

PATRIARCHY AND GENDER PERSPECTIVES - GLIMPSES FROM THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

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Abstract

Women today, are scaling great heights and achieve things unparalleled in their lives. From education to exploring the mysteries of space, women have no stone left unturned. In the same world where we live in there are petit worlds that have women who undergo torments, who toil for their survival, struggle keep up their culture codes and willingly bind themselves to shackles that the patriarchal society has created. One such culture that has always been looked with awe for their myths, taboos and cultural codes is the Appalachian society. Domestic violence is on high tide in Appalachia in this meta modern world. This article draws the individual and social status of women in Appalachia.

Keywords : *Appalachian, patriarchy, subjugation*

Introduction

The prime habitat of man is the womb of a woman even before she is called, a mother. It is not to be taken just as an instance of comparing the landscape as a nursing mother, but to consider it as a woman as well. Women across the world have been facing numerous difficulties based on gender, race and culture. While race and culture are concerned with the other, gender discriminations have been a universal disparity thrust upon women. Women become doubly jeopardized on account of the issues pertaining to gender discriminations.

Appalachia is one of the most unique bioregions in the world gaining attraction from many ecologists, environmentalists, geographers and scientists. It has been a house for many endemic species and most of the species from this miniature world is indigenous too. Feminists and social scientists as well delve deep into the roots of Appalachian culture, finding ways to curate the social issues that the society has been facing. The Appalachian society has many questions left unanswered. Appalachia thought to be one of the earliest of the cultures that originated in the US. Yet the Appalachian lots are in their darkest rooms ever owing to their inability to give up their tradition and cultural practices. Modernization has hardly brought in anything worth.

There are numerous factors that enable to compare the American continent or the Appalachian landscape with feminine perspectives. An imagery of landscape being compared to a woman may be felt to be archetypal and most of the writers find it to be an essential phenomenon. This may be reasoned out with the usage of phrases including, motherland, and mother tongue and so on. The phrase that was used by Johnson to describe native America as a 'Paradise with all Virgin Beauties' (qtd. Kolonody) describes it all that man has done to nature and how he has perceived nature as woman.

The Appalachian scholars have always put forth their views that literature by Appalachian writers always reflected the lives and people in Appalachian counties. They have also reflected the otherness of women who have been mute for ages and forbidden a stand either culturally, socially or politically. The considerations and readings of Appalachia from the point of view of environmental or with an ecofeminist vision shall keep away the notions of placing them merely as southern literature.

Depictions about women of Appalachia have always imparted the myths and folklore on wampus cats and folklore in their culture and discern a laudable place which is steeped in cultural and traditional ethos. The question is whether the women of Appalachia enjoy the privileges that women do in the Western Culture. There are gender discriminations in all part and parcel of their lifestyle, home and in their treatment in workplace.

While referring to the Appalachian bio-region and its surrounding borderlands, it could be inferred that the boundaries of the state – nation and the boundaries between a white male and female have long been established by the ideas relating to the physique of women and the role women play in culture. Even in the process of colonization, sexuality had a variety of concerns to be pondered upon national and racial considerations. Anne McClintock observes, “sexuality as a trope for other power relations was certainly an abiding aspect of imperial power.”(Imperial Leather, 1995) Thus, equating a land or territory with female metaphor has fixed roots in depth in gendering the nation as a woman, where citizens are reproduced.

In spite of the major concerns to be discussed and answered, the writers of Appalachia have a depth understanding of the evident omission of the immediate issues. In her work, *The Tangled Roots of Feminism*, Engelhardt points out that there were stereotypes of Appalachian women as destitutes, while there were proposals that set solutions for environmental damage and that of the ‘othering’ of female sex. (15-16). She also says in the introduction to *Beyond Hill and Hollow* that stereotypes in Appalachian county is not merely about class and gender alone and it includes discussions of colour and race as well.

Critiques of contemporary literature especially that talk about the marginalization of people retain a view that favours the masculine. On the whole, the exploitation of women is at large untouched in literary and other studies. Engelhardt points out the same in the introduction to *Beyond Hill and Hollow* that the Appalachian stereotypes tend to be twofold for women in the Appalachian testings or in case of dealing with people of colour, race and gender discussions, as they are removed in totality. Engelhardt whose focus is always on feminism and environmental literature points out that such erasures permit the clichéd norms themselves to frame the dialogues on, who Appalachians are in the society they live in. (2)

In his introduction, Alan Williamson explicates the hardships on the part of the male authors writing the women perspectives. He says that certain emotions, certain basic human motives including narcissist play, intense physical awareness, the act of sacrifice and surrendering oneself, have been culturally determined as being feminine. Hence, he adds that a man who experiences them may eventually face a gender crisis and they undergo shame as they find themselves one with women. To add, such men writers also face backlash from feminist women writers who do not in fact support the thought that such male writers as ‘served as a propaganda’ on the plight of women and thereby have produced ‘suspicion that lingers even today’ (2)

Many young Indian wives may be cited as instances for this kind. However it does not just stop in India. There are numerous lands that treat women not as a part of this world, not as a human but make them stereotypes of kindness, legacy, ill omen and a sexual object. Appalachian woman in itself is looked down as a weakness; the weakness of a being a grief-stricken woman, it is the weakness of being born vulnerable in a society that looks down upon women.

The landscape, the mountains that tall high in the Appalachia, the streams that whisper and the sky that is red and every miniscule in the world, exhibit feminine aspects or at least are compared to feminine attributes. William Byrd opines of the topography of the mountainous landscape that a single mountain in the Blue Ridges very resembles a woman’s breast and that further adds ‘Ledge stretch’t away to N.E. (rising) in the shape of a woman’s breast’. (175)

While the due respect paid to the motherland was much in the culture of Appalachia, the scenario changed along with the drifts in economy and the growing industries and the increasing patriarchal demeanor. There has been a continuous fascination amidst the people for the single male in the wilderness in the patriarchal society. Moreover, the literary heritage has been throwing light on the essentially adolescent, pre-sexual and the heroes with pastoral reflections who turn out to be the models for masculine in the Appalachian cult. The father is an authoritative figure and he stands as representative for a society

built with operation and that of a conformist one. The marginalized and the women are subjugated as in the Appalachian culture.

A frailly structured matriarchy showed itself in the latter days, after the Civil war. The word 'frailly', though carries negative connotations of being weak and puts forth the prejudices against women, may be suggestive of a caring and warm household, time and again what is expected of an Appalachian woman. However, this outlook enables one to pay attention to a father-driven society which is not natural but only a hegemonic culture to exhibit power.

Beyond advocating for women's rights, feminists or ecofeminist writers not only focus on equating women with nature but also put forth the perennial challenges faced by women, day in and day out, on numerous fronts in the name of female foeticide, male gaze, misogyny, and even on how technology plays villainy in the case of women. Appalachia being the most rich bio-region in the world, no wonder man had always wanted to keep the region in his control. In a similar way, women are looked at as a bountiful resource not only in Appalachia but in many countries and cultures across the world. So it is not just to do with women and nature alone; women- portrayal of women, how women are appreciated by men or women in the society they live.

If thought in a global woman perspective, Appalachia will hold a place frequently posited as Engelhardt puts forth that Appalachia is a third world in the United States – a feeling both reprimanding and shallow. These contraries may enable one to evaluate the interconnectedness between Appalachian women working in Walmart; these women not only struggle to maintain their cultural identity but also in the employment and in the growth of another country that has its rapid growth in economy. Engelhardt also compares how the power dynamics of language classes in Appalachia enable them to lose their distinctive accent with the Indian scenario of telemarketing by Indian women with the US mask to carry out outsourcing jobs from the US companies (10-11). Regardless of the above views of Engelhardt, the disposition of Indian women is not better in anyway though.

In each of the incidents quoted and every example cited, the marginalized groups are exploited for the benefit of the others and for the progress of the others. The marginalized women are either enslaved or enforced to be stereotypes of an industrialized world that has a no care attitude towards either ethical value, cultural or societal behavior.

Violence in family has always been a tormenting factor in the family. Family is the smallest unit that is quintessential to make responsible citizens and society. In Indian contexts we say that charity begins at home. In parallel lines, it could be drawn that socialization begins with a family circle. Intimacy amidst family members, face to face conversation and amicable environment at home can up bring a responsible individual with high moral values and thereby a healthy society.

A violent stricken family is suggestive not only of the familial status but also the serious economic and social conditions that prevail. Violence against women and at home is a symbol of a non-cooperative family setting. Usage of abusive language and physical abuse have been increasing despite the increase in literacy rates and growing awareness. Families belonging to these worlds have been practicing a culture that does not break its familial ties at any cost whereas the woman in the family is made a scapegoat and is silenced with excruciating pain at heart and physically as well. On the other hand, there is a world within this world where ignorance has been on limelight, generation after generation. It is high time we realized the torments undergone by the women in Appalachia. After all, cultivation of mind and behavior is the expected outcome of education, whereas even in the 21st century, in this meta modern society, the fragmented families and domestic violence have been witnessing only an upward move.

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