, the appetite to encounter a female and the random are now understood as prevalent, and physical behaviors once disregarded and dismissed are now considered legitimate areas of inquiry"

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(Delphy and Leonard 98). For instance, "The Loved Flaw" comparatively exemplifies the fictional plot, then, it eventually includes the notion of male gaze conveyed through the narrator's perspective. This is the essence of feminist-oriented narratives, i.e. the concept of male gaze that originates in a male disposition to see a female; and the fictional narrator who recalls the wife paradigm as she came by night "that was the feeling she gave when she came to me in the nights" (172). Here, the narrator embodies the author's interest in seeking realistic description of male gaze that has profound impact upon women's individuality and their subjectivity as being equal to men. As such, as a technical element, the narrative point of view is harnessed to provide the reader with authentic impression of female characters that suffer from male gaze.

The concept of male gaze is revealed in feminist-dominated fictional discourse (Al-Fartoosi 4468). Chris Rojek claims that authorial conceptualization of male gaze reinforces the story's feminist insights because "the genre [feminism] establish an identity and validity within a culture apparently hostile to its printed, linear narrative and conventional assumptions about 'plot,' 'character,' 'authority' and 'representation'" (10). In "The Loved Flaw," Authorial "feminist" implications of male gaze falls into the use of narrative technical devices sustained by the narrator's emotions "when she [wife] put her hands on my body" (173). In these words, there are conspicuous indications about female body and its relationship with male gaze.

Feminist male gaze and fictional texts intersect with each other (Abu Jweid 530). However, this study pinpoints the identity of female characters in the selected story. The notion of the narrator's emotions and Maniam's fictional narrative intersections are of utmost significance to the primary narrative gender ties. Therefore, realistic events are presented as fictional in story's plot to "present not only that the 'writer' is a concept argued through previous and critical literary and social contexts but that what is normally taken to be 'fact' is also structured and contemplated in a similar male gaze. 'Fact' is to this extent 'literary' and can be grasped through a proper 'reading' mechanism" (Rojek 16). This is truth to the narrator's utterance "I'm decisive" (177); as an indication to his dominance over his wife.

The narrative point of view, furthermore, is a reference to the position of women in patriarchal communities (Al-Fartoosi 35). Yet, authorial view of feminist issues correlates to "the male respond to the problem of how to provide impermanence and a meaning of feminist entity, in the permanent and ordered terms of feminism, has had a much more significant influence on the development of the novel as genre" (Rojek 12). This refers to Maniam's capacity to portray male gaze in the story as the fictional narrator becomes more interested in having a wife. The narrator longs for having a family that include body's

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"well-being" (177). Here, the concept of male gaze is appropriated within the scope of family and its pertinent family relations.

The concept of male gaze encompasses essential ideas regarding men's social position which "takes as its starting-point the classical male representation and female position in literary works" (Hoing 3). The narrator's acute perception of women comes from the authorial textual interpolation within the literary formal knot out of which the fictional story is presented. In the following quote, the narrator's tendency to perceive his wife's body's "regions": "was it my wife's trust that compelled this voyeuring into unexpected regions" (172). Moreover, Bonnie Hoing maintains that feminist fictional discourse represents "the connectivity of the elements of a text is essentially a matter of meaning and reference; but we are interested, here, in the formal means by which these connections between males and females are signaled" (244). Here, the fictional attributes of feminist discourse incarnates the way by which women are treated by their patriarchal societies having a "singular gaze" which has "a major influence on each woman's creative expression" and "her female subjectivity" (Charlery and Maury 9). In this sense, the obvious token of male-oriented gaze events of "The Loved Flaw" starts with the author's deliberate intervention in the textual events. In this regard, Rojek says that feminist critiques have inherent interrelations "because story and plot are the means whereby experience is understood as a relation, as a comprehensible or coherent sequence or chain or relations, they make the experience of female characters" (Rojek 6).

This is true to "The Loved flaw" when Maniam contemplates the viable ways of writing feminist literary fiction about male gaze, and this is obvious in the narrator who "looked at Viji" (181). Equivalently, Saba Mahmood claims that "male gaze reveals, and thereby facilitates a discussion of, the nature of the feminist text concerning both male and female characters" (9). This is because "the idea of 'male' is misleading and it implies that the narrative world and its inhabitants have a feminist reality beyond the narration itself" (Rojek 40). Consequently, Maniam directly addresses this matter in the story. The narrator describes this facts that as he says: "I was deeply committed to her" (177).

Hoing tackles the "obvious" and "hidden" male-oriented discourses in order "to draw a clear-cut boundary between hidden and obvious open male gaze in any concrete instance sometimes proves quite difficult. But the semantic distinctions here are very fundamental. Overt male gaze is quite simply directed at another's discourse, which it refutes, as if at its own referential object" (196). By the same way, Hoing approaches male-dominated discourse with regard to the emancipation of fictional discourse. Furthermore, he claims that such discourse results in crucial influence on exploring the literary text's implicit meaning. Yet, Hoing accentuates the accumulation of male-dominated discourse

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projected in the literary fabric; "this process of preparing for the disclosure of male mainstream position in the text took place more rapidly, completely, and profoundly in feminist creativity than in the abstract philosophical and strictly feminine, ideological views of enlightenment thinkers" (26). This is true to the narrator's fictional discourse depicted in "The Loved Flaw"; when he has a look at the face of his wife: "her face was swollen" (177) since her body is considered very significant to him because male gaze begins at the "moment constituted by the feminist validity of a thought judgment, that is, an evaluation of the validity of the judgment constitutes a necessary moment in the composition of the performed act, although it does not yet exhaust the female character" (Bakhtin: 1993, 3). "The Loved Flaw" perceives this feminist reality when the narrator says: "I'd committed myself to Viji through passion and surrender" (180). The narrative point of view, in this regard, carries out the narrative perspective on female characters that play a crucial role in representing the object of male gaze.

The concept of male gaze is also associated with "women individuality" (Abu Jweid 7). In this regard, Stephen Bygrave contends that "the beginning of any inquiry into rhetoric rather than its end. To insist on the self-enclosed male gaze rhetoricity as a means of evading the negative questions of the ends it may serve" (2). Male gaze inherently exemplifies the "activity of persuasion. It is also the study of that activity, and we shall need to return to that double sense, but it should be noted here that rhetoric is necessarily transitive. Even where a rhetoric is a static repertory of tropes, these are tropes which aim to persuade someone to do something: persuasion itself might be defined as 'male gaze priority'" (4). In "The Loved Flaw," the male gaze appears when the narrator loves to look at his wife and Viji at the same time.

This interpolation is forged in terms of feminist "reference." Hoing argues that feminist narration is "experiencing or conceiving one's life as a narrative is a good thing; a richly narrative outlook is essential to a well-lived life, to true or full personhood of female body" (428). Hoing idea is a postulation of feminist reference of male position in literary works. Accordingly, female reference is the implication of mimetic feminist devices since "mimetic art involves the creation of a feminist illusion which only simulates a male reality" (Rojek 40). More precisely, feminist fiction provides literary references where "some fictional references are directed towards the depiction of women in feminist literature" (117). Casting a feminist plot, thus, brings off a male narrator. In the concept of male gaze, the narrator appears from inside the literary work. It has a considerable affinity to the author's parody of real life stories. In "The Loved flaw," for example, there is a connection between the characterization of the narrator and the author, Maniam. The narrator embodies the author's social

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perspective over the suppression of females in societies; the narrator informs us indirectly of this fact: "I know she can't go beyond the limits I set for her" (180).

Rojek ascribes the male narrator to "thoughts or perceptions" (192). In like manner, these thoughts or perceptions are the determining aspect of the narrative events as "internal factors which include not only the narrative female position within the feminist texts, but also attitude as well as cultural, moral, and ideological orientation" (Hoing 71). In addition, Joan Nordquist maintains that the "internal characterization is explained by a hypothetical spectator or a point of view in the radical, pictorial sense of the male characters, the places, and the events. This typology is in harmony with the male gaze with respect to its authorial narrative stance" (25). In "The Loved Flaw," the author, Maniam, portrays this gaze when the narrator says: "her touch had a different feel" (170).

The male narrator connects the real world to the author who composes a story about feminist reality. Fictional actions, therefore, are the proper strategy used by the author to depict the world according to his ideological insights. Then, the story is considered as a concrete demonstration of fictional actions which refer to the fact that male-mainstream and male gaze inherently "cannot co-exist" (Getty and Vice 6). At the center comes the male narrator who attends to all these narrative components. The central role of the male narrator is to condense the authorial ideological perception within the text about the exploitation of female bodies for passion (Hoin 57). Maniam, in "The Loved flaw," uses the narrator as an agent for exposing the negative picture of male gaze. This is true to the fictional women employed to create an effective picture of females' ordeals to a great extent.

The limited access of the male narrator is restricted to the relationship between reality and fiction. The author stands in reality, while he infiltrates such reality in feminist fiction for "the distinction between 'real and imagined experience would be useless if all experience was equally past" (Rojek 43). The perfection of the male narrator "occurs of representation, or rather of the simulation of imaginary actions and events; unless language serves to invent stories, or at least to transmit stories that have already been invented about females" (Rojek 7). In this way, male gaze entails the masculine desire to have control even over the presence of females in the same social circumferences.

In "The Loved Flaw," the story of the narrator exemplifies the male dominant presence in society. Therefore, the satiric simulation relates pertinently to the male narrator. Nordquist asserts that satiric simulation of females' inferior position "usually has a male narrator who can take responsibility for the narratives he or she constructs. While describing oneself as a male 'narrator' admits that one's conclusions are interested, by confessing this bias a writer can indirectly increase the ethical force of his or her claims" (192). This simulation

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announces the authorial narrative perspective for "internal representation which is fully realized only in the narrative of 'interior depiction' of male and female relationship" (193).

Satiric representation, by means of feminist discourse, appears in the narrator's story. He is an incarnation of Maniam, and he conveys the essence of the subject of male gaze. This subject lies in the writing "limitation" which the narrator suffers from the lack of seeing women other than his wife, like Viji. The narrator, in this sense, carries out Maniam's perspective over females' restricted social liberty. In feminist critiques, this is deemed as "one of the feminist techniques of male gaze by which male reveal their awareness of the context-dependent nature of their dominance over women, of the importance to signification of the circumstances surrounding any female life" (Hutcheon, 2000: 85).

Hence, Nordquist links the utilization of literary satiric tones with feminist fictional discourse. In feminist fictional discourse, "the male gaze does, with the most tedious precision, register all the minutest movements of the male hero, not sparing endless repetitions. The narrator is literally fettered to his hero; he cannot back off from him sufficiently to give a summarizing and integrated image of his deeds and actions" (Rojek 78). The male gaze, in this sense, is the complete embodiment of feminist fictional discourse. By the same token, Maniam reflects the role of men's fictional discourse "to rediscover validly the artifices of male superiority... if one goes about it the right way, aware of what male superiority has been up to" (1984: 68). Therefore, Maniam uses a male narrative point of view to inspect the existence of every woman's body surrounding him.

Consequently, the concept of male gaze is "an inauthentic way of relating to the female position, just as there is both an authentic and an inauthentic way of relating to male and female interactions" (Nordquist 39). In this regard, Nordquist claims that "male discourse dominates, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse toward the female object; if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the male gaze, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given male status" (292). The narrator, in "The Loved Flaw," exemplifies the experience of male gaze: "I could have had more beautiful women" (173).

The most feasible indication of male-oriented gaze of such narrative perspective is "the male consistent watching of female characters in feminists texts" (Nordquist 14). In "The Loved Flaw," the narrator, for example, describes his emotional feelings as Viji approaches his chest: "her figures on my chest broke that Gordian knot of discipline in me and set loose that wavering need to be free" (173). That is the core of male-oriented gaze as the narrator views Viji in an emotional way. In this respect, the concept of male gaze corresponds to the

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notion of women's body as the receptive medium of that gaze. The narrative description of women's body unravels Maniam's absorption of women's plights; and she pedantically transforms it through the female characters conveyed to the receptive readers by dint of narrative point of view.

Moreover, the male-oriented narrative perspective hinges on "the insight that the agent that sees must be given a status other than that of the agent that narrates the male gaze" (Hoing 101). The concept of male gaze needs a degree of equilibrium between male fictional narrative angles because it implies the gendered-based "practice of being seen by others" (Rodríguez-ón 112). The initiator of male-oriented voice "is here not just narrating the general sensibility of the community but also depicting its shared field of male vision and thus providing an unusual and fascinating collective perception of females" (104). Maniam, by the same way, portrays the shortcomings of male-oriented communities. However, she utilizes the passive place of male fictional characters in the plot to describe her authorial implied visions in the fictional text. She employs a male-oriented narrator to exemplify the male-oriented gaze and perception of females' bodily aspects; the narrator expresses this as follows: "on the other hand, a relationship, even a physical one, lasting that long must have some hidden support to it" (177). Being so, Maniam deals with male gaze through the men's view of women on the same social demarcations.

4. Conclusion

This study focused on the conceptual insights of male gaze portrayed in Maniam's "The Loved Flaw" (2001). The discussion has accentuated the view of women characters by male-oriented narrative perspectives. Maniam utilizes her men characters to inform us of the negative influence of male gaze concerning women characters. The core of this masculine-oriented gaze is the women's body and its pertinent gender attributes. Being so, the male-oriented gaze is employed to unravel the negative peculiarities of men who perceive females as inferior to their own social position. Consequently, the study has identified the feminist insights of Maniam's "The Loved Flaw" (2001). Feminist critical disciplines, consequently, attempt to find a suitable indicting voice for women to improve their status in the surrounding milieus.

The issue of male gaze, therefore, exemplifies an essential feminist problem exposed in the story. It reveals the intricate conditions undergone by women in their male-dominate social circumferences. This gaze is traced throughout the historical phases of treatment of women in an inferior way. It sheds light on the problems of women in order to offer remedial solutions to their social or cultural plights. As such, the study has empathized such male gaze to mitigate its negative effects upon women. For example, women are often associated with the lower position of social consideration of gender. This is because women are

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treated as secondary to men in term of responsibilities and duties in the traditional patriarchal societies. For this reason, the study pinpointed the genuine aspect of the view of women in these patriarchal societies and how they perceives women on the basis of gender considerations. Therefore, the study contributes to the discovery of the suppressive effect of male gaze in the selected story.

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