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# Female Identity: A Deconstructive study of “The Adulteress” by Sabyn Javeri

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## Abstract

This paper aims at identifying female identity that is misrepresented in the short story “The Adulteress” by Sabyn Javeri (2019). The third person narrator *she* in the story is continuously trying to build her identity from the perspective of imaginary male character *he*. The privileged binary of the *Adulteress* (Javeri, 2019) is male though it is absent, but its continuous presence is felt in the identity presentation and construction of female. To find out the construction of female identity Feminism (Khaddar, 2018) is used as a theoretical perspective and deconstruction approach of Derrida (Tyson, 2014) is applied as a method to provide true meaning to the representation of female identity in the story. The study is qualitative in nature. The findings have exposed that the binary of male is absent in the story and the male in the story is only imaginary male who is present with her even when *she* was performing normal chores of daily routine. It seems as if the female identity construction is done from the perspective of male in the selected text, but the deconstruction approach helps in portraying the identity of female that is misrepresented in the story.

**Key Words:** Feminism, Deconstruction, Female Identity, Misrepresentation

## 1 Introduction

This study aims at deconstructing the short story “The Adulteress” by Sabyn Javeri. The story is narrated from third person point of view and constructs the central tension through the binary of presence versus absence, he versus she, housewife versus working woman, and husband versus colleagues.

The identity of female is described through the construction of absent male character and from the very beginning of story she wants to authenticate her identity from the absent male character’s point of view. There is no name given to the narrator in the story that shows lack of identity; narrator is represented only by using the pronoun *she*, but no name is given to male character as well that indicates that female is not having lack of identity. The narrator is busy in-house chores since the beginning like; washing and cutting vegetables, cooking, opening the door etc., and during her works *she* gets lost in imagination where she starts thinking about a male. The ambiguity of the story is evident from the start that her personality is split up into her mind and body even the main adultery event that is revealed through her imagination reminds how mechanically

*she* is behaving after the event. The adultery event has not been shown explicitly in the story, but is presented through her imagination, so it is not clear that either it happened in reality or not. In adultery event *she* finds herself involved in an affair with an unknown male and wishes that her husband and kids might not know about it. Further, the story reveals that she has written certain stories and gets a small amount of money for them that keeps on increasing with the passage of time along with her fame. This moment gives her pleasure, and she does not tell her husband about it initially, but later *she* shares it with her husband too. Throughout this process of getting money and fame *she* has been assisted by an unknown male character who is her colleague, and she finds herself caught in a physical relation with that male too in her imagination; though she stops him to go further when she realizes that the other male is not her husband. *She* seems assisted by the male character, but she is not following any commands from him she is taking every decision independently. This short story portrays a lot of ambiguity that is there because of lot of imagination and continuous shift of story from present to absent events.

The analysis of female identity is done from the perspective of Feminism (Khaddar, 2018) by using deconstruction as a method that provides the data that her personality is split up.

### **1.1 Research Objectives**

1. To explore and understand the construction of female identity.
2. To deconstruct the ideologies used in female identity representation

### **1.2 Research Questions**

1. How female identity is represented in Javeri's (2019) short story "The Adulteress"?
2. How does the ideology of female identity representation is deconstructed in the short story "The adulteress" (Javeri, 2019)?

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The female identity of the narrator (*she*) of the story is constructed through the binary of imaginary male character *he* in the story, and the current study aims at deconstructing this identity by using deconstructive approach of Derrida's (Tyson, 2014).

### **1.4 Theoretical Framework**

Feminism is opposition to sexist oppression (Khader, 2018). Feminism talks about women marginalization that they are marginalized in the society and even in their homes too. This concept started from west and now it has prevailed in many parts of the world. Feminism later developed into the feminist movements and then feminist theories. There are three waves of feminism, and they are concerned with different contemporary issues of their time. The main aim of all these waves and movements is to talk about women marginalization and to fight for their equal rights in property, politics, education, inheritance, jobs etc. (Mann & Patterson, 2015). In this study, Feminism is selected as a theoretical perspective by the researcher to represent the female identity in the short story *The Adulteress* (Javeri, 2019). The feminist perspective is observed by using the deconstructive approach of Derrida. Derrida's deconstructive approach is developed in

response to Saussure's *structuralism*.

Ferdinand de Saussure (2001) claimed about the "nature of linguistic signs" that *signifier* is a word and *signified* is a concept or meaning in a mind, and these concepts are fixed due to which meaning of linguistic sign is conventional. Derrida challenged the claim of Saussure about *fixed meanings* and said that there are *individualized concepts* because everyone has his/her own concept of an entity and due to which meaning of linguistic sign is ideological. For example, Tree. The image of a tree is not same in every individual's mind, and everyone has his/ her own image or mental structure of tree. A tree can be an orange tree, a tree with dry leaves in autumn or it can be a tree full of flowers in spring even. That is why meanings are not fixed according to Derrida.

Saussure also claimed that language is necessary for communication and imagination is also dependent on language, a person cannot imagine a particular thing without language, whereas Derrida's (Tyson, 2014) view about language is that it works only as a mediator, and it only mediates the communication. Derrida's (Tyson, 2014) concept of individualized meanings proposes that the same thing can be seen differently by different people, and it is known as deconstruction. Deconstruction helps an individual to reach the reality which a common person cannot get, and it could be done through textual evidences, by breaking binaries and using linguistic signs and literary figures (Tyson, 2014). The deconstruction approach of Derrida is based on three elements (Binaries, deconstruction of binaries and ideologies) for deconstructing any text (Tyson, 2014), and current study has used these three approaches for doing analysis of the text "The Adulteress" by (Javeri, 2019).

The current study has used the feminist perspective as a lens and deconstruction as a method to explore and deconstruct the feminist ideologies represented in the text "The Adulteress" by (Javeri, 2019). Textual Evidences are used to analyze this text.

## **2. Literature Review**

Deconstructionism has not been used as a method to see the feminist perspective of representation of female identity in the text "The Adulteress" (Javeri, 2019). The short story "The Adulteress" (Javeri, 2019) has not been explored from any theoretical perspective yet. Only few interviews of the author and readers are found on internet, but no research has been done on it yet and this is the research gap that is found by the researcher.

## **3. Research Methodology**

The researcher has used Derrida's (Tyson, 2014) deconstruction as a methodology for this study to explore the representation of female identity and to deconstruct the ideologies that have represented the split personality of the "she" in the story. The qualitative approach is used for data collection.

## **4. Data Analysis**

This section/chapter of data analysis is based on the analysis of short story “The Adulteress” (Javeri, 2019) from the lens of Feminism and by using Derrida’s (Tyson, 2012) approach of deconstruction. The following three elements of Derrida’s deconstruction approach are used as a basis for analysis:

1. Binaries found in the text
2. Deconstruction of the binaries
3. Ideology of the text

Here, the analysis of first two elements will be done side by side by presenting the binaries found in the text and then deconstructing those binaries by providing textual evidence.

Feminism focuses on the female empowerment to provide them equal rights in all fields of life irrespective of their “female identity.” “The Adulteress” (Javeri, 2019) is a short story that is comprised upon eight pages only and is selected from Saybn Javeri’s book “Hijabistan”. The title of this short story “The Adulteress” (Javeri, 2019) represents two interpretations. First interpretation of the word ‘adulteress’ is related to the “adultery event” on which the narrator keeps on pondering time to time. The other interpretation of the word, adultery is “not pure” as the narrator’s perception of her own identity is not purely formed from her own individual thought it is perceived from the perspective of “he”.

#### **4.1 Binaries and their deconstruction in *The Adulteress***

There current study has found six boundaries in the short story *The Adulteress* (Javeri, 2019). These binaries are shown by providing textual evidences and the deconstructive approach of Derrida is used to break the binaries.

##### **4.1.1 He vs she**

In this short story, the first binary is of *he versus she*; the third person narrator *she* is having split identity due to which *she* behaves ambiguously. In this binary the first term is privileged over the second one. In the beginning of the story the third person narrator *she* is seen busy in her works like, folding the clothes, putting them away, working in the kitchen, opening the fridge, picking out the things from fridge, and chopping vegetables. While performing all these tasks the narrator is continuously thinking about the imaginary male character, *he*, and that *he* is not given any name in the story (Javeri, 2019, p.1). *She* in this story herself is not aware of her personality that *she* fits in which category. *She* is entangled in different tasks related to house chores, kids, husband and so no. *She* is unable to find her own identity because she is trying to build her identity from the perspective of imaginary male character and that male is always there even when *she* is in the kitchen, on the Taurus, or busy in other tasks, but the presence of male is imaginary and the presence of *she* is in reality. This fact indicates that though she is continuously imaging about the imaginary male character, but she is aware of her own identity that is why she comes back to reality after certain intervals.

At the end of third page, narrator goes back to kitchen and starts chopping the okra, and again she starts thinking about the “man” and says, “...it was the man who had made the first move” (Javeri, 2019, p.3), so once again she is thinking from the perspective of the male and trying to build her identity based on man’s

perception. This identity is constructed through her own imagination and is not due to any patriarchal oppression. She starts thinking about her own constructed identity and utters that, “Never thought of herself as someone who cheated” (Javeri, 2019, p.4). Although no one is there who is accusing her, but she is involved in a continuous thinking process and makes assumptions on the basis of that. She is involved in a continuous thinking process and makes assumptions on the basis of that. She thinks that she will be called “infidel” (Javeri, 2019, p.4) due to the “adultery event” which seems just an imagination of her mind and remains ambiguous till the end of story because of her constructed identity from male’s point of view. The narrator’s thinking of herself as “infidel” is indicating that she is feeling guilty or accusing herself for the evil, but this is not shown anywhere in the story that this is reality. As narrator is in imagination, so this perception of accusing herself may also be imaginary and cannot be generalized for her actual perception of herself when she is in her conscious senses.

In the start of page five, narrator said, “We are all made up of stories. The stories we tell others, the stories we tell ourselves and, most importantly, the stories we hide. Deep inside” (Javeri, 2019, p.5). This statement may indicate towards the feministic perspective that females are always associated with certain taboos or conventional stories which they have been told by others, and in others there can be mothers, elder sisters or any sibling who tells the stories about how to eat, sit, behave, talk etc. in the society. The stories that are not told and remain in one is inside maybe the stories that require certain action, but society does not allow that. This indication of hidden stories also gives the clue towards the stories of female exploitation that are not openly shared just because of the fear of losing respect.

It can be said that text is giving a clue that females are not allowed to share the stories of their exploitation, but they should empower themselves to share and fight against those stories. In second paragraph she waits for “lifeless vegetables” to respond to her for the questions in her mind, and these “lifeless vegetables” may represent to strict societal rules or a strict patriarchy system where women are not free to ask questions about their basic rights and remain reserved. Towards the end of page five the narrator gets remindful of the “schemes” that she had in her mind but nothing was achieved as evident in the text in lines, “A beautiful jewel that she couldn’t have, a perfect home, or even the love she expected from her husband...long ago, she had learnt not to expect” (Javeri, 2019, p.5). Here the narrator may represent the role of males that they do not bother about females’ expectations, but it portrays the other face of reality as well that the husband is not able to afford that jewelry. So, it cannot be said that the male should always be there to fulfill the just or unjust demands of females. In the selected short story, the male is providing food and shelter and there is no evidence that can show that husband is not providing necessities of life to his wife. The only incident of jewelry which he is not able to purchase indicates the financial problems that are part of life and both husband and wife must bear with them.

The narrator realizes for the first time that “her life was hers to live. Her voice was hers to use. And for that, she was grateful to him” (Javeri, 2019, p.10); the first part of this realization is indicative of the women

marginalization as explained in previous sentence but the last part of this realization is again showing the fact that the narrator is constructing her identity through “he” and she again seems confused about her own self. This identity construction is not due to the patriarchy it seems that she herself is unable to decide.

#### 4.1.2 Present versus Absent

The binary of *present versus absent* becomes visible on page one when the narrator listens the sound of an old song from a movie, “Purdy my rehny do purdah na uthao” (Javeri, 2019, p.1) and starts thinking about that song and the dance that was performed on it. She remembers about her time when she was a “little girl” (Javeri, 2019, p.1) and she watched that movie with her parents. She remembers that time in which she was only a “little girl” and was not bothered with her other roles which she is having now. This represents her identity as a female that now as she is grown up, so she must fulfill the tasks that a female is supposed to do. She remembers that time in which she was only a “little girl” and was not bothered with her other roles which she is having now, so this is her realization of her identity that she possesses now.

The narrator seems complaining when she talks about the other people around her that “her daily routine,” “her children’s demands,” and “her husband’s indifference” (Javeri, 2019, p.3) everything stayed the same “Except her” (Javeri, 2019, p.3). At this thought, she turns away and moves towards her “dark” and “airless kitchen” as “It was the space she knew well” (Javeri, 2019, p.1). This turning back of the narrator towards kitchen and presenting it as a space that she knows well pretends that she is not denying her duties and celebrates her identity as a working woman. The present is given privileged over the absent.

#### 4.1.3 Good Girl versus Bad Girl

The third binary is of *good girl versus bad girl* where the narrator talks about the old days that everything was so clear then; “black and white” (Javeri, 2019, p.1). There was no confusion in the rules about “a good girl” and “a bad girl.” *She* was so young at that time that the goodness or badness was limited to the traits that were same for both little girl and boy but now as she is a grown-up woman, so these rules are different for both males and females, and she needs to abide by them. The rules for a “good girl” and “bad girl” can vary from home to home, society to society and even from person to person.

#### 4.1.4 Certainty versus Uncertainty

In the fourth binary of *certainty versus uncertainty* again the first term is privileged over the second one. The narrator is overpowered with ambiguity that makes her indecisive. It is evident in the text as well on second page of the story, “She wanted to do something, but what?” (Javeri, 2019, p.2). She is unable to decide about the aim of her life. It is evident in the text that she cannot think at her own and needs outer help to think about her doings even, but whatever decision she has taken in the story is taken by herself without any outer assistance.

On page three in the story, *she* again starts thinking about “he” who is found nowhere in the story, “.... she allowed herself to think back “To him” (Javeri, 2019, p.3). Here at this point narrator is again involved in thinking about “another man” who is no one to her, and narrator says that she is confused because she is

indecisive of thinking about “another man” (Javeri, 2019, p.3), as represented in text, “The memory of being with another man was something her mind seemed to block and obsess over at the same time”. This makes the ambiguity of narrator’s identity clearer. The narrator has control over her thoughts that is why her mind can think and block the imagination of the imaginary male at the same time.

#### **4.1.5 Housewife versus Working Woman**

In the binary of *housewife versus working women* housewife is privileged over the working women. At page seven, the narrator is found once again thinking about the “man” who has praised her writing first and then her appearance, and now trying to be involved in an affair. This is represented in text as, “.....she recalled with wonder how she had let him enter the boundaries she had so carefully built around herself. He had entered unopposed”, and this textual evidence provides an insight into the contemporary social issues that are faced by females who leave their homes for earning more money and stay away from their homes and are thus exploited by the males in order to get more financial benefits. Here, the narrator is going through the same stage that the “man” is giving her the incentives that he would send a car to pick her up for the launching ceremony of a women magazine, but she gets convinced at her own will. The man has not forced her he has only given her the offer. This was the narrator’s own decision to join the ceremony.

Although she initially goes through the problem of managing the kids and husband at the time when she would be attending the ceremony but somehow, she manages it. These are also typical feminine issues which usually working women face, but it is not indicated in the text that the male has forced her to be in physical relation; she does not resist his intentions, and the man stops suddenly when she asks him to do so on page nine. This is clarifying the ideology that all males are not same; they do have their own boundaries and rules.

At the end of page seven, the narrator finds her identity for the first time when she narrates, “Outside her home, she was not just a mother or a wife, but a writer. A person of her own” (Javeri, 2019, p.7). This textual evidence is making it clear that females are not oppressed and under patriarchal control they can take their own decisions as the narrator in this story has taken the decision of being a writer and she does not follow any resistance from patriarchy or society and somehow manages to deal with all the problems.

#### **4.1.6 Husband versus Colleagues**

The sixth binary that is found in the selected short story is of *husband versus colleagues* and the first one is given more privilege. The narrator identifies her identity from the perspective of imaginary male character *he* who has now taken the form of a colleague. The narrator identifies her identity in last sentence but just after that she again starts thinking from the perspective of “he” even about her admiration as a writer. This idea is presented in the text on page eight, “He was a poet by passion and a journalist by profession. He told her that he liked her craft. And that he liked her even more. He did not even say that. She had made it all up” (Javeri, 2019, p.8). The narrator although seems to be convinced more by the colleague’s admiration than husband, but on other hand it could also be assumed that she was not sure about the colleague’s admiration as

it is evident in the above-mentioned textual evidence as well. The narrator's being doubtful of the colleague's admiration is indicative of the fact that she gives privilege to her husband's ideas more than colleague. The narrator goes out to attend the launching ceremony with "he" and he starts physical relation with her that she "felt consumed by him". here the word consumed is important to tell that as soon as women leave their home they get consumed by the society and spoil themselves. The ides of "home" by Iris Marion Young (2005) provides evidence of the protection that "home" provides to the females and as soon as they leave their home they get exploited by the society, so home and husband's protection is evident here in the above textual evidence.

Then narrator tries to focus on the thought that "her husband was a good man" (Javeri, 2019, p.5) but suddenly gets shifted to the "other man's scent" (Javeri, 2019, p.5) that is imaginary. This represents that narrator is not able to share her problems with her husband maybe or maybe she is not listened by him that's why she suddenly shifts towards a stranger but only in imagination and in reality, she comes back to her husband who may not give importance to her thoughts, but provides a shelter to her that is not based on deceiving.

#### **4.2 Ideology present in *The Adulteress***

The ideology that is presented in the selected short story is of Feminist oppression on superficial level, but by doing deconstruction of the binaries that are presented in the short story it becomes evident that female who is presented in the short story is not under patriarchal influence rather she is leading a free life, and having full authority of taking her decisions at her own. The depiction of female character although presents a typical characterization of female characters in literature but by doing deconstruction of the textual evidences it becomes evident that the female identity in the story is characterized by her own and she is not under any male influence rather she thinks from male perspective only because it is not possible to disassociate that gender from a female's life.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The *Adulteress* is a short story selected from the book *Hijabistan* by Sabyn Javeri (2019). The story presents the distorted identity of the narrator throughout the story, and that distortion is only because of overburden in her life. The female identity is not dependent upon the imaginary male character as there is no evidence of it in the story. The female in the story takes her decisions at free will without being harassed or forced by any male, which is indicative of the fact that female identity is not constructed by the male she was assisted only as a colleague. The identity of the narrator "she" is seen from the perspective of Feminism and deconstructed by using Derrida's deconstruction approach. The ambiguity of the narrator is due to her own inability to find true meaning of her life and getting lost in the imagination. There is no external pressure on her, she herself decides to be a writer that becomes tough initially to manage with kids and husband but later she manages it. Initially, she was confused maybe because she was not able to cope up with all her responsibilities as a mother, wife, and working woman.



Derrida's deconstructive approach makes it possible to move the narrator from non-identity towards identity by finding out the ideologies that were the reason of the wrong identity of narrator.

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